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Metropolitan Cleopas of Sweden Participates in Orthodox Christian Worship Services with the Skolt Sámi People



STOCKHOLM – His Eminence Metropolitan Cleopas of Sweden and All Scandinavia visited the cities of Sevettijärvi, Finland and Kirkenes, Norway from Wednesday, August 21st, through Monday, August 26, 2024, to represent His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, as a participant in the 75th anniversary ceremonies for the remembrance of the resettlement of the Skolt Sámi people in the areas of Sevettijärvi, Keväjärvi and Nellim following World War II.

The Skolt Sámi are the sole recognized Orthodox Christian indigenous population in the European Union. They received official recognition under this status by virtue of the Finnish Constitution in 1995.

Metropolitan Cleopas traveled to Helsinki on Wednesday, August 21, and met with His Eminence Archbishop Leo of Helsinki and All Finland the next morning at the airport. Subsequently, the two prelates flew to the city of Ivalo and then drove to the city of Inari, following a luncheon at the Kultahippu Hotel.
Archbishop Leo was accompanied by his Archdeacon Rev. Andreas Salminen and his Theological Secretary Dr. Jelisei Heikkilä.

That evening, the aforementioned dined at the Wilderness Hotel Inari, where they were also joined by the parish priest of the Rovaniemi region Rev. Protopresbyter Fr. Jaakko Vainio, the retired priest Rev. Protopresbyter Fr. Rauno Pietarinen, and the head of the Skolt Sámi people Mr. Veikko Feodoroff.

Archbishop Leo offered Metropolitan Cleopas and Mr. Feodoroff a copy of the commemorative album “A Century of Union,” published by the Holy Archdiocese of Finland for the celebration of the centennial anniversary of the granting of autonomy to the Archdiocese by the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which was commemorated from September 8-12, 2023, with the Ecumenical Patriarchate presiding over the ceremonies.

Metropolitan Cleopas thanked Archbishop Leo and offered him a replica of an Athenian tomb effigy from the exhibition gallery of the New Acropolis Museum, along with his recently published study from the Apostoliki Diakonia of the Church of Greece entitled The Missionary Ministry of Archimandrite Eusevios Vittis in Scandinavia 1965-1980.

The next morning, Friday, Augusu 23, the prelates and their entourage visited the Parliament of the Sámi people, where they were received by the Speaker Ms. Pirita Näkkäläjärvi, who offered a luncheon in their honor at the Čaiju restaurant and provided them with a tour of the Parliament. The Sámi Parliament is their supreme political body in Finland and represents them nationally and internationally.

Ms.Näkkäläjärvi informed the visiting hierarchs that the Sámi Community includes a population of approximately 100,000, with 50,000 living in Norway, 30,000 living in Sweden, 12,000 living in Finland, and 2,000 living in Russia.

Metropolitan Cleopas conveyed the heartfelt blessings of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and briefed the Speaker of the Parliament about the “green patriarch’s” international initiatives regarding the protection of the environment.

Afterwards, the visitors were given a tour of the “Sámi Museum and Nature Center SIIDA” by its Curator Ms. Taina Máret Pieski.

They subsequently trveled to the city of Sevettijärvi, where the Akathist Hymn in honor of St. Tychon of Pechenga was celebrated at the local Orthodox Christian church.

The service was followed by a show presented by local students in the auditorium of their school.

The service was celebrated by the clergymen from the Holy Archdiocese of Finland Rev. Protopresbyters Frs. Marko Patronen, Jaakko Vainio, Phocas (Tuukka) Rantanen, and Theodore (Heikki) Harvola. It was attended by 100 faithful, who traveled from the Finnish cities of Cuopio and Oulu.

The hymns for all the services that were held were chanted in Finnish, Greek, and Sámi by a ten-member choir led by Presvytera Disa Piispa-Harvola.

That evening, the visitors traveled by car from the city of Sevettijärvi to the city of Kirkenes in Norway, where they spent the night.

The next morning, Saturday, August 24, the aforementioned visited the memorial where they remains of the Orthodox Christian members of the Skolt Sámi Community are housed, while a memorial service was conducted by the Rev. Protopresbyter Fr. Jaakko Vainio and the Rev. Deacon Fr. Artturi Hirvonen.

Aftewards, after the faithful made a procession to the historic St. George Chapel, His Eminence Metropolitan Elias of Oulu conducted the blessing of the waters of the Nhávdánjohka River, aided by the aforementioned clergymen.

A tour of the Ä´vv Skolt Sámi Museum by its Curator Ms. Hanna-Maaria Kiprianoff followed, along with the presentation of a musical program featuring traditional songs in the Sámi language and a luncheon at the Sanila reindeer Ranch restaurant.

That same afternoon, the visiting prelates traveled to the city of Keväjärvi, where Metropolitan Cleopas presided in chorostasia over the service honoring all the saints in Lapland, which was held at the Sts. Boris and Glebs Chapel, assisted by the aforementioned clergymen of the Holy Archdiocese of Finland.

Afterwards, all the participants in this pilgrimage traveled by car to the city of Nellim, where they dined and spent the night, following the celebration of the holy services of Vespers and Matins according to the Slavonic rite at the Church of the

Holy Trinity and St. Tryphon, which was presided over by Metropolitan Elias of Oulu, along with Frs. Marko Patronen, Jaakko Vainio, Tuukka Rantanen, Heikki Harvola, and Deacon Artturi Hirvonen.

The next morning, Sunday, August 25, an archieratical Divine Liturgy was concelebrated, with Metropolitan Cleopas presiding, and aided by Metropoltan Elias of Oulu and Bishop Sergei of Hamina, along with the clergymen of the Holy Archdiocese of Finland Frs. Marko Patronen, Sulo Naakka, Olavi Matsi, Jaakko Vainio, Tuukka Rantanen, Heikki Harvola, and Deacons Andreas Salminen, Artturi Hirvonen, and Erkki Lumisalmi. Archbishop Leo was also on hand in the Holy Sanctuary.

Fr. Tuukka Rantanen is the sole clergyman of the Holy Archdiocese of Finland who hails from the local Skolt Sámi Community.

Immediately following the Holy Gospel, Metropolitan Elias of Oulu delivered a sermon, while Archbishop Leo spoke to the large congregation at the end of the Divine Liturgy, emphasizing the ongoing impact of the resettlement of the Skolt Sámi people on their culture and language, and stressing their Community's connection with nature, as well as their leading role in the preservation of the environment. He also drew a parallel between the harmonious relationship of the Skolt Sámi with nature and the Orthodox Christian teaching regarding the creation of the world.

"Think of the world as a giant cathedral. What is our role in this sacred place? We are servants and intermediaries. Our duty is to sanctify creation and offer it up back to God as a blessing. This is the greater purpose of sacrifice, the center of all our prayers and liturgical actions. God blesses creations and returns it to us so that we may also be blessed," he noted.

Archbishop Leo also spoke about the Skolt Sámi worldview, explaining that "from the Skolt Sámi perspective, man, nature, and language are not separate from each other.

Their language resembles poetry, which paints a gentle picture of the miracles of nature. Their crafts and artfiacts reveal humanity's coexistence with nature, and they change their place of residence depending on the season, following the migration of the fish and reindeer. All this represents more than just a relationship based on survival; it reveals an entire worldview."

A luncheon was subsequently held at the Wilderness Nellim hotel, along with a celebration on the hotel exterior grounds featuring traditional music and dancing.

The even was co-organized by the Orthodox Christian parish in Lapland, the Skolt Sámi Siida administrative body, the Skolt Sámi Cultural Foundation, the Ä'vv Skolt Sámi Musueum, and local sponsoors, while state and government representatives from the greater Helsinki area were also on hand.

Following the greeting offered by the leader of the Skolt Sámi. Mr. Veikko Feodoroff and the representative of the Finnish Government Mr. Pekka Pesonen, the Patriarchal Representative Metropolitan Cleopas addressed the audience, highlighting the significance of the Skolt Sámi presence in the Eastern Orthodox Church for over four centuries and conveying the congratulations and greetings of Ecumencal Patriarch Bartholomew on the occassion of the 75th anniversary of the resettlement of the Skolt Sámi. In his address, Metropolitan Cleopas noted the following:

"We celebrate the resilience, culture, and faith of the Skolt Sámi, who have been united with us in our common Orthodox Christian faith since the 16th century, following the missionary ministry of St. Tryphon of Pechenga, the sweet fruits of whose spiritual toils and labors we continue to savor until today.

The commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the resettlement of this unique ethnic group is important because it enriches the local Church, authentically celebrating the presence of native minority groups in the life of the Church and engaging them, while also highlighting the lasting importance of work in spreading the testimony to Christ and "good news" across the world.

In carrying on this ancient command given by the Lord, we also celebrate two characteristics of our holy Church – its apostolic and catholic nature. Our ministry is apostolic because it follows in the example of the Holy Apostles, who went out into the four corners of the ecumene to spread the good word of Christ's Gospel.

Likewise, it is catholic, because it is directed to all and makes no distinction between majority and minority ethnic groups and languages, but rather, endeavors to spread Christ's teachings and bear witness to Him in the midst of all the people, so that all may participate in the unity of the faith, just as St. Paul explained: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

Therefore, the presence of the Skolt Sámi people in the Orthodox Christian Church, with whom we have shared the same baptismal font for over 400 years, since their illumination and embrace of the Christian faith in the 17th century, is a remarkable occasion.

This same faith has also blessed them with the courage and endurance to bear the crosses that this ephemeral life has in store for each of us, as we strive and struggle to attain the laurel crown that Christ awaits to bestow upon us.

The ethnic, political, social, and climatic changes that occur on the international, national, and regional level, often impact the smallest and most vulnerable, in a disproportionate manner. The most innocent often bear the burden for the decisions of their leaders and rulers. Often times, this translates into forced relocation, uprooting, sometimes even acts of violence designed to erase the historical presence of a group of people.

As Christians, we are no strangers to this cross. In fact, no sooner did our Lord make His miraculous entrance into human history through His Nativity according to the flesh, than He was forced to flee Bethlehem and seek refuge in Egypt.

Our Mother Church and Venerable Center of Orthodoxy, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, is also no stranger to this harsh reality. In the 20th century alone, it lost significant portions of its flock during the events leading up to the Asia Minor Catastrophe, over the first quarter of the 20th century.

Similar violent acts targeting its flock also led to the expulsion and mass exodus of much of its remaining flock who trace their historical presence in those lands since antiquity. However, as Christ Himself reveals to the Apostle of the Nations St. Paul, his “power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9).

And while the faithful located in Asia Minor and other nearby areas bore this historic cross, the Mother Church of Constantinople saw its eparchies abroad, throughout Europe, the Americas, and Australia grow and prosper in a true testament to its ecumenical presence and nature.

Likewise, here in the northernmost part of Europe, it is a truly special blessing to commemorate and celebrate the resilience and faith of the Skolt Sámi people, who endured and overcame the historic challenges that they came across and prevailed.

Our gathering here today gives us occasion to glorify the Trinitarian God and praise His holy name, for “to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common

good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom … to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he will" (1 Cor. 12: 7-11).

Having sampled this sweet fruit of the Holy Spirit, I share in the joy of our Orthodox Christian brethren who are natives of the Skolt Sámi people, as we join in prayer, to give thanks to the Lord for blessing their resettlement and enabling them to retain their unique customs, heritage, and traditions, which have become organically grafted into our common liturgical life.

Conveying the heartfelt congratulations and paternal blessings of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew on this milestone, I pray that through the intercessions of the Holy Evangelists and Apostles, and our Most Glorious Lady the Theotokos, you may receive the just reward from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and proclaim the Gospel to the coming generations of the Skolt Sami people for many years to come, enjoying the abundant gifts of God."

In conclusion, in reference to the election of the new Archbishop of Helsinki and All Finland, which will take place this November, Metropolitan Cleopas prayed that "the Lord our God will reveal a worthy successor to His Eminence Archbishop Leo, to whom the Holy Metropolis of Sweden and All Scandinavia and my humility owe eternal gratitude for his wholehearted paternal support toward our Finnish parish in Stockholm named after St. Nicholas of Myra, to which he regularly sends his worthy and devoted clergymen to celebrate holy services."

At the conclusion of his speech, Metropolitan Cleopas presented Mr. Veikko Feodoroff and Ms. Hanna-Maaria Kiprianoff with commemorative gifts.

That same evening, Archbishop Leo and his entourage, accompanied by Metropolitan Cleopas, returned by car to the city of Nelim in Ivalo and subsequently flew from there to Helsinki.

The following day, Monday, August 26, Metropolitan Cleopas returned to his see in Stockholm, after previously expressing his deepest gratitude to Archbishop Leo and his coworkers for their generous hospitality.

Photo credit: Fr. Phocas (Tuukka) Rantanen, Protodeacon Andreas Salminen, Holy Metropolis of Sweden.

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