

NEW STRATEGY NEEDED TO SAVE ENDANGERED ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE

by
Peter Marudás



ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN LAITY



Occasional Papers Series • No. 7, 2006

OTHER OCL OCCASIONAL PAPERS IN THE SERIES

Transition, Renewal: ONE FAITH, ONE CHURCH Bishop Iacovos of Catania, 1997.

The Theological Foundation of the Role of the Laity in the Church, Daniel J. Sahas, Ph.D., University of Waterloo Ontario, Canada, 1997.

The Challenge of Outreach, Nikolas K. Gvosdev, Ph.D., 1997.

The American Church and the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Proceedings of the Tenth Annual Meeting, Alice Kopan, Editor, 1998.

An Orthodox Christian Church in the United States: Unified and Self Governed, Peter Haikalis, Ph.D., 2000.

Greek Philosophy and the Theology of the Greek Orthodox Church, John Mavroides, Ph.D., 2006.

DEDICATION

OCL Past Presidents (1987 – 2006)

James Koulogeorge
George D. Karcazes
Soterious Tsoutsoura (of Blessed Memory)
Nicholas Karakas
George Matsoukas
George Coupounas
Alice Kopan
Peter Haikalis
Lee Kopulos

Introduction

The OCL Occasional Papers are published as part of the educational mission of OCL. This timely essay by Peter Marudas entitled **New Strategy Needed to Save Endangered Ecumenical Patriarchate** first appeared as a special report to The National Herald, New York May 13 and May 20, 2006. We are delighted to reprint these articles and make them available to OCL members, supporters and others interested in the present conditions of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. It is our hope that the essay will be a catalyst to help reasonable people prayerfully and thoughtfully evaluate the policies that impact this ancient Patriarchate so that it can become a relevant force in the present day world.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate together with the collective experiences of the Patriarchates of Antioch, Jerusalem and Alexandria has much to convey to the present world order on the major issues of the 21st century including coexisting with Islamic cultures. It is our prayer that the discussion on developing a new strategy to save the Patriarchate opens up to include you and me and is not left only to Archons, United States Senators, European Union parliamentarians and the Greek, Turkish, Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian Governments.

The Ecumenical Patriarch also must assume responsibility for the present state of this venerable institution. He must see himself as an Ecumenical leader rather than the head of the world wide "Greek Diaspora". The ecclesiological solution for the present state of the Patriarchate is for him to convene the Great and Holy Council. This Council has been in the planning stage for almost the entire 20th Century. The time to convene it is now! The Holy Spirit working in synergy with the Orthodox Bishops from throughout the world in a conciliar meeting will produce the solution of restoring good order within the Orthodox

Church. When a delegation of OCL members met with His All Holiness in 1993 soon after his enthronement as Ecumenical Patriarch he discussed convening the Great and Holy Council and promised that it would be called before the end of the twentieth century.

As an Ecumenical leader he must also reexamine his opposition to administrative Unity of all the canonical Orthodox jurisdictions in North America and Europe. He must encourage the development of a Synod of Bishops consisting of all the canonical Orthodox Bishops in America so that good order can prevail in the Church in America. A united Orthodox Church in America will strengthen not only the Church in America but also all the ancient Patriarchates so that they may remain the source of inspiration to faithful Orthodox Christians throughout the world.

It is in this spirit of brotherly love and to promote dialogue and positive solutions for strengthening the Patriarchate that OCL is motivated to reprint these articles. New strategies to invigorate the Ecumenical Patriarchate and to buttress all the ancient Patriarchates to continue to teach the Word of His Truth and to be a Light in the world that seeks the Truth of the Apostolic faith.

George Matsoukas
Publication Coordinator
October, 2006

NEW STRATEGY NEEDED TO SAVE ENDANGERED ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE

I still remember vividly my grandfather taking my cousin and me sometime in 1949 to see then Archbishop Athenagoras on his farewell tour before departing for Constantinople (present-day Istanbul) to assume his duties as Ecumenical Patriarch. As the tall, immense and heavily bearded man swept down the aisle of the Detroit high school auditorium to the musical tribute of the assembled choir, it appeared to this very diminutive 12-year old stretching for a better view that Athenagoras was indeed God himself - a sacrilegious, but understandably forgivable thought from a child overwhelmed by his imposing presence.

Regrettably, I never met Patriarch Athenagoras, but that indelible first impression was subsequently reaffirmed by those who did know him. He was a gifted hierarch of gentle demeanor and humanitarian impulse. Later, as a reporter, I was able to write a number of articles for the Baltimore Sun about Athenagoras and the status of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which succeeded in provoking protest from the Turkish Embassy in Washington. Subsequent, years of public service offered me the unique and unexpected privilege to work directly with the Patriarchate on a number of activities.

These feelings for Athenagoras and the Patriarchate prompted me to place a beautiful oil portrait of Athenagoras on the wall of my home office. The print was given to me in 1967 by former Maryland Governor and Baltimore Mayor Theodore R. McKeldin for my service as his last chief of staff. It hangs next to a large picture of that same grandfather in the uniform of a Greek army *fantaros* (i.e., private) when he returned to Greece from America to serve as a volunteer in the Balkan Wars of 1911-13.

The pictures of these two heroes are daily reminders of that pivotal and great immigrant generation whose lives and faith bridged the “Old and the New Worlds” and laid the foundations for Orthodoxy and Hellenism in America. Two patriarchs, one spiritual, the other family: Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras of Blessed Memory, a man devoted to peace and keeper of our ancient Orthodox Faith in Constantinople died in 1972 at age 86, and my late *pappou*, Nicholas Leventis, our family patriarch, who passed away in 1987 at age 98, leaving a legacy of six married children, 17 grandchildren and 25 great grandchildren.

One may legitimately ask how this personal account relates to the currently grave status of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople. It is relevant, for it demonstrates in genuine, personal terms the strong spiritual and emotional connection which millions of Greek and other Orthodox feel for the Patriarchate, and the pain and frustration they equally feel for its present diminished condition. Moreover, for Greek Orthodox Americans with roots in the “old country,” this reverence toward the Patriarchate is comparable to their respect for the memories of their own parents, grandparents and great grandparents.

What essentially fuels the present pessimistic view of the Patriarchate's status is the unfulfilled expectation that conditions would improve as Turkey moved closer to the European Union under a government unburdened by anti-religious and secular Kemalism. Instead, the mood is now one of disappointment. Despite the intense debate over human rights and civil liberties in Turkey, Ankara continues to blatantly violate provisions in the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne (in which the United States was also a participant), which guarantees the Patriarchate's independence, and the Turkish Government contemptuously continues to ignore internationally recognized standards of religious freedom.

For those officially charged with the responsibility for protecting the Patriarchate (the hierarchy of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of

America and the leadership of the Order of Saint Andrew - Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate), these developments have been especially vexing. After a long and highly public effort to project the Patriarchate's cause, the results are depressing, if not demoralizing: Continued confiscation of Patriarchal properties; no movement at all on the 35-year closure of the Theological School at Halki; restrictions on movement of Patriarchal personnel; repeated and unacceptable acts of disrespect toward the Patriarchate with Turkish authorities seeking to downplay its ecumenical role by asserting that it is merely an Archdiocese of Istanbul; prohibiting the Patriarchate from publishing its own digest or theological publications; and even interference with whom it can invite.

One can not underestimate the gravity of the situation. Unless the Patriarchate and its supporters react to this crisis with a renewed and realistic sense of urgency, hopes for preserving the Patriarchate hold little promise. The first step is to recognize that the present Patriarchal effort has, to date, been notably ineffective - inadequate not for lack of good intentions, but far more seriously for lack of a coherent strategy: a deficiency largely attributable to the leadership's failure to involve a much wider circle of committed Orthodox and other religious resources in America and abroad.

Indeed, if any coherent strategy ever did exist, it has been a carefully guarded secret among those ordained as the Patriarchate's protectors. Most everyone else has been, at best, an interested observer or, most of the time, ignored bystander. As the Patriarchate's steady decline demonstrates, it is simply unrealistic to place its fate in the hands of a select few, rather than on the shoulders and prayers of the tens and hundreds of thousands of the faithful who consider the See of Constantinople the ancient repository of their Orthodox Christian faith. A reservoir of loyalty and wisdom resides among the Orthodox faithful in America, but their talents must be welcomed, and then skillfully utilized.

Why then, despite a substantial expenditure of political and monetary capital, is this effort presently stalled? Most of the reasons are disturbingly simple, and will be addressed in no particular order of unreality or ineffectiveness. They are essentially divided into two separate but overlapping categories: actions and activities initiated by the “Patriarchal Lobby” both here and abroad, and those undertaken by the Patriarchate itself.

This discussion presupposes the realistic premise that the Patriarchate and its supporters have (obviously) little direct influence on Turkish internal politics, and must work around the margins of international religious and political pressure. It also presumes, however, that developing a smarter strategy might enable the Patriarchate to more effectively defend, and even advance, its interests during this period of change in Turkey.

A logical starting point is to review some of the efforts undertaken by the “Patriarchal Lobby,” an informal group of Greek Orthodox Hierarchs, clergy, and the lay officers and members of the Order of St. Andrew, Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Their main task is to persuade policy makers and elected officials in the Executive and Legislative branches of the American and other governments to pressure Turkey to ease its restrictions on the Patriarchate.

Despite much well-motivated activity, the Lobby has produced minimal results. After years of importuning appointed and elected officials, convening innumerable meetings, press conferences and hearings and issuing statements, the Patriarchate's fundamental status situation remains precarious and, in some respects, has deteriorated.

Without question, Turkey's continued refusal to meet its obligations to the Patriarchate is the basic problem. But another important factor is that the Patriarchate and its chief supporters, at a fundamental level, misunderstand the complex political and historical forces affecting this issue. Unfortunately, this

misreading has led to policies and actions which have weakened the Patriarchate, rather than strengthening its cause.

One example is the inexplicable and continuing willingness to put the Patriarchate in the center of Greek-Turkish relations and tensions. This ineptitude has made the Patriarchate a target in the line of diplomatic fire between Athens and Ankara, and even Nicosia, providing an assortment of Turkish nationalists with ammunition to attack the Phanar as an instrument of Greek national ambitions.

For fresh evidence of this ill-advised policy, one need go no further than the January-February, 2006 Edition of the *Orthodox Observer*, the official news organ of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. This Lenten edition appropriately features on its front page Patriarch Bartholomew's Homily for Holy and Great Lent, as well as a similar message from Archbishop Demetrios, a most befitting beginning for the great journey to Pascha (Easter).

But rather than direct us to more conventional spiritual directions such as Jerusalem, Archbishop Demetrios and the *Observer's* editors, instead, diverted its readers to Cyprus, courtesy of an eight-page special supplement (an apparent luxury for the financially strapped *Observer*), sporting a huge banner headline proclaiming, "FIRST EVER VISIT TO CYPRUS." Beneath this headline, Archbishop Demetrios is pictured laying a wreath before the gigantic statue of the late President of Cyprus, Archbishop Makarios.

Obviously, this unusual journalistic splash reflects the high priority assigned by the Archdiocese to this visit - which then raises the question whether it ever occurred to the planners of this expedition as to ask why there was never before a "First Ever Visit?" Was it because wiser minds, in years past, comprehended the negative political implications of sending the Patriarchate's leading representative in the U.S. on a state visit to Cyprus? This certainly was not a subdued, traditional pilgrimage - more in keeping with the spiritual duties of a Greek Orthodox Archbishop -

but a high profile journey with definite political overtones. We can only speculate as to its motivations.

Was it to reassure Cypriots about the support of the Greek Orthodox community in America? Did Archbishop Demetrios feel compelled to visit Cyprus because his predecessors, Archbishops Michael, Iakovos and Spyridon, were unsympathetic to the injustice suffered by the Cypriot people? The answer is that neither the support of the community, nor that of His Eminence's predecessors, has ever been in question. A simple statement issued in New York would have provided the Cypriots with the required assurances.

What is truly astonishing is that so little thought was obviously given as to the trip's perception in Ankara. Did the Archbishop and his advisors actually believe that this widely publicized visit would go unnoticed in official Turkish circles, and that it would have no effect on their attitudes toward the Phanar?

Given the unfortunate reality that the Patriarchate's fate rises and falls at the whim of the Turkish Government, why then would Archbishop Demetrios insert himself and the Church in America into a political dispute which inflames Turkish public opinion? How could this hope to help either Cyprus or the Patriarchate?

After all, in ecclesiastical terms, the Archbishop is the Exarch of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in the United States. In laymen's language, he is the Patriarchate's highest ranking representative in America, the long arm of Constantinople. Suddenly, and with great fanfare, that long arm is thrust into the simmering Cyprus dispute.

The Archbishop's own statements, and the venues in which he appeared, clearly delivered a political message, particularly with respect to Greek-American support for Cyprus, remarks more appropriate for a secular leader.

It should be emphasized that such support existed long before His Eminence ever appeared on the American scene, however, and is dependent neither on him nor the Archdiocese for direction or leadership. Groups like PSEKA (International Coordinating Committee - Justice for Cyprus) AHEPA, the American Hellenic Institute, the United Hellenic American Congress, the National Coordinated Effort of Hellenes and the Cyprus Federation of America, as well as countless other organizations and individuals have carried out a vigorous and relentless struggle for Cyprus over the years.

How deeply the Archbishop enmeshed himself in the politics of the Cyprus question was recorded in press dispatches, and from official Archdiocese media releases which referenced a private meeting between Archbishop Demetrios and Cypriot President Tassos Papadopoulos, during which they discussed the Cyprus issue and the role of Greek Americans in its resolution.

Politics were also at center stage during the official state dinner honoring His Eminence, during which President Papadopoulos castigated Turkish policy, expressing the certainty that the visit will strengthen the Archbishop's "bold voice, which is in favor of the fair rights of the people of Cyprus, and renew the effectiveness and fervor of overseas Greeks for a Cyprus settlement."

And politics even impinged on the Archbishop's liturgical duties when, after presiding at a Divine Liturgy on January 29, he was introduced by Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Paphos who, in His Eminence's presence (according to press reports), sharply criticized American policy towards Cyprus as one which "embraces the perpetrator of the crime and condemns the victim," and described "The awful Annan Plan as a methodical attempt to 'Turkimize' our land." In response, Archbishop Demetrios assured the congregation that the Greek American community would continue to fight and push Washington "for a peaceful and viable solution for the Cyprus issue."

Would it be so unreasonable to conclude from these statements that part of Archbishop Demetrios' mission as the Patriarch's representative in America is to be a "player" in the Cyprus and other Greek national issues? It certainly appears that way, and if so, it is a mission with dangerous implications for the Patriarchate.

From the Patriarchate's perspective, the damage to its interests was further compounded by the prominence in the Archbishop's entourage, of the Phanar's chief lay protector in the United States, Archons National Commander Dr. Anthony J. Limberakis, and Rev. Alexander Karloutsos, the Patriarch's chief confidant in the U.S. and spiritual advisor to the Archons.

The appearance in Cyprus of this Patriarchal trio can best be described as target practice in a Turkish diplomatic shooting gallery. Over the years, Dr. Limberakis and Father Karloutsos have been delegated to meet with Turkish officials and plead the Patriarchate's case. It is hard to see how their visit to Cyprus will ingratiate them to the Turkish Government. To connect the Patriarchate so directly with the Cyprus question is both politically irresponsible and naive.

Linking the two issues gives Turkey a political advantage to play one off the other and clouds the situation. Such matters are best left to politicians and diplomats, not ecclesiastical representatives of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

These political intrusions are also confusing and contradictory: confusing because, on the one hand, the Archons and others repeatedly assert, in international venues, that the Ecumenical Patriarchate is a purely religious institution which transcends national identity and parochial politics. As such, it is entitled, under the Treaty of Lausanne and other international agreements, to complete religious freedom. On the other hand, the Archbishop's trip to Cyprus flatly contradicts such assertions.

To be fair, involvement by Greek Orthodox hierarchs in Greek political issues did not start with Archbishop Demetrios. His predecessors - especially Archbishop Iakovos and, to a lesser extent, Archbishop Spyridon - frequently entangled the Church in America in such issues, to such an extent that these hierarchs actually received private briefings on Greek Foreign policy issues from the highest levels of the Hellenic Ministries of Defense and Foreign Affairs.

The Patriarchate has paid a high price for these and other misplaced political involvements, actions which have trivialized its spiritual prestige and provided ammunition for enemies in Turkey. It is a policy of reckless endangerment.

This inability to formulate a viable, consistent strategy was also revealed during the Archons' visit to the European Union in May 2005. The following report, lifted verbatim from the Archons Autumn 2005 Newsletter, demonstrates the point: "Led by Metropolitan Emmanuel of France, who serves as the Ecumenical Patriarchate's liaison to the European Union, a special National Council task force of five Archons and their spiritual advisor, Rev. Alexander Karloutsos, visited leaders of the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France and Brussels, Belgium from May 9 to May 13 to launch a dialogue about the religious human rights deficit in Turkey and to promote Turkey's accession to the E.U."

Why would the Archons support or "promote" Turkey's accession to the European Union when Ankara has resisted even the slightest concession on the Patriarchate and, in some ways, has even tightened the screws?

Just how far the Archons strayed from long-established positions is disclosed in the newsletter, which reports on the testimony Archbishop Demetrios and Dr. Limberakis delivered before the Helsinki Commission on Human Rights in Washington. Flanked by prominent American religious leaders, they vigorously and appropriately condemned Turkey's decades-long persecution of the Patriarchate, stressing that since 1936, Ankara has confiscated 8,000

Patriarchal properties, and that the Halki Seminary has been illegally shut down for 35 years by governmental fiat.

Also described are the Archons many meetings in Europe and Washington specifically highlighting that Archbishop Demetrios “personally met with President Bush regarding the serious violations of basic religious human rights perpetrated by Turkey against the Spiritual Center of World Orthodoxy.”

After spanning continents and oceans to expose Turkey's transgressions to the world, how could Dr. Limberakis, Father Karloutsos and associates morph from Paul Revere in Washington to Neville Chamberlain in Brussels?

It's as if a victim, who is mugged repeatedly by the same assailant, finally gets his day in court; recounts his tormentor's many crimes; and then suddenly asks the judge to release the accused.

The Archons should have unequivocally opposed Turkey's E.U. application: No action on the Patriarchate. No support for E.U. entry.

Whether the U.S., Greece or even the Patriarchate publicly supported Turkey's entry into the E.U. membership process, the Archons, as American citizens, should have insisted that Ankara adhere to universally acceptable standards of religious freedom if Turkey wants E.U. consideration and admission. A strong Archons stand in Brussels would have sent an unmistakable message to Turkey that its treatment of the Patriarchate would be aggressively challenged every step of the way during Turkey's E.U. accession negotiations.

Instead, at the very moment when Turkey was under intense international scrutiny, the Archons blinked.

Were the Archons and the Patriarchate so convinced that, by supporting Turkey's E.U. application, Ankara would ease pressures and/or possibly reopen Halki? Experience has shown that

Turkey only moves on such issues when it is under extreme pressure.

This is why proposals to assist the Patriarchate must always be carefully thought through to maximize precious political and economic resources. Many ideas are always forthcoming, but they must be measured against the basic criterion: Will they really help the Patriarchate? Preoccupation with public relations and other images of the moment often squander time and energy.

Such was the case with the highly successful campaign to obtain a Congressional Resolution bestowing the Congressional Medal of Honor on Patriarch Bartholomew during His All Holiness' visit to Washington in 1997. The patriarchal lobby accurately boasts that this resolution gathered a near record sponsors. It did so because of an extraordinary effort by the tribute's organizers in Washington, those who contacted their elected representatives to sign onto the resolution, and sympathetic members of Congress who courted their colleagues.

Much effort was invested in this Medal drive and, as they say in Washington, "A lot of chits were called in." Did it justify the huge political investment? Not really. For in the end, it had no perceptible impact on American policy toward Turkey. In the nine years since the Medal Ceremony, American diplomats did, on occasion, make sincere but discreet interventions on behalf of the Patriarchate. But it is important to note that past and present U.S. administrations have consistently refused to publicly condemn Turkey's treatment of the Patriarchate.

When His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, 51, was enthroned in Constantinople (present-day Istanbul) on November 2, 1991 there was great hope in Orthodox circles that this relatively young, well-educated and energetic hierarch would restore the Ecumenical Patriarchate's role and lead world Orthodoxy to a new era of spiritual rebirth and secular status.

Nearly 15 years have elapsed since that event, and this expectation has evaporated like wisps of smoke from a flickering church candle.

Many political and ecclesiastical factors have contributed to this development, but a major influence has been a series of missteps and miscalculations by the Ecumenical Patriarch - serious mistakes in judgment which have alienated the Patriarchate from longtime supporters, as well as from important segments of world Orthodoxy.

The Patriarch is certainly not responsible for all these many contentious issues - although he has done his share - but he and his agents are culpable for handling them in a heavy-handed and counter-productive manner, responses and decisions which have steadily undercut the Ecumenical Patriarchate's international prestige and status. A brief listing is instructive:

- Continuous feuding with the Patriarchate of Moscow, the largest Orthodox Church in the world, to the point where the two Orthodox centers had suspended relations. An uneasy truce prevails, but these strained relations have denied the Patriarchate the vital support of millions of Russian Orthodox Christians.

- The highly publicized confrontation with the Church of Greece over jurisdictional and hierarchical control of the so-called "New Lands," dioceses located in Greece. The Orthodox and secular worlds were shocked and appalled by the bitter public exchange this dispute generated between Bartholomew and Archbishop Christodoulos of Athens & All Greece. Its coverage by international and Greek media was intense, lengthy and embarrassing. It divided Greek Orthodox faithful around the world; split Greek public opinion; and became such an intense political issue that only intervention at the highest levels of the Greek Government finally resolved it. Why Patriarch Bartholomew pushed this issue when his predecessors did not was never made clear. One explanation was offered by Rev. Alexander Karloutsos, generally viewed

as the Patriarch's closest advisor in America, during a chance encounter in Baltimore in the summer of 2004. Asked why the Patriarch persisted on this issue, Father Karloutsos responded that, since His All Holiness was convinced that these Episcopal arrangements violated the Patriarchate's rights, he was determined to protect these prerogatives. One has to assume that Father Karloutsos was accurately conveying the Patriarch's position, a stance which was eventually both self-defeating and humiliating for the Patriarchate.

- Treating the late and much-admired Archbishop Iakovos with disrespect and actively pushing for his ouster. Even if it was time for the aging prelate to retire, his departure should have been conducted in a manner befitting his many years of devotion and service to the Church. Instead, his retirement was abruptly forced, leaving a lingering resentment among many Orthodox in America.

- Replacing Iakovos with Archbishop Spyridon, a well-intentioned, inexperienced hierarch with a very limited understanding of America. This appointment created four years of tension and controversy, culminating with Spyridon's unceremonious removal, an action which sparked further division and rancor in America.

- Arbitrarily destroying the unity of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North & South America by dissolving it into weaker Metropolises, concurrent with Spyridon's appointment. This unilateral reorganization was imposed without consulting either Archbishop Spyridon or the clergy and laity of the Church in the Western Hemisphere. It is a reorganization which has weakened the Church internally, and has also affected the Archdiocese's ability to assist the Patriarchate with greater unity and decisiveness.

- A highly divisive and public confrontation with the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia and its primate, Archbishop Stylianos, another controversy which created ill will toward the Patriarchate in this growing corner of Orthodoxy.

- Disregard for transparency and proper process in the governance of the Archdiocese of North & South America, since downgraded to the Archdiocese of America. This controversy centered on imposition of a new charter by the Patriarchate over the objections of many devout Greek Orthodox who felt that the Patriarch should have shown a greater measure of pastoral feeling and understanding in this matter.

- The bitter struggle between the Patriarch and the monks of the Esphigmenou Monastery on Mount Athos, which has turned into an international public relations nightmare for the Patriarchate. Even if one concedes that these monks are rebellious fanatics, the inability of the Patriarchate to resolve or manage this dispute, short of cutting off their food supply and electricity, represents a failure of leadership.

- Bartholomew's trip to Cuba in January of 2004.

The Patriarch's heralded trip to Cuba takes the cake for an initiative where mature political judgment was virtually absent.

Why would the Patriarchate and its advocates, while actively seeking help from the Bush Administration, the most viscerally anti-Castro administration in recent years, undertake a high-profile trip to Cuba to dedicate a small Orthodox church in Havana? Did they not calculate how the Bush Administration would view this trip through the prism of trying to wrench concessions from Turkey with respect toward the Patriarchate?

The visit generated just enough attention from mainstream media to spark some controversy, while the Archdiocese released a barrage of press releases and photos showing the aging Cuban dictator wining and dining with Bartholomew, Archbishop Demetrios and a bevy of Greek Americans. To make matters worse, either through a mix-up or an intentional slight, the Patriarch skipped a special reception specifically

arranged for him by the American special interest section with representatives of Cuban Human Rights groups. Archbishop Demetrios went instead, to the chagrin of American officials and human rights activists.

Is this any way to win friends and influence among people in Washington (or Athens, for that matter)? Playing a front-and-center role in the Patriarch's trip was none other than the deposed King of Greece, Constantine Di Grecia, a person whose actions many believe undermined parliamentary democracy in Greece and paved the way for the seven-year nightmare of the military junta. With the Patriarch's standing in Greece already weakened because of the New Lands dispute, appearing publicly with an unpopular ex-monarch could only increase public displeasure.

And what about the reaction of those Greek Orthodox in America (whether they take a hard or softer line toward Cuba) observing their spiritual head openly embracing a dictator who betrayed the Cuban Revolution and brought the world to the brink of nuclear war? Or those Orthodox Christians in the former communist countries who suffered severe repression and even lost relatives to martyrdom, under totalitarian regimes which Castro extolled over the years?

In both conception and implementation, the Patriarchal extravaganza in Cuba demonstrated, with depressing clarity, an almost amateurish perception of contemporary politics and history.

By now, it should be evident that those officially responsible for advancing the Patriarchate's agenda lack a fundamental understanding of the complex political and religious issues whose interplay threaten, or can assure, the Patriarchate's survival in Constantinople. This status quo is unacceptable, and if it continues, it will eventually end up with a "last person to the leave the Phanar door" scenario.

NEW PEOPLE AND NEW APPROACHES

New people and new approaches are needed immediately. What might be the components of such a new strategy? Here are a few suggestions to jumpstart a long overdue debate, which will hopefully encourage others to come forward with additional ideas:

No effort has ever been made to recruit to the Patriarchate's cause. But it is imperative to truly internationalize the effort to save the Patriarchate, first by severing its connection with Greek national issues, and second by creating entities which would maximize foreign pressure on the Turkish Government and possibly develop stronger ties with Turkish elites inclined to look favorably on the Patriarchate.

This would mean placing the sanctity and independence of the Ecumenical Patriarchate at the top of the world's religious freedom priorities. Committees of prominent public and academic officials would be formed throughout the world, heavily laced with non-Greek and non-Orthodox figures, like the late Sir Stephen Runciman, for instance the man who revolutionized world thinking about the Crusades and who also authored "The Great Church in Captivity," the definitive work on the Greek Orthodox Church under Ottoman rule, an individual who devoted an enormous amount of personal resources and energy to preserving the religious treasures and spirit of Mt. Athos.

It should go beyond bestowing awards and banquets upon leaders like Nobel laureates Elie Wiesel and Bishop Tutu and Mikail Gorbachev, or ex-Presidents Jimmy Carter and George H.W. Bush. Requesting their services as honorary chairs, or even working members, of broad-based committees with real agendas in support of the Patriarchate is essential. Every European Union country should have such committees, all working in unison to hold Turkey's feet to the fire of religious freedom.

The Patriarchate must become truly ecumenical, not only in name, but also in spirit and practice. The Phanar and its supporters must decide

whether it will remain merely a national Orthodox Center for Greeks similar to the Serbian and Bulgarian Patriarchates, or meet its ecumenical obligations as the spiritual leader of world Orthodoxy. Attempting to perform both roles has led to an ecclesiastical schizophrenia, sapping the Patriarchate's religious and moral position.

It is unthinkable that, in this post-Ottoman, post Cold War era, a Patriarch who asserts, as Bartholomew did over ten years ago, he is the leader of the "Apodemon Ellenes" (Greeks living abroad) can expect to be perceived as the Ecumenical Patriarch of all Orthodox. Assuming the role of a Greek ethnarch confuses the faithful; legitimately angers Greek secular and religious leadership; and incites the Turks. By assuming its ecumenical role, the Patriarchate increases its chances of survival. Continuing on its present parochial path, as recent experience strongly suggests, may well seal its doom.

The Patriarchate needs to become more ecumenical, but this does not imply de-Hellenization. Just as the Vatican remains Italian in spirit and staff, even though the past two popes have been Polish and German, so could the Patriarchate remain Greek.

It would become more ecumenical overnight, however, simply by appointing non-Greek hierarchs in its jurisdiction as rotating members of the Holy & Sacred Synod in the way the Roman Catholic Church became more inclusive by appointing more non-Italians to its College of Cardinals.

Two outstanding candidates immediately come to mind: Bishop Kallistos Ware of England, a member of the Monastery of St. John the Theologian on Patmos, the most widely known author and proponent of Orthodoxy in the English-speaking world, and Metropolitan Nicholas, primate of the American-Carpatho Russian Orthodox Diocese of the USA. A friend of Patriarch Bartholomew, Metropolitan Nicholas, who was also a student at Halki, is probably the most effective Orthodox bishop in the United States.

Additional appointments could be selected from the Patriarchate's other jurisdictions. By this and similar appointments, the argument that the Patriarchate is exclusively Greek in orientation would be removed.

The Patriarchate has demonstrated it can make wise decisions. A stellar appointment was the decision to send Archbishop Anastasios Yianoulattos, a Greek national, to the Church in Albania, an essentially non-Greek country. Anastasios has transformed the Albanian Orthodox Church, one of the most suppressed during the Cold War, into a viable force for Orthodoxy and reconciliation among all Albanians.

Expanding the planning and leadership base of the Patriarchal effort in America is also crucial.

This can develop in many forms. For instance, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese could establish commissions of clergy, academics, public officials and other laity to advise the Archons, and even the Patriarchate, on strategy and tactics. Such a process would have the advantage of diversifying information and ideas, while subjecting old and new policies to serious review. For too long, the Patriarchate has relied on a narrow, small group of advisors in America whose capacities have been either overtaxed, or who are of insufficient competence.

The Patriarchate must immediately convene a Great and Holy Synod of all Orthodox Churches. It is an ecclesiastical imperative to bring all Orthodox together in this post-modern globalized world, but most importantly, because it is essential to the Patriarchate's own survival. By this one single action, the Patriarchate would signal to the world - and to Turkey, in particular - that it is the only entity authorized to convene a Pan-Orthodox synod. In so doing, it would establish itself as the bona fide spiritual center of Orthodoxy in both the secular and religious worlds.

A Pan-Orthodox synod would also address the harmful jurisdictional disputes which have plagued contemporary Orthodoxy. Such a meeting would

empower the Orthodox Churches to engage the modern world with renewed unity and re-invigorated intellectual and spiritual capacities.

In this process, and in all its dealings with other independent Orthodox Churches, the Patriarchate must understand that it has much more to gain by taking on its canonical role as the chief coordinator/convener and mediator for world Orthodoxy, rather than trying to act as its controller. Becoming a leader of Orthodoxy in this manner will strengthen its position with respect to Turkey by establishing a bedrock of support, both in Orthodox countries and among Orthodox wherever they live.

In fact, Patriarch Bartholomew told a group from America, to include myself, visiting him at the Phanar in November 1993 that a Great Orthodox Synod would be convened before the end of the 20th Century. It's now 16 years later, and a synod has yet to be called. Seventeen years have also passed since the fall of the Berlin Wall, marking the end of the cold war and the liberation of Eastern European Orthodoxy from the yolk of Communist atheism. Any further delay in arranging a Pan-Orthodox synod is inexcusable and threatens the viability of the Patriarchate.

SUPREME IRONY

It is supreme irony that the Orthodox Churches in former Communist states now have more freedom than the Ecumenical Patriarchate residing in NATO member and EU applicant Turkey.

There is much to be done in a very short time. It is hoped that these observations and criticisms will stimulate new people with new ideas, as well as renew the spirits of those who have carried the Patriarchate's banner these many years.

Complete unanimity among Orthodox concerning the Patriarchate's future is lacking, however. Many believe the struggle is hopeless and not worth pursuing; that, in the end, it will be in God's hands. Others propose moving it from inhospitable Istanbul to more conducive locations like the island of Patmos,

Mount Athos, Thessaloniki or even the United States. Others contend that the Patriarchate is so out of touch with the contemporary challenges and opportunities facing today's Orthodox that it is religiously irrelevant.

Each of the above observations have considerable merit. But for all Orthodox Christians, there are profound and practical reasons for keeping the Ecumenical Patriarchate in its ancient, spiritual home. It is one of the original five centers of Christianity, after all (the other four being Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria and Rome). For Orthodox and all canonical Christians, survival of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople is a vital part of their spiritual heritage. It was founded by the Saint Andrew the First-Called Apostle, and is a holy place from which the river of faith runs deep and true.

The Patriarchate also has surprising contemporary utility, even for non-believers of good faith. It has had a long, if tumultuous, history of living with Islam. Consequently, it and the other historic Eastern Patriarchates have an accumulated and balanced institutional memory in dealing with Islamic peoples, one not distorted by the ignorance and arrogance of many “Western” religious, political and academic figures.

The present Patriarch has already demonstrated proven leadership in this realm. A revived Ecumenical Patriarchate operating as a free and independent institution could do much for alleviating the tensions between the so-called East and West, Christianity and Islam.

To even begin to think of these possibilities, however, the Patriarchate and its quasi-official supporters must reach out much more broadly for advice, information and support. Perhaps they should borrow a page from the great Athenagoras, who led the Patriarchate during the dark days of the September 1955 anti-Greek riots in Istanbul, and in the early years of Christian ecumenism.

Despite this awful and terrible event, Patriarch Athenagoras never looked back, and just ten years after this catastrophe, he reached reconciliation with the Roman Church; maintained Orthodoxy as an important part of the Christian Ecumenical movement; and restored the Patriarchate's dignity and authority unblemished. And he accomplished those feats not only under the most oppressive and dangerous conditions, but also with an abiding faith steeped in a spirit of openness and love for all. That spirit would serve us well today, as we seek to build a broad coalition in support of his beloved Patriarchate.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Peter Marudas began his professional career covering government and politics for the Baltimore Evening Sun, for which he also wrote many articles about Greek- Turkish relations, the Cyprus question and the Ecumenical Patriarchate. He also covered President Johnson's separate White House meetings on Cyprus in 1965 with the late Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou and the late Turkish Prime Minister Ismet Inonou. In addition to serving for 23 years as Chief of Staff to Senator Paul Sarbanes of Maryland, he also served as Chief of Staff to two Baltimore Mayors and as a senior staff person to a third.

He and his wife Irene are parents of two sons and the pride a joy of their lives is their granddaughter. He is a member of Annunciation Greek Orthodox Cathedral in Baltimore where he and Irene have been active stewards for many years. He is a founding member of Orthodox Christian Laity and has served on the board and is an advisory board member.

OCL MEMBERSHIP

I am concerned about my church and I subscribe to the missions and goals of OCL. Please enroll me as a member and accept my support.

Name

Address

City

State

Zip

Phone

E-mail Address

Orthodox Jurisdiction

Individual Family Renewal New Member

Guardian \$1,000 and over \$ _____

Benefactor \$500 - \$999 \$ _____

Patron \$250 - \$499 \$ _____

Donor \$100 - \$249 \$ _____

Sponsor \$51 - \$99 \$ _____

Member \$50 \$ _____

FORM OF PAYMENT:

Check Enclosed

Please charge my credit card

Account #: _____

Expiration Date: _____ Zip Code: _____

COMPLIMENTS OF OCL

*For more information visit OCL on
the web at www.ocl.org and
www.orthodoxnews.com*

**Orthodox Christian Laity
P.O. Box 6954
West Palm Beach, FL 33405
877.585.0245**