

**Bishop Auxentios  
of Photiki**

# THE PASCHAL FIRE IN JERUSALEM



Photograph courtesy of the Harvard University Art Museums

**Foreword by  
Archbishop Chrysostomos**

SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM PRESS

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BISHOP AUXENTIOS OF PHOTIKI

**THE PASCHAL FIRE  
IN JERUSALEM**

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**A Study of the Rite of the Holy  
Fire in the Church of the  
Holy Sepulchre**

Third Edition



With a Foreword by  
Archbishop Chrysostomos of Etna  
and the Saint Gregory Palamas Monastery

SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM PRESS

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## FOREWORD

The Christian East and the Christian West are separated by centuries of mutual distrust and honest disagreements over some very basic matters of theological, ecclesiological, and spiritual moment. In this age of ecumenism, manifold efforts have been made to dismiss as inconsequential this tragic estrangement, which has nonetheless marked all of the free and uncoerced historical exchanges between the Orthodox Church and Roman Catholicism, especially, in the past centuries. Too often these efforts have fostered polite exchange for the sake of superficial and premature proclamations of unity and at the cost of leaving unresolved and unacknowledged the profound issues that separate the Orthodox East from the Western Christian confessions. It has long been the argument of more circumspect Orthodox Churchmen, at least, that reconciliation between the Orthodox Church and the Latin Catholic West and its Protestant scions can best be accomplished by a return to the pre-Schism commonality of Christian experience which the Orthodox Church believes that it embodies: to a commonality of belief and practice which entails not the statements of compromise put forth by the failed union councils of the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries and Orthodox-Protestant dialogues over the past two centuries or so, but which demands careful study of the past and a frank acknowledgement of persistent areas of disagreement and debate. Only then will dialogue reflect the truth, as it must, and not the rubrics of diplomatic interchange.

Bishop Auxentios, in his excellent and comprehensive study of the rite of the Holy Fire in the Church of Jerusalem, paves the way for this kind of mutual understanding. In the phenomenon of the Holy Fire we have a remarkable artifact that dates back to the undivided Church of the Roman (Byzantine) Empire, the one Church of Old and New Rome. The history of the rite provides us with glimpses into the sad effects of the Great Schism, which

drew the Christian West away from a pious commemoration of the Resurrection of Christ that is today an Orthodox rite *par excellence*, but which is also very much a legacy of the Orthodox roots of the Christian West. This common heritage is lost in the polemical attitude that now leads most Latin Catholics and Protestants to disregard the fascinating ceremony as a hoax or a fraud and which, ironically enough, has also led even some Eastern Christians to shun it as “pious legerdemain” because of its supposed “Latin origins.”

Bishop Auxentios’ account of the rite of the Holy Fire thus reveals both the tragedy of the Great Schism and the complexity of its consequences, a complexity which once more tells us that, in order to achieve Christian unity in the future, we must address the past with care, acumen, and the humility to submit to the majesty of that undivided Christian witness which shines forth in the Orthodox Faith with the same quiet but illuminating Fire of the Resurrection that descends yearly on the Tomb of Christ in Jerusalem. His Grace’s book is a pivotal contribution to the kind of studies that will ultimately accommodate such a future, a future so longed for by all sincere Christians and so ill-served by the relativistic superficiality of the contemporary ecumenical movement.

*Archbishop Chrysostomos of Etna and  
the Saint Gregory Palamas Monastery  
Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies  
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# THE PASCHAL FIRE IN JERUSALEM

by BISHOP AUXENTIOS OF PHOTIKI

“I had heard about the Holy Fire and was, when I made my trip to Jerusalem for Pascha, not disbelieving. I found the idea that such a phenomenon existed interesting, and I wanted to see it for myself. What I saw *was* interesting. ...The Church was crowded beyond description. Before the manifestation of the Holy Fire, the Arabs created a tremendous scene, proclaiming the correctness of their Faith and running here and there through the Church.... Then the Holy Fire was brought out by the Patriarch. During this time, I could see what appeared to be flashes of blue-colored light bouncing off the walls of the dome of the Church and through the galleries. There was an electric quality to the air, almost like static electricity.”

*Dr. Eugene Zavarin  
Professor of Chemistry (Retired)  
Wood Products Laboratory  
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The Right Reverend Dr. Auxentios is Titular Bishop of Photiki and serves the American Exarchate of the Synod of Old Calendar Greek Orthodox Bishops under Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Fili. He completed his B.A. degree in Religion at Princeton University, where he studied with the late Protoperbyter Georges Florovsky, and the Licentiate in Orthodox Theological Studies from the Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, which he now directs. His Grace received his doctorate in liturgical theology in 1992 from the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley.

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