

At Council on Foreign Relations, Abp. Elpidophoros calls for dialogue over division



At a wide-ranging conversation at the Council on Foreign Relations today, His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America urged policymakers, religious leaders, and civil society to resist the temptation to push faith communities to the margins. Instead, he called for sustained dialogue between religion and the public sphere, warning that exclusion fosters alienation—and sometimes radicalization.

Ideally, His Eminence said, we “try to separate church from state” while still involving religious leaders and communities in dialogue. By doing so, we create understanding and empathy as opposed to marginalization.

Religious Freedom Beyond Worship

Interviewed by Frances Fragos Townsend, a CFR board member and former

homeland security adviser, Archbishop Elpidophoros outlined a robust view of religious liberty. True freedom, he argued, extends beyond the right to worship: “Religious freedom has to do with the education, the freedom to educate our clergy ... It is the freedom to, in public, demonstrate your faith,” he said, pointing to Türkiye as a country where restrictions on Orthodox seminaries remain unresolved. He added that faith markers—a cross worn at work, or a headscarf for Muslim women—must also be protected.

Against the Weaponization of Faith

Archbishop Elpidophoros pressed hard against the political exploitation of religion, noting that politicians in the United States and abroad frequently cherry-pick sacred teachings for partisan gain. He insisted that religious communities should be part of the discussion, but that “we should not weaponize religion.” Later, he added more bluntly: “Any attempt that weaponizes religion is a crime against religion. It’s not fair, because I don’t think there is any religion that ... in its core, supports violence and conflict.”

Grounded in an Ecumenical Legacy

His Eminence situated his message in the legacy of his spiritual leader, His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, who has cultivated interfaith relations for decades. From Istanbul—a city where Orthodoxy remains a small minority—His All-Holiness has advanced global conversations not just among Christian churches but with Judaism and Islam: “This is a very strong and powerful message to everyone,” the Archbishop said. “That this is the only way to live in peace in this world.”

Quiet Diplomacy in Volatile Regions

Speaking on volatile regions like Syria, Iraq, and Israel, he described the Ecumenical Patriarchate’s quiet but persistent advocacy. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, he noted, has raised Christian safety concerns directly with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, while maintaining coordination with the Vatican.

Climate Stewardship as Moral Imperative

Turning to climate change, he invoked Patriarch Bartholomew’s reputation as the “Green Patriarch,” framing environmental action in moral terms: “Whatever you do against this environment is a sin. Then I think your audience is taking it more seriously.” Still, he cautioned that a clean-energy transition cannot succeed if it remains a costly luxury: “We have to invest more ... to make the clean world

cheaper than the polluted world."

Technology at the Pulpit: Promise and Peril

In an exchange that underscored the growing reach of technology into religious life, the Archbishop acknowledged that priests are already experimenting with AI-written sermons. He welcomed innovation but drew a clear line: "If I don't understand the content of that, what's the value when AI does something like that for me?" he asked. Technology, he suggested, is always double-edged, like "a knife, the sword. You use it to kill people ... or you use it to share your food."

The challenge, he said, is ensuring AI "respects human thought, the human person, not to replace" it. He announced that the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America is planning a major conference at the end of next month on Theology and AI.

Dialogue as the Practical Path

At its core, Archbishop Elpidophoros's message was a plea for dialogue—not as an abstract value but as the only practical alternative to estrangement and violence: "If people think that their religious leaders are being heard, are being called as partners to a dialogue, then they feel accepted, they don't feel marginalized, and they really are easier to work with anybody else, live in peace with all the other people in a society," he said. In a time of sharpened cultural conflict, his argument landed as both warning and hope.

Watch the Council on Foreign Affairs conference [here](#).

Register for the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America's conference on AI and theology.

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