



GRAND MAGISTERIUM – VATICAN
EQUESTRIAN ORDER OF
THE HOLY SEPULCHRE OF JERUSALEM

At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

The “virtual” Spring Meeting of the Grand Magisterium



The Spring meeting of the Grand Magisterium, the first to be chaired by the new Grand Master, His Eminence Cardinal Fernando Filoni, should have taken place on April 21-22, with its customary pattern and agenda. As in the past, the two-day working session would have started with a Holy Mass in Palazzo della Rovere. The meetings would have taken place in the building of the Pontifical Council for Culture, with simultaneous translation in Italian, French and English; after the meetings and during the working luncheons the members of the Grand Magisterium would have exchanged informal opinions and evaluations.

Circumstances linked to the coronavirus pandemic have forced us to change all this. Since meetings in person were impossible, we met virtually. It was deemed advisable to keep the traditional agenda and each speaker was asked to send the text of his intervention by April 21. The following days were left to comments and remarks. The meeting therefore took place at distance, in accordance with the current provisions, but has however revealed a number of advantages. First of all, the interventions that in the past were recorded by the secretariat, and sometimes simply delivered of the cuff, are now available with specific and thought-over texts, in their original form, providing useful documentation that can be easily circulated. Furthermore, our virtual meeting has drastically reduced the costs in travel and accommodation costs for participants, for simultaneous translation and rental of space, which in a time of funding shortages, and of the need to convey every possible resource to the Holy Land, makes a difference.

The warmth of a direct meeting was of course lacking, all the more sadly in the light of the change of our Grand Master, who would have wished, attending the meeting for the first time, to personally get to know the confrères entrusted with the strategic direction of the activities of the Order, to reach a deeper communication, to listen to their evaluations, and offer them encouragement with his own reflections.

Certainly the next meeting of the Grand Magisterium, hopefully in the coming Autumn, will afford the opportunity to allow for this aspect and – according to the intentions of the Grand Master – should even be extended over three days, in order to allow the direct and deeper discussion which was not possible this time.

In the various written contributions, beginning with the initial welcome address by the Grand Master, the wish for a productive meeting in the Autumn was expressed. Preparation for the meeting should include the submission of written proposals by each member, in the belief that the Grand Magisterium should have a more active role in determining the Order's future strategies.

I then intervened, in my capacity of Governor General, summing up the Order's activities over the last six months, underlining both its dynamic and correct management, at a time when our normative framework is under review in the new Statute, and the awaited restructuring of Palazzo della Rovere is under way.

The presentation given by the Apostolic Administrator, Msgr. Pierbattista Pizzaballa deserves particular mention. He provided a clear analysis of the situation in the Holy Land, in terms of the current health crisis and political problems (with specific criticism of the American Peace Plan). He also outlined measures taken to cover the debts of the Patriarchate.

In the same line the Chief Executive Officer of the Patriarchate, Dr. Sami El-Yousef presented the administrative data and those concerning the running of the schools in a detailed report. The report revealed how, even under the current circumstances and also thanks to the Order's support, the Patriarchate is able to guarantee the wages of 1850 employees and over 100 ecclesiastics as well as financial aid to a number of Christian families left without an income because of the pandemic, and to face the difficulties of virtual schooling being offered to children online.

The Assessor, Msgr. Tommaso Caputo, focused on the ongoing review of the Statute, a task he was entrusted with at the beginning of his mandate and which he has pursued with notable energy. The review is being carried out in close contact with the Cardinal Grand Master, and the process will resume once the restrictions imposed by the coronavirus are lifted allowing for the final series of meetings with the Secretariat of State.

The enhanced role in terms of coordination and support taken on by the four Vice Governors was evident in their respective reports.

The Vice Governor General for Asia and the Pacific, Paul Bartley, expressed inevitable regret for the forced cancellation of the visit by Cardinal O'Brien which had been planned for January last, due to his replacement. He also spoke of the vitality of the Order in his area, namely in Malaysia, Philippines and New Zealand.

Thomas Pogge, Vice Governor General for Northern America, reported on the effort undertaken in this area to spread the message of the Order in the best possible way and to promote pilgrimages to the Holy Land. It will be impossible to hold the area meeting planned in Los Angeles for June. This will instead be replaced by a video conference in an attempt to be equally effective and open as in the past meetings of these Lieutenancies.

The problems of the European Lieutenancies were outlined by Vice Governor General Jean-Pierre de Glutz Ruchti who has, when needed, acted as deputy participating in meetings and Investitures representing the Governor General when I could not attend, carrying out important missions in countries such as Ireland and Poland, bringing them the support and closeness of the Grand Magisterium.

The report by Enric Mas, the newly appointed Vice Governor General for Latin America, was particularly interesting: his missions in Mexico, Brazil, Argentina and in other countries of Central America, his contacts with other very active Lieutenancies, such as Colombia, and his plans to expand in the Latin American continent – in close coordination with the Vatican Secretariat of State – form one of the most important and innovative aspects of recent months.

The budget of the Order, submitted by the Treasurer, Dr. Saverio Petrillo, illustrated a correct and well-balanced management and an increasing allocation of funds to the Holy Land. The budget shows a surplus of 6,853.60 Euros, achieved thanks to the contributions from the Lieutenancies, amounting to 14,743,685.77 Euros, with an increase of 1,461,190.67 Euros from the previous budget. We have therefore been able to send 14,106,087.34 Euros to the Holy Land, 1,805,125.76 Euros more than in 2018.

Dr. Petrillo, in his capacity as chairman of the Economic-Financial Commission, briefly reported on the management of the Order's resources and on the criteria of their investment.

Ambassador Alfredo Bastianelli, as Chancellor, has provided the statistical figures of the Order, confirming roughly a membership around 30.000 units. He singled out the efforts of some Lieutenancies in encouraging the participation of young people in the Order's activities, a subject which is particularly dear to the Grand Master.

In his second report, as chairman of the Commission for the Review of the protocol rules, Ambassador Bastianelli described the changes introduced, on the initiative of Cardinal Filoni, in the liturgy of the Investiture ceremonies, changes that conform to a greater spiritual sensibility, which is also deeply felt by the Holy Father.

The team work of the Grand Magisterium was underscored by the reports of the other commissions set up by the Grand Master to support the task of the Governor General.

The work of the Juridical Commission is particularly relevant as outlined by its chairman, Flavio Rondinini J.D, and focused mainly on comparing the statutes of the various Lieutenancies as well as sensitive issues such as disciplinary measures and tax benefits.

The vital contribution of the Spiritual Commission, chaired by the Master of Ceremonies, Msgr. Fortunato Frezza, was greatly appreciated. The report dwelt on complying with the reflections introduced by the Grand Master on the training of candidates, the rationalization of liturgical ceremonies, the enhancement of the spiritual commitment also through an increased attendance to parish activities, participations in pilgrimages, as well as on the role of ecclesiastics acting as chaplains.

The report from the International Commission for Palazzo della Rovere, chaired by Vice Governor General Jean-Pierre de Glutz Ruchti, was of a more technical nature. The Vice Governor has the delicate task of counseling the Grand Master on all of the activities involving the repossession, clearance, restoration, ensuring compliance with health and safety standards, consolidating and renovating the premises of the palace to be used as hotel, and in the choice of the future tenant.

The report by the president of the Holy Land Commission, Professor Bartholomew McGettrick, was also very detailed in view of the missions carried out to follow the projects of the Patriarchate, the management of the schools and seminaries, the outcome of pastoral activities and the effectiveness of humanitarian aid.

Finally the Lieutenant General, Prof. Agostino Borromeo, submitted two reports: the first in his capacity as chairman of the Commission for the Third International Pilgrimage of the Order to Lourdes, planned for June 2021, where the preparations that he is overseeing are described in detail; the second in his capacity as Chairman of the Commission for the Consulta 2018, updating the Grand Magisterium on the work to draft the final document, which is also awaiting the approval of the new Statute.

The reports to the Grand Magisterium ended with the contributions of the persons in charge of two offices working in close coordination on the information about the Order and on the promotion of its image and fundraising: the Communications Service and the Office for External Relations.

Dr. François Vayne, in charge of the former, reported on the various communication initiatives in progress, such as the "Grand Master's Corner" on the website, the videos, the plan for a documentary on the presence of the Order in the Holy Land, the interviews with television and in the press.

Dr. Marcella Scotto di Vettimo, responsible for external relations, described the different activities carried out in 2019 at Palazzo della Rovere, aimed at boosting the Order's visibility and encouraging fundraising for its charitable activities.

In short we can safely assume that the Coronavirus emergency has not interrupted the activities of the Grand Magisterium. On the contrary, it has stimulated its commitment: the results of the virtual meeting, translated in different languages, will provide the Lieutenancies with subjects for reflections and encouragement for the future and with useful references and incentives for Knights, Dames and Ecclesiastics belonging to the Order worldwide, to the benefit of their charitable activities in the Holy Land and the support for the Christians who live there.

Leonardo Visconti di Modrone

Governor General

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