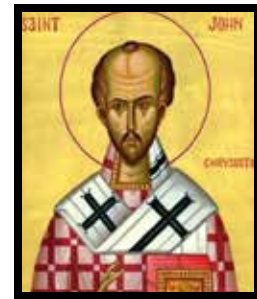


Light of the East

Newsletter of the Society of Saint John Chrysostom
Western Region Edition
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Winter 2016

Permanent diaconate East, West explored

By Jim Trageser

A wide-ranging exploration of the role of deacons touched on everything from early Church history to differing contemporary practices to the role of women in the Church.

“The Diaconate in the Orthodox and Catholic Churches” was the topic of the Jan. 23 presentation of the Society of St. John Chrysostom - Western Region. Held at Saint Nicholas Antiochian Orthodox Christian Cathedral in Los Angeles, the talk featured presentations from both Catholic and Orthodox deacons, followed by a question-and-answer period.

Deacon David J. Estrada, director of diaconate formation for the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles, spoke first. He was introduced to the audience of roughly three dozen by SSJC-WR President Archbishop George Morelli, following an abbreviated third-hour service.



Photo by Jim Trageser

Deacon David J. Estrada, director of diaconate formation for the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles, speaks during the Jan. 23 presentation.

Deacon Estrada shared his own faith journey to the diaconate: Growing up in Los Angeles, leaving seminary to serve in the Air Force, marrying and beginning a family, pursuing a career with the County of Los Angeles — and then once again contemplating

the calling that had first led him to seminary.

Deacon Estrada pointed out that the office of deacon in the Christian Church is laid out in the Acts of the Apostles — but that for about 1,500 years in the

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Happenings!

CANCELED:

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

Due to unforeseen circumstances, this conference had to be called off. We hope to reschedule this discussion for a future date and location. We apologize for any inconvenience this cancellation may have caused.

SSJC-WR Presentation:

“Rejoicing in the Resurrection of Christ: Tradition and traditions in the Eastern and Western Churches”

Father Bratso Krsich and Monsignor Dennis Mikulanis will speak on how Easter / Pascha is observed. 9:30 a.m., Saturday, May 21, San Rafael Catholic Church, 17252 Bernardo Center Dr, San Diego (Rancho Bernardo). Contact Father George Morelli 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.

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Light of the East

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Message from the President of SSJC-Western Region



Orthodox unity to be focus of 2016 Council

By the Very Reverend Archpriest George Morelli PhD

There are many serious challenges to the unity of the Churches, ecclesial communities and confessions, and religious groups in today's world. Among these are: secularization, religious pluralism, fundamentalism and ethnophyletism.

If the Orthodox Churches — one of the Apostolic Churches tracing their succession to Christ Himself — in agreement on faith and morals can achieve agreement on approaching these issues confronting them today, God willing, this will be a witness and model for other Churches and religious communities to do the same.

Just such a witness was described in the document issued in January in Chambésy, Switzerland, by the *Synaxis of Primate of the Local Orthodox Churches* in preparation for the Holy and Great Council that is to be held on the Greek island of Crete during June (Pentecost as celebrated in the Eastern Orthodox Churches). This had been preceded by a draft document adopted by the Fifth Pan-Orthodox Pre-Council in October, also in Chambésy. Many ecumenical encounters between Eastern and Western Churches have occurred leading to these events.

Among the issues to be considered by the Great Council are ecclesiology (primacy, autocephaly, autonomy), the diaspora (movement of Orthodox Christians from their original Patriarchates to non-Orthodox lands), nationalism, and fundamentalism.

The split between East and West started sporadically in the first millennium, culminating with the Schism of 1054 AD and punctuated by the Crusader siege of Constantinople in 1204 AD. In recent times, various attempts have been made to heal the East-West divide. Notably, in 1965, Pope Paul VI and Athenagoras I, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, declared invalid the anathemas of 1054.

Since then, both Churches have sent delegations to the liturgical celebrations of feasts significant to the other: e.g., the Feast of Sts Peter and Paul (29 June) for

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Orthodox set historic synod for June; Crete will host

By Jim Trageser

The Patriarchs of the fourteen local autocephalous Eastern Orthodox Churches have set June 19 as the date for the next Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church — to be held on the island of Crete.

Not considered a true ecumenical Council — the Orthodox hold that all the historic Churches must be in communion and invited for a true ecumenical Council to be called — the Holy and Great Council is nevertheless set to address a number of issues facing the Orthodox Communion.

Originally proposed in 1961 during the first Pan-Orthodox Conference, the plans for the Council were finalized at a synaxis among all the Eastern Orthodox Churches held in January in Geneva. This follows five Pan-Orthodox Preconciliar Conferences — 1976, 1982, 1986, 2009 and 2015.

A total of six items have been put on the official agenda, with some covering several sub-topics:

- The Orthodox Diaspora, and the right of each Church to tend to its own flock outside of its historic geography

- Autonomy — the degree of autonomy granted to semi-independent churches within autocephalous churches (for example, the Orthodox Church of Finland which belongs to the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate). One topic that was deferred from this item is the status of the diptychs (the list of autocephalous churches according to their honor and rank) — can the order of the churches be changed? No unanimity was achieved

at the synaxis, so this is off the agenda. A separate agenda item to address the method of recognizing new autocephalous churches was not unanimously approved, although the issue may be discussed as part of the autonomy agenda item.

- Canonical impediments to marriage — particularly in the cases of inter-Christian marriages.

- Should the rules of fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays be changed?

- Ecumenism — including possibly adopting a common date to celebrate Easter across Christendom. Relationships with the non-Orthodox branches of the ancient Church,



Representatives of the 14 autocephalous Eastern Orthodox Churches pray during a Great Liturgy celebrated during the synaxis held in Geneva in January. Most of these same leaders will gather again in June in Crete for a long-anticipated Holy and Great Council.

such as the Roman Catholic Church, the Oriental Orthodox Churches, and the Assyrian Church of the East, as well as with Protestant denominations, will also be discussed.

- The mission of the Orthodox Church in the contemporary world. A separate proposal to have an agenda entry devoted to the contribution of Orthodoxy to affirming peace, fraternity, and freedom was deferred due to a lack of unanimity.

However, as might be expected any time 14 autonomous Church leaders prepare to gather, cracks in the unanimity required to approve any decisions have already appeared (this despite unanimity at the synaxis to get them on the agenda). The Georgia Orthodox Church has already rejected a shared date for Easter, as well as the proposed ecumenical policy. And the Russian Orthodox Church has indicated it will oppose any moves that make it easier for regional churches to be recognized as autocephalous by the rest of Orthodoxy — making it unlikely the situation in Ukraine will be clarified.

Catholic leaders looked East for inspiration on deacons

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Catholic tradition, there was no permanent diaconate.

“Deacons existed in the Roman Rite, but we were only transitional deacons on the way to becoming priests,” Estrada explained. “So the faithful weren’t really familiar with what a deacon was.

“We would see deacons for about two weeks. They would come, accompanying the priests — and two weeks later they were ordained priests.

“Meanwhile, in the Eastern Church, of course, the diaconate was strong and alive. But we westerners didn’t really have that.

“The Second Vatican Council realized something was missing from the Western Church. Something, perhaps, that already existed and could be of tremendous service to the Church.”

Pope Paul VI decreed in 1967 that the diaconate was to be restored in permanency. A year later, American bishops petitioned for and were granted permission to re-start the permanent diaconate in the United States — including the ordination of married men.

Estrada said that, “It’s important to note that when the bishops petitioned Rome, they listed reasons why”:

To complete the hierarchy of sacred orders. Deacon is a different role from that of priest and bishop.

To enlist a new group of devout and competent men.

Aid and expand charitable and liturgical services. Deacons have a specific role in the liturgical celebration of the Church.

Provide a sacred presence in secular life. “We need to penetrate the real world out there, which is sometimes difficult for priests and bishops to do because of the pressures of parish and diocesan life.”

As Catholic dioceses around the world began preparing coursework to prepare men to be ordained permanent deacons, Estrada said Catholics “Looked to our Eastern brothers and sisters to see

what was going on there. One of the things that has always impressed me about the Eastern Church is the great spirituality.”

As far as the liturgical role of deacons, Estrada explained that in the Roman Catholic Church, deacons can perform the sacraments of baptism and marriage, and conduct funerals — so long as those services do not include a full Mass, as only a priest or bishop can serve Mass.

While most deacons are assigned to a parish to assist the pastor, and often work in faith formation (leading First Communion classes for parents, RCIA classes for adults contemplating conversion or joining the Catholic Church), Estrada said the Church is “still working to establish the identity fo the deacon in the Church, among the faithful.”

“I really couldn’t tell you what the role of the deacon will be in a hundred years from now, because it’s still unfolding.

“But we still look to our

brothers in the Eastern traditions.”

Still, Deacon Estrada said that while the specific nature of deacons’ work may still be evolving, the heart of that Church office is simple:

“Preach the Gospel — that’s what we’re called to do.”

While Deacon Estrada came to the diaconate late in his secular career, and is now able to devote his working hours to the Church, Deacon Maxime Najim is still in the beginning stages of a career in computer sciences.

The son of an Antiochian priest, Deacon Najim holds masters degrees in both sacred theology and computer science, and works full-time in technology in addition to his part-time services to the Church.

Deacon Najim opened his remarks by pointing out that while there are some important variations in the approach of the different historic Apostolic churches to the permanent diaconate, all see it as part of the ordained priesthood — and echoing what Deacon Estrada had said about the restored

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‘I really couldn’t tell you what the role of the deacon will be in a hundred years from now, because it’s still unfolding.’
— Deacon David Estrada

Pope, Russian Patriarch hold historic meeting in Cuba

By Jim Trageser

Proclaiming “We are brothers,” Pope Francis embraced Patriarch Kirill during a historic meeting on Feb. 12 in Havana, Cuba.

This was the first meeting between a Russian Orthodox patriarch and Catholic pope since the Great Schism of 1054 that divided Orthodox and Catholic. While the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople is “first among equals” in the Eastern Orthodox communion, the Russian Orthodox Church has more than half of all Eastern Orthodox believers in the world.

During their meeting, Kirill reportedly told Francis that, “Things are easier now” — perhaps referencing the challenges the two Churches have had in arranging a meeting of their heads. Francis was overhead replying, “It is clearer that this is God’s will.”

A joined declaration signed by both patriarchs repeatedly referred to the violent suppression against Christians in the Middle East and North Africa — an ongoing genocide largely unmarked by Western governments and media.

But even before those comments in the declaration, the two leaders addressed the schism between the two branches of the ancient historic Church:

“Notwithstanding this shared Tradition of the first ten centuries, for nearly one thousand years Catholics and Orthodox have been deprived of communion in the Eucharist. We have been divided by wounds caused by old and recent conflicts, by differences inherited from our ancestors, in the understanding and expression of our faith in God, one in three Persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We are pained by the loss of unity, the outcome of human weakness and of sin, which has occurred

despite the priestly prayer of Christ the Saviour: ‘So that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you ... so that they may be one, as we are one’ (Jn 17:21).”

The very next paragraphs in their joint declaration addresses an issue near and dear to the hearts of members of the Society of St. John Chrysostom:

“Mindful of the permanence of many obstacles, it is our hope that our meeting may contribute to the re-establishment of this unity willed by God, for which Christ prayed. May our meeting inspire Christians throughout the world to pray to the Lord with renewed fervour for the full unity of all His disciples. In a



Photo courtesy Vatican Radio

Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill and Pope Francis met in Havana, Cuba.

world which yearns not only for our words but also for tangible gestures, may this meeting be a sign of hope for all people of goodwill!

“In our determination to undertake all that is necessary to overcome the historical divergences we have inherited, we wish to combine our efforts to give witness to the Gospel of Christ and to the shared heritage of the Church of the first millennium, responding together to the challenges of the contemporary world. Orthodox and Catholics must learn to give unanimous witness in those spheres in which this is possible and necessary.”

Further passages call on the international community to respond to the genocide in the Middle East, defend the traditional view of marriage, call to task secularists who seek to restrict religious expression, and condemn both abortion and medical research carried out on human embryos.

The entire English translation can be found on the Vatican website at <http://www.news.va/en/news/joint-declaration-of-pope-francis-and-patriarch-ki>

Role of diaconate in period of change in East as well

Continued from Page 4

diaconate still being fleshed out in the Roman Catholic Church, Deacon Najim said the diaconate is in a period of revival across all of the ancient, historic Church.

“The Orthodox Church ordains deacons because they are an important part of the priesthood — deacon, presbyters and bishops.

“The bishop has the charism of speaking the truth; the ordained presbyter is celebrating the presence of Christ — the charism of offering.

“The deacon is given the charism of service.”

In terms of a liturgical role in the Eastern Orthodox Churches (with which the Antiochian Ortho-

dox Church is in full communion), Deacon Najim said, “The deacon is an indispensable part of the sacraments.”

“It is clearly the function of the bishop and priest to preside over the Liturgy, while the deacon ministers. It is precisely because the deacon is powerless that he can represent the image of Christ the servant.

“The deacon is mediator between the heavenly altar and earthly reality.”

Deacon Najim further pointed out that the ordained priesthood, including deacons, has its roots explained in the New Testament, from Romans 15:8 to Acts 6:1-6 and Acts 8:6, and in 1st Timothy 3.

While Deacon Estrada praised the Eastern Churches for maintaining a vibrant diaconate, Deacon Najim said that the role of deacons had been suppressed in the East as well, particularly during periods of power struggles between priests and deacons.

“There are many Orthodox parishes where there is no deacon,” Najim said. “In some areas, it is only a transition to the priesthood.”

During the question-and-answer session, one attendee asked about the training deacons receive. Deacon Najim said Eastern Orthodox Churches generally have a three-year training program. Deacon Estrada said in the Catholic Archdiocese of LA, it is a five-year program, but that other dioceses have programs ranging from four to six years in length.

In both Orthodox and Catholic Churches, married men seeking ordination into the permanent

diaconate can only do so with the full support of their wives — and if widowed after ordination, may not remarry.

The next question was whether monastic communities have permanent deacons.

Deacon Estrada said that monastic

orders in the Catholic Church — such as Franciscans and Dominicans — often do have permanent deacons as part of their communities. Since these orders generally require a vow of celibacy (even for non-ordained brothers), the permanent deacons could not be married, and generally would not have a full-time job outside the Church.

Deacon Najim said that in the Eastern Orthodox Churches, “Monastic communities are self-contained, and usually a monk does not leave a monastery. So the diaconate in monastic communities is there to function liturgically.”



Photo by Jim Trageser

Deacon Maxime Najim explains the role of the permanent diaconate in the Eastern Orthodox Churches during the Jan. 23 presentation.

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Morelli

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Catholic Church and of St. Andrew (Nov 30) for the Patriarchate of Constantinople,

Furthermore, numerous papal-patriarchal visitations have occurred. These events have been much welcomed by many in both the Eastern and the Western Church.

Recently an historic and unprecedented meeting took place between the Patriarch of Moscow, His Holiness Kirill, and Pope Francis I. The importance of this meeting from an ecumenical perspective is that the Moscow Patriarchate has the largest (and wealthiest) number of Orthodox Christians under its jurisdiction, around two-thirds of the world's Orthodox Christians, which number 200 million adherents.

Both hierarchs shared favorable statements about the meeting. It was reported that Pope Francis said, "We spoke as brothers. We share the same baptism. We are both bishops," Patriarch Kirill commented: "Yes, things are much easier now."¹

Both signed a joint declaration composed of

30 sections. Part of the declaration is particularly relevant to the spirit of the Society of St. John Chrysostom: "We are pained by the loss of unity, the outcome of human weakness and of sin, which has occurred despite the priestly prayer of Christ the Savior: 'So that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you ... so that they may be one, as we are one.' (Jn 17:21)... May our meeting inspire Christians throughout the world."²

May we join our prayers to those of all who are prayerfully hoping that the upcoming "Great Council" takes a significant step toward an implementing of ecclesial unity.

And let us be encouraged by the hope of Pope Francis, who has indicated: "there is no longer any impediment to Eucharistic communion which cannot be overcome through prayer, the purification of hearts, dialogue and the affirmation of truth."³

1. [<http://www.religionnews.com/2016/02/12/pope-francis-russian-church-leader-hold-historic-meeting-in-cuba/>]

2. [http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2016/02/12/joint_declaration_of_pope_francis_and_patriarch_kirill/1208117]

3. [<http://www.lastampa.it/2016/01/20/vaticaninsider/eng/world-news/the-future-of-the-panorthodox-council-is-to-be-decided-at-chamb-sy-DGOBGir09sttqzbqEOvpO/pagina.html>]

Role of female deacons in ancient Church is unclear

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Finally, the historic record of deaconesses was brought up.

Deacon Najim said that in the ancient Church, "Their functionality was to minister to women. They were involved with the male deacons in terms of social work. Their liturgical role is somewhat controversial, as some say they did have an important role. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I says there is no canonical problem ordaining women, but there are challenges."

The Armenian Apostolic Church attempted to further restore women deacons, but there is uncertainty regarding the liturgical role regarding deaconesses.

"Saint John Chrysostom and other early Church fathers do hold the women's diaconate as something important, and perhaps its restoration is something that could happen — but the question is what does that mean?"

Deacon Estrada said that while Rome recognizes that historically deaconesses did serve, it is thought that this was a nonordained role — a subdeacon, not part of Holy Orders.

*The Society of St. John Chrysostom
Western Region*

WELCOMES NEW MEMBERS

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*and ask for Fr. James, or e-mail
secretary Diane Alves at:
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Briefly ...

Pope Francis, Pope Matthias meet



Pope Francis greets Pope Matthias during their meeting at the Vatican on Feb 29.

On Feb. 29, Pope Francis welcomed the head of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, Pope Matthias I, to the Vatican.

During their meeting, Francis told Matthias (who leads the largest of the Oriental Orthodox Churches, which are not in communion with Rome or Constantinople), that the oppression of Tewahedo Christians in Africa is not forgotten by their brothers and sisters elsewhere — and argued that this suffering should further Christian unity.

“Just as in the early Church the shedding of the blood of martyrs became the seed of new Christians, so today the blood of the many martyrs of all the Churches has become the seed of Christian unity,” Pope Francis said. “The ecumenism of the martyrs is a summons to us, here and now, to advance on the path to ever greater unity.”

Succession settled in Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia

On Jan. 14, the Ecumenical Patriarchate announced that a unanimous decision regarding the formerly disputed succession of Archbishop Krystof, who resigned in April 2013.

Following Krystof’s resignation, the Ecumenical Patriarchate had recognized Metropolitan Simeon of Brno and Olomuc as temporary head of the Church until a proper election could be held.

An extraordinary synod was called later that year, and the synod elected Archbishop Rastislav — removing Metropolitan Simeon over the objections of

the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

The January announcement stated that Metropolitan Rastislav is now recognized as Primate of the Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia. For his part, Metropolitan Rastislav issued a letter of apology for his criticism of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

It was further noted that Metropolitan Simeon of Olomouc and Bmo maintains his previous office, prior to his temporary appointment.

Finally, a combined committee made up of representatives of those backing Rastislav and those backing Simeon was appointed.

New Syro-Malankara Catholic eparchy created for United States and Canada

Pope Francis announced on Jan. 4 that members of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church will have their own eparchy (diocese) serving the United States and Canada. Aboon Thomas Mar Eusebius was appointed as first bishop of this new diocese.



Aboon Thomas Mar Eusebius

The Syro-Malankara Catholic Church is a branch of the ancient Malankara Church founded by the Apostle Thomas on the west coast of the Indian subcontinent in the first century, and part of the Church of the East.

The Syro-Malankara Catholic Church came into communion with Rome in the 1930s, along with the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church — another ancient Church founded by St. Thomas.

Other branches of the Malankara and Malabar churches are in communion with the Oriental Orthodox Churches.

The new diocese — named the Eparchy of St. Mary, Queen of Peace — will be based at St. Vincent de Paul Malankara Catholic Cathedral in Elmont, N.Y.

Aboon Thomas Mar Eusebius was born in 1961 in Mylapra, India. He was ordained to the priesthood in 1986 before being ordained bishop in 2010. He served Syro-Malankara communities in Canada and Europe before his latest elevation.