

LIGHT OF TRUTH



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WE ARE PROUD OF MOTHER TERESA,' ALBANIANS SAY OF FUTURE SAINT

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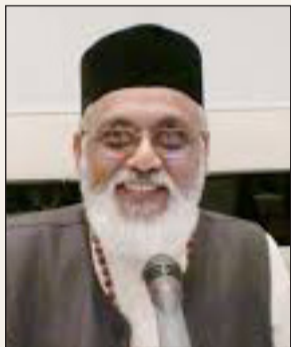
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VAIDIKARATNAM FR. SEBASTIAN THURUTHEL
Rev. Dr. M.D. Thomas

There is a Great and Holy Council of the Orthodox Churches scheduled to meet at the Orthodox Academy in the Greek island of Crete from 16 to 27 June 2016. Are you invited to that Council?

In fact, this is a Council of Synod of all the "Local Churches" belonging to the Byzantine liturgical tradition like, for example, Greek, Russian, Romanian and such other churches. Apart from this Eastern Orthodox family of Churches there is the Oriental Orthodox family, which includes the Coptic Church, the Syrian Church, the Armenian Church, the Ethiopian Church, the Eritrean Church and the Indian Malankara Orthodox Church. These two different families of Churches were separated in the 5th century at the Council of Chalcedon over a dispute on the Nature of the incarnate Christ. I understand that the Oriental Orthodox are invited as one family. However any invitee including the Roman Catholic Church is supposed to attend only the ceremonial opening and closing of the Synod and not its deliberations. I am personally very close to some of the people who are involved in the

Rev. Dr. K.M. George



NEED A NEW PARADIGM OF CHRISTIANITY

"Humanly speaking, one cannot expect a lot from this Great and Holy Council of Eastern Orthodoxy but we believe in the power of the Holy Spirit. The fact that such a synodal gathering (In the island of Crete from 16 to 27 June 2016) is possible after more than 50 years of preparation is itself something great?"

preparations, and am closely watching its outcome.

Do you think that there is a substantial disagreement on Christological problems between these two families?

For 1500 years we were separated because of the Christological disputes, but, in the 20th century, unofficial meetings of very distinguished theologians from both sides and a series of official meetings came to the agreement that in fact both

families of Orthodox Churches had maintained the same apostolic faith and tradition though Eucharistic communion had been broken in the 5th century. So, overcoming the cultural and linguistic barriers that created the doctrinal deadlock could be overcome and we hope that eucharistic communion can be restored. But practically the Churches have to take a firm decision towards restoring eucharistic communion.

(Contd. on page 13)

EASTERN ORTHODOXY'S APPROACHING COUNCIL



The Great and Holy Council (GHC) of Orthodoxy is finally set to begin in from June 16-27, 2016. on the island of Crete. There are approximately 250 million faithful compared to well over 1 billion Catholics. The ten-point agenda from 1976 has continued to guide discussions to the present day. Orthodoxy's GHC is no surprise at all, having been talked about in some form for nearly a century now since a partial, informal gathering was held in Constantinople in 1923. More proximate preparation began in 1961, but more serious and more immediate preparation was not begun until 1976, the first of several pre-conciliar pan-Orthodox consultations over the last forty years to work out an initial agenda. Naturally for most Catholics the analogue

aftermath also. A great deal of the difference stems, of course, from the fact that there is no centralized papal authority in Orthodoxy. Thus the questions of the Orthodox diaspora, of autocephaly and its manner of proclamation, of autonomy and its manner of proclamation, and of the diptychs (liturgy) are important issues. Most Orthodox churches began, and maintain roots in, some "homeland" or other—Greece, Russia, Ukraine, Romania, etc.—but have, thanks to modern immigration, existed in Western Europe, North America, and Australasia for over a century in some cases. Following on from the above, when an entire diocesan, regional, and national structure gets set up in a new country, does it continue to report to the old

country and be accountable to bishops and synods there, or can it be granted total independence (autocephaly) or partial independence (autonomy) in its new place? The dispute here is whether the "mother-church" grants such independence or whether doing so is a prerogative that belongs exclusively to the Ecumenical Patriarch. The diptychs are merely prayers in the liturgy which commemorate by name the bishop with whom one is in communion, and the bishops in communion with him. Does the lack of full communion with Rome justify moving Constantinople into the first place, and perhaps granting additional authority to it? And what about patriarchates created in the second millennium—Moscow, Bucharest, Sofia, and others? Finally, if one church's autocephaly is not recognized by others, how, if at all, should one pray for them? Orthodox attempts to adopt a common calendar since 1923 have led to schisms in places such as Greece and Romania, which remain unhealed today. Orthodox churches relation to other Christians, ecumenical relations, on peace liberty and brotherhood are issue that may vex the Council. The outcome is hard to imagine given the disunity among the heads. But will the heads of the church rise above power complexities and open up to the Spirit of God to come out with wonders for the world and for Christians in the world?

(Contd. from page 1)

NEED A NEW PARADIGM OF CHRISTIANITY

There are ten points in the agenda for discussion. Perhaps the first point of discussion is the diaspora, which means large numbers of the Orthodox people are very much spread all over, especially in Europe and America. These migrants in different parts are exposed to western culture. Do you think that the proposed Synod is going to seriously look into some sort of an adaptation or inculturation similar to what happened in 1960s in the Catholic Church after the Second Vatican Council?

We cannot compare this Synod with the Second Vatican Council and its impact as the latter took place within the one body of the Roman Catholic Church. In the Orthodox Council they are dealing with some 14 autocephalous (self-headed) Orthodox Churches. They are all independent Churches in matters of jurisdiction, administration etc. but linked only in the one Orthodox faith, liturgical theology, spirituality and canonical traditions. What binds them is the same faith in Christ and the same eucharistic communion. So this cannot be compared with the situation of the Roman Catholic Church where you have one universal head in the Bishop of Rome. Here we have autocephalous Churches like for example, Russian Orthodox Church or the Orthodox Church of Cyprus. Every national Orthodox Church has its own patriarch as the Head. Therefore this Council is very different in terms of its Synodal procedures.

The diaspora is an important and vital issue for the Synod, because the people who have emigrated from the geographical area of their mother Churches are living in new cultural and political situations. There is a question of jurisdiction, and that is what the Synod is primarily concerned about. The pastoral questions regarding the Diaspora is primarily addressed by the Local Orthodox Churches.

I do understand that this Synod cannot be compared to the Second Vatican Council

and also I do understand one of the important points for discussion is autocephaly and autonomy. But don't you think that, in spite of being different Churches under different heads, they all come under one tradition and one Orthodoxy. There could be decisions which could be taken together and some good will can be created among them. That kind of a good will could help them also to practise certain things commonly, don't you think so?

Autocephaly and autonomy are again a major problem for them. For example, the See of Constantinople, also called the Ecumenical Patriarchate, claims the primacy of honour over other Patriarchates, but the Patriarchate of Moscow may challenge some of jurisdictional claims of the Patriarchate of Constantinople and vice versa. This can create tensions. Another example is the young Orthodox Church called, the Orthodox Church of America (OCA), which is purely a North American Church where English is used in the liturgy and in the theological seminaries. They are all American citizens, but people in that Church originally came from Russia and some other East European countries. But the Patriarchate of Constantinople has not yet given its full canonical consent to accept the OCA though it is very lively and creative in terms of theological literature, spiritual, missionary and pastoral work.

What do you expect from this Council?

Personally, one does not expect much, because of the brevity of the gathering and the huge volume of agenda in addition to the possible tensions between the autocephalous churches. They have taken almost fifty years to prepare this Great and Holy council. After the seventh ecumenical Council in the eighth century, they never had a Council of the whole Orthodox Church. In the Western tradition, the Second Vatican Council is considered as the 21st. In the Oriental Orthodox tradition, we have only three Ecumenical Councils which are Nicea (325), Constantinople

(381) and Ephesus (431). According to an earlier understanding, this Great and Holy Council should take up the issue of the Eucharistic communion with the Oriental Orthodox Churches. But I don't know to what extent that will appear for the serious discussions at the Council, because time is extremely short and the agenda is very big. It is likely that there will be tensions between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. So, humanly speaking, one cannot expect much from this Great and Holy Council of Eastern Orthodoxy but we believe in the power of the Holy Spirit. The fact that such a synodal gathering is possible after more than 50 years of preparation is itself something great.

Do you hope that this Council could at least envisage the possibility and openness to convene a Synod in future of all the Orthodox Churches?

In principle, a Council of all Christian Churches, including Orthodox and Eastern Oriental Churches, is a great ideal, but few individual theologians and bishops in the Orthodox Churches would press this now. Even the very idea about it may not be easily accepted. Certain circles particularly the monastic ones can take very conservative positions.

But do you think that this conservatives are verging on some sort of fundamentalism?

It may not be so. The problem of these Orthodox Churches is that the majority of leadership can be rather open to newly arising pastoral and social questions but it may be difficult to convince some of the radical groups within the churches which are staunchly rooted in a certain vision of the orthodoxy of Christian faith. There is what is called a process of Reception in the Orthodox Church regarding synodal deci-

sions. The Council can make decisions, but the process of reception is very significant because they are to be accepted by the rank and file. The local churches, parishes and national churches and monastic circles all will have to accept the decisions of the Council for implementation. That may take time and can be sometimes negative in result. Unlike in the Roman Catholic Church, where what is decided by a Synod under the presidency of the Bishop of Rome is more or less accepted so far in the Catholic Church as a whole.

In the Council's agenda there is a topic called Orthodoxy and ecumenical movement. From what you said and as far as I know, the Mount Athos monasteries are terribly against ecumenism, aren't they?

I understand that the agenda on ecumenism gives priority to the relationship with the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church. I also understand that the Synod would have to listen the voice of the monks on Mount Athos since the monasteries there have been traditionally strong defenders of the purity of Byzantine Orthodoxy, rejecting all sorts of so called contamination by contact with any other church tradition.

Humanly speaking, one cannot expect a lot from this Synod, but we believe in the power of the Holy Spirit who can guide us at all levels. The very fact that these Churches are coming together for this Synod after 50

years of preparation is something great in itself and should be seen as guided by the Spirit of God.

Christianity is also facing terrible difficulties in the modern world. If you look at the Eastern European Church, Marxism has practically demolished it. In the Western world, capitalistic consumer system also is decimating Christianity. In the given context, don't you think the Christian Churches should come together and think together for the hope and future of Christianity rather than engaging in power struggles, which were traditionally a terrible curse for the Church?

I think you have raised a very relevant question. Personally, I believe that the Christian Churches all over the world should adopt a new paradigm, because we have been working under the age old paradigm of exclusive identity, hateful division and unending fights. It seems leaders like Pope Francis wish to shape a new paradigm of Christian life style and pastoral care although some people would say that this is too idealistic. It is not only imperative for the Christian churches but for all religions and nations to conceive of a new world order of peace and mutual hospitality, of justice and respect for each ones identity and a new life style that protects the integrity of creation and the healthy life of "the world that God so loved."

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Novena To Saint Jude

Most holy Apostle, St. Jude, faithful servant and friend of Jesus, the Church honors and invokes you universally, as the patron of difficult cases, of things almost despaired of, Pray for me, I am so helpless and alone.

Intercede with God for me that He bring visible and speedy help where help is almost despaired of. Come to my assistance in this great need that I may receive the consolation and help of heaven in all my necessities, tribulations, and sufferings, particularly - (make your request here) - and that I may praise God with you and all the saints forever. I promise, O Blessed St. Jude, to be ever mindful of this great favor granted me by God and to always honor you as my special and powerful patron, and to gratefully encourage devotion to you. Amen

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