

The Interconfessional Nature of the Order of Saint Lazarus and its Configuration as a lateral body of the international ecumenical Christian institutions.

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Introduction

The Order of Saint Lazarus saw its origins in the Holy Land after the First Crusade of 1099 with the primary aim of giving assistance to lepers within the Kingdom of Jerusalem in its leprosarium just outside the walls of Jerusalem. It initially fell under the direct control of the Latin Patriarch in Jerusalem adopting the Rule of Saint Augustine through the Bull promulgated by Pope Alexander IV in 1255. After the expulsion of the Christians from the Holy Land in 1291, the Order of Saint Lazarus stationed its headquarters at Boigny near Orléans in France. The other houses in other European lands remained subservient to the mother house in France. The loss of influence of the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem led to attempts at incursions into the privileges enjoyed by the Order in France and elsewhere. In 1318, Pope John XXII promulgated a pontifical decree granting the Order exemption from local ecclesiastical authority and making the Order dependent only to the Holy See.

The subsequent centuries were to see political machinations, arising from the Ottoman incursions into Europe and the Reformation-Counter-Reformation movements that resulted in an administrative fractionalization of the Order with separate branches in England led by the central house at Burton Lazar, the Kingdom of Two Sicilies led by the central house at Capua, and France led by the central house at Boigny. The preceptories in Central Europe and Hungary remained loyal to Boigny. The Ottoman incursions into Hungary lost the Boigny branch of the Order its holdings in the region; while the Reformation Movement

resulted in the Order losing its holdings in Central Europe. The English branch was abolished unilaterally by King Henry VIII in 1544; while the southern Italian branch was amalgamated in 1572 with the Order of Saint Maurice – now named the Order of St Maurice and St Lazarus – and given in perpetuity to the House of Savoy whose Heads served as Grand Masters. The French branch was, in 1608, administratively linked to the newly created Order of Our Lady of Mount Carmel under the protection of the French King. Both the Order of St Lazarus and St Maurice and the United Orders of Saint Lazarus and Our Lady of Mount Carmel retained the *fons honorum* of the Holy See and, therefore, remained purely Roman Catholic organizations. The political movements initiated by the 1789 French Revolution and the subsequent turmoil leading to the 1830 July Revolution led to the loss of Royal Protectorship by the French Order. It retained, however, the *fons honorum* of the Holy See even though it established links with the Melkite Patriarch who accepted to serve as the Spiritual Protector of the Order. The links of the Order to the Catholic Church and the Melkite Patriarchy were clearly defined in the statutes promulgated in 1910. These state: *Lors de leur élévation, les Chevaliers Hospitaliers justifient qu'ils professent la Religion catholique, apostolique et romaine,.... relevant de l'Autorité régulièrement dépendante du Souverain-Pontife, qui est celle de sa béatitudo le Patriarche d'Antioche, d'Alexandrie, de Jerusalem et de tout l'Orient.*¹ The office of Grand Master was re-established in 1935 after the Council of the Order appointed H.R.H. Francisco de Paula de Borbón y de la Torre, Duke of Seville and Grandee of Spain, as the 44th Grand Master of the Order. The Melkite Patriarch retained the role of Spiritual Protector.

¹ de Jandriac. Les chevaliers Hospitaliers de Saint Lazare de Jerusalem et de Notre Dame de la Merci. *Rivista Araldica*, November 1913, XI(11), pp.679-683.

A major organizational drive was subsequently undertaken in the 1960s aimed at opening membership to the English-speaking world. This required statutory changes that would allow the admission of Christian but non-Catholic religions, thus initiating a process that made the Order ecumenical. This was a major turning point in the Order's nature and its legal form since it thus ceased to be a group of Catholic faithful, as such subject to the laws and to the decisions of the Holy See, and became an independent ecumenical structure, still tied to the Catholic Medieval traditions, but no longer subject to the code of Canon Law. This was resented by the hard-core Roman Catholic traditionalists setting the scene for a schism within the ranks of the Order that led to two obediences – the traditional one known as the Paris obedience and the other called the Malta obedience. The two branches formally reunited in September 2008 with the election of H.E. Carlos Gereda y de Borbón, Marquis de Almazan as the 49th Grand Master of the reunited Order. The Melkite Patriarch His Beatitude Gregory III remained the Spiritual Protector of the united Order.

The Order's present Religious Configuration

The Military and Hospitaller Order of Saint Lazarus of Jerusalem remains today a civil organization in form of an ecumenical Order encompassing a wide range of Christian denominations with H.B. the Melkite Patriarch Gregory III Laham serving as the Spiritual Protector and the Archbishop Abbot of Monreale H.E. The Most Reverend Michele Pennisi serving as Ecclesiastical Grand Prior. It does not, however, fall under the precepts of the Roman Catholic Canon Law, without in any way, conflicting with the same Catholic Canonical norms.

The *Jus Canonicum* or Canon Law of the Catholic Church is the system of laws and legal principles made and enforced by the hierarchical authorities of the Roman Catholic Church to regulate its external

organization and government, and to order and direct the activities of Catholics toward the mission of the Church. Because of its ecumenical structure, the modern Order has lost its character as a legal entity under the terms of the Roman Catholic Canon Law. The Roman Canon Law (Can. 116 §1) states that: *Public juridic persons are aggregates of persons (universitates personarum) or of things (universitates rerum) which are constituted by competent ecclesiastical authority so that, within the purposes set out for them, they may fulfil, in the name of the [Roman Catholic] Church, according to the norm of the precepts of the law, the proper function entrusted to them in view of the public good; other juridic persons are private.*² Since the Second Vatican Council II, the Holy See has, however, promoted the right of recognition and maintenance of relationships with institutions extraneous to those defined under its Canon Law. In the *Pontificum Consilium ad Christianorum unitatem fovendam* approved by Pope John Paul II in 1993: *Catholics are invited to respond according to the directives of their pastors, in solidarity and gratitude with the efforts that are being made in many Churches and ecclesial Communities, and in the various organizations in which they co-operate to re-establish the unity of Christians. Where ecumenical work is not being done, or not being done effectively, Catholics will seek to promote it.*³

Under these terms, and because of the recent reforms of the Statutes of the Order and the acquisition of legal status as a foundation, a similar recognition by the Holy See for the Military and Hospitaller Order of Saint Lazarus of Jerusalem could be facilitated. There are already a number of lay associations, structured on an ecumenical basis, which

² *Code of Canon Law.* http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/_INDEX.HTM.

³ *Pontificum Consilium ad Christianorum unitatem fovendam* dated 25 March 1993. http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_25031993_principles-and-norms-on-ecumenism_en.html.

maintain mutual relations with the Catholic Church and other Churches of different denominations. The Christian view is full of organizations that have made ecumenism the very reason for their existence. The fact that they do not belong to a specific Canonical Order (Catholic, Protestant or Orthodox) is the root of their strength, without anyone even thinking of challenging their nature and legitimacy. Several examples of such ecumenical organizations can be mentioned:

- 1) The Iona Community (Great Britain). This community was founded in 1938 by the Scottish Baron and Minister of the Church of Scotland, Lord George Fielden MacLeod, on the island of Iona, the historic centre of Celtic Christianity. The community is composed of an ecumenical group of Presbyterians, Anglicans, Lutherans, Quakers, Catholics and people without any specific religious denomination. The community has two centres on the island of Iona and one centre on the neighbouring island of Mull, a head office in Glasgow, and the Wild Goose Publication publishing house. It has 260 members, 1600 associate members and 1600 sympathizers scattered in Scotland, England , Wales, Australia, Germany, Malaysia and the United States.⁴
- 2) The Taizé Community (France). This community was founded by Roger Louis Schütz-Marsauche who, while coming from a Swiss Protestant family, was brought up in a Catholic environment. After his theological studies in Lausanne in 1940, Frere Roger bought a house in the tiny village of Taizé, North of Cluny, with the intention of helping the suffering population and persons displaced as a result of the Second World War. After the war, the community continued to grow with men taking the vows of simplicity, chastity and community life. In 1969, for the first time, the community became part of a Belgian Catholic community and, subsequently, both Catholic and Orthodox individuals joined the community. The Brothers of Taizé have a worldwide mission

⁴ www.iona.org.uk/.

forming groups in deprived places such as in Calcutta, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Algeria and Brazil.⁵

- 3) The Bose Monastic Community (Italy). This community was founded in 1965 by the Piedmontese Enzo Bianchi in Bosein, the Province of Biella, Italy. It today houses about 80 men and women, Catholic and Protestant, who have adopted a co-enobitic lifestyle (i.e. live in a community, praying and working together) based on the teachings of St Pachomius. They have since opened other centres in Ostuni, Assisi and Jerusalem. They also have a thriving publishing house known as Edizioni Qiqajon.⁶
- 4) Ecumenical Institute of Bossey (Switzerland). This institute was founded in 1946 in the Castle of Bossey in Geneva by the World Congress of Churches (W.C.C.) as an international centre for meetings, training and ecumenical dialogue. It organizes courses in Ecumenical Theology, Theology of Missions and Social Ethics. The Institute and the diplomas which it issues are formally recognized by the University of Geneva.⁷
- 5) Centre Saint-Irenee (France) is an ecumenical organization founded in 1953 by Fr René Beaupère in Lyon to encourage dialogue between the various Christian denominations. Its activities include the organization of inter-faith courses (including online courses), cultural and religious trips, etc. It also dedicates efforts to addressing inter-faith mixed couples (Protestants, Catholics, Orthodox) providing a marriage preparation course.⁸
- 6) The Dombes Group (France). This ecumenical dialogue group was founded in 1937 on the initiative of two Catholic priests from Lyon – Fr Laurent Remillieux and Fr Paul Couturier, and of a Protestant Pastor of Erlenbach near Bern – Fr Richard Bäumlín. Since 1948, the Dombes Group, now composed of Catholic, Lutherans and Calvinist pastors from France and Switzerland, originally met every year in September at the Trappist Abbey of Dombes (hence its name). Since 1998, the Group has transferred its meeting to the Abbey of Pradines.

⁵ www.taize.fr/.

⁶ www.monasterodibose.it/.

⁷ www.oikoumene.org/en/activities/bossey.html.

⁸ www.oecumenisme.info/.

- 7) The Agape Ecumenical Center (Italy). The Center was built in 1947 in Prali near Turin on the initiative of some young Protestants led by the Waldensian Pastor Tullio Vinay (and supported by the International Ecumenical Movement. Today, the centre belongs to the Waldensian Board and consists of a group of permanent residents of about 12 people of different faiths (apart from external volunteers in times of peak), organizing and hosting meetings and national and international conferences.⁹

It would, therefore, be sufficient to state that the Order as it exists at present is subject to its legal structure and that it is unnecessary to obtain other recognitions. Arguments based on attempting to prove or disprove the historical continuity of the Order are irrelevant to the Order's recognition.¹⁰ Since the Order is not one awarded on the basis of Merit or Honour, but is in itself an association of individuals embracing religious aims, any reference to the requirement of a *fons honorum* is inappropriate. It is the acceptance by potential partners which legitimizes the existence of the association and not the fact that it occurred through an act of recognition or constitution based on the principle of sovereignty. Suffice it to recall that Italian State Law refers to so-called "unrecognised associations", namely those associations which have not requested or obtained any form of recognition by the State but still have a legal identity. Because of the historical events that have characterized the recent history of the Order of Saint Lazarus troubled by repeated divisions and disagreements (albeit numerically insignificant), it is necessary that the Order finds a point of departure that emphasizes the genuineness of its general government and structure to enable this centuries-old organization to conduct its affairs and also to defend itself from possible frauds. One way to achieve this

⁹ www.agapecentroecumenico.org/sito/.

¹⁰ The Melkite Patriarchs have repeatedly attested and certified their protection since the mid-19th century.

could be based on the ecumenical organization of the Order and establishing links with organizations that are willing to recognize its ecumenical Christian Equestrian Order structure.

The most important thing is surely recognition by the World Congress of Churches (W.C.C.). The W.C.C. legal system provides, in fact, the so-called related bodies. Various types of organizations formed by churches play a vital part in the life of the ecumenical movement as a whole. Some are organized geographically into the Regional Ecumenical Organizations and other regional and sub-regional fellowships (R.E.O.s). Others are international groupings of churches within a single confessional tradition (Christian World Communions). And some are world ecumenical organizations focusing on a specific task or issue or a specific constituency. Their principal aims include helping their members to shape a common Christian response to issues of regional concern, and serving as a bridge between churches and national councils in the region and worldwide organizations. As "essential partners in the ecumenical enterprise" (W.C.C. rules, XV.1.), R.E.O.s may send representatives to the W.C.C. assembly and to meetings of its central committee.

The W.C.C. cooperates with several other regional and sub-regional organizations and groupings of churches and/or national councils of churches, which, in some regions, have become an important part of the ecumenical scene. They help groups of churches linked by historic and cultural factors to express their distinctive identity and witness within the larger regional framework. In particular, the constitutional documents of the W.C.C. recognize that the Council must maintain working relationships with a wide variety of international ecumenical organizations, some of which are older than the W.C.C. itself. These include organizations representing particular constituencies - such as youth, students, women, lay people - and bodies and agencies with a

particular functional purpose or ministry in such fields as education, communication, resource-sharing and development. As organizations with an international scope and mandate, most of them understand themselves as carrying out a specialized ministry in response to the same ecumenical calling as the member churches of the W.C.C. Since 2006, both specialized ministries and agencies engaged in ecumenical Diaconal services and other international ecumenical organizations may apply for formal recognition by the W.C.C. according to the revised rule XVIII. Thus recognized, they are invited to send a delegated representative to the assembly.

In the latter context because of its currently strong ecumenical vocation, the Order of Saint Lazarus, which antedates significantly the W.C.C., could be considered as the first historical organization made up of lay and clerical members of different Christian denominations active in welfare and the charitable sector, but with a strong Christian character. The same may hold true for the Conference of European Churches (C.E.C.). In fact, C.E.C. maintains relationships with a number of Organizations in Partnership. These organizations are specialised church or ecumenical organizations with expertise in particular issues or areas. Collaboration with Organizations in Partnership helps C.E.C. respond to a broad range of societal and theological issues.

Direct relationships could, therefore, be established, on the basis of memoranda of understanding, with international associative ecclesiastical organizations such as the Union of Utrecht or the Union of Scranton (traditional Catholic groups), the International Lutheran Council or the Lutheran World Federation, or even with organizations representing diverse Anglican viewpoints. To this end, a useful hallway could be facilitated by the clergy members of the Order, each for their own denomination. In this regard, it suffices to recall that the current

Ecclesiastical Grand Prior is the Catholic Archbishop of one of the oldest, largest and prestigious Archiepiscopal Sees in the world, that of Monreale. In addition, the Order has a countless number of cardinals, archbishops, bishops and priests or pastors belonging to all Christian denominations. It is truly a case of recognizing the legitimacy and authority of the Order that is derived from the numerous and broad-based membership of representatives of the various Church denominations.

Further consideration should be made regarding the legitimacy of the Order of Saint Lazarus. We have already said that, for independent Orders, the category to which belongs the Order of Saint Lazarus, simply, for the allocation of a connotation of legitimacy, it is necessary that a sovereign subject recognizes the nature. The Order is formally recognized by various States, including Spain, Hungary and Croatia. Of particular importance is the recognition of the Order of Saint Lazarus by the reigning dynasty in Spain, since this is the legitimate heir to the deposed House of Orleans and thus holder of temporal protection law originally granted by the Holy See. The Lord Lyon King of Arms in Scotland, moreover, in 1967 confirmed in a matriculation to the Order the arms that it bore prior to 1672. This recognizes the Order as the continuation of the original Order of Saint Lazarus: the Lord Lyon King of Arms is not a private individual, but a public authority of the United Kingdom, and its acts are an expression of the sovereignty of the state power. It follows that the United Kingdom itself recognizes the legitimacy and historical continuity of the Order of Saint Lazarus.