The 2016 Spring Meeting of the Grand Magisterium

The members of the Grand Magisterium gathered around the Grand Master in Rome, on April 12 and 13, 2016

The Chancellor Ivan Rebernik, concluding his term of office, was publically thanked for all of his work on behalf of the Order by the Grand Master and the Governor General in the presence of members of the Grand Magisterium who had gathered in Rome. In recognition, the Chancellor received the Golden Palm.

Opening proceedings following the inaugural Mass celebrated at the Palazzo della Rovere – seat of the Grand Magisterium – Cardinal Edwin O'Brien strongly encouraged participants at the meeting of the Institution's governing body to study the Pope's recent apostolic exhortation, Amoris Laetitia, "a hymn to family life", and to promote its reading among the members of the Order.

After presenting his new secretary, Air Force chaplain Father John Bateman, the Grand Master announced his forthcoming visits to the Lieutenancies and Magistral Delegations, in particular for the first **Investiture in the Czech Republic**, and later to the Pacific and Asia where the Order is growing. He underscored that he counts on the members of the Grand Magisterium to cultivate bonds with Lieutenants in the major regions of the world.

The Governor General, Agostino Borromeo, also thanked Cardinal O'Brien for his steadfast commitment to visiting the Lieutenancies around the world, an activity that stimulates all of the Order's vital forces to come together and support the **"culture of encounter"** in the Holy Land. The Governor hailed the generosity of members of the Order which has enabled the collection of 13.5 million Euros in 2015 for the benefit of the "living stones" of the Church in the territory of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, which extends from Jordan to Cyprus.

After having warmly thanked the **Chancellor Ivan Rebernik** for his work during his recently concluded fouryear term of office, the Governor officially welcomed lawyer Flavio Rondinini as the newest member of the Grand Magisterium, who will also be responsible for managing staffing issues.

In his speech, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Grand Prior of the Order, described the situation in the Holy Land, with special emphasis on the 'discrimination' that Catholic schools in the Holy Land are facing, now that they have been deprived of government subsidies. He also stressed the challenge of migrants, especially refugees who today make up about 20% of the Jordanian population.

Among the various relevant issues touched upon, **Msgr. Twal** mentioned the construction of the "Cremisan separation barrier" and the tragedy that this represents for Palestinian Christian families whose livelihood depends on the cultivation of olive trees in this valley near Bethlehem. He also stressed the urgent need for the resumption of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, particularly at a time when public attention is being diverted from this central question of international law by the wars in the Middle East.

Faced with these growing difficulties, particularly with regard to social, healthcare and education problems in Palestine, the Patriarch proposed a larger participation of the Grand Magisterium to the general reflection, in the framework of a Committee which could also focus on **better school management**, in addition to the projects regularly followed by the Commission for the Holy Land. This proposal was discussed at length and will be the subject of further study, given that various members of the Grand Magisterium supported the use of local experts. A broader collaboration with the Patriarchate was happily taken into consideration during the exchanges that took place, particularly in the drawing up of a five-year development plan.

An effort for real, consolidated dialogue between the Order and the Latin Patriarchate

The 2015 budget presented by Father Imad Twal, general administrator of the Latin Patriarchate, shows an overall higher deficit for the institutions, the seminary and the schools compared with previous years: this was attributed to the decrease in donations from sources other than the Order of the Holy Sepulchre which, for its part, has instead sizeably increased its regular contributions.

Father Imad Twal echoed the Patriarch's urgent appeal to the Grand Magisterium, especially regarding **Catholic schools that form the future pillars, lay and ecclesiastic, of the Holy Land**, given that some in Jordan risk closure. One of the problems is the low wages of teachers and staff – 80% of whom are members of the Christian community – leading to the exodus of teachers to state structures. In agreement with the Patriarchate representatives, the Grand Magisterium will send a specific set of questions to the general administrator to better understand the reasons for the deficit and try to remedy them as part of its effort for real consolidated dialogue. On this point, the Vice Governor, Patrick Powers, reiterated the willingness of American members of the Order to help form tomorrow's leaders in the Holy Land while the Patriarchate will commit itself with a rationalizing logic capable of restoring Catholic education to its position of excellence.

The **Commission for the Holy Land**, which is led by Thomas McKiernan, described its ongoing and future projects, which include support for a home for the elderly in Taybeh and renovations in two Jordanian schools. The Commission also confirmed its willingness to engage in a prospective study of a pastoral nature with the Patriarchate. This would involve, beyond existing material projects, "strategic planning" aimed at saving the Catholic schools which are essential for the consolidation and the future of the local Church.

In his analysis of the state of the Grand Magisterium accounts, Engineer Pier Carlo Visconti revealed that the annual aid sent to the Holy Land has passed from 9.3 to 11.3 million euro, while the Grand Magisterium expenses have decreased. The contributions for schools continue to grow (3 million euro in 2015 compared to 2.5 the previous year).

The Assessor of the Order, **Msgr. Antonio Franco**, outlined how the **Vatican Foundation St. John the Baptist** has been able to repay the debts of the University of Madaba and ensure development in the coming years (see *Annales* 2015, p. 61-62).

Concluding his term of office to great applause, Chancellor Ivan Rebernik provided details on the **Order's statistics** showing the entry of 1,250 new members in 2015 (a total of 28,787 worldwide). He also presented a summary report on communications and his work on the Grand Magisterium's archives, which have been reorganized thanks to a lengthy restructuring project including their digitalization.

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