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# **Speech by His Eminence Metropolitan Cleopas of Sweden at the School of Theology of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens**



“Salt of the Earth” Conference:  
Orthodoxy and Otherness in the Modern World

Topic: Missionary Work in the Northern Lands: An Empirical Perspective

Athens, November 3, 2022

Beloved Brethren in Christ,

It is with great joy that I received the invitation to participate in this webinar conference and have the opportunity to speak with you, but also to present the ministry and challenges facing the Holy Metropolis of Sweden and All Scandinavia, which I have been shepherding for eight-and-a-half years.

Allow me to begin by thanking the School of Theology of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, and Dr. Evi Voulgaraki-Pissina, the Editor-in-Chief of Salt, for their gracious invitation and enabling me to share my experiences, together with the unique challenges facing the Ecumenical Patriarchate’s northernmost eparchy, which encompasses the nations of Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Iceland.

Missionary work is likely best known for the evangelization of populations living in third-world countries and conditions of extreme poverty. However, the mission of the Church and its charge inherently extends to all peoples, irrespective of race, ethnicity, or financial status. This includes citizens and residents of “developed nations,” an increasing number of whom are unchurched or in search of Christ’s truth – either due to being raised in other faiths or denominations, which they eventually abandoned, or in a highly secularized environment hostile to the message of the Gospel. During this brief presentation, I will endeavor to provide a brief overview of the missionary outreach being undertaken by the local Church in Scandinavia over the past eight-and-a-half years to minister to the various populations of the Northern Lands.

Prior to my election by the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate,

at the proposal of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, I had spent twenty-two years serving as a clergyman in the Holy Archdiocese of America. As the Ecumenical Throne's largest eparchy, it possesses vast financial resources, over 500 parish communities, a plethora of institutions, and is by all accounts well organized and developed.

I was ordained to the episcopacy on May 21st - the feast day of Sts. Constantine and Helen, and as I look back upon the choice of this date, I realize that Divine Providence and the wisdom of our venerable Patriarch were at work here. These saints, hailed as equals-to-the-Apostles by our Church, are synonymous with the Holy Cross. St. Constantine the Great famously saw a vision of the Holy Cross together with the words "in this sign conquer" ahead of his triumph in the Battle of the Milvian Bridge - which also took place on October 28th! - setting the stage for him to become sole ruler of the Roman Empire. His mother St. Helen later traveled to Jerusalem and led the excavations that resulted in the discovery and universal exaltation of the Holy Cross.

I often think about this and the role of the Holy Cross in my ministry and the life of the Church. St. Nectarios of Pentapolis, who served as the subject of my doctoral dissertation and who inspired most of my publications, famously coined the saying: "Σταυρός, ἡ μερὶς τοῦ βίου μου," which roughly translates to "The Cross, a part of my life." It is this understanding of the Cross as a "weapon of peace; an invincible trophy" with which I armed myself as I prepared to undertake a ministry in a land that was foreign to me, with many unknown circumstances.

The limitations of the human senses cannot interpret the mystery of the God-man's sacrifice on the Cross, just as they cannot comprehend His kenosis or self-emptying, and His humility. Therefore, this singular event of Divine condescension and love can be experienced in no other way than through awe and joy. Awe and joy reveal the deeper meaning of the Cross, which symbolizes the concept of χαρμολύπη, which can be loosely translated to mean sweet sorrow or happiness intermingled with sadness. It refers to the spiritual condition that reflects or should reflect the permanent ethos of the Orthodox Christian mentality and Orthodox Christian truth. Let us not forget that the Cross holds a prominent position in the life and faith of Orthodox Christians, and hence best describes the missionary experience.

St. Silouan would say that the Cross of the Lord grants hope and the ability to overcome the hell of failure, because it opens up prospects for us to observe life and experience it, overcoming hell and Hades. In our daily struggle to spread the Gospel, let the Lord's words ring clearly and triumphantly: "In the world you shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Besides, we must not forget that even the simplest faithful Christian expresses the

experience of χαρμολύπη through the sign of the Cross.

It was with this truth in mind that I assumed my charge on June 14, 2014. My arrival in Stockholm reminded me of Charles Dickens' classic novel A Tale of Two Cities. I had left the fruitful vineyard of America, which enjoyed all of God's good blessings in abundance, and arriving to a region that - despite boasting a high GDP, economic development, and many social benefits - was severely underdeveloped in terms of its ecclesiastical infrastructure and being weather-beaten by the winds of a highly secularized society.

By the Grace of God, in the time that has passed since then, many efforts have been undertaken and by the Grace of God, a good number of projects have been realized or are currently underway. However, I will provide you with some facts to give you a better understanding of the many deficiencies and privations our local Church experienced and the concerted effort to re-evangelize Scandinavian society. Over the past eight years, the Holy Metropolis has added ten (10) new clergymen to its ranks, raising the present number to eleven (11), inasmuch as only one (1) clergyman was serving in the entire Metropolis prior to my arrival. Over that same period, along with the existing six (6) parishes, ten (10) new ecclesiastical communities were established: five (5) in Sweden - St. Cleopas the Apostle in Kalmar, The Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple in Borås, Sts. Constantine and Helen in Jönköping, the Transfiguration of Christ in Överkalix, and the St. Nicholas Hermitage in Rättvik; three (3) in Norway - St. Nectarios of Pentapolis in Stavanger, St. Chrysostomos of Smyrna the Holy Ethnomartyr in Bergen, and St. Gerasimos of Cephalonia in Trondheim; one (1) in Denmark - St. Georgios of Ioannina the New Martyr in Roskilde; and one (1) in Iceland - St. Bartholomew the Apostle in Reykjavík.

The establishment of new parishes all throughout Scandinavia was a major priority, because there were Orthodox Christian faithful living in remote areas, as well as large cities, that were underserved and unchurched. Thanks to the continued establishment of new parishes, the Orthodox Christian witness is spreading throughout the entire region, while local enclaves of Orthodox Christians have an opportunity to attend church regularly. This is the cornerstone of our ministry.

In April 2018, the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom was published in Greek, English, and Swedish for the first time. The necessity of this initiative arose as a result of native Swedish speakers' - especially young people's - need to understand the Divine Liturgy. A large number of faithful from this demographic come from mixed marriages and their comprehension level of liturgical texts is limited, resulting in an inability to fully comprehend the richness of our tradition of worship.

As an eparchy of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, we are called to spiritually serve not

only our Greek Orthodox brethren, but also all those who – out of zeal or interest – wish to learn more about the ministry of the Holy Metropolis, regardless of their religious, national, and social background. This is why the Holy Metropolis of Sweden’s ministry and pastoral work is missionary in nature and directed to “all the nations.” (Matthew 28:19). This is another feature of our missionary work. The Greek language is revered and plays a leading role in our liturgical life, but the local languages of all 4 nations are also included in attempt to facilitate outreach and minister to an increasingly heterogeneous congregation.

Our outreach efforts and Orthodox testimony have yielded fruits. From June 2014 until now, following the corresponding spiritual preparation and catechesis, the Holy Metropolis of Sweden has welcomed over 170 new members into the faith, via adult baptisms or the service of Chrismation for heterodox. Through our extroversion and social consciousness, the Holy Metropolis actively invites people from all walks of life in the present-day multicultural Scandinavian reality to “come and see,” as Philip told Nathanael.

Another feature of our missionary approach is extending the liturgical experience to other aspects of our communal existence. From June 2014 until today, Sunday Schools, Ladies Philoptochos Society chapters, youth groups, and the Holy Metropolis’ radio station have been established, while lessons in iconography, Byzantine music, and cooking are being offered. These are some of our communal activities aimed at promoting social inclusion and extending the sense of belonging for our parishioners.

Newly arriving brethren from Greece represent a steady part of our local Church’s weekly pastoral ministry, with the Holy Metropolis putting forth an organized effort to help them find housing and work at the earliest possible, thus facilitating their integration into local society. We are currently extending similar efforts to aid refugees arriving from war-torn Ukraine and other areas of the world.

The efforts of the Holy Metropolis during this same period include the adoption of administrative measures (i.e., increase in office hours from three (3) hours per week to a full eight-hour day, Monday through Friday), and regular archpastoral visits throughout the entire realm of the Holy Metropolis. It is important for parishioners and visitors to know that they can come into contact directly with Metropolis personnel in real time.

Since this webinar is being hosted by the University of Athens, let me take this opportunity to commemorate a great citizen of Athens, the orator Demosthenes, who famously said in his First Olynthiac speech that “we need money, for sure, Athenians, and without money nothing can be done that ought to be done.” This reality holds true today, nearly two-and-a-half millennia later, and that is why fundraising is such an essential component of missionary work. I personally

spearhead fundraising efforts to ensure: a) the smooth operation of the Holy Metropolis and its parishes, b) the renovation of its churches, c) the modernization of our technologies, d) the upgrading and development of our facilities to showcase the Hellenic Christian heritage.

Until today, three concerts, as well as several day conferences and speeches of a religious and cultural nature, receptions and lunches, and four instructional conferences for clergymen and prospective clergymen have been organized.

Our crowning achievement in terms of fundraising involves the full interior and exterior restoration of our Cathedral, which is a historic Stockholm landmark over 130 years old, which had never been previously renovated. This ambitious project, which was miraculously completed during the duration of the pandemic, completely changed the face of our largest and most historic church, providing a unique Hellenic Christian imprint in the heart of Stockholm. We performed a similar extensive renovation at the Metropolitan Church of the Annunciation in Oslo and the Hermitage of St. Nicholas in Rättvik, Sweden.

The establishment of a Museum of Hellenic-Christian Heritage was a sine qua non for us, inasmuch as it filled a longstanding void. This museum space, which has been housed inside the facilities of the St. George Cathedral in Stockholm, showcases the treasures of our cultural heritage in the most effective manner possible, providing visitors with knowledge, information, and an empirical foundational basis. At the same time, the promotion of the Hellenic Christian heritage to the general Scandinavian public is a responsibility of the Holy Metropolis, with artifacts of this culture, which have been saved throughout the centuries, being clearly displayed in the glass museum showcases and clearly expressing its values, viewpoints, ideals, and aesthetic perspective.

Along with the museum, two new offices for the clergy, a library and an archive room were established in the Stockholm Cathedral premises, and the church was adorned with 36 large icon frescos in the altar, above the entrance and the balcony. By the grace of God, His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew presided over the dedication ceremony of our Museum and other renovated facilities during his official visit to the Metropolis in 2019 to celebrate our Metropolis' semi-centennial and preside over our first ever Clergy-Laity Synaxis. Approximately 200 representatives of the 16 parishes, in the 4 nations that consist the Metropolis, as well as 43 members of the Dialogue between the Orthodox and Lutheran Church attended the Synaxis.

Aware of the demands of the modern age and taking advantage of technology, I make it a point to develop our Metropolis' internet ministry, writing articles, encyclicals, messages and press releases, to keep our faithful and interested parties regularly informed through the Metropolis social media about our liturgical

life, community events, and manifold ministries.

I must also point out that it is of great importance to cultivate good cooperation with the local Civic and Church Authorities, as well as the heads of our doctrines and faiths, as through the spirit of love and dialogue, reconciliation and peace is preserved and prevailed, which benefit the inhabitants of the four nations and offers authentic Orthodox testimony to society at large. Faithfully serving the work of His All-Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch, we support and promote Christian unity, which we do not consider to be a luxury, but rather, a necessity and a priority. There is no greater proof of what I am saying than the close relations and collaboration that have blossomed between the Holy Metropolis and other Christian Communities following the inception of my archpastoral duties, as well as my personal attendance at events organized by the other Orthodox presences, the Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Coptic, and Syriac-Aramean Churches.

Along with participation in events organized by other Christian communities, I have participated in numerous international conferences, representing the Ecumenical Patriarchate. In fact, I have already visited 16 nations from the day of my election to the episcopacy. Moreover, I have had the privilege of participating as a rotating member of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. In addition, for the last five years, I participate in the meetings of the Conference of European Churches, where I currently serve as Vice-President.

Finally, in my pastoral work, I also include my writing activity and contribution for the enlightenment of the members of our Church and those who wish to learn more about the Orthodox faith, life and history. During my ministry in Sweden, I was guided by God's Grace to publish a bilingual two-volume work on Saint Nectarios of Pentapolis, the trilingual edition of the Divine Liturgy in Greek, English, and Swedish, the bilingual edition of the Akathist Hymn in Greek and Swedish, a story for children in the Swedish language, as well as books written by the missionary and former clergyman of our Metropolis the late Fr. Eusebius Vittis.

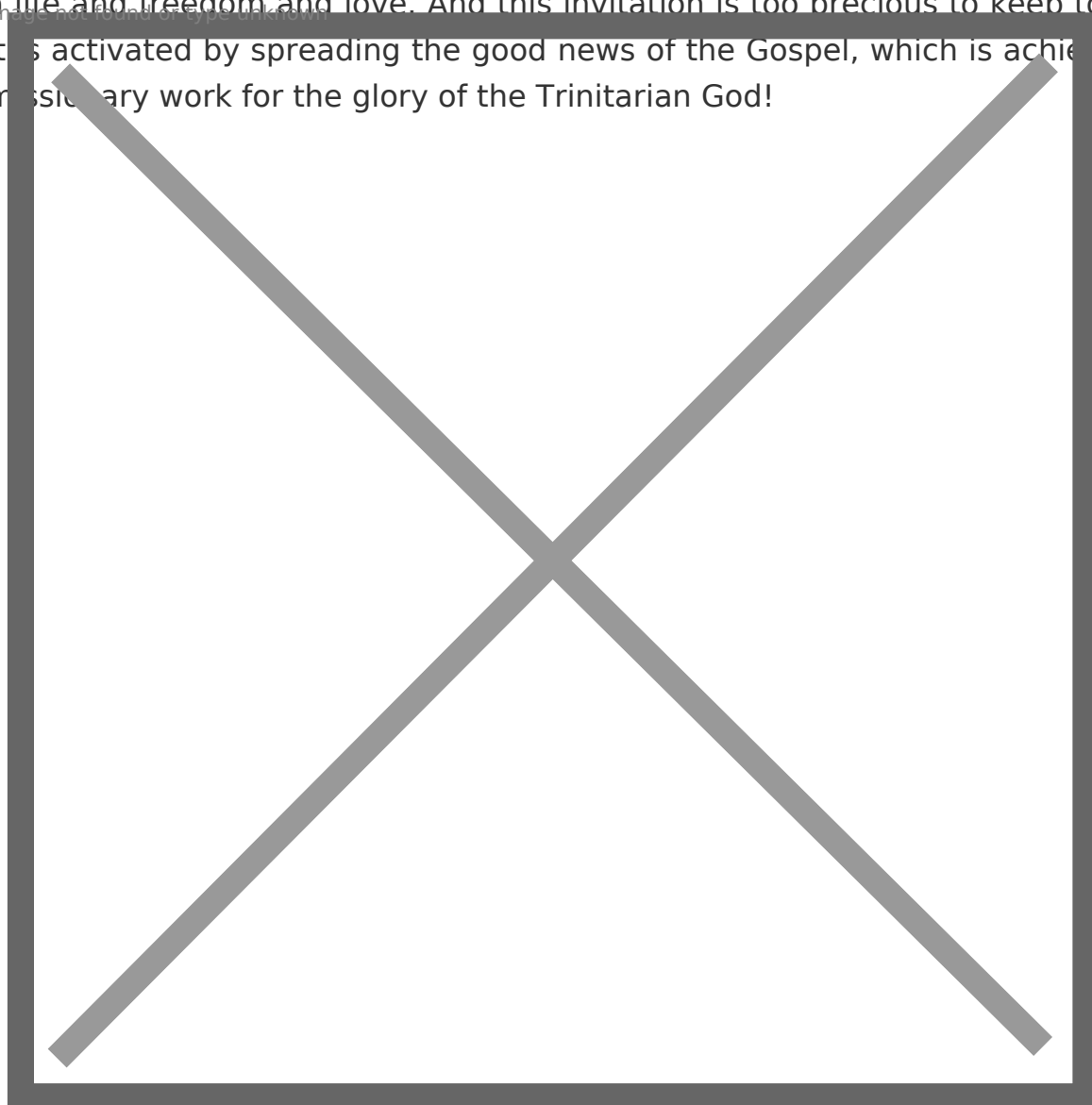
I am grateful to the Trinitarian Godhead for all our accomplishments, which were achieved through prayer, many sleepless nights and long workdays, and the continual knowledge that on the path toward Golgotha and the Cross that each of us is called to bear for the salvation of our souls, Christ walks together with us, lightening our load and encouraging us through the empirical knowledge that the Resurrection always follows the Cross and our journey does not end at Golgotha, but at Emmaus!

There is still much to be done to advance our missionary work in the Northern lands, minister to the unchurched, and re-evangelize local society. As St. John Chrysostom says, "οὐκ ἰστάμεθα, πορευόμεθα γάρ," we do not stand, for we are constantly pushing ahead. This is our task and our defining trait. This is the model

handed down to us from the Fathers of the Church who worked continuously, dedicating their attention to every possible aspect of their flock's communal life.

For my part, I express the humble wish that we may all derive spiritual joy from this webinar where we have come to share our experiences and knowledge in the service of Christ's Gospel, since we all confess that: "behold, through the Cross joy has come to the entire world."

Let us all boast, then, in Christ, as St. Paul the Apostle did: "but God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. 6:14). This is a boast that is made not with sentiments of egotism and pride over superiority to others, but because our Savior Jesus Christ Himself, Who went up on the Cross, calls us to a life and freedom and love. And this invitation is too precious to keep to ourselves. It is activated by spreading the good news of the Gospel, which is achieved through missionary work for the glory of the Trinitarian God!



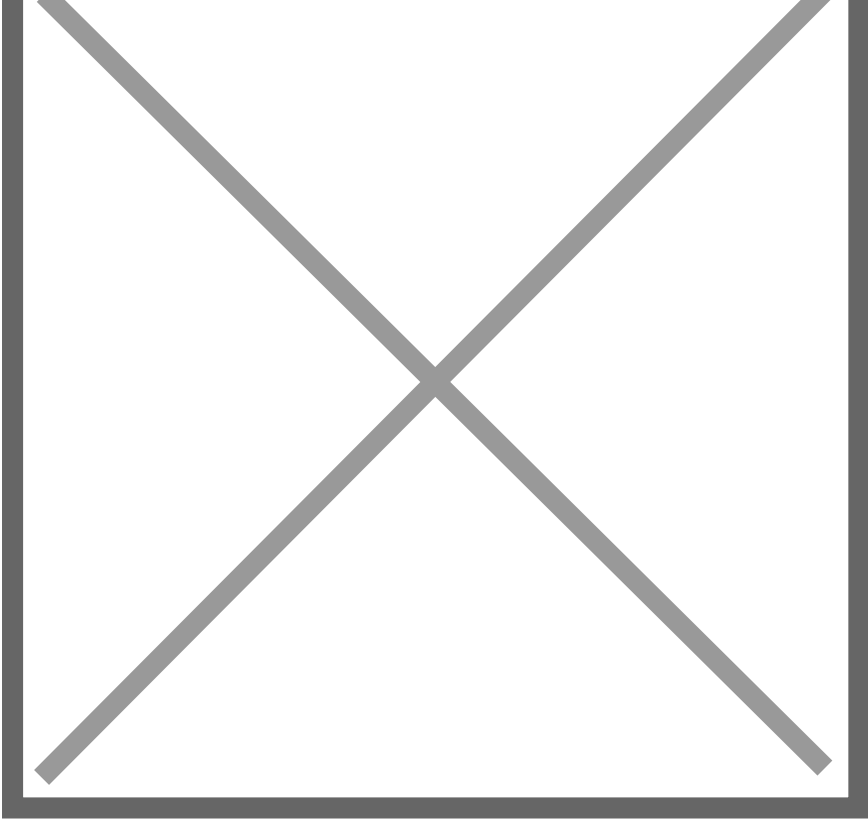
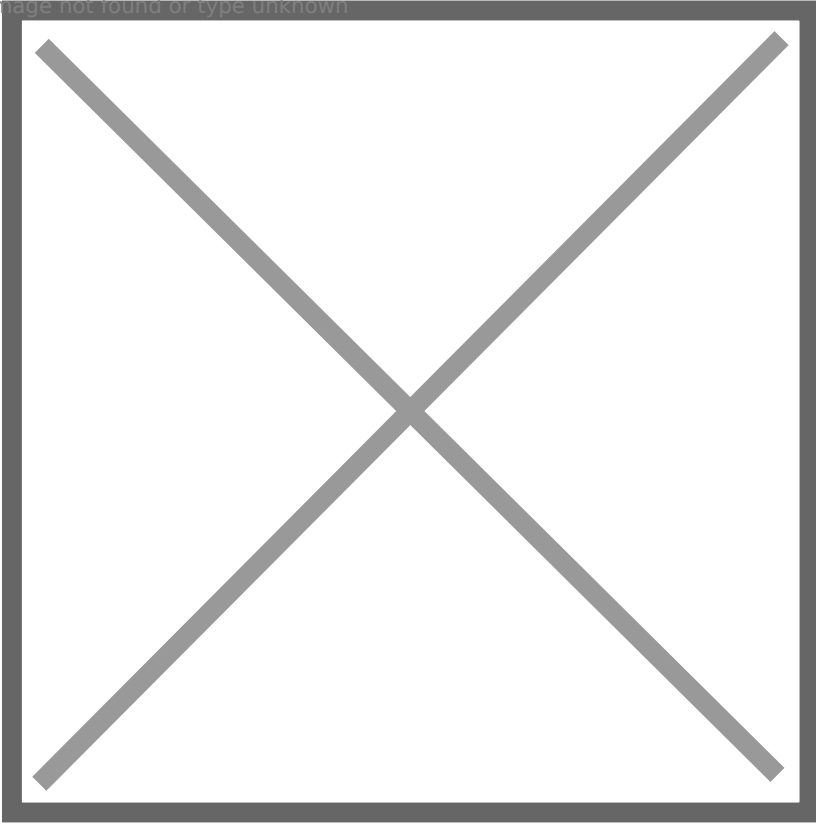






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