

Jaharis Spoke about Monasteries-Church, a Year Ago...

by A.P. Cromidas

Last year the top layman of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America issued an unprecedented statement about problems in the archdiocese. In perhaps his strongest point, he spoke about “a regrettable and most distasteful subject, i.e. the current state of monasteries in their relationship with the U.S. Church.” Has anything been done about this matter? Not that one would know about. (And, yes, we the laypeople should know about it.)

The layman was Michael Jaharis, who is Vice-Chairman of the Archdiocesan Council. He was speaking at last fall’s Council meeting. He used some rather strong terms about his concerns. And, though details were lacking, he said that “If we are to ‘bear fruit’ as a faith, we have to make certain to guard our garden from disease.” One can assume that he was referring to an undue influence the monasteries are having among some parishes, and that they are overstepping their “obligations” under the terms of the Charter of the Archdiocese.

These monasteries are the ones directed by the “Elder” Ephraim, a monk who has established some 18 monasteries in the United States and Canada. Jaharis said that the work of an Archdiocese committee charged with examining the problems was being obstructed. He said “severe” action may be required in the case of the young monk who apparently took his own life at the gates of the Arizona monastery that is headquarters for Ephraim in America.

And so, where are we? Take a guess. At the end of this May the next meeting of the council was held in Boston. It is understood that most of the metropolitans (bishops) did not even attend this meeting, and that not much, if anything, was accomplished regarding the problems that Jaharis had spoken about with such urgency at the previous meeting.

Not all that long ago, the metropolitans lobbied to be included in the deliberations of the archdiocesan council. Now, it appears they are quite willing to thumb their noses at meetings of the council. When the committee was set up to look into the Ephraim situation, it was headed by a layman. Since then, a metropolitan has become chairman and not much has happened – he was one of the absent members at this last meeting. At a session of the Synod of Bishops earlier this year, it was reported in the *Orthodox Observer*, the official paper of the archdiocese, that the matter of the monasteries was “discussed” by the metropolitans, but not surprisingly, no details were given. So the bishops discuss the matter but don’t tell us what they said, and then they are largely absent from the next archdiocese council session where presumably the “distasteful” monastery problems were to be dealt with.

Is this the best we can expect from the council? The only report so far of the May meeting was in the June issue of the *Orthodox Observer*, and no mention was made of any report or discussion of the monasteries.

One is reminded of the current situation in the American military where the commanders are saying to the country: “Not to worry, we’ll handle the sexual misconduct problem within our chain of command.” Likewise, our bishops seem to be saying: “Don’t worry, we’ll handle the monastery situation, you laypeople don’t have to.”

Well, it is obvious that they are not dealing with it in a forthright, open and timely manner. And, aside from Mr. Jaharis' serious comments, the laypeople of the council are also failing at the job. TNH, the main Greek-American newspaper, is also letting us down by not providing timely follow-up reporting.

While most of the faithful may only just be learning that there are concerns about the Ephraim monasteries, the matter is not new. It was written about more than 10 years ago by this writer and by TNH.

More recently, two concerned websites have emerged: "weareorthodox" and "gotruthreform", But, in what seems to be the usual mode of operation by the Church, the matter is being dealt with, as the Greek expression goes, "avrio – avrio" – "tomorrow, tomorrow".

But that is not good enough. The body of the Church is being hurt and the people deserve better treatment from their leadership, today, not "tomorrow."

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