

Appendix 5

Memorandum of the Greeks submitted to the Peace Conference in Paris, 1919

The superior of the Franciscan Monks in Jerusalem, Ferdinand Diotallevi, submitted to the Peace Conference in Paris a short Memorandum under the date of the current year, which was written in French and printed in the printing-office of the Franciscan Fathers in Jerusalem, under the following title : 'Memorandum - The Holy Places in the Paris Conference.'

Just from the first page of this memorandum an honourable mention is made of the activities of the Latin Powers in the West, and especially of Venice, Genoa, Naples, France, Austria, Poland, Spain, England and Holland for the interest, care, and protection which they had shown towards the Franciscan Monks in the Holy Places. It is also historically explained that, after the unfortunate period of the Crusades, the Franciscans had settled down in the most important Holy Places, since the fourteenth century through pecuniary means on one hand, and on the other by the intermediation of Kings and Democracies.

The Memorandum is written in such a way by which the Franciscans appear as occupying the Holy Places. Furthermore, they pass over in silence the existence of their Christian communities in these places, and in addition they avoid to state by whom they had been occupied during the previous long centuries; because it is historically and archaeologically proved that the Holy Places existed, since the fourth century. These two points are essential and most important for the understanding of the whole question of the Holy Places.

The Franciscan Monks succeeding through political influences to occupy a position in the Holy Places since the fourteenth century, they never were alone in them, but the Greeks always occupied in the central positions the important Holy Places, and around them in fixed corners, sometimes outside the enclosure of the Holy Places, Latins and Armenians were stationed. We

mention these two Communities only, as the jurisdiction of the smaller Christian Communities in the Holy Places was greatly limited.

But political circumstances and various other influences at different periods, as well as an incontrollable zeal of a national and ecclesiastical strife, have given to the Christian Communities in the Holy Places a hostile character towards each other. Thereupon the monks of the various Christian Communities, who were serving in the Holy Places, have been changed in their real nature and mission to soldiers and guardians of the Holy Places.

The Greek Monks, as possessors and masters of the Holy Places, by virtue of possessory rights and reasons of ethnological nature, from the fourth century till the period of the Crusades, at the eleventh century, have been exclusively the rulers and masters of the Holy Places; erecting repairing, ornamenting, and serving in them. During the period of the Crusaders, however, the position of the Greeks in the Holy Places has been changed into a secondary one, because Latinism has appeared as an enemy to Hellenism in the East generally, and especially in the Holy Places; but after the expulsion of the Crusaders the Greeks by virtue of an official political act of Saladin were recognised as the only rulers and masters of the Holy Places, they continued their mission and traditions, with the only difference that since the fourteenth century and further on Latins and Armenians, as well other smaller Christian Communities, had settled down in fixed positions of the Holy Places.

As a proof of the modern intrusion of the Latins into the Holy Places it is not necessary that we should refer to the positive facts of history, but it is sufficient to observe that all the ancient Monasteries in Jerusalem are occupied by the Greeks, and none of them by the Latins. The few Monasteries occupied by them are principally the Stations of the Via Dolorosa, which are an invention of modern authors, not having any authenticity in connection with the Holy Places. Besides that, the Monastery of the Franciscans itself has been taken from the Greeks, as the history of the event, which is well known, witnesses the fact. But in addition to what has been mentioned, there is another more important fact, that the centre of the Greek Fraternity of the Holy Sepulchre was always and continually the Holy Sepulchre, which was built by them, while the Franciscan Monks had always as their starting point a place on Mount Zion, considered by tradition to be the Coenaculum (Chamber of the Last Supper), which they had occupied temporally by a royal transaction and on payment of a sum of money.

After that period of the Mamluks in the Holy Places, who used to disregard the Greeks, the Turkish sovereignty since the sixteenth century and the

Greek revolution at the nineteenth on one hand, and on the other, the influence of the Catholic Powers of Europe on the Sublime Porte, and the large amounts of money of the Latin Church, created severe struggle and almost continual war in the Holy Places, especially between the Greeks and the Franciscans since the sixteenth century. This struggle used to end in favour of the Franciscans whenever the political influence of the West oppressed efficaciously the Sublime Porte leaving no outlet to it.

The Greek Fraternity of the Holy Sepulchre used to march out courageously against these influences and oppressions of so strong powers, and sometimes used to come out of the struggle victorious and sometimes wounded; but the power of duty, the grace drawn from the Holy Places, which she many a time bought off by her own blood, and the conscience of the honour in the service and custody of the Holy Places, strengthened her and exalted her power to an invincible position. Thus the Fraternity of the Holy Sepulchre under the leadership of her Patriarchs, used to have continually a struggle of right against the powerful and strong men of the earth, against money and political influences; but by the grace of God she succeeded, through difficult times, to arrive at these days of liberty at which the rights of the great and small nations and communities are equally recognised.

The other point, in which the memorandum of the Franciscan Monks is deficient, is the passing over in silence of the position of the Holy Places before the twelfth century. The reason for that is very simple. The Latins heavily bear the fact that the Holy Places were Greek, and that their custody and the care about them were entrusted to the Greek Clergy of the Church of Jerusalem. Whenever this question is presented, some of them pass over it attentively with silence, while others, when provoked to discuss this matter, they invent and devise by a judicial way new theories to the effect that the custodians of the Holy Places had not an ethnological character, as these places were under the rule of the Byzantine Empire, which was a Roman Empire, i.e. Latin and not a Greek Empire. Thus a complete bankruptcy of the historic truth is presented and a corruption of the real facts for personal reasons and prospects.

The establishment of the Byzantine Empire was subjectively and objectively Greek, although during its first period there existed some documents written in Latin. But this part also was quickly swept off by predominating the other aspects of the Byzantine period Cosmopolitan Greek spirit. The establishment of the Byzantine Empire meant the great political event of the gradual separation of the Latin West from the Greek East. The centre of the

former was Rome, with the traditions and claims of ancient Rome the bearers and apostles of which were the Popes, while the centre of the latter was Constantinople, and therefore it was called New Rome. The political and ecclesiastical events which had followed completed the separation of the West from the East. Greece itself had not at that time a deep conception, not to say something more, of the fact that the Byzantine Empire was the Ark of the further salvation of the Greeks with all their spiritual and moral capital. It was proved later that Constantinople saved Greece and Peloponnesus from continual barbaric invasions. Constantinople as a fortified rampart saved the Greek Church and the Greek literature and education.

When great parts of the body of the Empire had been separated, then it commenced to have a deeper conscience of its national powers that they are Greek powers. The Latin aspect was quickly swept off and hindered by two factors viz. the Greek Church and the Greek Public (Plebs).

But the most important of all is an historic irony. The Latins imagined for a moment, that the Emperor Justinian introduced the new Latin spirit by his code, which was written in Latin, but this phenomenon was upset and reversed by the great scheme of the same Emperor, who built the Cathedral of Constantinople and of the whole Empire 'The Church of Agia Sophia' (St Sophia). This Cathedral was built according to the Greek and Eastern style, with a Greek idea, and a Greek name was given to it (God's Wisdom). The Architects of Agia Sophia worked artistically a miracle of art, in which was incorporated the living spirit and magnificence of the Greek Church.

Besides these important events Hellenism displaced rapidly in Byzantium the administrative system of the Roman Empire. Thus the Proconsul, Praefectus, and Praeses, have been substituted by a General, concentrating in them the highest military and political administration. From the reign of Emperor Heraclius the districts (themata) existed in the administration of the country.

The Issavrian and especially Macedonian Dynasties worked hardly and successfully for the renaissance of the Greek spirit, which was in flourishing state during the Komnenian period. At that time, however, the Crusaders at their invasion showed clearly, in documents and deeds, through the conduct of their leaders, as well as by the behaviour of the army in general, and antihellenic policy, and rude phraseology, that they were inspired by the ambitions and ideas of the Popes.

Therefore Manuel Komnenos deported the Venetians from Constantinople for reasons of national contrast. Kinamos states that this measure has been taken on account of the arrogance of these persons.

On the other hand, in 1147 French Barons and Bishops, incited by national and religious motives, used to request the King of France, Louis VII in alliance with the King of Sicily Rogerus, to conquer Constantinople. The same project occupied the mind of Frederic I at 1190, and afterwards his son Henry VI, and at last the 'Hateful Byzantium' was conquered on the 12-13 of April 1204, with a terrible destruction and devastation, and great indecency, which is beyond any description. Therefore, the brother of the Metropolitan of Athens Niketa characterises them as follows: 'But none of the Graces or Muses was agreeable to these barbarous people, and in addition I think that they were fierce in nature, their anger always outrunning their reason.' The conquerors mocking at the Greeks used to go about in pomp carrying pens, ink-stand, and volumes of books, and with a strange fanaticism used to destroy the decorum of the Christian Churches, and deliver it to the Latin priests.

But with all the efforts for reconciliation, between Latinism of the West and Hellenism of the East, the result was, as it has been expressed by Marius Sandus, of Venice, in his publication under the name of 'Secreta fidelium Crucis', that the strong men of the West have been able to dissolve the Greek Empire, but did not possess the power to maintain it, and that the Union of the Eastern and Roman Churches could not be obtained by force, as it had been proved in several countries of the East, in which the foreign conquerors only and not the natives accepted the Latin doctrine. They killed for a moment the body of the East, but not the spirit, and it was proved that it is impossible for the centrifugal and centripetal forces to meet. In this essential struggle, and in the other factors, which formulate the political character of an independent and self-sufficient government, the Greek character of the Byzantine Empire is clearly and completely revealed. In addition we have before us a better proof of that in the relation of the Byzantine Empire to the Holy Places in Palestine, which have not only been established and maintained by the Greeks, but the most important of all is that, when Palestine was separated from the Byzantine Empire and subjected to the Rulers of Islam, they continued to show the same great interest for the Holy Places. They used to protect them either by making alliances with the conquerors, or by intervention through their ambassadors or special commissioners. This fact has been more clearly manifested during the rule of the Crusaders in the Holy Places.

Many consider as curious fact, and probably even as inexplicable one, that although the Crusaders were the sovereigns in the Holy Places, they showed such intolerance and fanaticism against the Greeks, and always hated and

suspected the Byzantine Court, nevertheless many renovations and embellishments have been made in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Bethlehem and other Monasteries by the Byzantine Emperor. But this question becomes very simple if the documents of that period are carefully studied. The high chivalry of the Crusaders, corrupted by the selfish tendencies of their hierarchy, became bankrupt and degenerated sooner than it was expected, and unobservedly was found under the vehicle of the regenerated Byzantine Power at the period of the Komnenian Dynasty, which reached the culmination of success and glory during the reign of Manuel Komnenos.

On account of that the Sovereigns of the Crusaders used to give their daughters to the Byzantine Court, and to hold the stirrup of the Emperor's horse. Thereupon, the curious and probably inexplicable question becomes natural and explicable, i.e., how the Emperor of Byzantium repaired, embellished the Holy Places, and extended his protection over them. These acts had been accepted by the succeeding Emperors, who even intervened that Latin Monks may be established in the Holy City. The Greek Patriarchs used to accept these Latin Monks with fraternal love, and grant to them the proper accommodation, considering this act as a Christian duty, although these Monks were ill-disposed, hostile, and had malignant thoughts against the Greeks. The geographical, physiological, and historical contrast between Hellenism, and Latinism which was manifested by many events in the history of the Byzantine Empire, has been transmitted, though in a small scale, to the Greeks and Franciscans at the Holy Places. As at that time the Latins used to curse and hate Byzantium, at present also they never deviate from this principle, but as if by tradition they always hate, and bitterly slander the Greeks in the Holy Places. Nevertheless, with all this contrast, it is necessary that efforts should be exercised for reconcillation of both parties, and establishment of friendly relations between them. Because it is a well-known fact that this disposition is the best way for the settlement of all differences, and avoiding all misunderstanding, more especially in these days, when many good and beneficial things might be expected from it.

The Greeks work, toil, and keep a vigilant eye in order to preserve the Holy Places, which are in their possession for series of centuries, and to them is due the great honour and glory, that before the appearance of the Latins in the Holy Land, they preserved with the Holy Places the Christian faith, fighting against insurmountable obstacles which used to be presented by the Non-Christian strong factors in Palestine. The Franciscans on the other hand, use all means, in order to take off from the Greeks the Holy Places, which are in their possession, and on account of that, especially since the sixteenth

century, a continual severe struggle is taking place in the Holy Places between the Greeks and the Latins. Therefore, whenever the pro-Franciscan political influences were predominating, especially during the war of the Greek independence, they gained many places; but whatever they gain immediately forget and do their level best always in order to extend their possessions and obtain something more. This is the reason of the continued struggle and of the uninterrupted storm at the Holy Places.

These dispositions have appeared again with greater bitterness especially now, when the terrible World War is ended, and while from the blood, which has been shed in torrents, and from the agony of the entire world the ideals of justice and fraternal love have grown up, as principles and not as abstract ideas, notwithstanding these facts, the Franciscan Monks have published a most insulting and indecent pamphlet against the Greeks at the Holy Places, which was even printed in the printing-office of the Pope.

In the memorandum, which was submitted by the superior of the Franciscans to the Peace Conference in Paris, the Franciscans endeavour again to obtain not the share of the lion, but they try by all means to expel the Greeks from the Holy Places. From the seventh page of this memorandum they present two lists in comparison the one with the other, in which they mention the Holy Places belonging exclusively to them, and those which they claim. In both lists the exaggerations and transgressions of the Franciscans are evident. In the first list, in which the Holy Places which belong exclusively to them are noted, some places which have never belonged to them exclusively are included, while the other list contains almost all the Holy Places claimed by them, and which they had usurped at 1740. A similar list to the latter had been submitted to the Sublime Porte by the Ambassador of France in Constantinople at 1850. Thus the aim of the Franciscans is to take for themselves everything and to change, as if by an alchemical method, everything into Latin.

They have observed at what period of the long history of the Holy Places the Franciscans had usurped the greater part of them, and they have stuck to it, considering this usurpation as justice, and requesting therefore the Peace Conference to confirm this point. All their attention concentrated in the year 1740 because during that year the usurpation had reached its highest point. History contains between its pages the tragic occupation of the Holy Places at that time.

Hence the question naturally arises, i.e., why do we concentrate all our attention to one chronological point, that of the year 1740, which was also mentioned by General Aupick at 1850, and we do not refer to the established

‘Status Quo’ relating to the Holy Places, which is fixed and defined in two official Firmans, which had been similarly recognised and confirmed by two European Conferences, that of Paris and that of Berlin?

The establishment of peace and its consolidation in the Holy Places is obtained by the firm maintenance of the ‘Status Quo’ relating to the Holy Places. It is the supreme duty of every Christian Nation, whatever might be its sect or doctrines, to do its level best, in order to cause peace and love reign in the Holy Places, between the custodians there, viz. Greeks, Franciscans, Armenians, and the other smaller Christian communities, so that all the Christians might take from these Holy Shrines the best example of Christian love, and practice it in deeds in their own life. Thus also an excellent example is set before the non-Christian nations for imitation.

But if the proper men consider the proposed basis as insufficient, why to confine ourselves to the year 1740, as the Latins claim, and not to examine the long history of the Holy Places during the sixteen centuries, which preceded the year 1740, as well as their modern history from 1740 to the present day? Then everybody will see clearly for how many centuries the Greeks were alone in the Holy Places and when the Franciscans appeared later in these places by which means they had entered into them as well as the period during which they had made the greater usurpation by diplomatic means and how long they have kept them.

We desire, and believe that it is necessary, that the history of the Holy Places during the first sixteen centuries should be examined and studied. From this study we can see on one hand, what was the position of the Greeks, and what historical, legal and political documents they have in their possession, and on the other hand, when and how the Franciscans entered into the Holy Places, and by what means they had taken the places, which are now in their possession. Furthermore what is the basis upon which the Franciscans depending lay their claims or all the Holy Places, while not only history and the official documents, but also Archaeology and the Christian Art, which is hitherto preserved, present clear and indisputable proofs refuting this basis? Besides that, all the preserved renovations of the important Holy Places, which had been erected by the Greeks, protest energetically against the claims of the Franciscans.

After all the various customs and the daily services which are held by the Greeks, in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and in the Basilica of Bethlehem, leave no ground to the Franciscans to lay such claims. But what can we say about the other tendency of the Franciscans, who, in order to

overshadow the rights of the Greeks, cover with curtains in many of the Holy Places the Greek inscriptions.

At last we request the wise men, who will give their decision about the Holy Places, to take into consideration these facts, which are undisputed truth, containing long history, which we are ready to explain in discussion and publications, and to grant to every one his own right. We earnestly desire that the Greeks and Franciscans may live together in the Holy Places with mutual esteem and love.

In the Holy City of Jerusalem,
29 June 1919.

Written by the Chief Secretary of
the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate.
T P. Themlis ⁵