

THE ORTHODOX OF JERUSALEM

TO those of us who reside in countries where Catholics and dissident Eastern Orthodox live, as regards one another, in practically 'water-tight compartments,' it would not appear that the death of an Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem (Mgr. Damianos Kassiotis, died August 14th, 1931) is of much interest to those in communion with the Holy See. Nevertheless, it must be realized—as it is realized in the Levant—that such an event has not merely interest for local Christians of all the ancient churches, but might conceivably result in events which would have significance for the Church at large. For the death of a patriarch involves the election of a successor; such an election involves ecclesiastical and even secular politics; and in the Near East politics of all sorts are fruitful of religious changes. Ever since, and even before, the break-up of Catholicism, religion in Palestine and Syria has gone hand in hand with politics; and many of the numerous small mass-reunions of Eastern Christians to the Catholic Church that have taken place during the past three or four hundred years were directly traceable to ecclesiastical politics, and sometimes to grievances of a secular nature. Precisely for that reason some of them have not subsisted, and the reunion has collapsed in renewed schism, bringing upon Eastern Catholics an undeserved stigma of 'tendency to disunion'; others have remained, and what began as a political move has developed into a soundly religious state of affairs.

Latterly, vacancies in high offices of the Orthodox Patriarchates of Antioch and Jerusalem have always tended to produce an ecclesiastical crisis, whose effects are felt outside the ranks of the religious body immediately concerned. Such an one occurred at the death

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of the Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch, Gregory IV Haddad, in December, 1928. The election of his successor (in which, as throughout the East, to a certain extent even among Catholics, the laity took an important and noisy part) resolved itself into a contest between the Damascenes and the rest, which went on until February, 1931, when, after a rumoured intervention by the Oecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, the succession of Mgr. Arsenios, the bishops' candidate, was recognized. This two years' quarrel, with its intriguing, pride, and violent controversy, was a matter of great scandal in Syria; and it is not surprising that when in June, 1929, Mgr. Gabriel Tapouni was elected Catholic Syrian Patriarch of Antioch at Sharfeh, by acclamation, in five minutes, and within two months of the death of his predecessor, religious Orthodox asked in print, 'Is it possible that the Holy Spirit, who moved so plainly at Sharfeh, is wanting to our bishops?' A certain number of Orthodox reconciliations to Rome followed this business, but Catholics have to proceed with caution: for it is not good, in any sense, to seek to profit the Church from the misfortunes of one's neighbours, and in the past we have not in the East (and elsewhere) been always innocent of 'fishing in troubled waters.'

But if this happened at Damascus, what may not happen at Jerusalem?—for the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, though numerically insignificant, is at the same time one of the most important and one of the most fundamentally troubled ecclesiastical organizations in Orthodoxy. It extends over Palestine and Transjordan, and has about forty-five thousand lower clergy and faithful, all native Palestinians except a handful of well-to-do Greeks. Ever since the days of Constantine the Church of Jerusalem, founded by St. James, 'the brother of the Lord,' has been one of the first in Christendom; it was recognized as the centre

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of a patriarchate in 451; and its patriarch, with the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulchre that has grown up around him, has ever been the principal guardian of the Holy Places, *de iure* before the schism from Rome, *de facto* since then. The principal, the only important, institution within the Orthodox patriarchate is the above-named Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulchre, numbering some two hundred and fifty monks (called 'hagiotaphites'), of which the Patriarch is the president and the holy synod (two residential metropolitans, ten titular archbishops, nine archimandrites), all members. Now this controlling body is almost, if not quite, exclusively Greek, while, as has been said, the parochial clergy and laity are Arabic-speaking Palestinians. In the days of full Turkish domination these diverse elements formed a unity: they were all 'Romans,' *i.e.* Christians of the orthodoxy of Constantinople, which was New Rome. But this unity has been undermined and falsified; the diverse elements no longer think of themselves as all 'Romans'; the natives are now Palestinians or 'Arabs,' the Greeks are now Hellenes.

Moreover, they have become rather bitterly Hellenic. For centuries the Brotherhood has had to resist continually what it regarded as the encroachments of the Catholic Church (represented by the Latins), the exactions of the Ottoman Turks, and, more recently, the growing power of Slav Orthodoxy as represented by Russia; then, from the declaration of the Turkish constitution in 1908, there has been the further struggle with the insurgent Palestinian Orthodox, clamouring for their 'place in the sun'—and that is the issue that may now be fought out. And this issue, as the Bertram Commission made clear, is made more difficult by the present mentality of the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulchre, which has produced two serious misconceptions among them. The members

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have come to look upon themselves as an Hellenic garrison, and have lost sight of the fact that their privileged position in Jerusalem carries with it very grave obligations both to local Orthodox Christians and to the Orthodox Church at large, without race or any other distinction. This rather arrogant attitude has bred the extraordinary and entirely uncanonical notion that the Brotherhood is the governing body of the Orthodox Church of Jerusalem, indeed, that it is practically synonymous with that church. This is certainly the position in fact, and the circumstance that the hierarchs of the Church are all members of the Brotherhood gives an entirely misleading and illusory appearance of right to the contention. The Church of Jerusalem is, or ought to be, governed by bishops-in-ordinary, like any other church. Furthermore, the Brotherhood has come to regard itself as custodian of the Holy Places, not in trust for all the Orthodox churches, but as agent or mandatory of the Hellenic race, which is assumed to have special interests and rights in those sacred shrines. The Archimandrite Kallistos has semi-officially expressed these 'rights' as including actual ownership.

The significance of such claims for Catholics is sufficiently obvious, and, without pretending either to prevision or to inside knowledge, it is clearly possible that we may see some sort of unofficial alliance between Catholics and Palestinian Orthodox, which from a purely religious point of view would be all to the good, provided it were an alliance of hearts and not merely of policy, much less of intrigue. Naturally enough, the native Orthodox tend to exaggerate their own side: in their more heated moments they represent the Greek monks to be a gang of foreigners who have robbed the people of their birthright, claim that all the patriarchal endowments should be in the communal ownership of themselves, and that the Holy

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Places are a private property of the local church of Jerusalem. Such statements are absurd, but they must not be allowed to obscure the reality of the Palestinians' grievances, and the reasonableness of their protest against the Greeks' high-handedness. What they asked for in 1908 was simply more resident bishops, a share in church government and finance, and better education. The late Patriarch, Mgr. Damianos, inclined to uphold these demands, but his synod straightway deposed him. Thereupon the Palestinians appealed to the Sublime Porte, and that Moslem authority pronounced that a Christian synod can elect but cannot depose! The Greek monks averted bloodshed by sprinkling vitriol on the mob, and closed all the native churches. When the Turks sent a commission to investigate, both sides accused their Patriarch of 'trimming,' and worse, and so things went on.

After 1918, when the Patriarchate was nearly bankrupt, the Brotherhood wanted to accept an offer from the National Bank of Greece, which would have made of it simply an Hellenic dependence; but Mgr. Damianos, of course supported by the Palestinians, stood out against this (he was a master of tact and tactics), and at length the British mandatory power intervened and appointed a financial commission of management.

It is clear, then, that, from other points of view besides the strictly ecclesiastical and religious one, the succession to the Orthodox throne of Jerusalem is a matter both inviting and promising interest.

DONALD ATTWATER.