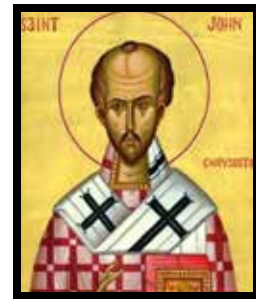


Light of the East

Newsletter of the Society of Saint John Chrysostom
Western Region Edition
Website: www.lightoftheeast.org



Volume 10, Number 3

Fall 2015

Coptic Church is explained

By Jim Trageser

St. Paul American Coptic Orthodox Church in Tustin hosted the Society of Saint John Chrysostom Western Region's November presentation.

Father Kyrillos Ibrahim, the pastor, gave a short but informative talk on the current state of the Coptic Church after leading attendees in a Third Hour prayer service at the Nov. 14 event.

Father George Morelli, president of the Western Region chapter of the Society, introduced Father Ibrahim to the Society membership.

Father Ibrahim told attendees that his congregation is specifically and intentionally an English-language Coptic congregation, formed by Bishop Serapion to serve converts and the children of Coptic immigrants to the United States. Local Coptics are served by the Diocese of Los Angeles, Southern California &



Photo by Jim Trageser

Father Kyrillos Ibrahim, pastor of St. Paul American Coptic Church in Tustin, speaks during the Nov. 14 presentation

Hawaii of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria.

"In the 1960s and '70s, when
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Different versions of Bible discussed at Sept. presentation

By Jim Trageser

There are many different versions of the Christian Bible extant today - each with its own strengths, each its own weaknesses.

So find one you like and read it - often!

That was perhaps the main message attendees took away from the talk by Presbytera Eugenia Constantinou of the University of San Diego at the September presentation of the Society of Saint John Chrysostom - Western Region.

Hosted at Holy Angels Byzantine Catholic Church in San Diego on Sept. 26, Constantinou gave an overview of the different English translations - all of which are no more, can be no more, than rough paraphrases - in wide
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Happenings!

SSJC-WR Presentation:

The Diaconate in the Orthodox and Catholic Churches

Presented by Fr. Deacon Maxime Najim, St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church, San Diego, and Deacon David J. Estrada, Director of Diaconate Formation, Archdiocese of Los Angeles. Presentation is at 10 a.m. Saturday, Jan. 23 at Saint Nicholas Antiochian Orthodox

Christian Cathedral (2308 West Third Street, Los Angeles). Contact Father George Morelli at 760-920-6530.

2016 Light of the East Conference: The Lord Jesus vs. the roots of violence: Catholic and Orthodox approaches

Mark your calendars now for the May 20-21 annual gathering! Details on speakers, registration and more to come next issue and online.

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

President: The Very Reverend Archpriest George Morelli, PhD.

Vice President: Very Reverend Archpriest Ramon Merlos

Secretary: Anne Petach

Assistant Secretary: Diane Alves

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Very Reverend Ramon Merlos (Orthodox)

Fr Cavanaugh Wallace (Roman Catholic)

Light of the East

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Message from the President of SSJC-Western Region



The spirituality of moral unity: Standing as one

By the Very Reverend Archpriest George Morelli, PhD

To borrow the opening lines of the famous 19th English novelist Charles Dickens in his *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859): "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness..." Though Dickens was referencing the pre- and post-French Revolution state of political, social and spiritual affairs in London and Paris, we can well apply these words to the state of the contemporary world as we enter the 21st Century.

On one hand, we have the "light" of unsurpassed scientific and technological innovations unimagined a couple of generations ago. Here we can think of space travel, medical knowledge and treatment, the humanities and the sciences. Smart-phones can especially be singled out as they are more powerful even than the previous generation of computers, allowing for instantaneous social communication and transfer of text and visual information throughout the world. Much of this can be seen as "wisdom." By analogy, we can see it as one edge of a two-edged sword.

On the other hand, we have the "darkness" of the age: the exponential disparity in the standard of living, economically and politically, between haves and have-nots. We have a new form of warfare: combatants, disguised as ordinary citizens, carrying out massive terrorism. We see hijacked planes being flown into skyscrapers, brutal public executions of innocents (such as beheadings), and suicide bombings (many of which are motivated by radicalized religious adherents or militant atheistic dictatorships).

In some cases, such as in the Levant, this has led to the movements of populations fleeing this unprecedented terrorism, and the threatening of the cultures of those being persecuted as well as of the cultures of the countries they are fleeing to for safety.

The ethos of this age also includes increasingly militant secularism attacking Christ and His Church. All of this being made worse by failure to care for the earth, God's creation, and the ensuing consequences such as

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THE SOCIETY OF ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

~Western Region~

www.lightoftheeast.org

presents

The Diaconate in the Orthodox and Catholic Churches

January 23, 2016,

10 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

Hosted by

Saint Nicholas Antiochian Orthodox Christian Cathedral

2308 West Third Street, Los Angeles, CA 90057

(Corner of Third St. and Grandview).|

(213) 382-6269, <http://stnicholasla.com>

Orthodox Speaker:

Fr. Deacon Maxime Najim,

St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church, San Diego, CA

Roman Catholic Speaker:

Deacon David J. Estrada,

Director of Diaconate Formation, Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

Public welcome. A freewill offering will be taken.

Directions: From 110 Fwy. (N. or S) exit: 3rd St. W. on 3rd St. Turn right on Grandview to 4th St. Rt. On 4th St. to Church parking lot (immediately on right, behind the Church).

From the 101 Fwy. (N. or S) Exit: Alvarado. S. on Alvarado to 3rd. St. Rt. on 3rd one block to Grandview, and as above. Note: Freeway traffic can be heavy on Saturdays around Los Angeles.



The Society of St. John Chrysostom-Western Region, is an ecumenical organization of laity and clergy of the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Eastern Catholic and Roman Catholic Churches which was established to make known the history, worship, spirituality, discipline and theology of Eastern Christianity, and to work for the fullness of unity desired by Jesus Christ.

Oriental Orthodox churches are focus of presentation

Continued from Page 1

Coptic churches began to appear in North America, they were seen as extensions of the mother church. Services were held in the mother tongue. For years, we had priests that were temporarily sent, then went home to Egypt.

"It became clear there was a permanent community here. We began to look for priests to serve the community in the diaspora.

"I came in the 1970s as an infant. In my parents' generation, they were pushing for more and more English in the Great Liturgy, for the children.

"Newer immigrants were not so interested in being acclimated as previous immigrants ... They wanted to live in their own 'Egyptian bubble.'

"Our bishop wanted to experiment. St. Paul's is an experiment. Services are all in English, with a priest who grew up here. To focus on mixed-marriage families, second- and third-generation Coptics, and converts.

"The success was almost immediate. Feedback came back to the bishop that there was great need for congregations like this. Now we have five parishes like this!"

Father Ibrahim then gave an overview of the Coptic Church within the universal Christian Church. He explained that where the Catholic Churches are united by communion with Rome and many shared traditions, and the Eastern Orthodox Churches are united by communion with one another and a (mostly) shared liturgy, the Oriental Orthodox Churches - which includes the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria - have no such unifying characteristic other than all having been

founded by apostles or disciples of Christ in the first century and all having split from the rest of the ancient historic apostolic Churches at the conclusion of the Council of Chalcedon.

"The Oriental Orthodox Church are not really united in any way except that they all rejected the Council of Chalcedon," Father Ibrahim said. "When you look at their history, their liturgical rites, their daily life, they are different from each other."

However, he said these differences enrich the life of the universal Church.



Father Kyrillos Ibrahim, pastor of St. Paul American Coptic Church in Tustin, speaks during the Nov. 14 presentation as SSJC Western Region President and moderator Father George Morelli listens

Photo by Jim Trageser

"Each keeps something from the diversity of the early Church," he said, explaining that the uniformity of Eastern Orthodox and Eastern Catholic worship means that, "In the Byzantine Rite, some of these early rites have been lost."

"On the other hand," Father Ibrahim said, the differences among the Oriental Orthodox churches "makes it very difficult to have concelebrations. Even the vestments are completely different. The hats are different.

"But it is interesting!"

The Oriental Orthodox Churches are in communion with one another, but not with the Eastern Orthodox or Catholic Churches.

There are six distinct churches within the Oriental Orthodox Communion:

- Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria
- Armenian Apostolic Church
- Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church
- Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church
- Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church
- Syriac Orthodox Church

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Oriental churches share history more than practices

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(The Assyrian Church of the East and the Ancient Church of the East represent the fourth branch of the historic apostolic Churches, although neither is in communion with any other branch.)

The Oriental Orthodox churches are mostly centered in their historic homes of Ethiopia, Egypt, Eritria, India, Syria and Lebanon.

"We were united with Rome and Byzantium until 451," Father Ibrahim said. "We only acknowledge the first three ecumenical councils."

During a question and answer session, Father Ibrahim addressed a few more issues.

He said that between 1962 and 1971, there was a series of dialogues between Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox churches. Father Ibrahim said based on the statements issued from those meetings, he feels there should be full communion between all the Orthodox churches.

Theological differences with Rome are more pronounced, particularly on the doctrines of purgatory and immaculate conception. "But the issue of Christology, which originally divided Rome and

Alexandria, has been addressed!"

In the early 1970s, a shared statement of faith was issued by both churches.

Father Ibrahim said in his understanding, Rome and Alexandria could be in full communion even without agreement on which ecumenical councils were valid - much as different churches have differing rolls of saints.

As far as the sign of the cross, Father Ibrahim said the Oriental Orthodox churches practice the same sign as the Catholics,

while the Eastern Orthodox go in the opposite direction.

"I see no evidence this is a Latin influence. Likely it was just always two traditions," he said.

Another question was about the liturgical calendar used by the Oriental Orthodox churches.

"Coptics have our own calendar, but it mostly coincides with the Julian Calendar," Father Ibrahim said.

"A growing majority of Copts in the United States want to celebrate Christmas on the 25th of December. Pastorally, it's creating problems."

'The Oriental Orthodox Churches are not really united in any way except they all rejected the Council of Chalcedon.'

– Father Kyrillos Ibrahim

Morelli

Continued from Page 2

global warming, water pollution and poverty etc. Awareness of all of this "foolishness," the underside of the two-edged sword, is made readily available to all by ubiquitous social media devices.

The followers of Christ, who are members of His Body the Church, can, in the spiritual tradition of the Eastern and Western Churches, engage in *spiritual combat* against the 'darkness' of our age.¹ Following this counsel, the ethos of our prayers and life should be confidence in God, humility that He is with us, and the acquisition and cultivation of virtue. In combating the evil one, who is known as the separator and divider, we can ponder the words of Christ to His apostles: "This kind can go out by nothing, but by prayer and fasting." (Mk 9:28).

The members of the Society of St. John Chrysostom have a unique spirituality and apostolate in a world wherein Christians are under increasing assault. We may be few in number, we may be the poor, the lowly or the meek, the outcasts and , as in the sense of the Hebrew word, *anawim*. But, in unity with Christ and His Church, we have strength. Let us continue our apostolate of unity and pray and work to overcome all that divides us

¹ [Lorenzo Scupoli & Theophan the Recluse (1997) *Unseen Warfare: The Spiritual Combat and Path to Paradise of Lorenzo Scupoli-as edited by Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain and Theophan the Recluse*, Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press.]

Orthodox never adopted a formal canon of Scripture

Continued from Page 1

use among the different Catholic and Orthodox churches.

Constantinou pointed out that among the ancient apostolic churches, only the Roman Catholic Church adopted a formal canon of accepted Scripture - and that was in response to the Protestant Reformation, which questioned the traditional definition and role of Scripture.

Even today, different branches of Orthodoxy may have different books included in their Bibles - but this is due not to a rejection or dispute over what belongs in the Bible, but rather in the history of Jewish and Christian Scripture, and the Orthodox belief in the value of local jurisdiction.

For most of its history, the Bible did not exist as the bound, single volume we know today. Bibles were collections of books, and books were scrolls of parchment, written by hand, copied from an earlier version.

What has survived from antiquity are individual collections (such as the Gospels, or the letters of Paul), individual books, and fragments.

"There are 10,000 biblical manuscripts around the world. That does not mean there are 10,000 complete copies of the Bible," Constantinou pointed out. Most of these manuscripts contain only a small portion of the modern Bible. "We have 300 copies of the Book of Revelation in manuscript form."

These manuscripts - hand-copied on parchment - are a very different form of writing than what we are used to today. Ancient Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic did not yet have punctuation or capitalization. And there weren't even spaces between words, in order to maximize how much writing could fit onto a piece of parchment or papyrus, both of which were very expensive. Common words were routinely abbreviated to further save on space (and thus cost).

Further, these manuscripts have variances in them - which is not surprising in that they were copied by hand.

"The fact is that every manuscript is different; every manuscript is unique - because they're all handmade copies."

As one example, Constantinou pointed out that

some manuscripts of Revelation read, "I have the keys to the kingdom of David." Other manuscripts read, "I have the keys to Hades."

"Which is it?," she asked. The words are similar in Greek, and so it is difficult for modern scholars to know which is accurate.

"There is no perfect translation.

"Even if it is literal, that doesn't mean you will understand it properly."

Further, Constantinou pointed out that a literal translation is generally not possible because languages are so different that a word-by-word translation simply does not exist.

"Very often, there is no one English word that encapsulates the meaning of the Greek word."

Further, there are cultural contexts to all words - and those are often lost over time. Constantinou offered the example of a Japanese translator coming across the phrase "raining cats and dogs" in an English or American book, and trying to figure out how to translate that into Japanese.

And not all translations of the Bible begin with the same original text, Constantinou said. For instance, most modern Catholic translations use Hebrew versions of the Old Testament - but the oldest surviving Hebrew translations tend to only be about 1,000 years old.

Most Orthodox translations are based on the Greek Septuagint, which was created about 250 BC by Jewish scholars for use by non-Hebrew-speaking

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*The Society of St. John Chrysostom
Western Region*

WELCOMES NEW MEMBERS

*Full membership: \$50; Associate:
\$40; Parish Membership: \$100. For
full information call 714-600-3660
and ask for Fr. James, or e-mail*

*secretary Anne Petach at:
secretary.lightoftheeast@gmail.com*

North American ecumenical group marks 50 years

The North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation marked its 50th anniversary in October.

The first official dialogue between Catholic and Eastern Orthodox theologians in modern times, the Consultation first met in 1965. In an Oct. 24 statement, the Consultation marked the progress between the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches during the past half-century:

“The bold decision by our churches to establish this Theological Consultation reflected the perspectives of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and the Pan-Orthodox Conferences (1961-1968). This Consultation was the first official dialogue between theologians of the Orthodox and Catholic churches to be established in modern times. It marked a dramatic new phase in the relationship between our churches.

“The early meetings were not easy. Centuries of divergent teachings and misunderstandings still existed. There were few contemporary models of dialogue to be followed. We give thanks for the vision of Archbishop Iakovos and Bishop Bernard Flanagan, bishops deeply committed to Christian unity. They encouraged Orthodox and Catholic theolo-

gians and faithful to move beyond isolation, and to commit themselves to dialogue in obedience to the prayer of Christ for the unity of his followers.

“For fifty years, this Consultation has contributed to the ultimate goal of restoration of full communion between our churches. This has taken place through theological dialogue, nurtured by prayer and characterized by mutual respect among the participants.”

The statement goes on to say:

“During the past five decades, there also has been a remarkable growth in positive relationships between Orthodox and Catholics. The meetings of Popes and Ecumenical Patriarchs have boldly expressed this new spirit. Relics of a number of saints have been restored to the shrines where they were originally venerated. Among clergy and laity, opportunities for prayer, study, and common witness have done much to eliminate age-old misunderstandings, and to deepen mutual respect. ... All of this, we believe, bears witness to the deep desire for reconciliation and unity in faith that now characterizes the life of the People of God.”

The complete text of the statement can be read online at <http://tinyurl.com/obe2qrt>.

Find a translation of the Bible you will actually read

Continued from Page 6

Jews throughout the Middle East, most of whom spoke Greek. The Septuagint is very well preserved, and was based on Hebrew manuscripts that are long lost to history. So while the Septuagint is a translation, in some ways it is likely more accurate than more recent Hebrew manuscripts.

Between figures of speech that don't translate from one language to another (or from one time to another), the lack of spaces and punctuation (including the lack of any quote marks) in the original manuscripts, and the fact that the manuscripts are not consistent, Constantinou said it is important when reading the Bible to remember that, “Everything in the Bible is the result of a decision someone made.”

During a Q&A session following her presentation,

Constantinou was asked some questions about specific translations.

To one question asking for a recommendation for the “best” English translation, she said, “The best Bible is the one you will read!”

“Growing up, I read ‘Good News for Modern Man,’ which is terrible, terrible - but I read it! It was simple. It was basic. And the Jerusalem Bible - because I went to OLP (Our Lady of Peace Academy).”

She did recommend avoiding any of the “inclusive” translations, because she said they consciously change the meaning of the original texts.

Videos of the presentation and the Q&A session can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/h69kukv> and <http://tinyurl.com/hhbqgvf>.

Briefly ...

Society of Saint John Chrysostom - Western Region elects new officers

At its November business meeting, following the presentation at St. Paul American Coptic Orthodox Church in Tustin, the membership of the Society of Saint John Chrysostom - Western Region, elected a new vice president and secretaries to two-year terms. Father James Bankston, pastor of St. John the Baptizer Ukrainian Catholic Church in La Mesa, was elected vice president. Diane Alves was elected secretary, with Bob Greenwell accepting the appointed role of assisting secretary for correspondence.

The new officers will be installed at the January business meeting.

New Assyrian Catholicos Patriarch selected; See to return to ancient Iraqi home

The Synod of the Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East elected Bishop Gewargis Sliwa as the new Catholicos Patriarch. He had served as Metropolitan of Iraq since 1981.



Mar Gewargis III

At his Sept. 27 consecration in Ankawa, Iraq, he took the name of Mar Gewargis III.

His predecessor, Mar Dinkha IV, passed into life with the Lord on March 26, 2015.

It was also announced that Mar Gewargis III will move the seat of the Assyrian Church from its home-in-exile of Chicago back to Baghdad, Iraq. The Patriarchal See of the Assyrian Church has been in exile since 1933.

Mar Gewargis III was born on Nov. 23, 1941 in Habbaniya, Iraq. He graduated from the University of Baghdad in 1963, and taught English in Iraq for the next 13 years. It was during a visit to the United States that he was called to the ordained ministry, and was ordained to the diaconate in April 1980 and to the priesthood two months later. Just under a year later, he was named Metropolitan for Baghdad and all Iraq.

Orthodox church in Turkish territory on Cyprus re-opens after 41 years

The Church of Panagia (Virgin Mary) Galakodrofousas in Palekythro, Cyprus, is being cited as evidence of progress in ongoing settlement talks in Cyprus between Greeks and Turks.

The longstanding conflict has resulted in a political division of the island. The historic Greek Orthodox church had been closed since 1976. It was originally constructed in 1896.

The first Liturgy to be celebrated in the church in 41 years was held on Aug. 16, led by Bishop Porfyrios of Neapolis and attended by some 400 worshippers, according to news reports.

New head for Pontifical Oriental Institute

Jesuit priest Father David Nazar has been appointed the new director for the Pontifical Oriental Institute. This is the premier institution for the study of Eastern Christianity in Rome.

Fr. Nazar comes to his new post from his previous assignment as superior of Jesuits in Ukraine. He grew up in and was ordained in Canada.



Father David Nazar

Upon taking his new assignment, he issued the following statement:

"I gladly accept this appointment. This is important work for the good of the Church and, in particular, for the Oriental Churches. Today

we have conflicts in the Middle East, particularly in Syria, and military action in Ukraine. The Church should rethink its mission in these countries and the Pontifical Oriental Institute, as an important institution, is an important element in this process."

Common date for Easter urged

The Middle East Council of Churches ended its annual meeting in November with a report stating that Christian unity can best be pushed forward with concrete steps such as adopting a common date for celebrating Easter.

The Council includes representatives of Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant churches