

Metropolitan Philip Calls On Great Synod to Take Action Toward Independence for American Orthodoxy

LOS ANGELES — The Most Rev. Metropolitan Philip Saliba, primate of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, has called on the forthcoming Great Synod of the world's Orthodox Churches to take action toward establishing an independent Orthodox Patriarchate in America, because "we are no longer a Church of immigrants."

As a first step, Metropolitan Philip suggested that the present Standing Conference of Orthodox Bishops of the Americas (SCOBA) be elevated to a formal Synod for America. He also urged that leaders of the various Orthodox Churches "come and see" firsthand the special circumstances of the Church in America.

Metropolitan Philip presented his proposals in a sermon to a congregation of over 700 faithful attending traditional Great Vespers of the Sunday of Orthodoxy, sponsored by the Southern California Council of Orthodox Clergy, at the St. Nicholas Antiochian Orthodox Cathedral in Los Angeles. Participating in the service were 20 priests from parishes throughout the area and the 150-voice Southern California Orthodox Choir under the direction of John Warren.

Following a review of the agenda for the forthcoming Great Synod, Metropolitan Philip stated that he was "not very impressed with some of the themes because after 12 centuries of expectation, I find some of these themes outdated and irrelevant." He called on the planners to include such contemporary concerns facing the Church as abortion, euthanasia, ordination of women, cloning, artificial insemination, test-tube babies, genetic engineering, and world hunger.

"Although the teachings of the Church are clear vis-a-vis some of these issues, the Church must again and again reaffirm her position and constantly proclaim the truth, in order to eliminate any confusion or misdirection on the part of the faithful," he said.

One topic that is on the agenda and that is of major concern to Orthodoxy in America is the "diaspora" or the situation of the faithful in non-Orthodox lands. Metropolitan Philip expressed concerns, however, that those hierarchs who will be discussing this topic really know little about the Orthodox of America.

"Who will speak for the American Church? I feel it is imperative that we provide our Orthodox brethren from across the ocean with a true and clear picture about our successes and failures, especially during the current century. Our brethren in the Old World must see that Orthodoxy on this continent is no longer a child."

Recalling the visit two years ago of his own patriarch, His Beatitude, Elias IV of Antioch and All the East, Metropolitan Philip issued an invitation "to our other brothers in the Old



LOS ANGELES — Officers of the Southern California Council of Orthodox Clergy stand with His Eminence Metropolitan Philip following Sunday of Orthodoxy Great Vespers at St. Nicholas Antiochian Cathedral. Shown (left to right) are Rev. Fr. Richard Grabowski, Holy Trinity Romanian Church, vice president; Very Rev. Fr. Gabriel Ashie, St. Luke Church (Antiochian), president; Metropolitan Philip; Rev. Fr. Thaddeus Wojcik, St. Innocent Church (O.C.A.), treasurer; and Rev. Fr. Constantine Zozos, St. Sophia Greek Cathedral, secretary. (Photo by C.T. Argue)

World, 'come and see'. Yes, come and see our churches and institutions, our liturgical and theological publications, our theological schools. But even more importantly, come and see our dedicated and faithful clergy, our devote; laity, and our dynamic youth movements."

At the conclusion of his three-month visit to North America, Patriarch Elias stated that "We affirm that in North America there should be an autocephalous Church with its own Patriarch and Holy Synod."

Metropolitan Philip, vice chairman of SCOBA, proposed that group as the best vehicle leading to such a patriarchate, by the elevation of SCOBA to the status of a Synod, "which will truly represent six million free Orthodox Christian believers and will be able to effectively respond to the moral and social challenges of our time."

An Orthodox Patriarchate in America, when later established, will "reflect both our organic unity and the richness and diversity of our cultures," he continued, but warned as in the past:

"I want to make it clear here, that this Patriarchate can only be established by a common decision of all Orthodox Churches."

Such administrative unity will place the Orthodox of America in a much stronger position in many areas, according to the Antiochian leader, noting that the Church must "not be permitted to be victimized by historical feuding and comfortable inaction."