

NEWSLETTER #5

Department of Foreign Relations
Synod of Bishops of the
Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia

August 76

HIS EMINENCE METROPOLITAN PHILARET'S RETURN DELAYED.

Little was mentioned in the press regarding the fire on the Liner Queen Elizabeth II which delayed the Metropolitan's return from Europe. The Metropolitan boarded the Liner on July 9/22 to return to the U.S.A. The fire, which the newspapers described as a minor accident, broke out in the engine room and in reality lasted over four hours and badly damaged almost all of the turbines. The flames rose higher than the Liner's stacks and the ship was forced to return to port for repairs. The Metropolitan has booked passage for the September 6th crossing and is expected to arrive in New York about the middle of September.

PREPARATION FOR THE ECUMENICAL COUNCIL.

The June bulletin of the Constantinople Patriarchate, "Episkepsis" reports that preparatory negotiations are continuing by the special Patriarchal delegation and the Serbian, Rumanian, Bulgarian, Greek and Finnish Churches. The general conclusion of these negotiations is reported with the reservation that these meetings have no juridical meaning. The conclusion is the following: "Orthodoxy is united in the wish to convoke a Pan Orthodox Council, and everywhere the hope is expressed that it will be of short duration, that it will strictly follow the agenda, that this agenda will be restricted to only non-dogmatical and non-theoretical subjects, that it should not touch the canons, and yet, that it (the Council) will find the means and interpretations to apply them to contemporary needs; that in the whole Orthodox Church decisions will be made about the anomalies in Church life, that the movement toward the unity of all Christians will proceed in the Pan Orthodox agreement, that Orthodoxy will witness to the world reinstated love and peace in regard to the contemporary world of believers' and non believers."

The Greek Newspaper "The Hellenic Chronicle" of July 29th reports more categorically that the question of the simultaneous celebration of Pascha by both Orthodox and Western Churches on a fixed Sunday in April, will also be discussed. The details proposed are still unknown to us. But it is of significance that the introduction of it by the Preparatory Commission alone, not even waiting for the Pan Orthodox Council, is in itself a very severe violation of the Canons, since the Commission, by such an act, would annihilate the decision of an Ecumenical Council, which lays the foundation of the whole liturgical year.

ARCHBISHOP IAKOVOS AT THE EUCHARISTIC CONGRESS.

The newspaper "The Hellenic Chronicle" of August 12th reports the presence of the Greek North American Archbishop Iakovos at the Roman Catholic Eucharistic Congress in Philadelphia. In his address to that Congress, the Archbishop noted that he had examined the subject "in the light of Christian pluralism, its much acclaimed theoretical unity in Christ, as well as in the light of our common Christian heritage, and that of the hope for reunion which will be culminated and consummated in the common cup - a favorite phrase coined by the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras of beloved memory....." His theme was "The Eucharist in Pluralism". Pluralism is a new theological term which supposes to express the idea that the unity of the Churches is possible while there still exists the multiplicity of Confessions. Is it not possible that the time will come, when the Ecumenists will offer us to exclaim at the Liturgy: "Let us love one another, that with one DISaccord we may confess?"

AGAINST THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN

The prospect of the introduction of the ordination of women in the Anglican Church creates uneasiness for the Greek Archbishop Sotirios, who is the head of the Canadian parishes. According to "The Hellenic Chronicle" of July 29th, he expressed the thought in Toronto, that the reform which is expected to take place during the month of November, will result in estrangement between the Anglican and Orthodox Churches. He said that the two Churches have enjoyed perfect ecumenical relations; he will continue collaborating with the Anglicans in the same way as he does with the Jews, Muslims and Roman Catholics. "But", he added, "there can never be intercommunion with the Anglican Church if it has women priestesses." Bishop Sotirios noted that the question of women priestesses is creating a great deal of confusion among the Anglicans and some of them have approached him seeking asylum in the Greek Church. He has advised them to "wait and see". He also explained that in places where they have no church of their own, the Orthodox are permitted to worship in Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches, but are not permitted to accept their Mysteries. If Anglicans introduce women priests, he said, he will issue a decree forbidding the Greek Orthodox faithful from attending Anglican churches. Bishop Sotirios did not quote (and surely could not quote) the canons which would permit even such participation in non-Orthodox church services. (Apostolic 43, 65; Laodic. 33).

ECUMENICAL "OPTIMISM"

As we reported in a previous newsletter, the Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Nairobi forwarded to the Central Committee, the question of the persecution of religion. We foretold at that time that no significant resolution was to be expected, and truly, as the "New York Times" of August 13th reports, the report made by the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, Dr. Philip Potter, almost completely ignores the persecution of religion in the USSR and other Communist countries. In his report he states that "there was no serious wrestling with the problems encountered in countries where the Roman Catholic Church is predominant or where there are large non-Christian communities, as in the Soviet Union, Turkey, Cyprus and elsewhere."

DISSATISFACTION WITH RELIGIOUS RADIO BROADCASTS

Keston College in England, which is studying the condition of religion in the USSR, made a survey of the question: "To what degree do the faithful there find the broadcasts from the West to be satisfactory." This study proved the broadcasts (some 240 hours a week) to be unsatisfactory. The listeners would like to hear more theology. One of the listeners commented: "We do not need to have atheist teachings disproved all the time and to be told that God does exist. This is elementary." One Baptist Christian noted that the preaching on the broadcasts is too simplified. The young people need more advanced teaching. He also said, that the method of preaching is too emotional. "The preachers shout too much trying to whip up the emotions." The best review was earned by Radio Liberty. "The Protestant stations are awful, beginning from the fact that they speak Russian badly....Voice of America and Vatican Radio are also very poor".... Yet, in spite of such criticism, the religious broadcasts are given much importance, since they are the only source of some Christian information.

DISAPPOINTMENT WITH THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

"St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly", #1-2 for 1976, published a rather pessimistic report by Fr. Th. Hopko and Constance Tarasar, about the Nairobi Conference. "No, the Orthodox cannot really rejoice too much over Nairobi because what one early Orthodox ecumenist called the "agony of the Orthodox" in WCC activities still remains. This is not the agony of being a small minority in an overwhelmingly Protestant organization. Nor is it the agony of representing positions which are basically unacceptable to this great majority - the continually unacceptable Orthodox positions on the nature of church unity, the meaning of the Eucharist, the understanding of the community of men and women in the Church, and the formulation of Christian positions and methods relative to "secular" issues. It is rather the agony of being in an organization and participating in an action where one's most basic views are not even understood. Disagreement and rejection are hard to take in any case, but disagreement and rejection without understanding are intolerable." After illustrating this lack of understanding with several examples, the authors used a strange logic and conclude that Nairobi, after all, "was not so bad".

REACTION TO SACRELIGIOUS HYMN.

The publishing of an interfaith hymnal in which the hymn "It was on a Friday Morning" was printed, met with many vigorous protests. (See our previous newsletter.) The magazine "Christianity Today", in its August 6th issue, reports that many protests were received by the Pentagon and Congress. Among the leaders of the protest movement was Mrs. Frank Horton, wife of the New York Congressman, Mrs. Melvin Prive, wife of the Chairman of the House of the Armed Forces Committee. Mrs. Horton was dissatisfied with the four page response to a letter she had sent to the Armed Forces Board of Chaplains, which supervised the publishing of this hymnal. On July 9th, the Chief of Chaplains, James Rogers, of the Veterans Administration, (a Methodist) ordered removal within 24 hours of the 15,000 copies of the hymnal, because of the sacreligious nature of one of the hymns. This action caused a big commotion, and a study was under way to determine if Rogers had the right to issue such an order. Some chaplains are searching for adhesive paper to cover the offending hymn instead of cutting it out of the book. More than half a million copies of the book with its 815 pages, has been printed at a cost of \$1.87 per copy.

SACRELIGIOUS POSTER

The "Christian Beacon" and the "National Enquirer" published a copy of a campaign poster of the presidential candidate Jimmy Carter. He is depicted with beard and long hair, in the likeness of Jesus Christ, but wearing his characteristic smile. The poster also has a double meaning inscription: "J. C. can save America." The initials can stand for Jesus Christ or for Jimmy Carter. More than 7,000 of these posters were sold during the Democratic Convention in New York. Even Senator McGovern obtained one. The publishers prepared 25,000 of these posters. It would be interesting to learn if the faithful democrats will demand that their candidate forbid this sacreligious act, and repudiate it. Nothing of this sort has happened so far, and is this not an indication of what one can expect from such a candidate in the future?

NEW ABYSSIAN PATRIARCH

The primate of the Ethiopian Church, the Abuna Theophilos, was arrested by the Communist government and accused of collaboration with the late Emperor Haile Selassie, during the month of February. Since that time nothing has been heard about him. The well-populated Elective Council, (809 delegates participated) elected as Patriarch, Abuna Melaku Voldi-Michael. He is 58 years old. He is credited with allegedly baptizing 300,000 people and erecting 65 churches and 24 schools.

JUBILEE OF THE R-CLUBS

The annual Convention of the R-Clubs will take place in New York this year and will mark the 50th anniversary of its establishment. On Saturday, Sept. 4th and Sunday Sept. 5th, festal services will be conducted in the Waldorf Astoria Hotel by Metropolitan Iriney and the head of the parishes in the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate, Bishop Job, as per official publication of the R-Clubs of June 1976.

THE FORTHCOMING ECUMENICAL COUNCIL AND THE CHURCH IN AMERICA.

Metropolitan Ireney in his address to the Patriarch of Constantinople, notes the necessity, as he thinks, to widen the circle of participants of the Committee for dialogue with Catholics, through acceptance as members, of the representatives of the Orthodox Church in America. The Orthodox Church in America was not invited due to the fact that its autocephaly is acknowledged only by the Church within the borders of the Communist countries. He stated that, if this committee does not include representatives of all Orthodox bodies, "further inter-Orthodox debates and disagreements may later emerge and eventually lead to a failure of the dialogue." The Bishops of the Church in America believe that "the composition of the commission should in no way be influenced by the internal and temporary disagreements existing among us concerning the status of some local churches, and particularly our own Orthodox Church in America." According to the Russian Orthodox Journal, a publication of the R-Clubs in America, in its June issue, the Constantinople Patriarchate did not answer this note. It is a well known fact that the Greek Churches do not recognize the autocephaly of the American Metropolia. Therefore it is to be expected that there will be no answer at all.

ANGLICANS REVISE LIST OF SAINTS.

The magazine "The Living Church" of August 15th, informs us of the revision of the list of Saints by the Liturgical Commission of the Anglican Church. Following the example of the Catholics, the Commission felt it necessary to remove from the list the names of St. Nicholas, St. Valentina, St. Catherine, St. Crispin and St. Cecilia. It is suggested that instead such "heroes of the faith" as Florence Nightingale, a 19th century reformer of nursing, John Bunyan, a 17th century writer, Francis Xavier, a Jesuit missionary, poet John Keble and Thomas Aquinas, be added. At the same time, the Commission suggested the introduction of the feast of the "Blessed Virgin Mary" to be celebrated on August 15th, but notes that this festive observance should "give no countenance to any unacceptable doctrine" about the Holy Theotokos.

COMMOTION SURROUNDING MELKITE ICON.

The Daily News reports that a Melkite Catholic Church in West Paterson, N.J. has enshrined an expensive icon of the Theotokos in honor of the Bicentennial celebration in America. The icon, titled "The American Icon of the Mother of God" was blessed by the Melkite Patriarch Maximos V of Antioch. The icon has been decorated and embellished with jewels under the direction of a Fr. Gorayeb, who said that the icon is famous because of its age, the reputation of the artist, and the quality of his work. The Orthodox Church has never entertained this attitude toward icons. They become famous because of the miracles which occur in answer to the prayers of the faithful. In the majority of cases, the name of the painter remains unknown.

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TO THE RECEIPIENTS OF OUR NEWSLETTER

We regret the delay with the current Newsletter.
Due to Summer vacations and now the Bishop's Council presently in
seccion there will not be a September Newsletter.

The next Newsletter will be mailed out during month of October.

Thank you

Foreign Relations Department