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Speech by Metropolitan Cleopas of Sweden: Completion of the Exterior Renovation of the St. George Cathedral of Stockholm



Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ,

This very moving spiritual occasion stands as an opportunity to sing praises to the Most High, since our Trinitarian God has shown us worthy to witness – through the eyes of our souls and bodies – the completion of the full exterior renovation of the St. George Cathedral in Stockholm.

Through the eyes of our soul, we witnessed the miraculous intervention of divine grace, which was perceptible to our intellect and senses, throughout the entire process of renovation.

Through my physical eyes, inspired by the 68th Psalm of David “for the zeal of your house has consumed me,” I was, on numerous occasions, shown worthy of climbing up to the highest point of the scaffolding, some 30 meters high, beginning this past August 15th, and touching, with my own hands, many parts of the church, the crosses, and its decorations, admiring its unique architecture from up close, while also, ascertaining, with great consternation, the evident signs of decay that it had sustained; the wounds that it bore over the 130 years that have passed since its construction.

Our Cathedral is neo-Gothic in style, with minimal lines along its interior, and its

cornerstone was laid in 1889. Construction was completed in 1890 and it was transferred to the Holy Metropolis of Sweden in 1976, during the tenure of my venerable predecessor His Eminence Metropolitan Pavlos.

This is the first time that a renovation of such scope and magnitude has ever been undertaken. By maintaining and repairing our Cathedral, we are contributing to society's spiritual need to learn about its past and connect it to its future. This project has to do with preserving the memory of a community and a people, and showcasing the material and spiritual work that this people created during a specific time and place in history.

The Cathedral is a spiritual point of reference, a place of reconciliation and coexistence in the multicultural society in which we live. It is a sacred place of prayer, contemplation, and dialogue – inter-Orthodox, interdenominational, and inter-religious dialogue – conducted within the framework of respect for otherness and diversity, which is compatible with the Hellenic Christian and universal ideals.

I consider it my duty to remind you that over the past five years, select isolated interventions have been undertaken in the church interior as well, including the formation of the *Museum of Hellenic Christian Heritage*, the library, three offices, smokeless candelabra, the installation of Byzantine chandeliers and two large veneration-stands, a wood-carved oblation table, showcase, and chairs inside the Holy Sanctuary, the beautification of the kitchen, small dining room, and church courtyard, the creation of a church entrance for persons with disabilities, the replacement of the church's four doors with new reinforced safety doors, as well as the installation of a door phone and security, fire, and alarm system.

These are the works of your hands, your labors, and the utilization of your gifts; your personal contribution and support for what we take pride in today. Together with you, our brothers and sisters from many parts of the world, who believe that the Church of Christ needs support, no matter where it is located, offered their dynamic assistance. Beloved fellow Hellenes from other countries contributed to our vision, supporting the Greece that exists outside of Greece! We thank them all and we offer them our gratitude for responding to our verbal requests, phone calls, proposals and letters, press releases and announcements, and the meetings that we had with them.

Above all, however, we believed in the power of prayer, our Sunday worship gatherings, the prayer rope, and noetic prayer. We called upon our Lord Jesus Christ, the Most Holy Theotokos, and our saints to successfully see through this historic initiative.

We hope and pray that we will soon continue with the renovation of our church's interior. I am certain that your prayers and dynamic support will greatly contribute to the achievement of our common effort. I thank you for entrusting me with the coordination of this historic undertaking.

Allow me to conclude my thoughts with an excerpt from the homily of His All-Holiness, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, last Wednesday at the Galata Civil School, during the presentation of the Album entitled «Σιωπή 206 δωματίων. Μελέτες για το Ορφανοτροφείο της Πριγκήπου» (The Silence of 206 Rooms. Studies on the Prinkipos Orphanage), which seeks to sensitize stakeholders, people, institutions, and forces to join in the effort to repair and restore this grand structure. I cite it here in order to sensitize and help raise consciousness about the responsibility that we bear all together and individually as members of our local Church and Greek Community, to actively participate in community affairs and not sit back as bystanders and onlookers.

“The monuments of the Greek Community, including the monumental architectural masterpiece of the Prinkipos Orphanage, constitute the history of our People, the authentic expression of our identity and culture, and follow our historical path.” “The history of the Prinkipos Orphanage reflects the path of the Greek Community during the tumultuous 20th century, the pinnacle and ‘dark years,’ the hopes, the suffering, and its debilitating dwindling.” “Indifference for this historic building, the preservation and maintenance of this structure, and the showcasing of the ideals that it embodies and expresses, constitutes the abandoning of the struggle for the future of Romanity in its natural and historic cradle, and is also tantamount to indifference for the preservation of the values that saved our People all throughout their historical path and constitute our unique personality.”

Metropolitan Cleopas of Sweden

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