

Metropolitan Cleopas' Speech at the Christian Council of Norway
Oslo, March 28, 2015

Your Excellency,
V. Reverend and Reverend Fathers,
Dearly Beloved all of you,

It is with great joy that I accepted the invitation to participate in today's gathering. Being that I am new to this country, having assumed archpastoral duties in the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Sweden and All Scandinavia only a few short months ago, on June 14th, I am especially happy to be among you all and share in this gathering with you for the first time.

I do not come here today primarily in the capacity of a prelate of the Church per se, but rather, as a fellow brother in Christ. And setting aside purely theological discourse for this particular gathering, I have instead chosen to convey to you my grave concern for the future of all Christianity. Regardless of denomination, we are now witnessing the brutal and merciless persecution of the Christian Church, without any just cause, and without any acts of provocation having been exhibited on its part.

Our Church is witnessing members of its faithful being crucified because of their professed faith in the Resurrected Savior; our Church is looking on in horror as its flock is once again being led to slaughter nearly 2,000 later by modern-day Neros and Trajans who are beheading them and watering the arid and barren land of their spiritual desert with the blood of neo-martyrs; our Church is enduring the destruction and desecration of its holy temples; our Church is weeping for the enslavement of its members, the abduction of its clerics, the defiling of its sons and daughters; our Church is witnessing history repeat itself as yet another Christian genocide takes place at the start of the 21st century, as it did in the 20th century, which the Swedish Parliament has recognized for our Armenian brothers, and will hopefully do for the other ethnicities who suffered genocide in Anatolia as well, like the Greeks and Assyrians.

Despite these inhuman onslaughts, the Christian Church's hopes are not dashed, but strengthened by the indomitable belief that as Christ Himself was scourged and crucified, so too will we experience the Resurrection, as Christ Himself trampled down death by death and was Resurrected.

Now, my question to all of you here tonight is this: What is our position towards our brothers and sisters who are facing persecution? Should we, at present, direct our attention to those matters that separate us, or should we focus on what unites us as members of the Body of Christ, His Holy Church?

More so now than ever before, in an era when the persecution against Christianity is growing at an inestimable pace all across the world, let us unite our prayers and voices, and let us make our presence known. And let this presence not be characterized by silence and tolerance of the genocide now taking place, but rather, by our dynamic presence, where we shall offer a resounding response in unison, with a voice of truth, boldness, courage, solidarity, and crystal clear decisiveness, opposing those who do not revere man as God's creation, who do not respect and honor the sanctity of human life, who do not uphold human dignity, and who do not respect the freedom of religion. We must direct our energy and attention to that which unites us, not that which separates us. Our modern era does not afford us the luxury of introspection and remaining self-centered. On the contrary, it demands the systematic promotion and propagation of a collective effort, wherein we can express ourselves in unison as the Body of Christ.

In addition to safeguarding the fate of Christian people all across the planet, now is the time to embark on joint initiatives to protect and preserve the environment, sensitize the God-fearing people of the world to matters of faith and spiritual discovery, modern social issues, the common hope of engaging our young people in the affairs of the church, our joint organization and participation in panel discussions and conferences, all of which should be aimed at sending a strong message of solidarity and collaboration among us.

As I mentioned at the beginning of my speech, I am new to this country, and in that sense, I have much to learn from your invaluable experience and esteemed counsel. At the same time, I bring with me my pastoral experience from my ministry in Greece, Great Britain, and, most recently, the United States, which I hope to share with you in fruitful dialogue.

The needs of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Sweden are many. In my few months here, interacting with our faithful, who number close to 30,000, in Norway, Sweden and Denmark, I have discerned a deep thirst for spiritual and communal progress. We are badly lacking clergymen, parishes, and vital ministries. Our financial resources are meager and our outreach was extremely limited. With God's help, all of this is going to change for the better.

Reflecting the will of the local faithful and the desire of our Mother Church, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, our Metropolis will be embarking on major outreach campaigns to engage not only the members of our ethnic communities and indigenous converts, but also to work closely together inter-denominationally with our beloved Christian brethren for the common good of this country, this society, our churches, and the glorification of Christ's holy name.

I am not ashamed to admit that in considering the magnitude of the task that has been entrusted to me, there are moments when I feel overwhelmed and am tempted by the weight that I have been asked to bear. But it is then that I draw strength from the exemplary courage and bravery of our Christian brethren who are facing adversity similar to the martyrs of the early Church and I thank God for this liberty-loving and tolerant land that we live in, praying for the guidance, blessings, and strength to help those less fortunate than ourselves.

Concluding my greeting to you, I express my genuine pleasure in meeting you all and my ardent desire to collaborate with you as closely and dynamically as I possibly can. I ask for your prayers in my new ministry and I thank you beforehand for any advice and support that our loving God would inspire you to offer. I am very happy to introduce to you our new Presiding Priest at the Annunciation Church in Oslo, the Very Reverend Archimandrite Alexander Loukatos.

My gratitude to Reverend Fr. Knut for his hospitality and to all of you for attending this beautiful gathering. Have a blessed Easter! Thank you.