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THE TURKISH GOVERNMENT CAN 'ONLY BENEFIT FROM RECOGNIZING THE ECUMENICAL STATUS OF THE PATRIARCHATE' A SENIOR OFFICIAL FROM THE FENER ORTHODOX PATRIARCHATE SAYS IN AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

Stopping resistance to the title "Ecumenical Patriarchate" and reopening the Halki Seminary can only elevate the reputation of Turkey as a democratic nation, according to a senior official from the Fener [Phanar] Orthodox Patriarchate.

"The 'ecumenical' status is a spiritual and religious jurisdiction. It is not legal or secular," John Chryssavgis, who holds the title of Archdeacon of the Ecumenical Throne, told *Hürriyet*.

"The Ecumenical Patriarch has direct authority over churches in Australia, Asia and Western Europe, as well as in North and South America. Moreover, he has the responsibility of coordinating all of the 14 independent Orthodox Churches in the world, including the Church of Moscow and the Church of Antioch [encompassing today's Syria and Lebanon], and so on," said Chryssavgis, who also serves as an advisor to Patriarch Bartholomew.

"So the ecumenical nature of the Patriarchate is genuinely historical and real. The Turkish government can only benefit from recognizing the 'ecumenical' status of the Patriarchate and from supporting the global reputation of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. I would say that ignoring the title 'ecumenical' is what the scriptures would call 'having eyes, but choosing not to see,'" he added.

Chryssavgis said more communication and more dialogue between the government and the Patriarchate would help solve issues, adding his opinion that attitudes toward the Patriarchate have improved overall in recent years.

"Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew himself has undoubtedly played a major role in this change through his charismatic and cordial personality. There has also

been significant progress achieved through such bodies as the General Assembly of the General Directorate of Foundations and the Association for the Support of the Greek Community's Foundations," he said.

In particular, Chryssavgis praised the government for the return of many properties to minority communities and for granting Turkish citizenship to bishops with formal positions at the Patriarchate. He also, however, stressed that these were simply "the right thing to do."

"The rights and privileges requested and expected by minorities in Turkey – whether Greek, Armenian, Jewish, or others – are their rightful prerogatives and lawful entitlements as citizens of this land. So, while these developments are welcome and promising, they are what every sovereign state should extend to all of their citizens, irrespective of religious or ethnic background," he said.

Chryssavgis described the current picture in Turkey regarding religious freedom as "somewhat inconsistent."

"On the one hand, we see clear signs of a willingness to address issues of religious freedom, especially in light of Turkey's accession to the EU. But on the other hand, the signs are not as clear when it comes to converting pronouncements of good will into concrete legislation and practical application," he said. – *The Hürriyet Daily News*, Dec. 8.

METROPOLITAN JOHN [ZIZIOULAS] OF PERGAMON, THE ORTHODOX CO-CHAIRMAN OF THE INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC-ORTHODOX DIALOGUE, GRANTED THIS INTERVIEW TO GIANNI VALENTE OF *VATICAN INSIDER*:

Q: Those were powerful words the Pope pronounced at the Phanar Your Em-inence.

A: Coming from a Pope, those words are very powerful indeed and represent a big step forward, which the Orthodox will appreciate. Because for many centuries, the Orthodox believed that the Pope wanted to subjugate them. And now we see this

is not in any way true. The emphasis he placed on professing and sharing the same faith is also important. Professing the same faith is the only basis of our unity. The question is recognizing what that same faith is; we need to profess this faith together in order for us to be in full communion.

Q: Which criterion should be followed?

A: For us members of the Orthodox Church, the common faith that makes full communion possible is the one professed in the 7 Ecumenical Councils of the first millennium. We need to clarify, from a Catholic point of view, whether a common faith that allows for sacramental communion should also include certain doctrines and dogmatic definitions which were established unilaterally by the Catholic Church. This point needs to be clarified in order to determine what concrete consequences may derive from the Pope's words at the Phanar.

Q: Is this clarification also to do with the Pope's role and his ministry?

A: Of course. If we were simply looking at the shared understanding of the role of the Bishop of Rome which prevailed in the first millennium, then there would be no problem. We know that in the second millennium, different conceptions of the papacy emerged. And this issue has been at the center of the Commission for Theological Dialogue Between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches' work for years. In the first millennium, the question surrounding the primacy of the Bishop of Rome was not about him not being recognized as an individual, but as the head of his Church. When we speak about primacy, we refer to the primacy of the Roman Catholic Church, which is exercised by the Pope, who is Bishop of that see.

Q: Is Christian unity only of interest to Christians?

A: In the speech he gave at the end of the liturgy for the Feast of St. Andrews, Patriarch Bartholomew reiterated that the Church does not exist for itself but for the whole world. For the salvation of men and

women who live in the world. Unity also helps give a stronger common testimony in the face of the problems that afflict the world and society today. Environmental problems, for example, or problems linked to the protection of creation. This is another important message that came through from the Pope's visit to the Phanar.

Q: Some say Christians should work together on concrete issues, leaving aside their attempts to mend theological and sacramental divisions. What do you think?

A: We tend to distinguish between co-operation and aspirations of unity. I believe "collaboration" is not enough. Our greatest wish is to achieve full communion in the Eucharist and across the Church's structures. This is not yet possible. But it is still something we cannot forget or put aside.

Q: The Ecumenical Patriarch said that Pope Francis has reignited hope among Orthodox faithful by assuring them that the Churches will return to full communion during his [tenure].

A: The current Pope has given some very important signs that give us the hope that quick progress will be made in achieving full communion. The way in which he is carrying out his ministry removes many apprehensions and fears of the past. With the current Bishop of Rome we are seeing a ministry of charity and service. And this really is a big step forward. Furthermore, in some parts of the world like the Middle East, Christians are suffering and their persecutors do not stop to ask them whether they are Catholic or Orthodox. All that matters is that they are Christian. This means that from the outside, we are seen as one family, that the divisions we sometimes seem to have grown used to are of no consequence. This also suggests that whether we like it or not, with this Pope and under the current circumstances, so many opportunities are presenting themselves from an ecumenical point of view.

Q: On the way back from Istanbul, Pope Francis quoted Patriarch Athanasios who suggested that to make progress on the path toward full unity, all theologians needed to be left on an island to discuss, while the Churches went on with their work. "If we wait for theologians to reach an agreement," the Pope said, "that day will never come!"

A: Yes, this may be true. But at the same time, history tells us that theology has divided the Church. So now, theology must help to remedy and unite the Church.

We cannot ignore the theological disagreements that have caused division in the Church.

Q: Will the pan-Orthodox Synod due to take place in 2016 deal with the question of unity with the Catholic Church?

A: Perhaps, but only in broad terms. It could be the right time to take stock of the big steps forward that have been made. But I do not think we will see anything more than this. The focus will be mainly on existing problems in the Orthodox world.

Q: The latest theological discussions between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches have not yielded many results, particularly due to the divisions that have emerged between the Orthodox Churches. How do you explain this?

A: It is important for the Orthodox Churches to be united. Unfortunately I see some Orthodox adopting the old attitudes of hostility toward the Catholic Church and toward the papacy. And this certainly does not make the situation any easier. — *Vatican Insider*, Dec. 9.

ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW ARRIVED TODAY AT 11:00 AM IN CORFU, AN ISLAND OFF THE WEST COAST OF GREECE. ARCHBISHOP NEKTARIOS OF CORFU, PAXOS AND DIAPONTIA HAD INVITED HIM TO VISIT THE ISLAND as part of the celebration of its patron saint, St. Spyridon, on this coming Friday, December 12.

The head of the Orthodox Church was formally received by local authorities, church representatives and numerous citizens, schools and the island's famous municipal philharmonic band. Upon his arrival, the Ecumenical Patriarch expressed his feelings, saying that he was very moved, and highlighted that Corfu acts as crossroads of people and civilizations, neighboring to the west with Italy and to the east with Albania.

He noted that the Ecumenical Patriarchate's mission is vital for the entire world and not just for Orthodoxy, sending a message of "ecumenical rapprochement and cooperation."

Soon after his arrival, Bartholomew visited the St. Spyridon Cathedral, where the Saint's sacred relics are being kept. Numerous events have been scheduled during the Ecumenical Patriarch's four-day visit to the Greek island.

The last official visit of the Primate of the Orthodox Church to Corfu took place 51 years ago, in 1963, by the late Ecumenical Patriarch Athanasios. — Aggelos

Skordas for *Greek Reporter*, Dec. 12.

“**A** CALL FOR THE REJUVENATION OF THE MINISTRY OF THE ORDAINED DEACONESS” HAS BEEN PUBLISHED BY SAINT CATHERINE'S VISION, AN INTERNATIONAL, PAN-ORTHODOX FELLOWSHIP OF ORTHODOX WOMEN THEOLOGIANs AND OTHER LAY SERVANT-LEADERS.

The document is addressed to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and the Secretariat of the Great and Holy Council. It is being widely distributed for prayerful reflection by hierarchs, clergy and laity.

“A Call for the Rejuvenation of the Ministry of the Ordained Diaconess” affirms that the ministry of ordained deaconesses is part of the Church's tradition. The rejuvenation of the order can be of great benefit in many places within the Church today as it has been through history. This apostolic ministry may become a witness in those many places that thirst for the outreach of Christ, the “One Who Serves” (Luke 22:27).

“A Call for the Rejuvenation of the Ministry of the Ordained Diaconess” reaffirms the understanding of the order that was unanimously stated at the historic Pan-Orthodox Conference at Rhodes, Greece in 1988.

The Rhodes Statement says: “The apostolic order of the diaconess should be revived. It was never altogether abandoned in the Orthodox Church though it has tended to fall into disuse . . . The revival of this ancient order . . . would represent a positive response to many of the needs and demands of the contemporary world.”

The “Call” recognizes that recent discussions regarding the ministry of deaconesses can be traced across the Orthodox world at least to the early 1800s. Within this context, St. Nektarios ordained two deaconesses in the year 1911.

More recently, the proposal for the restoration of the order of the diaconess has been led by emeritus Professor Evangelos Theodorou of the University of Athens. Since the 1940s, much of his scholarly writing has been devoted to the study of the Byzantine ordination rite of the diaconess and her ministry. He has led the cause for the restoration of the order of the Diaconess.

Professor Theodorou and other Orthodox theologians have shown that the historical evidence for the order of the diaconess reaches back to the apostolic period where St. Paul speaks of St. Phoebe,

the deacon (Rom. 16:12). Throughout the Byzantine period, there are extensive examples of ordained deaconesses who contributed greatly to the life of the church. Among these are: St. Olympias, St. Nonna, St Gorgonia, St. Theosevia, and St. Irene of Chrysovalantou.

“A Call for the Rejuvenation of the Ministry of the Ordained Deaconess” says that today this ministry “would benefit the life of the Church. The deaconess, in the ever-expanding needs of the local church, under the direction of the bishop, would assist in areas such as pastoral care, education, mission, and philanthropy. She would also expand the outreach of the church particularly through evangelism and witness as well as care for the sick, destitute and unchurched, bearing further witness to the values of the Gospel in the wider society.”

The “Call” also recognizes that the ministry of women should be expressive of the teaching of Christ expressed in Scripture and Tradition. It cannot be influenced by other false and demeaning views of women. Here, the text cites the Rhodes Conference which says: “The Church must re-examine potential data, views and actions, which do not agree with her unshakable theological and ecclesiological principles, but have intruded from outside and, being in fact perpetuated, may be interpreted as demeaning toward women.”

In presenting their “Call,” the leaders of St. Catherine’s Vision say: “It is our hope that this call for the rejuvenation of the ministry of female deacons, or deaconesses, will prayerfully and sincerely be considered by our hierarchs, who serve as our Fathers in the Lord, prior to convening for the 2016 Great and Holy Council of the Orthodox Church. This document also is being distributed throughout the entire Church for edification, consultation and prayer. The text bears witness to the many examples of holy women throughout Church history who have been filled with “the grace of the diaconate” and who inspired St. John Chrysostom, Patriarch of Constantinople, to declare, “this order is also in the highest degree necessary, useful and proper in the Church.”

Saint Catherine’s Vision (SCV) is an international, Pan-Orthodox fellowship of women theologians and other lay servant-leaders addressing contemporary concerns from an Orthodox Christian perspective. Founded with hierarchical blessing in 2001, SCV is an endorsed organization of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox

Bishops of the United States of America. St. Catherine’s Vision has produced two books on women saints, *Encountering Women of Faith*, Volume I and *Encountering Women of Faith*, Volume II. Most recently, SCV sponsored a major Conference on “Divine Compassion and Women of the Church: Theological Perspectives.” Metropolitan Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia was the keynote speaker. – Press Release, Saint Catherine’s Vision, Dec. 7.

ON THE EVENING OF MONDAY 8 DECEMBER 2014, HIS BEATITUDE THEODOROS II, POPE AND PATRIARCH OF ALEXANDRIA AND ALL AFRICA, H A.Θ.M. ATTENDED THE PRESENTATION OF THE BOOK BY METROPOLITAN GEORGE OF GUINEA “PETROS VII: THE VISIONARY PATRIARCH (1997-2004)” which took place in the great function hall of the ‘Four Seasons’ Hotel in Limassol.

The function began with the singing of the Apolytikion of the Saint Apostle and Evangelist Mark and with the greeting of the representative of the President of Cyprus Mr. Panayiotis Antoniou – Director of the President’s Private Office. The Journalist/Academic recited the poem ‘Ithaca’ by the Alexandrian poet Costas Cavafis. The author was presented by the Journalist Elena Haralambous. The presentation of the book was made by the Professor Emeritus of the Kapodistrian University of Athens and Director of the Historic Archives of the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece, Mr. Spyridon Kontogiannis. A screening dedicated to the late Patriarch Petros VII followed, then address by the author in which he thanked all who contributed to the publication of the book and the beautiful function, which ended with the address by His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa – among other things he congratulated the author, outlined the great personality of his predecessor and awarded the Cross of St Mark to the sponsor of the publication of the book and the function, Mr Glafkos Mouskis, owner of the Four Seasons Hotel. The evening ended with songs of Cyprus, beautifully presented by the singer Despo Plyta, accompanied by piano. The event was coordinated with great success by the Journalist Andreas Dimitropoulos.

Among those present were the Ambassador of Greece Mr. Vasilis Papioannou, Their Eminences Metropolitan Makarios of Kenya, Timotheos of Vostron, Dimitrios of Irinopolis and Chrysostomos

of Cyreneia, Their Graces Nicholas Bishop of Amathous and Nektarios of Arsinoe, the Chairman of the Office Bearers Theodoros Panagopoulos, Parliamentarians, Mayors, Municipal Councilors, the Clergy of the Holy Metropolis of Limassol, the family of the late Patriarch and many friends of the Missions and of the Patriarchate. – Press Release, Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria, Dec. 9.

HIS BEATITUDE PATRIARCH JOHN X OF ANTIOCH AND ALL THE EAST GRANTED THIS INTERVIEW TO AL-MONITOR.COM:

Al-Monitor: Metropolitan Joseph of the United States has been described as a “son of Damascus” with a particular interest in protecting Christians in the Middle East. Do you foresee the US church playing a greater role in addressing the plight of Christians in the region?

John X: We have a huge archdiocese here, with about 270 parishes, 500 priests and deacons, and nine bishops. We have a lot of hope for the ecclesiastical work this archdiocese can make for all our people to bear witness to Jesus Christ. We are one church, one family and all our people here have roots in Syria or Lebanon or Jordan or Palestine or Iraq and they help spiritually and financially. On the financial side, they send [aid] to the Patriarchate to help our people there, in Syria especially these days. There are about 2 million Christians in Syria [and] we have a lot of needs these days. We try to help all without distinguishing between Muslims and Christians — we give to the Muslims and the Christians.

Al-Monitor: Earlier this year a conference focusing on protecting Christians in the Middle East was held in Washington. Has it had any impact?

John X: We are waiting. We are waiting. We are waiting to see some action. We finished the conference with a communique [urging] the governments [of the world] to find a peaceful solution, a solution through dialogue, not through other kinds of ways — the most important issue is to press all to find a peaceful solution for Syria.

Al-Monitor: What has been your message in your meetings with US and other officials?

John X: Our message is for peace, how to find a peaceful solution for Syria — that’s the most important thing. And the second is that we as Christians, we are not transients — we are not visitors. We are from these countries, and we live

there, and we will still live there. Everywhere we go they ask us, are you remaining in Syria, or Iraq, or Lebanon? It's a very sensitive and difficult topic. But we believe the solution is not to send warships or ships for transportation to take us abroad. We ask all the governments to push for peace. If you want to help us as Christians, to protect us as Christians, you have to find a peaceful solution for Syria and for the Middle East. You can't protect me only, if my neighborhood is not well.

Al-Monitor: A key aspect of US policy is to empower so-called moderate rebels to help achieve such a political solution. What is your view on this?

John X: We hope to find a peaceful solution through political dialogue, and to cut off all these sources of money and weapons to all these rebels.

Al-Monitor: You've personally been impacted by the violence. Have you had any news of your brother [Paul Yazigi, Metropolitan of the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of Aleppo] and Syriac Orthodox Bishop Mar Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim, who were kidnapped last year? Have you found out who is responsible?

John X: Unfortunately, we do not have any news. We are afraid because we see this international silence. All [foreign officials] say to us is they do not know anything, unfortunately. It's a shame for all the world, for all the governments, because they're speaking about human rights and about democracy, but in this case where is the democracy and where are the human rights? Some governments have information, absolutely, but they don't give it to us.

Al-Monitor: How are you counseling other victims of violence? Are you worried about a cycle of sectarian revenge?

John X: We believe the only way to live with the other is in a peaceful way, and to accept the other. We do not believe in extremism or takfirism or this kind of thinking. For these reasons as Christians we try to remain in our homes, in Syria and Lebanon and all the Middle East, and we do not believe that you can use the religion to divide families, to divide brother from brother. For these reasons we have to live in this spirit and to accept the others, to respect the others. We still live this spirit [and] have a very good relationship in our Patriarchate with the Muslims.

Al-Monitor: What kind of support do you need from the US and the rest of the world to achieve peace?

John X: We still hope that we will have a good result and we will find a solu-

tion, despite all these catastrophes and tragedy. We still hope. And we still hope that some governments and institutions in the world want truly to find a solution.

This encourages us to continue our mission, our work. We live with this hope that after the cross there is the resurrection. We are now bearing a very difficult cross, but we believe in the resurrection. We ask the international community not to think only about their interests in the Middle East — to know that the people of the Middle East is a lovely people, and they seek and ask for peace. And to help us to live all together peacefully.

Al-Monitor: What are you doing to get across this message that the situation is salvageable?

John X: We try to communicate [how] we try in the Patriarchate to help the others, not only the Christians but the Muslims. That is the way we express our mission; that's what we are, that's what we believe. It's very important for the outside world to know this is true. And I think they know.

Al-Monitor: The Antiochian church is among the oldest Christian churches in the world. What are some of your plans for its future?

John X: The church always has to be alive. And when we say has to be alive, that's two things: You have roots in the past, your traditions for example, and you have a vision for the future. And you have to connect the past with the future. Now the youth have mobile phones, iPads. We have to change and speak their language. That is not a problem for us, because the truth is the truth. It's the same content, in a different way. We have a lot of converts — Protestants, Anglicans. They realize they don't have the true meaning of a lot of things in their life and they find it in the Orthodox Church, because we have this kind of thinking to connect the past with the future. -- Julian Pecquet for Al-Monitor, Dec. 12.

ON DECEMBER 3, 2014, A FRATERNAL TALK TOOK PLACE, AT THE PATRIARCHAL AND SYNODAL RESIDENCE IN ST. DANIEL'S MONASTERY, BETWEEN HIS HOLINESS PATRIARCH KIRILL OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUSSIA AND HIS BEATITUDE METROPOLITAN TIKHON OF ALL AMERICA AND CANADA, who has come for an official visit to the Russian Orthodox Church.

Before the talks, the Primate of the two Church proceeded to the residence's Chapel of All Saints Who Shone Forth in

the Russian Land for a thanksgiving, which was celebrated by Metropolitan Tikhon. Patriarch Kirill was praying in the sanctuary.

In his welcoming speech after the prayer, Patriarch Kirill noted in particular that His Beatitude Tikhon had visited the capitals of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus last year on the occasion of the celebrations marking the 1025th anniversary of the Baptism of Rus' and now, during his official visit to the Russian Church, had an opportunity to see the church life in Moscow and St. Petersburg.

'I am sure that you will feel the love that we have for the Orthodox Church in America. It goes back to the great feat performed by St. Herman of Alaska and his followers and to the work of Ss Metropolitan Innocent and Patriarch Tikhon, many great predecessors on the see of Moscow, whose missionary achievement became a bright page in the history of our Church. The sees of Moscow and Washington are located in different continents and separated from each other by thousands of kilometres, but our Churches are united not only by a common history but also sincere love. For the Russian Church, Orthodoxy in America is a cherished fruit of her missionary work. We are delighted to meet you and your honorable delegation and to discuss with you the matters that will help to strengthen our relations. We are confident that your historic peace visit to the Russian Orthodox Church will become another important step towards the consolidation of our bilateral relations and Orthodox witness on the American continent', His Holiness said.

In his response, His Beatitude Tikhon conveyed to His Holiness Kirill greetings from the members of the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church in America and assurances of prayerful memory from the clergy and faithful in North America.

'The Orthodox Church in America, the youngest among the Orthodox Churches, is always strengthened in spirit by its fraternal relations with the ancient Patriarchates and Churches that faithfully preserve the fullness of the Church and the experience of the Apostles, Martyrs and Saints throughout the ages.

'The Church of Russia herself has played an invaluable role in the life of the Orthodox Church in America, from the sending of the first missionary monks from Valaam in 1794 to the granting of autocephaly in 1970. The brotherly support of the Church of Russia continues in our own day and I am truly grateful for the

invitation extended by Your Holiness to the Orthodox Church in America for this present visit and humbled to receive the warm hospitality which is so characteristic of Your Holiness and the Church of Russia', Metropolitan Tikhon said.

After the thanksgiving, a fraternal talk took place between the Primate of the two Churches at the throne hall of the Patriarchal Residence.

In the course of the talk, Patriarch Kirill stressed the importance of the missionary feat performed by St. Herman of Alaska in America, the significance of the work of St. Innocent (Veniaminov) and St. Tikhon the Patriarch of All Russia to reinforce the dioceses of the Russian Orthodox Church in North America. As was noted, the decision to grant autocephaly to the Orthodox Church in America was correspondent with the opinion St. Tikhon had expressed in his time.

His Holiness also recalled with gratitude the work carried out by the predecessors of His Beatitude Metropolitan Tikhon at the primatial throne of the Orthodox Church in America – Metropolitans Theodosius, Herman and Jonas, as each of them, Patriarch Kirill said, made an essential contribution to the development of relations between the two Churches. 'Continuity in the Church is of special importance as we are bound together by virtue of the apostolic succession, but continuity in inter-church relations is also an important fact, and we are confident that under your primatial ministry, good relations between our two Churches will continue developing', His Holiness said pointing out the work of the OCA Moscow Representation and the Patriarch Cathedral in New York as an important factor in strengthening relations between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Orthodox Church in America.

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church also recalled that their meeting took place on the eve of the Entry of Our Lady to the Temple – the day when the ascension of St. Tikhon to the Patriarchal throne of Moscow in 19917 is commemorated. 'He is your heavenly patron, therefore it is a special day for you. We will celebrate together the Divine Liturgy at the Cathedral of the Assumption in the Moscow Kremlin in which His Holiness Patriarch Tikhon was enthroned', Patriarch Kirill said addressing Metropolitan Tikhon.

He also spoke about the events of the last year when Metropolitan Tikhon visited the Russian Orthodox Church on the

occasion of the 1025th anniversary of the Baptism of Rus'. 'At that time, we all enjoyed peace and joyful life, including in Ukraine. Now the Kievian Rus' is torn by upheavals. We pray each day that the suffering of the people may come to an end, that a lasting peace may be established in Ukraine', Patriarch Kirill said stressing that today there is a fratricidal civil war going on in Ukraine'.

'Unlike other religious groups in Ukraine, our Church realizes that there can be only one stand in face of this conflict – to be a peacemaking force. We avoid any political engagement or support for a particular side of the conflict. We are praying and working to have a just peace established in Ukraine so that nobody may suffer from discrimination, be it on the grounds of language, ethnic background or religion'. Patriarch Kirill stated.

'We are extremely concerned about the situation of our flock in eastern Ukraine, as there is a humanitarian catastrophe going on there', His Holiness continued, adding that for a number of reasons, people in the West are not aware of what is going on in that area where people suffer both from artillery shelling and an economic blockade. Each day, people die and houses and churches are destroyed in artillery shelling.

In central and western Ukraine, churches belonging to the canonical Church are captured on the initiative of the so-called 'Patriarchate of Kiev'. The attackers often burst into churches, use violence and abuse priests. The Uniates too have used the situation for their own purposes.

Today our Church is going through the most difficult period in Ukrainian modern history', Patriarch Kirill stated noting that the church people are courageously standing by the clergy and episcopate. It is a testimony to the fact that the Ukrainian Church has preserved her power and ability to influence the Ukrainian society.

The Church's peacemaking work can be required not only in settling the civil conflict in Ukraine but also in the context of the Russian-American relations, which are going through not the best time at present. 'Recently I have met with the new US ambassador in Moscow and said that even in the difficult Cold War period, not only the Orthodox but generally Christians in the two countries had the courage and ability to do something to improve the situation', Patriarch Kirill related.

'Several decades ago, we and Chris-

tians in the USA were divided by the Iron Curtain and the Cold War psychology, but at a difficult time we were united by the awareness that we as Christians belong to the same system of moral values', he said, pointing to the common system of values as a very important philosophical factor that created the system of relations between Christians in the two countries.

'Today we cannot say about many Christians in the USA that we belong to the same system of values as they do, Patriarch Kirill stressed. He noted that a deviation from the fundamental biblical moral norms makes it impossible to continue dialogue with a considerable part of the Protestant communities in America who are members of the National Council of the Churches of Christ, with which the Russian Church used to maintain cooperation for decades including the grievous Cold War years. 'At the same time, we are fully open to cooperation with the churches in North America who have remained faithful to the biblical morality. These are, in the first place, Orthodox Churches, the Roman Catholic Church and some Protestant churches'.

Another problem raised in the talk concerned the persecution of Christians in the Middle East and North Africa. Patriarch Kirill said that the first to experience oppression and persecution in the modern time were Orthodox Christians in Kosovo. 'There are still enormous wounds in the body of Kosovo and in the body of the Serbian community living there, which have not been healed', he stressed.

His Holiness also expressed special concern for the situation of Christians in the Middle East. In his opinion, it has become especially disturbing after terrorist groups, such as the Islamic State, have intensified their efforts. 'I believe our task is to speak out loud about the tragedy of Christianity in the Middle East. Moreover, I see it as our most important task today to help the world community elaborate specific measures for preserving the Christian presence in the Middle East'.

It was also noted that the millennium of the demise of the Holy Prince Vladimir Equal-to-the-Apostles will be marked next year. As the seminary of the Orthodox Church in America is named after him, a theological conference is planned to take place in it as part of the celebrations.

Having thanked Patriarch Kirill for the expression of warm love and fraternal consideration, Metropolitan Tikhon stressed, 'I experienced this same hospitality last year for the joyous events cele-

brating the 1025th Anniversary of the Baptism of Holy Rus. It was a privilege to be able to serve together with Your Holiness and the most holy Patriarchs and Heads of Delegations of the Orthodox Churches throughout the world, for this glorious celebration and as a testimony to the unity of world Orthodoxy. Although there are occasional obstacles to this unity, it is my conviction that, by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the source of our unity, we will continue to collaborate together and strengthen the bond of brotherly love among the Churches in our complex global context.

‘The challenges facing world Orthodoxy are no less present in North America. The Holy Synod of Bishops and I remain committed to the work that has been initiated by the Most Holy Patriarchs and Heads of Orthodox Churches to address the question of the canonical normalization of the situation in the so-called diaspora.

‘The Orthodox Church in America, from the time of the granting of its Autocephaly by the Church of Russia, has labored to minister to people of all ethnic and cultural traditions, including native Americans and those who have no connection with any tradition in particular. We are thankful for the brotherly prayers and support of the Russian Orthodox Church, which has always defended our existence.’

He expressed hope that the strong bond of love and fraternity that has been developed over many years will continue to grow as we work together for the strengthening of the Orthodox Faith throughout the world, especially in those areas where Christians face persecution from others or in those areas where the challenges of modernity and a secular culture threaten the faith of our people.

His Beatitude noted that the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church in America instructed all the priests and lay people to pray for those who are suffering in the Middle East, in Kosovo and in Ukraine, and in all the places where people are suffering for their faith’.

‘We pray and hope that Christians and all people of good will will be protected and will have an opportunity for confessing their faith freely. Let us seek to bring out humble witness to those who live in the dark. It is also my hope that we will be able to address, both today at this meeting and in the future, areas of mutual concern for our two Churches and that we will continue to strengthen our fraternal relations as we address these challenges

and strive to fulfil the Apostolic mandate, given to us by our Lord Jesus Christ, to make disciples of all nations’.

The two Primates also discussed various problems involved in the bilateral relations and the topics of pan-Orthodox significance. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, Dec. 3.

ON 11 DECEMBER 2014, HIS HOLINESS PATRIARCH KIRILL OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUSSIA MET WITH PROF. DR. MEHMET GÖRMEZ, HEAD OF THE PRESIDENCY OF RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY, usually referred to as Diyanet, at the Patriarchal residency in Chisty side-street.

Greeting the guest, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill mentioned their previous meeting which had taken place in 2001 and initiated relations between the Moscow Patriarchate and Muslim leaders of Turkey. Within the framework of the agreements reached during that meeting, a working group on the dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Diyanet was established.

At their sessions, members of the working group discuss such issues as pilgrimages, religious tourism, and student exchange. His Holiness Patriarch Kirill suggested holding such meetings on a regular basis and broadening their agenda.

‘It would be good if scholars could join the working group, since it is very important to reflect together on what is going on with human civilization,’ His Holiness said, ‘It is perfectly obvious that the Western civilization, the modern Western culture, has lost its ties with religion and that the Western world cannot be called Christian any more. Religious values are no longer present in social sphere. Such laws are being adopted that contradict God’s commandments and traditional morality.’

The deviation from norms of religious morality, which had occurred under the pressure of secular forces in a number of protestant churches in Western countries, has affected the bilateral relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and those communities, His Holiness told Dr. Görmez.

The Primate of the Russian Church also mentioned the cooperation with the Catholic Church, saying, ‘Catholics remain faithful to the Biblical tradition. Yet, they find it more and more difficult to raise their voice. We strive to render all possible support to the Catholic Church and believe that it is necessary to promote

and deepen our dialogue on these issues.’

His Holiness also emphasized that the relationships with the Islamic world and other religious groups that uphold God-given morality ought to be strengthened.

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church expressed his deep concern over the Christianophobia spreading in the Middle East. ‘We are alarmed at the developments in Iraq, Syria, and some other countries, where militants kill Christians,’ His Holiness said, ‘The Christian population in Northern Iraq has decreased considerably. Churches are being destroyed. Christians are being killed, sold into slavery, or forced to accept Islam or pay a special tax.’

The Russian Church is concerned over the fate of two Christian hierarchs abducted in April 2013, Metropolitan Paul of Aleppo and Metropolitan Mar Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill emphasized.

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church also dwelt on the consequences of actions committed by radical forces, in particular, by the ‘Islamic State’ group. ‘I cannot get rid of the idea that the ‘Arabic Spring’ and the emergence of Muslim radical military forces, who commit public executions, are aimed at demonizing Islam in the eyes of the world community,’ His Holiness Patriarch Kirill added. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, Dec. 12.

ON 13 DECEMBER 2014, A CEREMONY OF AWARDING THE DOCTOR HONORIS CAUSA DIPLOMA TO METROPOLITAN KALLISTOS (WARE) OF DIOKLEIA WAS HELD AT THE MAIN HALL OF SS CYRIL AND METHODIUS THEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE FOR POST-GRADUATE STUDIES.

The decision to confer the degree on Metropolitan Kallistos was made by the Academic Council of the Theological Institute and was approved by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia.

Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, rector of Ss Cyril and Methodius Theological Institute for Post-Graduate Studies, greeted all those present, saying in particular:

‘It is a great joy and privilege for us that, with the blessing of Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, doctor of theology *honoris causa* degree is awarded to one of the most notable Orthodox hierarchs of our times, Metropolitan Kallistos

of Diokleia.

“At the very onset of his academic work, the Metropolitan chose to focus on patristic studies, and he has been faithful to this field for many decades of his academic endeavors... Quite a few hundreds of academic papers that influenced the current development of the Orthodox theology were prepared and defended under his guidance.

“During his years at Oxford, Metropolitan Kallistos equipped many scholars of Orthodox theology and patristic heritage, and his graduates represent the Orthodox Church around the globe, in the East, as well as in the West, from New York to Moscow. Among his disciples are hierarchs of the Local Orthodox Churches, renowned theologians working in the fields of patristic studies and church histories, and members of other Christian denominations.

“During the years of his ministry, the Metropolitan has participated in many important projects aimed at developing Orthodox scholarship and making Orthodox Christianity better known in the West. His Eminence is the chairman of the group Friends of Orthodoxy on Iona (in Scotland) and of the Friends of Mount Athos. Besides, the Metropolitan chairs the Committee on Orthodox-Anglican dialogue and is a member of the Committee on dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church.

“The Metropolitan discusses Russian spiritual tradition as well. It was in Russia that the heritage of Byzantine hesychasm was revived in the ascetic life of such great saints as Sergius of Radonezh, Nil Sorsky, Seraphim of Sarov and Silouan the Athonite. Metropolitan Kallistos wrote a few papers on the heritage of St. Silouan, and his interest in the life of this saint originated not only from reading St. Silouan’s writing but from a personal acquaintance with one of St. Silouan’s closest disciples, Archimandrite Sophrony (Sakharov).”

In a solemn atmosphere, the rector of Ss Cyril and Methodius Theological Institute for Post-Graduate Studies handed over to Metropolitan Kallistos of Diokleia the Doctor *Honoris Causa* diploma and a doctoral cross.

Among the speakers were also His Eminence Kallistos’s other students: Archpriest John Behr, Dean of St Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary, USA; Dr. Archimandrite Irenei (Steenberg), Dean of Saints Cyril and Athanasius of Alexandria Institute for Orthodox

Studies, USA; and hieromonk Nikolai (Sakharov), professor of the Cambridge Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies and the Moscow Theological Academy.

Metropolitan Kallistos expressed his gratitude to Ss Cyril and Methodius Theological Institute for awarding him the degree of Doctor *Honoris Causa*. In his address he said:

“I wish to express my profound gratitude to the rector of the Institute, His Eminence Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk and to the Academic Council of the Institute, who have extended this honor to me. I am happy to count Metropolitan Hilarion not only as one of my former students, but as my personal friend. I feel that this [honor] that you have conferred upon me in your Institute strengthens our bonds with one another. I would also like to thank my three former pupils for their generous words, of which I feel unworthy.

In his speech, Metropolitan Kallistos shared with those present his reflections on theology, saying:

“Theology is not only an academic discipline to be pursued with scholarly detachment and objectivity. Theology involves commitment, the dedication of our whole life. Between theology and prayer, between doctrinal studies and our profound involvement in the living out of a Christian life there is an essential connection.

“We are all familiar with the words of the desert father, Evagrius of Pontus, “The theologian is the one who prays, and if you pray in truth, you are a theologian.” So it is my hope that this Institute will be not only a place of study, but also a center of prayer. Bearing in mind the connection between theology and life, I would like to ask this morning not so much the question “what,” as the question “who”: not so much the question what is theology, but I would like to speak briefly who are the theologians who have given me the greatest inspiration.

“First, thinking of Russian theologians of the 20th century, the two who most influenced me were Father George Florovsky and Vladimir Lossky. I was inspired by Father George Florovsky’s vision of neo-patristic synthesis. I was inspired by Vladimir Lossky’s understanding of mystical theology. I had the happiness and privilege to know both of them personally, and their example has inspired me in my years of teaching theology at Oxford.

“But I would like to extend my question this morning: who among the Holy

Fathers of the Church have most inspired me? I find it difficult to know who to choose as the father closest to my heart. Perhaps, St Irenaeus; perhaps, St Maximus the Confessor; perhaps, St Symeon the New Theologian; or perhaps, St Gregory Palamas. All of them I regard as sources of personal illumination. But perhaps the father whom I love and esteem the most is St Gregory of Nyssa.

“I would like to speak this morning of two elements in his teaching that have particular value for me. They are both emphasized in his book *The Life of Moses*. He speaks there, in the first place, of the Christian journey as being marked by three stages. The first stage, and this is marked in *The Life of Moses*, is when he saw God in the burning bush. It was the vision of God in light, a cataphatic vision. Then there comes the second stage in *The Life of Moses*, when God accompanies the people of Israel in a pillar of cloud and fire, mixed light and darkness. Then comes the third stage when Moses enters deep darkness on Mount Sinai – an apophatic vision of God. And in this third stage he is taught that the true vision of God is non-vision, the true knowledge of God is unknowing. So there is the reconciliation of the opposites in the third stage.

“What is interesting here is that St Gregory envisages the Christian life as the journey not from darkness into light, but from light into darkness. The Christian path is an entry into mystery. And this is also true of the vocation of the theologian. The theologian is one who enters into the living mystery of the living and personal God. But in Gregory of Nyssa the darkness is not negative, it is, he says, “a luminous darkness.” Thus, while the darkness signifies the Divine mystery, it is also a symbol of union with God. Moses is united with God in the darkness. So this darkness is not an absence. What Moses experiences on Mount Sinai is the love of God. But this luminosity, this union, this presence, this love are things that, on St Gregory of Nyssa’s understanding, lie beyond words, beyond understanding.

“In theology we use our reasoning brain, because that is a gift from God. But always we recognize that in theology we are working on something that lies beyond our reasoning brain, because it is mystery.

“That is one thing I retain particularly from St Gregory of Nyssa. And then there is the second thing. After the three theophanies of which I have spoken, in the burning bush, in the pillar of cloud and fire, and in the darkness of Sinai, there

comes the fourth theophany. St Gregory speaks of the vision of God received by Moses in the 33rd chapter of Exodus. God hides Moses in a cleft of a rock; and then God passes by in all His glory, and Moses looks out and sees the back part of God. What does this mean? If you see somebody's back, this means you are following them. So, says Gregory, to be a Christian, to be a theologian is to follow Christ. But we never totally catch up with Him. He is always ahead of us. We see His back. So here we have a further paradox in St Gregory of Nyssa: to follow God is to meet Him face to face.

"Gregory sees a Christian life as involving infinite progress, which continues even in the age to come. When I was a child, I was given a book about Felix the Cat. And Felix the Cat was given a pair of magic boots. And with the help of these magic boots he kept walking everywhere. I remember the refrain in the book, "Felix, he kept walking, he kept walking on." St Gregory of Nyssa was not, in fact, the author of this particular book, but it expresses his theology. To be a Christian, to be a theologian is to keep moving, to keep following, never to rest satisfied, always to move further. The essence of perfection is that we never become perfect. We always reach out to what lies in front of us. We always advance from glory to glory.

"I would apply this also to our work in theology. The theologian's task is never complete. It is always provisional, always work in progress, always an unfinished program. However eloquent we are as theologians, we never express more than a small part of the truth.

"St Irenaeus says, "In the age to come God will have new things to teach us and we shall always have new things to learn." Those of you who teach theology here, those of you who are studying theology in this Institute – I hope you will always have this feeling that you have only heard a very small part of the story. There is so much more to be said. And we will never in this life say it all.

"Once more I express my gratitude to Ss Cyril and Methodius Theological Institute for Post-Graduate Studies for the honor that they have bestowed upon me. May God bless all your teaching, your writing, and your study. May this Institute always be faithful to the vision of theology that St Gregory of Nyssa upheld.

"May you honor the living mystery that theology seeks to express. May your theology always be dynamic theology. When your faces are turned to the past, to

the Holy Fathers, may your faces also be turned to the future. May you enter ever more deeply into the living mystery, always reaching forward to what lies ahead, as St Paul said (Phil. 3:13). That is my prayer for the Institute."

To conclude the ceremony, the Moscow Synodal Choir performed a number of religious chants. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, Dec. 13.

ON 16 DECEMBER 2014, METROPOLITAN HILARION OF VOLOKOLAMSK, CHAIRMAN OF THE MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE'S DEPARTMENT FOR EXTERNAL CHURCH RELATIONS, MET WITH H.E. JÁNOS BALLA, NEWLY APPOINTED AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE REPUBLIC OF HUNGARY TO THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION.

Warmly greeting the guest, Metropolitan Hilarion noted traditionally good relations between the Department for External Church Relations and the Hungarian diplomatic mission in Moscow and told about many years of his service as administrator of the Russian Orthodox Church's Diocese of Budapest and Hungary.

The DECR chairman expressed his satisfaction over the fact that Hungary's new Constitution emphasizes the role of Christianity and traditional moral values in the life of the country.

Mr. Balla thanked Metropolitan Hilarion for the meeting and noted the importance of contacts between the Hungarian state and the Russian Orthodox Church.

The participants in the meeting discussed topical issues of the international agenda. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, Dec. 16.

A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (WCC) JOINED A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE MOSCOW PATRIARCH TO VISIT CHURCHES IN UKRAINE AND TO ENCOURAGE EFFORTS TOWARD PEACE THERE.

Faith and Order program executive Archpriest Dr Daniel Buda visited Ukraine 15-17 December, representing WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit. He was joined by Archpriest Mikhail Goundiaev, representative of the Moscow Patriarchate at the World Council of Churches.

Their visit to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Moscow Patriarchate, included an audience with Metropolitan Dr Anthonij of Boryspil and Brovary, administrator of the church, and also meetings with several

representatives of the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Communities.

After the three-day long visit, Buda said, "We found there a great desire among church leaders and representatives of religious communities to express their hope for peace in the country, to work together for it and to be heard by the international community."

Father Buda added: "If it only would depend on Ukrainian churches and religious communities, peace would be achieved immediately."

The WCC intends to follow up this visit with a process of a larger ecumenical delegation visiting Ukraine in the coming months, and efforts to establish a meaningful conversation about peace. – WCC Press Release, Dec. 17.

ON 17 DECEMBER 2014, METROPOLITAN HILARION, CHAIRMAN OF THE MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE'S DEPARTMENT FOR EXTERNAL CHURCH RELATIONS (DECR), MET WITH THE PRIME MINISTER OF BULGARIA, MR. BOYKO BORISOV.

The DECR chairman reminded the head of the Bulgarian government of his meeting with Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia two years ago when His Holiness visited the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and conveyed greetings from His Holiness to Mr. Borisov.

Metropolitan Hilarion said: "Our Churches and nations have maintained relations for centuries, and the centenary of consecration of the St. Nicholas church contributes to the strengthening of these relations" and thanked Mr. Borisov for congratulation sent to archimandrite Filipp and for assistance rendered to him.

Metropolitan Hilarion added that though the relations among countries are being tested nowadays due to political circumstances, there is hope for taking the right turning from the way of confrontation, mutual accusations and sanctions to the way of negotiations. "We understand that the situation in Ukraine is a reason for the current crisis. The situation is very painful for our Church. You know that our Patriarch is the Patriarch of both Russia and Ukraine. Our flock in Russia and in Ukraine wants peace. People in Ukraine are divided on the principle of political leaning, while our Church unites all people and does not support any political force. This is our uncompromising and consistent attitude."

Prime Minister Borisov believes that

the centuries-long friendship of the Bulgarian and Russian people will last forever. He said that the Bulgarian Orthodox Church was highly esteemed by people in Bulgaria. 'The unity of the Church is a major factor of the national unity and of the integrity of the state,' Metropolitan Hilarion added.

That same day in the evening, His Holiness Patriarch Neophyte of Bulgaria and Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk attended Christmas reception given by the Russian Embassy. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, Dec. 18.

ON DECEMBER 20, 2014, WHILE ON A VISIT TO SKOPIE WITH THE BLESSING OF PATRIARCH OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUSSIA, METROPOLITAN HILARION OF VOLOKOLAMSK MET WITH Macedonia's President Georje Ivanov. Participating in the meeting was Russia's Ambassador O. Shcherbak.

Later the DECR chairman had a talk with Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski at the Government's residence. Participating in the talk were Macedonian Foreign Minister N. Popovski and Russian Ambassador O. Shcherbak.

On the same day, Metropolitan Hilarion met with the head of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, Archbishop Stephan of Ohrid and Macedonia. They discussed the settlement of the canonical status of this church structure which is outside communion with world Orthodoxy.

Metropolitan Hilarion also visited the Russian embassy and had a talk with Ambassador O. Shcherbak. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, Dec. 21.

PATRIARCH KIRILL OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUSSIA HAS SAID THE ATTEMPTS TO CREATE A LOCAL CHURCH IN UKRAINE ARE ODD.

"Also alarming are the ever increasing attacks on the Church, including forced handover of churches to schismatics, forced conversion into non-canonical entities or the building, along with the Greek Catholics, of some "local Church" as if Ukraine did not have one already," the Patriarch said at an Eparchial meeting in Moscow.

He urged the clergy to pay attention to their words, "be mindful that these words can be a drop of oil in the fire of the feud on the Ukrainian land."

"Let us think and pray how to find words filled with Christian love for those who suffer from the atrocities of war and for those who, without being asked, are

called up to the army, on the ground of their duty as soldiers. In this fratricidal war, both victors and losers, the dead and survivors are victims because they have seen the horrors of death and homicide," he said.

He also recalled that he had earlier blessed a Moscow initiative to raise funds for Donbas refugees, saying that a total of 57.65 million rubles have been raised to date.

"Unfortunately, my visit to the Ukrainian land failed to take place in 2014 because of the current military and political situation. I hereby attest that the Russian Orthodox Church, which embraces the people of Russia and Ukraine and is driven by pastoral responsibility, is ready to do all it can to restore the fraternal, neighborly relations filled with mutual respect between Russia and Ukraine," Patriarch Kirill added.

All Russian churches end their liturgy services with a prayer for the end to the feud in Ukraine, he said. – *Interfax*, Dec. 24.

ON 24 DECEMBER 2014, METROPOLITAN HILARION OF VOLOKOLAMSK, CHAIRMAN OF THE MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE'S DEPARTMENT FOR EXTERNAL CHURCH RELATIONS (DECR), RECEIVED THE REVD. CLIVE FAIRCLOUGH, CHAPLAIN TO ST ANDREW'S ANGLICAN CHURCH IN MOSCOW, appointed by Archbishop Justin Welby last August.

The Revd. Clive Fairclough described the life of the Anglican community in Moscow, noting in particular that St Andrew's Anglican Church in Moscow is unique for Russia.

Discussed were relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Church of England. Metropolitan Hilarion wished his guest success in his new ministry and noted that he was appointed to Moscow at a difficult time for the dialogue between the two Churches due to the recent resolution of the General Synod of the Church of England to allow women to become bishops. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, Dec. 24.

ON DECEMBER 23, 2014, THE SYNOD OF THE UKRAINIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH [MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE] MET FOR ITS LAST SESSION IN 2014, AT THE SYNODAL HALL OF THE KIEV LAURA OF THE DORMITION. The session was chaired by His Beatitude Onufry, Metropolitan of Kiev and All Ukraine.

The Synod adopted an appeal to President Petro Poroshenko concerning the critical situation in Ukrainian society. The appeal cites glaring facts of the damage inflicted on churches in the armed conflict zone in south-east Ukraine: 9 churches are fully destroyed, 77 are damaged; the residence of the Metropolitan of Donetsk at the Peski village near Donetsk is plundered. The Holy Synod appealed to the Ukrainian President to ensure due and impartial investigation of these facts.

The message also informs the Ukrainian President about the forceful capture of 14 churches perpetrated by the schismatics in the Kiev, Lvov, Ternopol, Volhyn and Rovno Regions. 'The historical experience shows', the Synod states, 'that conflicts on religious grounds prove to be the gravest and bloodiest. They deeply affect the lives of countries and peoples. It may take more than one decade to overcome their consequences. Therefore, today we should exert as much effort as we can to preserve inter-confessional and interreligious peace in Ukraine'.

The Holy Synod draws Mr. Poroshenko's attention to the scale of the humanitarian programs that the Ukrainian Orthodox Church has carried out in the armed conflict zone in the southeast. In 2014, its dioceses sent over 850 tons of humanitarian aid and distributed over 7000 tons to civilians and forced settlers. The clergy and faithful have organized the evacuation and accommodation of refugees, raised funds, established diocesan humanitarian aid centers and a hotline 'Nadezhda' (Hope) to give spiritual support to people.

In connection with the rise of municipal service prices, the Synod also made an appeal to President Poroshenko and Prime Minister Yatsenyuk to fix special prices for gas for religious organizations.

The UOC synodal departments presented traditional annual reports about the work they carried out in 2014. Special attention was given to the work of the social-humanitarian department. It was charged with developing and implementing a program for designated aid to 'people in the Donetsk and Lugansk Regions and forced settlers', and all the faithful were called to take part in the program.

The Synod adopted a program and membership of the organizing committee for celebrations to mark the 400th anniversary of the Kiev theological schools to take place in 2015.

The Synod also adopted a Provision for the Metropolitan's Council on Culture.

The Synod also made a number of legal, staffing and disciplinary decisions concerning the internal life and order of the synodal departments, dioceses, monasteries and educational institutions of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. – Press Release, Moscow Patriarchate, Dec. 25.

MACEDONIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH - OHRID ARCHBISHOPRIC ON MONDAY OFFICIALLY ASKED FOR CLEMENCY FOR ZORAN VRANISHKOVSKI - ITS FORMER BISHOP JOVAN WHO IS IN PRISON AFTER BEING SENTENCED FOR DEFRAUDING THE CHURCH AND EMBEZZLING ITS FUNDS.

Vranishkovski left the Macedonian Orthodox Church and formed a Serbian run church in Macedonia in 2002, which added fuel on the long running feud between the two churches.

"The Holy Synod of the Macedonian Orthodox Church-Ohrid Archbishopric, in serving the Lord who through the holy prophet Hosea and through the words from our Savior, speaks: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice," and guided by the love of man and the higher goals, calls on all relevant authorities in the Republic of Macedonia to show mercy in their treatment of imprisoned former Bishop Jovan. Despite the trespasses he has been tried and sentenced for, he should not be left without the hope of clemency in these holy days before Christmas," the Synod of the Macedonian Orthodox Church writes in its press release published on Monday.

The move comes shortly after the visit from Metropolitan Hilarion from the Russian Orthodox Church, who met Macedonian leadership, including Archbishop Stephan, but also President Gjorge Ivanov, who has the power to grant pardons.

The Macedonian Church informs that it was on the initiative of the Russian bishop that the Church calls for clemency for Vranishkovski, in hope that it would open talks between Macedonia and Serbia for the recognition of the Macedonian Orthodox Church.

"Macedonian bishops with gratitude accept the initiative of the Russian Orthodox Church, which has announced it is fully prepared to give its contribution to resume and successfully complete the dialogue between the Macedonian Orthodox Church - Ohrid Archbishopric and the Serbian Orthodox Church, and solve open issues between the two churches," the Holy Synod of the Macedonian Church informs.

Macedonia has struggled to have its church recognized as equal among other Eastern Orthodox churches due to objections from the Serbian Church, which has never recognized the reestablishment of the independent Macedonian Church in the 1960s.

The ancient Ohrid Archbishopric, the corner stone of the modern Macedonian Orthodox Church, lost its independence during the Turkish rule in the 18th century, and Serbia, as later ruler of contemporary Macedonia, refused to accept its re-establishment in the 1960s, even when Macedonia became an equal state in then Communist Yugoslavia.

Vranishkovski was tried in absentia, while living in Serbia, Greece or Bulgaria. He was the bishop of Veles and the Vardar region for the Macedonian Orthodox Church, but switched allegiance to the Serbian church in 2002, which promoted him into an Ohrid Archbishop of a newly founded Orthodox church that, despite its tiny following, claims to be the one, true Orthodox Christian church in Macedonia.

Different intermediaries, often from Russia, have tried to solve the issue between the two churches, further complicated by the influence the Greek Church has over the Eastern Orthodox Christianity, and the strong Greek positions against the promotion of the historic heritage of the Republic of Macedonia – *Pravoslavie.ru*, Dec. 22.

IN RESPONSE TO THE INVITATION OF HIS BEATITUDE DANIEL, PATRIARCH OF ROMANIA, HIS BEATITUDE JOHN X; PATRIARCH OF ANTIOCH AND ALL THE EAST, PAID A FRATERNAL VISIT TO THE CHURCH OF ROMANIA BETWEEN THE 28TH OF NOVEMBER AND THE 2ND OF DECEMBER 2014. This was the occasion for the Patriarch John and the Antiochian delegation to better know the Church of Romania, its life and its testimony. The visit was also an occasion for the two Patriarchs and the two Churches' delegates to exchange their ideas about the issues of common concern mainly in the difficult conditions that the Near Eastern region is going through, but also vis-a-vis the present situation of the Orthodox Church in general. Taking into account these delicate situations, the two Patriarchs, in the name of their respective Churches declare the following:

1. Christians are called upon all over the World to give witness to the message of Love that the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ brought to it and expressed through

His Crucifixion and Resurrection. This is why the two Churches declare that they are committed to work for the welfare of their societies.

2. The unity of Orthodoxy and its capability to bear witness to the "Good News" toward the whole world depend on the communion of love and cooperation for Peace and Hope. Therefore, the two Churches consider that Orthodoxy is called upon today, through its leaders, clergy and believers, to witness the reality of this communion by overcoming divisions caused by different organizational or ethnic motivations and to give total priority to the spirit of mission, mutual consultation and solidarity.

3. The two Churches are aware of the importance of maintaining close relations between both of them, to better enhance the sense of dialogue between Orthodoxy and the other Christians and the non-Christians.

4. The Christians in the Near East are suffering nowadays from the extremists' unacceptable pressure and persecution. While refusing such situation, the two Churches urge all responsible authorities to work urgently to stop these inhuman actions. The two Churches declare firmly that the Christians of the Middle East are the children of this region and that they share with their compatriots all the sufferings of their respective countries. This is why the two Churches give a high priority to all the actions that will help the Christians to remain in their homeland despite the difficulties they are facing. Therefore, the two Churches regret the passive attitude adopted by the international community regarding the kidnapping of metropolitans John and Paul of Aleppo, and they consider that it is its responsibility to work urgently and effectively in order to have them released with all the other persons kidnapped in recent years.

5. Concerning the relations between the two sister Churches, the archives and monuments in Romania are a testimony of the lively and strong relations that were maintained over the centuries. This visit is the occasion for the two sister Churches to affirm their will for strengthening these relations through:

a. A structured and continuous consultation between them, mainly in issues related to the life of the Orthodox Church and its witness to the World.

b. Strengthening the fraternal bonds between their schools of Theology especially by stressing the importance of the pastoral role of the Church and its respon-

sibility towards the society in the present social, economic and cultural contexts.

c. To promote, whenever possible, the exchange of students between the schools of Theology in order to develop better communication and mutual cooperation, as has been the case up to now.

d. Organizing pilgrimages, when it is possible to let the faithful from each Church better know the life of their brothers and sisters in the other Church and how they witness all together to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

e. Exchange their experiences, mainly in regards to the pastoral care and organization of their mission for the faithful from Antiochian and Romanian origins living in diaspora, working hand in hand to better show the unity of Orthodoxy all over the world.

f. Building strong relations between the University of Balamand and Romanian educational institutions mainly in the social and medical fields.

g. Supplying each other with information through ecclesiastical mass media concerning the life and mission of the two Churches.

h. Enhancing the research regarding the history of the relations between the two Churches through the existing academic institutions. [signed]
† DANIEL, Patriarch of Romania
† JOHN X, Patriarch of Antioch
Bucharest, on the 1st of December 2014
-- Press Release, Romanian Patriarchate, Dec. 1.

ON 16 AND 17 DECEMBER 2014, THE WORKING SESSION OF THE HOLY SYNOD OF THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IS BEING HELD AT THE PATRIARCHAL RESIDENCE UNDER THE CHAIRMANSHIP OF HIS BEATITUDE PATRIARCHAL DANIEL.

On the first day, after opening the session, His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel chaired the working session of the Holy Synod for electing the titular hierarch for the vacancy of Archbishop of Timisoara and Metropolitan of Banat.

On 6 and 7 November 2014, after consulting the Eparchial Assembly of the Archdiocese of Timisoara, the Metropolitan Synod of the Metropolitanate of Banat assigned by secret ballot His Eminence Archbishop Ioan Selejan, Bishop of Covasna and Harghita, His Grace Dr Lucian Mic, Bishop of Caransebes, and His Grace Dr Sofronie Drincec, Bishop of Oradea, as candidates.

After the first voting, none of the

three candidates assigned got the necessary number of votes (half plus one out of the total number of votes validly expressed) to be elected.

Then, a runoff was organized between His Eminence Archbishop Ioan Selejan, Bishop of Covasna and Harghita, and His Grace Dr. Lucian Mic, Bishop of Caransebs.

The Holy Synod elected by secret ballot His Eminence Archbishop Ioan Selejan for the vacancy of Archbishop of Timisoara and Metropolitan of Banat with 26 votes out of 45 ones validly expressed.

The enthronement of the new Metropolitan of Banat will take place on Sunday, 28 December 2014, in the Metropolitan Cathedral of Timisoara.

Then, the working session of the Holy Synod for electing the new Archbishop of Roman and Bacau was held under the chairmanship of His Eminence Teofan, Metropolitan of Moldova and Bucovina.

On 13 December 2014, after consulting the Eparchial Assembly of the Archdiocese of Roman and Bacau, the Metropolitan Synod of the Metropolitanate of Moldova and Bucovina assigned by secret ballot His Grace Ioachim Bacauanul, Assistant Bishop to the Archdiocese of Roman and Bacau and His Grace Calinic Botosaneanul, Assistant Bishop to the Archdiocese of Iasi, as candidates for the vacancy of Archbishop of the Eparchy of Roman and Bacau.

The Holy Synod elected by secret ballot His Grace Ioachim Bacauanul for the vacancy of Archbishop of Roman and Bacau with 35 votes out of 45 validly cast.

The enthronement of the new Archbishop of Roman and Bacau will take place on Sunday, 4 January 2015, in the Archiepiscopal Cathedral of Roman. – Press Release, Romanian Patriarchate, Dec. 16.

TODAY, 17 DECEMBER 2014, 12.00 HOURS, THE BELLS WERE RUNG IN ALL THE CATHEDRALS, CHURCHES AND MONASTERIES AS A SIGN OF GRATITUDE AND SOLEMN PRAYERS WERE SAID FOR THE FIRST REVOLUTIONARY HEROES WHO SACRIFICED THEMSELVES 25 YEARS AGO AT TIMISOARA FOR THE FREEDOM, FAITH AND DIGNITY OF THE ROMANIAN PEOPLE OPPRESSED BY THE COMMUNIST REGIME.

At the end of the Te Deum celebrated in the Patriarchal Cathedral of Bucharest today on the occasion of the name day of His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel, His Beatitude spoke about the importance of the

sacrifice of the revolutionaries of Timisoara, in 1989.

“Today we remember from a national point of view the young people who sacrificed themselves on 17 December 1989, at Timisoara, where the revolution for the liberation of the Romanian people from under the communist atheist dictatorship began. This is why we decided that today, at 12.00 hours, the bells should ring in the entire Romanian Patriarchate. During the Divine Liturgy, a special solemn service was celebrated for the heroes of the revolution in Timisoara of 17 December 1989. We pray to the good God to place the souls of those who sacrificed themselves for faith, for the freedom and dignity of the Romanian people among the righteous ones. When we pray for our freedom we think of those who sacrificed their lives for the freedom and dignity of the Romanian people. They are remembered at every Divine Liturgy, heroes, Romanian soldiers and fighters of all times and places, so that those who died for the dignity and freedom of the Romanian people are included in this liturgical formula remembering the heroes who are not only soldiers, but also fighters, namely civilians who fought for the honor of the nation, for the freedom and dignity of the Romanian people,” His Beatitude said.

His Beatitude has also spoken about the way we use freedom and underlined the fact that if we use freedom for strengthening faith it means that our freedom glorified God.

“We must think now, 25 years after the revolution of December 1989, what we have done with our freedom. We wondered at the time how to get freedom, but now we must wonder how much our freedom brought us close to God and to one another. If we use our freedom for strengthening faith – such as the religion class in the public schools, building churches, increasing the charitable social activity – then it means that our freedom glorified God. When freedom leads us to division, neglect, feud, we do not have the holy freedom, but a decayed freedom. This is why Saint Peter the Apostle says “do not use your freedom as justification of feud, as reason to do evil.” Thus, with these thoughts in mind, of the heroes of the revolution of Timisoara of 17 December 1989, and thinking too that we shall celebrate a solemn service for all the heroes of the revolution of December 1989, let us pray God to put their souls with the righteous ones and strengthen us to keep on cultivating freedom and responsibility,

the national unity and dignity for the glory of God and the welfare of the Romanian people,” the Patriarch of Romanian also said.

From 17-23 December 2014, the hierarchs, priests and deacons will celebrate solemn services at all the cemeteries, monuments and road side shrines dedicated to the heroes of December who sacrificed their lives 25 years ago. – Press Release, Romanian Patriarchate, Dec. 17.

TODAY, 21 DECEMBER 2014, HIS BEATITUDE DANIEL, PATRIARCH OF ROMANIA WAS AT THE PARLIAMENT PALACE WHERE THE INVESTMENT CEREMONY AND SWEARING IN OF MR KLAUS IOHANNIS, THE NEW PRESIDENT OF ROMANIA took place in front of the reunited Chambers of the Parliament.

During the ceremony His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel said a blessing prayer and then congratulated the new President of Romania, Mr. Klaus Iohannis.

Besides the MPs, diplomats and other special guests, the former presidents Ion Iliescu and Emil Constantinescu were also present. The Royal House of Romania was represented by His Royal Highness Prince Radu, and the Roman Catholic Church by His Excellency Archbishop and Metropolitan Ioan Robu.

Mr Klaus Iohannis officially became the new president of Romania when he swore the constitutional oath during a plenary meeting of the Parliament. According to the procedure, the president swore on the Constitution and on the Bible. He was elected on 16 November 2014 for a five year mandate, and he is the 5th President of Romania after the Revolution of 1989. – Press Release, Romanian Patriarchate, Dec. 21.

BULGARIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH CLERGY AND LAITY HELD A PEACEFUL PROTEST OUTSIDE THE SOFIA HEADQUARTERS OF THE HOLY SYNOD, THE CHURCH’S GOVERNING BODY, on December 9 against the proposed promotion to bishop of controversial figure Archimandrite Dionisii.

The protest was held ahead of a meeting of the Holy Synod, and follows open letters of objection, including from the Zografski Monastery on Mount Athos and a petition signed by well over 1000 people, most of them priests.

Dionisii is controversial for a number of reasons, including his involvement in conferring the title “Archon” on wealthy business people who in turn have some-

times controversial reputations. Archon, in effect an honorable lay supporter of the church, is a title that is seen in traditional church circles as having been obsolete for several centuries.

Among those on whom the title was conferred was Slavi Binev, who on December 8 resigned as head of Parliament’s committee on culture and media following public protests against him holding the post.

Other objections are that a candidate bishop should have lived in a monastery for at least three years and should be at least 35 years old, conditions that Dionisii does not meet.

Recommending the conferring of the title on Dionisii on November 28, the Synod scheduled his elevation to bishop for December 21.

According to specialist church news website Dveri, ahead of confirmation by the Synod of the recommendation, Dionisii already had scheduled a celebratory reception for 200 guests at a luxury hotel in central Sofia. – *The Sofia Globe*, Dec. 9.

THE HOLY COMMUNITY OF MOUNT ATHOS HAS SENT AN OPEN LETTER TO THE DEAN OF THE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY OF THE ARISTOTLE UNIVERSITY IN THESSALONIKI. AgionOros.ru has published extracts from this message.

In connection with the opening of the Department of Islamic Studies at the School of Theology the Athonite Monks are expressing their “dismay and distress.” They are “raising alarm in the spirit of love, responsibility before history and posterity.”

In the Holy Community’s view, the initiative of studying Islam at the School of Theology, formerly oriented exclusively towards the Orthodox tradition, “is a serious mistake and clearly contradicts the teaching of the Holy Fathers... This step is directed against theology and against the Orthodox Church Itself.”

Copies of the letter, signed by representatives of all the Athonite monasteries, were also sent to the Greek Minister of Education and Religious Affairs, dean of the University of Thessaloniki as well as teachers of the University of Aristotle, reports AgionOros.ru.

According to earlier reports by Afonit.info portal, establishment of the Center for Islamic Studies at the School of Theology of the Aristotle University in Thessaloniki provoked active protests from the brethren of the Athonite monas-

teries.

“How can the Holy Gospel and the Qur’an be taught in the same school?” wrote the brethren of the Karakallou Monastery on Mt. Athos. They believe that such decisions of the state authority “will lead to a change of religious feeling, to the loss of the cultural and national identity.” According to the Athonite monks, the mentioned initiative of the Greek civil authorities is especially ill-timed in the current circumstances, when “our Christian brothers and sisters in Syria and other Middle East states are being brutally persecuted by Islamists.” -- Pravoslavie.ru, Dec. 30.

HIS BEATITUDE, METROPOLITAN TIKHON, PRIMATE OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA, PRESIDED AT THE DIVINE LITURGY AND ENTHRONEMENT OF HIS GRACE, BISHOP IRÉNEE [ROCHON], AS BISHOP OF OTTAWA AND THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA’S ARCHDIOCESE OF CANADA at Annunciation/Saint Nicholas Cathedral in Ottawa on Saturday, November 29, 2014.

Bishop Irénée, who had been serving as Administrator of the Archdiocese of Canada, was elected by the Holy Synod of Bishops on October 21, 2014. Three weeks earlier, he had been nominated by clergy and lay delegates at the Extraordinary Archdiocesan Assembly held in Gatineau, QC.

Concelebrating with Metropolitan Tikhon and Bishop Irénée were His Eminence, Archbishop Nathaniel of Detroit and Romanian Episcopate; His Grace, Bishop Alexander of Ottawa and Upstate New York, Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America; His Grace, Bishop Ioann Cassian of Vicina, Romanian Patriarchate; His Grace, Bishop Job of Kashira, Vicar of the Moscow Diocese, Administrator of the Parishes of the Moscow Patriarchate in Canada; His Grace, Bishop Michael of New York and New Jersey; and His Grace, Bishop David of Sitka and Alaska. Mitered Archpriest Ihor Kutash represented His Eminence, Metropolitan Yuri of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Canada. Archpriest Anatoly Melnyk, Archdiocesan Chancellor, and 26 clergy representing the OCA, Romanian, Ukrainian, Russian and Antiochian Churches also served.

The Divine Liturgy was celebrated in the presence of the Wonderworking Icon of the Mother of God, “Abbess of the Holy Mount Athos,” and the relics of Saint Gabriel of Mount Athos.

“On behalf of the holy Synod and all the clergy, monastics and faithful of the Orthodox Church in America, I wholeheartedly congratulate you on your election and enthronement as the ruling Bishop of the See of Ottawa and the Archdiocese of Canada,” Metropolitan Tikhon told Bishop Irénée in the exhortation he offered upon presenting the archpastoral staff at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy. “Through the mystery of the All-Holy Spirit and the election by the Holy Synod, our Lord has bestowed on Your Grace the apostolic grace to strengthen you in your Episcopal labors. Your election comes at a time when the faithful of the Archdiocese are in great need of a good pastor and capable shepherd who knows his people, and is known by them.”

A festive banquet followed the Divine Liturgy and Enthronement in the undercroft of the cathedral. Mr. Nikita Lopoukhine, Archdiocesan Treasurer, served as Master of Ceremonies. – OCA Press Release, Dec. 1.

The Oriental Orthodox Churches

ARCHBISHOP NOURHAN MANOUGIAN, THE ARMENIAN PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM, ADDRESSED A LETTER TO HH KAREKIN II, THE SUPREME PATRIARCH AND CATHOLICOS OF ALL ARMENIANS, IN NOVEMBER. These are brief excerpts from the letter:

Your Holiness,

You can be certain that I am committing these words to paper unwillingly, especially when I just heard a little while ago that you recently reproached your bishops, who supposedly never counteract the numerous articles written against you that often appear on web pages. As they say, “Silence is a sign of approval.”

In the month of September, during the course of the theatrical representative convocation which took place in the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, once again was repeated and reiterated the viewpoint of converting the Jerusalem Armenian Apostolic Patriarchate and Hierarchical See to a “diocese.” This year a number of wild-barking mouths...with understandable reasons, dictated and motivated, not so much for the security of their seats and statuses, but more so for the security of their pockets – expressing your primary and only worry, “bravely” demanded that the Patriarchate of Jerusalem be directly subject to Etchmiadzin...

As if our daily issues and difficulties with other Christian communities were not

enough, along with our constant issues with Jews and Moslems; now the brotherhood of Etchmiadzin like you, have risen on a crusade against the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, driven by the itch of despotism... Your Holiness, at one time you tried to neutralize the Jerusalem and Constantinople Hierarchical Seats, but you did not succeed; come now, don’t try again. And don’t ever forget that foreigners have become familiar with the Armenian Church by means of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem...

The Armenian Apostolic Church during the course of its centuries-old existence has not endured so many external blows, as much as those mindless and destructive efforts, which you, Holiness, a native child of this same Church, are preparing from within, against her...Now the time has come that you stop acting like a resident of paradise trying to cover your moral nakedness and emptiness with fig leaves.

Holiness, you can be sure, that the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin remains for us and always will remain a source of inspiration and hope, while you ...

-- *The Truth Must be Told*, Nov. 26

ON DECEMBER 1, THE SUPREME SPIRITUAL COUNCIL MET IN THE MOTHER SEE OF HOLY ETCHMIADZIN, UNDER THE PRESIDENCY OF HIS HOLINESS KAREKIN II, SUPREME PATRIARCH AND CATHOLICOS OF ALL ARMENIANS. During the meeting, the Council discussed, among other issues, a publicly published letter of His Beatitude Archbishop Nourhan Manougian, Patriarch of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem. In this regard the Supreme Spiritual Council has issued the following statement:

“We express our concern regarding the letter of the Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem, His Beatitude Archbishop Nourhan Manougian; which was addressed to the Catholicos of All Armenians, but was first publicly distributed on the Internet, days prior to being delivered to His Holiness.

The Supreme Spiritual Council considers unacceptable the manner of the steps taken by His Beatitude Archbishop Nourhan Manougian, who casts a shadow on the high ranking position of the Patriarch with inappropriate language and actions for a clergyman, harming the reputation and prestige of the Armenian Church, and trying to defame the Catholicos of All Armenians, the members of the Church

Representative Assembly, and the bishops. It is unfortunate that false accusations are being put into circulation by the Patriarch, particularly relating to the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin turning the Jerusalem Patriarchate into a Diocese.

On the eve of the 100th anniversary of Armenian Genocide, the Supreme Spiritual Council urges His Beatitude Archbishop Nourhan Manougian to recall his episcopal oath offered before the Holy Altar of Descent to the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin and to the Catholicos of All Armenians.

“Set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12).

The Supreme Spiritual Council expresses their high appreciation and offers support to the Brotherhood of St. James for their dedicated service, exhorting them to continue to preserve the Armenian rights of the sacred places in the same zealous spirit for the vibrancy of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church.” – Press Release, Holy Etchmiadzin, Dec. 1

ON DECEMBER 28, IN THE MOTHER SEE OF HOLY ETCHMIADZIN AND IN ALL THE ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC HOLY CHURCHES, THE PONTIFICAL ENCYCLICAL OF HIS HOLINESS KAREKIN II, SUPREME PATRIARCH AND CATHOLICOS OF ALL ARMENIANS, ISSUED FOR THE UPCOMING 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE, WAS READ DURING DIVINE LITURGY.

In the Mother See, under the presidency of His Holiness, the Pontifical encyclical was read during the Divine Liturgy by His Grace Bishop Moushegh Babayan, Director of Administration of the Mother See. Following is the full Pontifical Encyclical:

KAREKIN II, SERVANT OF JESUS CHRIST, BY THE MERCY OF GOD AND THE WILL OF THE NATION CHIEF BISHOP AND CATHOLICOS OF ALL ARMENIANS, SUPREME PATRIARCH OF THE PAN-NATIONAL PREEMINENT ARARATIAN SEE THE APOSTOLIC MOTHER CHURCH OF UNIVERSAL HOLY ETCHMIADZIN

Christ-bequeathed greetings of love and pontifical blessings to the Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia, to the Armenian Patriarchates of Holy Jerusalem and Constantinople, to Archbishops, Bishops, Priests and Deacons, to diocesan assemblies, diocesan and parochial councils and officers, and to all beloved faithful Arme-

nian People:

“The path of the righteous is as the dawning light that shines brighter and brighter unto the perfect day.” Proverbs 4:18

The centennial of the Armenian Genocide is before us and our souls resound with a powerful call for justice and truth that will not be silenced.

Each day of 2015 is a day of remembrance and devotion for our people, a spiritual journey to the memorials of our martyrs in the Homeland and the Diaspora, before which we humbly kneel in prayer with offerings of incense for the souls of our innocent victims, who abide in unmarked graves, having accepted death rather than rejecting their faith and nation. Indeed “the path of the righteous is as the dawning light that shines brighter and brighter unto the perfect day.”

In 1915, and for years following, Ottoman Turkey committed genocide against our people. In Western Armenia – on our native soil – in the Armenian homeland and in Armenian communities throughout Turkey, one and one half million sons and daughters of our nation were subjected to slaughter, famine and disease, as they were deported and forced to march to their deaths. Centuries of honest accomplishments and creativity were swiftly plundered. Thousands of monasteries and churches were desecrated and destroyed. National institutions and schools were razed and ruined. Our spiritual and cultural treasures were uprooted and obliterated. Western Armenia, where for millennia - from the time of Noah - our people lived, created and built their history and culture, had been wrested from its native population.

A century ago – when the fragments of the Armenian nation, having lost their patrimony, were scattered all over the world, and while Eastern Armenia was waging a life-and-death struggle for survival against Turkish invaders – it was hard to believe in the future of the Armenian people. Nevertheless a new dawn came. By the grace of the Lord, our people rose up from death. On a small, salvaged part of the homeland, our people reestablished statehood, recreated a country out of the ruins and vestiges, and built a “homeland of light and hope,” of science, education and culture. The Armenians exiled throughout the world built homes and hearths, and flourished in countries near and far, carrying on their traditions and spiritual life. Wherever the children of our nation lived, they achieved

success, earned respect and trust, and gained recognition for their conscientious work and their contributions to science, the arts and the common welfare. This is the history of our people for the last century – a history of adversity and resurrection. Today, hardships notwithstanding, our nation strengthens its independent statehood, creates its new life of freedom, and looks hopefully to the future, embracing national reawakening, optimism and faith.

Glory to you, O Lord, boundless glory, “Like a shield you protect us with your good favor.” (Psalms 5:12). By placing our hope in You, O Lord, our people were enlightened and strengthened. Your light kindled the ingenuity of our spirit. Your might propelled us to our victories. We created though others destroyed our creations. We continued to live though others wanted us dead. You, O Lord, willed that our people - condemned to death by a genocidal plan - should live and rise again, so that we might raise this just cause before the conscience of humanity and the law of nations, to free the world of the callous indifference of Pilate and the criminal denial of Turkey.

For the sake of justice - until the triumph of our cause, we will continue our struggle without retreat – Church, Nation and State together. The blood of our innocent martyrs and the suffering of our people cry out for justice. Our destroyed shrines, the violation of our national rights, the falsification and distortion of our history all cry out for justice. Having survived genocide, our people believed and continue to believe that the multitude of righteous countries, national and civic organizations, and individuals who have recognized and condemned the Armenian Genocide will be joined by others who believe that the affirmation of truth and justice are the prerequisite and guarantor of a peaceful world free of enmity and violence.

In memory of our one and a half million martyrs of the Genocide, we express our gratitude to the nations, organizations and individuals who have had the courage and conviction to recognize and condemn the Armenian Genocide. We express gratitude to those countries and kind peoples who accepted the children of our nation as brothers and sisters. These examples of justice and humanitarianism are luminous pages in the history of mankind. They shall always be remembered and appreciated for generations, and benefit the peaceful, secure and congenial life of the

world.

As Pontiff of the Armenians, it is spiritually consoling to announce to our people that on April 23, 2015, during the Divine Liturgy, our Holy Church will offer a special service canonizing its sons and daughters who accepted martyrdom as saints “for faith and for Homeland,” and will proclaim April 24 as the day of remembrance for the Holy Martyrs of the Genocide.

O, Armenian people, graced from on high - a nation martyred; a nation resurrected - live boldly, advance surely, with your gaze toward Ark-bearing Ararat, and with an unwavering heart, keep your hope great. The Lord's encouragement and message are addressed to you: “Though you are not mighty, you were faithful to my word and you did not betray my name... Hold fast what you have so that no one will take away your crown of victory.” (Revelations 3:8-11). Thus, let us stay on course before God, righteous and true, on the steadfast paths of faith, which like the morning light dispels the darkness and makes the horizons of hope visible. Our way is with God; and the life of faith is our victory. Let us make fruitful the centennial anniversary by valuing our peoples' 100-year-long path of travails and rebirth, so that our children, recognizing the heroic will of their grandparents and parents to live and create, and their commissions undertaken for the sake of nation and homeland, create the bright day of our native land and our people dispersed throughout the world. Let us transform the remembrance of our martyrs into energy and strength in our spiritual and national life, and before God and all people, illuminate the path by our righteous course to guide our way toward the realization of justice and our sacred aspirations.

From our nation's Christ-built and cherished spiritual center, before the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin's Holy Altar of Descent of the Only Begotten, let us pray to God for peace, safety and the welfare of our Homeland, our beloved people throughout the world, and especially, for everlasting light and peace for the innocent souls of the holy martyrs of genocide. May love and brotherhood, justice and truth reign over humankind, and may the ways of the righteous radiate, guide and spread the light until the dawn of a new day brings peace and happiness to all the world.

May the grace, love and peace of our Lord Jesus the Christ be with you and with us all. Amen. – Press Release, Holy

Etchmiadzin, Dec. 28.

THE GRAND IMAM OF AL-AZHAR AHMAD AL-TAYEB AND COPTIC POPE TAWADROS II INAUGURATED THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE FOR COUNTERING EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM IN CAIRO WEDNESDAY.

The conference was opened in the presence of an international array of religious scholars.

It comes as part of government-led efforts to counter the emergence of the Islamic State in Iraq and Al-Sham (ISIS). Egypt has joined the international coalition to fight the ISIS existence in Iraq and Syria.

ISIS affiliate 'State of Sinai', formerly known as Ansar Beit Al-Maqdis, has killed hundreds of people over the past year, who have for the most part been military personnel.

During his speech, Al-Tayeb said: "Division, strife, and polarisation are the main tactics extremists are using to divide the Islamic nation."

He added that despite the existence of several entities working on unifying Muslims worldwide, the Arab-Islamic nation still needs to work on mutual goals in facing security challenges.

Al-Tayeb tackled the nature of the existence for those troops, the threats they pose and potential ways to overcome them. He said those "terrorist" groups claim the caliphate is one of the Sunni assets, and is expiating several Muslim victims by killing them. Al-Tayeb added that Al-Azhar is taking new measures to develop "a rational religious speech."

Pope Tawadros II, who co-launched the opening ceremony for the conference, said principles of divine religions are common to all creeds. "Our religion urges us to love and accept those who are different from us," he said.

Pope Tawadros reviewed the long history of Egyptian unity through several decades of critical political turning points, from the 1919 revolution to the present. – Website of the Serbian Patriarchate, Dec. 8.

EGYPTIAN COPTIC LEADER POPE TAWADROS II SAID EGYPT AWAITS THE REAL ARAB SPRING, TO BRING PROSPERITY, GROWTH AND HAPPINESS.

In an interview with state-run TV on Tuesday, the Pope said that the 25 January revolution was produced by the youth but ultimately hijacked.

The Arab Spring did not bring any-

thing positive, Tawadros added.

The January revolution was on track to correcting the path he said, however it deviated and was then corrected on 30 June. He also said that people still await the real spring that will come by means of Egyptians' insistence to work.

Egyptians are working on rebuilding the country, he said adding that Egypt has suffered many complications and is currently being restored. – MENA, Dec. 31.

The Catholic Churches

POPE FRANCIS DEDICATED THE CATECHESIS OF THIS WEDNESDAY'S GENERAL AUDIENCE ON DECEMBER 3 TO HIS RECENT VISIT TO TURKEY, A LAND DEAR TO MANY CHRISTIANS FOR BEING THE BIRTHPLACE OF THE APOSTLE PAUL, HOSTING THE FIRST SEVEN COUNCILS, AND FOR THE PRESENCE, NEAR EPHESUS, OF THE "HOUSE OF MARY." In the same way as he asked the faithful, before his journey, to accompany him in prayer, today he asked them to give thanks to the Lord for the success of the trip and to pray that it might bear the fruit of dialogue in our relationship with our Orthodox and Muslim brothers, and in the path towards peace among peoples.

Francis spoke first of his meeting with the authorities on Friday 29, thanking them for the care and respect with which they greeted him. In a constitutionally secular country with a Muslim majority, the Pope noted that it is oblivion to God and not His glorification that engenders violence, and insisted before the leaders of the nation on the importance of concerted efforts between Christians and Muslims for solidarity, peace and justice, reaffirming the need for States to guarantee real freedom of worship to citizens and religious communities.

On the second day, the Pope visited the Museum of Hagia Sophia, the Blue Mosque and the Catholic Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, highly symbolic places for the different religions that co-exist in Turkey. "I did so, feeling within my heart the wish to invoke the Lord, God of Heaven and Earth, merciful Father of all humanity." The central event of the day was the Mass held in the Cathedral, attended by pastors and faithful of the various Catholic rites in Turkey, along with representatives of other confessions, to invoke together the Holy Spirit, "who builds the unity of the Church: unity in faith, unity in charity, unity in internal cohesion," so that the People of God, "in the richness of their

traditions," may grow in openness and obedience to His divine action."

The feast of St. Andrew the Apostle, patron of the Church of Constantinople, on 30 November, offered the ideal context for consolidating the fraternal relations between the Bishop of Rome and the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, who renewed their joint commitment to the path of re-establishing full communion between Catholics and Orthodox, and signed a Joint Declaration which represents a significant step along the way. Francis expressed his joy at having participated in the Divine Liturgy and for the dual blessing imparted by the Pope and the Patriarch at the end. "Prayer is the foundation of any fruitful ecumenical dialogue under the guidance of the Holy Spirit."

The Holy Father's final meeting, of which he spoke with emotion, was with a group of young refugees from the war zones of the Middle East, under the care of the Salesians. "It was very important for me to meet them," he said, "both to express my closeness and that of the Church, and to highlight the importance of hospitality; a value to which Turkey is committed." The Pope again thanked the country for its work in this field, praised the Salesians for their work with the young refugees, and concluded by again asking all those present to pray for refugees and internally displaced people, and for the removal of the causes of this "painful scourge." – VIS, Dec. 3.

THE U.S. CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS' (USCCB) SUBCOMMITTEE ON AID TO THE CHURCH IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE APPROVED 79 GRANTS FOR A TOTAL OF \$2,854,878 IN AID TO FINANCE PASTORAL PROJECTS IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE. The subcommittee evaluated and approved grant proposals for 2015 during the bishops' annual fall General Assembly on November 9 in Baltimore.

The projects focus on rebuilding Catholic schools and orphanages, charitable programs, formation programs for seminarians, and the preservation and dissemination of Catholic education and intellectual life. The geographical area served by these projects includes 20 countries and extends into Central Asia. These grants are funded by the annual Collection for the Church in Central and Eastern Europe.

"Our brothers and sisters in Central and Eastern Europe stand in great need of

our help and solidarity,” said Archbishop Blase J. Cupich of Chicago, chairman of the subcommittee. “In these countries, the Church continues to face enormous challenges, both from the recent political upheaval in many areas and from the continuing influence of the secular culture on families, and particularly on the youth. Through our funded projects, Catholics in the United States offer a strong message of support and gratitude to the faithful in these countries.”

Several grants focused on Catholic education in Albania, one of the poorest countries in Eastern Europe. The subcommittee approved 6 grants for pastoral work in Albania, which include several grants that will support schools. Many Albanians attend Mass regularly and the faith is growing and spreading among the population. Most of the students are from very poor families who do not have the resources to support the schools or pay full tuition. Faced with this need, many of the Catholic schools are run by religious orders, which finance the schools through their own limited means. The subcommittee funded one grant that will purchase uniforms for a Jesuit-run high school in Scutari. Another grant will install a central heating system for a nursing school located in Elbasan, which is run by the Sisters of Charity of St. Jeanne-Antide Thouret.

In Hungary, one funded project is the Benedictine Archabbey of Pannonhalma. Founded in the tenth century, the abbey operates a boarding school for 900 boys, vineyards, a winery and a renowned archival library. The abbey is unusual in that it also functions as a diocese, with the abbot serving as the bishop for 15 parishes in the surrounding region. The abbey has faced many financial challenges over the years. In 1950, the communist government confiscated all abbey properties, which were not returned to the abbey until the 1990s. The abbey runs many charitable and catechetical programs in its parishes, which are all staffed by Benedictine monks from the abbey. In order to facilitate transportation of lay ministers and parishioners to workshops and other events, the subcommittee also funded the purchase of a nine-passenger van. This vehicle will help the monks to continue supporting and educating the people of their diocese.

“I offer my sincere thanks to each person here in the United States who has contributed to this collection,” said Archbishop Cupich. “We need your prayers and financial support to continue serving

our brothers and sisters, who live in the ancestral lands of many of our immigrant families. These projects build up their faith and give them the resources they need to continue their struggle oftentimes in the face of an anti-religious, secular climate.” – USCCB Press Release, Dec. 10.

“THROUGH YOU, I GREET YOUR COMMUNITIES THROUGHOUT THE WORLD, AND EXPRESS MY ENCOURAGEMENT IN PARTICULAR TO THOSE IN IRAQ AND SYRIA, who are living through a time of great suffering and fear in the face of violence,” said the Pope this morning, as he received His Beatitude Ignatius Youssef III Younan, Patriarch of Antioch and all the East of the Syrians, accompanied by the bishops and faithful of the Syriac-Catholic community.

The Holy Father, who expressed his solidarity and compassion for this community, assuring them of his prayers, reiterated that the difficult situation in the Middle East continues to cause an exodus of the faithful of this Church to the Eparchies of the diaspora, and creates new pastoral needs. “It is a challenge,” he said; “on the one hand, of remaining faithful to origins, and on the other, of entering different cultural contexts, working in the service of the ‘salus animarum’ and the common good.”

“This movement of the faithful towards countries that are considered safer impoverishes the Christian presence in the Middle East, the land of the prophets, the first preachers of the Gospel, the martyrs and many saints, the cradle of the hermits and monasticism. All this requires you to reflect on the situation of your Eparchies, which need zealous Pastors as well as courageous faithful, capable of bearing witness to the Gospel in the dialogue, at times not easy, with people of different ethnic and religious backgrounds. Many have fled from the inhumanity that throws entire populations onto the streets, leaving them without means of subsistence.”

The Pope invited the bishops to coordinate their efforts to respond to the humanitarian needs, both of those who stay at home and those who flee to other countries, and in this regard he recalled that during their meeting in Rome the Syriac Church had asked to be able to hold a Synod outside the Patriarchal territory. This request was accepted immediately in order to facilitate the meeting, intended to acknowledge the pressing needs of the Church and to respond to the spiritual

expectations of the faithful. In particular, the Syriac Church has undertaken the process of reform of the Divine Liturgy, in the service of the Word of God, which should allow new devotional zeal. This has required “intense examination of the Tradition and great discernment, knowing how sensitive the assembly of the faithful is to the great gift of the Word and the Eucharist.”

“Now, as you return home, you are refreshed by this experience of communion at the tombs of the apostles Peter and Paul; a communion that finds particular expression here today, as we raise to the Lord along with the Successor of Peter a prayer of gratitude and supplication.” He concluded, “Dear brothers, I exhort you to continue your pastoral efforts and your ministry of hope in the service of the venerable Syriac-Catholic Church. I greet with affection the faithful who accompany you, in whom I see the different communities you represent. I invite you to transmit to all the expression of my closeness and my prayer to the Lord.” – *VIS*, Dec. 12.

THE PRIME MINISTER OF UKRAINE ARSENIY YATSENIUK MET WITH PAPAL LEGATE CARDINAL CHRISTOPH SCHONBORN TO MARK THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE LIBERATION OF THE UKRAINIAN GREEK-CATHOLIC CHURCH.

The meeting was attended by the Head of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, His Beatitude Sviatoslav Shevchuk, and the Apostolic Nuncio in Ukraine, His Excellency Archbishop Thomas Edward Gullickson.

Yatseniuk praised Cardinal Christoph Schonborn for visiting Ukraine.

“We have always felt that the Catholic Church is a buttress in our struggle for independence, territorial integrity, freedom, and our rights. I appreciate your efforts in supporting Ukraine,” said the premier.

Yatseniuk then recalled his own meeting with Pope Francis in April earlier this year.

The Prime Minister went on to stress that Ukraine faced serious challenges: “But with God’s help and the help of the Church we shall overcome them.”

Yatseniuk noted that freedom of worship is one of Ukraine’s fundamental values, and that, in his opinion, the Church and other religious organizations in Ukraine “have found a way to co-exist and respect each other.”

“We have a real unity, despite the fact that some people try to use religion as a

tool of political influence,” Yatseniuk said. – *RISU*, Dec. 12.

DURING THE LITURGY IN THE BYZANTINE RITE IN THE CATHEDRAL OF ST. STEPHEN IN VIENNA CARDINAL, CHRISTOPH SCHÖNBORN IN HIS HOMILY EXPRESSED HIS "GREAT JOY CONCERNING THE REVIVAL OF THE GREEK CATHOLIC CHURCH." The priests and the faithful of the Greek Catholic Church who live in Austria also took part in a common prayer.

In times of communism this Church, according to the preacher, gave a large number of martyrs and confessors. Bishops, priests and lay people in times of persecution showed an unusually large force of will, having stayed faithful to the Church.

They drew this power from the Holy Spirit, said Cardinal Schönborn. Twenty-five years ago this church, which was thought to be almost destroyed, "again resurrected from the catacombs." His mission of the legate of the Holy Father Francis during the 25th anniversary of celebrations of the UGCC legalization he interpreted as a sign of solidarity with the people of Ukraine in this difficult time.

There are ten thousand Greek Catholics who live in Austria. Greek Catholic communities exist in Vienna, Graz, Klagenfurt, Linz, Salzburg and Innsbruck. Especially in the last two decades the community composition, according to Fr. Yuriy Kolasa, has undergone significant changes. If after the World War II community members were mostly Ukrainian Greek Catholics who lived in Austria, now there are Byzantine Rite Catholics from almost all the Eastern European countries. These changes were caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the opening of the borders of the European Union. The vast majority continue to belong to the Ukrainian Church (86%). Significantly less in number are the believers of the Romanian Greek Catholic Church (11%).

So Fr. Kolasa noted the efforts made by the Eastern Catholic Churches on behalf of reconciliation between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. "They serve as a bridge: the beginning of our institutional churches lies on the border of two worlds - the Western Latin and Eastern Orthodox" – remarked Fr. Kolasa. In Austria we find fertile ground for the meeting of different cultures and religious traditions. – Press Release, Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Dec. 16.

UKRAINIAN CATHOLIC LEADERS HAVE WARNED THEIR CHURCH IS BEING DRIVEN UNDERGROUND AGAIN, A QUARTER-CENTURY AFTER IT WAS RE-LEGALIZED WITH THE END OF COMMUNIST RULE.

"In Crimea and eastern Ukraine, we've already effectively returned to the catacombs," said Father Ihor Yatsiv, the church's Kiev-based spokesman. "It's a sad paradox that history is being repeated just as we commemorate our liberation. But after a couple of decades of freedom, we again look set to lose our freedom," he told *Catholic News Service* Dec. 18.

The priest spoke as Ukrainian Catholic communities in Russian-occupied Crimea approached a Jan. 1 deadline for re-registering under Russian law. He said the Byzantine Ukrainian Catholic Church had no legal status in Russia and would therefore be unable, in practice, to register.

Father Yatsiv said Russian and separatist forces had not officially refused to register Ukrainian Catholic parishes, but had ensured it was impossible because of the lack of legal provisions. He added that there was no effective government in separatist-controlled eastern Ukraine, where rebel groups did not recognize Ukrainian Catholics and were "imposing whatever rules and regulations they choose." -- Jonathan Luxmoore for *CNS*, Dec. 18.

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC ARCHBISHOP OF BELGRADE, THE CAPITAL OF SERBIA, DESCRIBED THE BALKANS AS AN ETHNIC TROUBLE SPOT—IN THAT REGARD, NOT MUCH HAS CHANGED SINCE THE END OF WORLD WAR II, SAYS ARCHBISHOP STANISLAV HOČEVAR. Serbs, Croats and Bosnians continue to make for a highly flammable mix, with the countries' religious leaders put in the difficult role of peace-makers.

Historical tensions between the different ethnic and religious groups make daily coexistence quite complicated, the prelate said in an interview with international Catholic charity *Aid to the Church in Need*. "Nobody is prepared to reach a new reconciliation."

"We should all together find new ways to reconcile with each other, otherwise it won't work. Without an ecumenical dimension we won't reach that reconciliation," Archbishop Hočevar stated.

Noting that the relationship with the Orthodox Church is good at a personal level, the archbishop stressed that the Churches must work hard to arrive at a joint perspective on important historical

events. Different interpretations of history and many theological disagreements persist.

For example, the archbishop explained, for the Orthodox Church religious and national identity are very closely linked; Serbians tend to emphasize the small differences between Catholics and Orthodox instead of focusing on more important, universal issues that transcend nationality. The prelate acknowledged that this leaning toward nationalistic pride is in part a lingering reaction to the communist policy of eliminating personal and national identity in favor of a new "identity of workers."

The archbishop praised the current Serbian Minister of Culture for helping the Catholic Church repair and upgrade Catholic churches. In fact, in late October 2014 a diocesan synod was held that focused on organizational problems. The number of local Catholics has decreased and resources are scant. Besides refurbishing churches and other diocesan buildings, strengthening ministry to children and youth, along with providing transport for priests to attend far-flung parishes are key priorities.

Archbishop Hočevar is strongly committed to dialogue with the Orthodox; and the availability of theological material in Serbian is a key ingredient in this process. Besides, until now it was assumed that Catholics in Serbia spoke only Croatian but the children of mixed marriages in his diocese speak Serbian. However, there is a catch: "if the Catholic catechism is translated to Serbian, the Orthodox fear we want to convert Orthodox faithful to Catholicism. Therefore we need to go step by step."

As Archbishop Stanislav Hočevar stressed, the reconstruction of the Balkan states is a complex and slow process. For its part, he said, the Catholic Church can make a huge contribution by demonstrating the universality of faith communities—a universality that transcends the often overly narrow connection between national and religious identity. This broad view holds the key to Croats, Serbs and Bosnians being able to work toward living in harmony.

This report was provided by Aid to the Church in Need. – *Zenit*, Dec. 23.

MEMBERS OF THE EPARCHY OF SAINT MARON OF BROOKLYN ARE MOURNING THE RECENT DEATH OF THEIR BELOVED BISHOP EMERITUS, BISHOP STEPHEN HECTOR

DOUEIHI, WHO PASSED AWAY ON DEC. 17 at the age of 87 after a long illness.

A funeral mass took place at Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral on Dec. 22. The bishop was buried in his native Lebanon.

Bishop Doueihi was appointed by Pope John Paul II as bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn on Nov. 23, 1996 and served as the eparchy's spiritual leader for many years. The Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn is the diocese representing Maronite Catholics in New York and several other states, including New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Delaware, Virginia, District of Columbia, Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut and Maryland.

In addition to his role as a clergyman, Bishop Doueihi was also a well-known

and widely respected teacher. He taught at the Seminary of Our Lady of Lebanon in Washington D.C. and was a professor of Theology at the University of Saint Joseph in Beirut, among other academic institutions. He was fluent in seven languages: Arabic, French, English, Italian, Spanish, Syriac and Latin.

Stephen Hector Doueihi was born to Youssef and Hassiba Zakhia Doueihi in Zgharta, Lebanon on June 25, 1927.

He was ordained into the priesthood on Aug. 14, 1955. Following his ordination he lived in Rome where he earned a doctorate in Sacred Theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University.

In 1959, he returned to Lebanon and served as pastor of the Parish of Zgharta until 1969. Over the years, he served as the spiritual leader of many parishes in the U.S. and Mexico, including churches in

Puebla, Mexico, Peoria, Illinois, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, San Antonio, Texas and Washington D.C.

He was elevated to the rank of monsignor in 1983.

He was named rector of Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral in Brooklyn in 1989, the same year that he was ordained a chorbishop, a rank just below bishop. He was appointed a bishop in 1996. His enthronement ceremony took place at Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral on Feb. 5, 1997.

Maronite Catholics and members of the clergy from all over the world attended Bishop Doueihi's funeral, according to members of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn. —Paula Katinas for *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Dec. 30.



Patriarch John X of Antioch and All the East (left) with Patriarch Daniel of Romania in Bucharest in early December.

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