

Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain

Archbishop's Concluding Speech

6 November 2010

PRAISE TO THE TRINITY, COMMEMORATION OF THE LIVING AND DEPARTED OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF THYATEIRA, GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND 1922 – 2010.

Dearly Beloved in the Lord,

“Glory to the Holy, Consubstantial, Life-giving and Undivided Trinity, always, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen”.

I must admit that I struggled a great deal to prepare this speech, because I did not wish to involve the problems which daily face the Clergy as Pastors and Teachers of the Church and particularly in this Eparchy of the Oecumenical Throne of Constantinople which was established 88 years ago with its seat in London. But in the end I decided to express in outline a few thoughts and to warmly thank you who are with us but also all those who have departed this life and are unable today to actively participate in the activities of the Church Militant. When some colleagues asked me what the subject of this Clergy-Laity Conference would be, I gave an obscure answer, but this is not because I did not know how to answer or how I perceive and understand the nature of this Conference. Since 1993, when the last Clergy-Laity Conference was held, many years have passed, many changes have occurred, not only around us, but also within our own Communities. Today we have more Communities and Church buildings and other properties. The Archdiocese has grown with new Priests and Deacons. What I wish to say, in other words, is that the Archdiocese has matured and has reached new heights in the minds of our People and of the wider Society.

During this time, we have held many local Meetings to kindle our zeal and deeply nurture our social spirit and conscience, to more greatly emphasise the Christian Faith and Orthodox Tradition in this country and biblical Eparchy of the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

First Period, 1922 – 1951

Reflecting on the establishment of this Archdiocese 88 years ago, its first Pastoral Leader, the late Germanos Strenopoulos, found four established Churches, three of which were founded in the 19th century and one at the beginning of the 20th century. Today, less than a century later, this Eparchy has multiplied dramatically, it has increased and broadened and grown, and has secured a special place of honour in the United Kingdom. The tiny number of clergy serving between 1930 and 1950 has been greatly enlarged, new churches have opened, and other necessary buildings have been acquired and new Communities established throughout the territory of the United Kingdom and Ireland.

Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain

Archbishop's Concluding Speech

Following the investiture of the late Metropolitan Germanos Strenopoulos in London (1922 – 1951) he had no house, no office and no wage. He was put up at the Cathedral Church of the Divine Wisdom in London, where he officiated and which was the base from which he operated. Back then his jurisdiction covered the United Kingdom and Ireland, and all of Western and Central Europe. The late Metropolitan Germanos during his almost thirty-year tenure achieved a great deal, and was distinguished especially for his contribution to the establishment of the Ecumenical Movement and cultivating close relations with Lambeth Palace and the occupants of the historic See of Canterbury, who long nurtured and continue to nurture great respect and a special love for the Oecumenical Patriarchate. Amongst other things, Germanos Strenopoulos put into circulation the first Year Book of the Archdiocese in 1926 and also published a small bi-lingual edition of the Divine Liturgy. When he died, he left his inheritance to the Archdiocese, including his home which he bought during his tenure. He blessed the establishment of All Saints' Church in London in 1948, following the request of many Cypriot settlers. He died in 1951 and was buried at Hendon Cemetary.

Second Period, 1951 – 1963

The late Germanos Strenopoulos was succeeded by Metropolitan Athenagoras Kavvadas, who served for many years in America. His day witnessed a mass influx of Greek Orthodox Christians to England, mainly from Cyprus. During that time the Cyprus Problem reached its height, and the citizens of Cyprus sought their freedom from the British Empire. This movement resulted in the establishment of the Republic of Cyprus on 16th August 1960. This year the Republic of Cyprus celebrates its 50th Anniversary. Despite his age and the troubles of his day, the late Athenagoras Kavvadas strived to respond to the new needs of his Flock. During his tenure the Church of St Andrew the Apostle was established in Kentish Town and new Clergy were appointed, including myself in 1959 and Bishop Chrysostomos of Kyanea in 1961. Before he died, Athenagoras unfortunately sold the property which he inherited from his predecessor, Metropolitan Germanos. As a result, when the late Athenagoras Kokkinakis arrived in London in 1964, he had to live in a flat, using the premises of the Cathedral of the Divine Wisdom as an office. Archbishop Athenagoras Kavvadas died in 1962 and was buried at Hendon Cemetary. Pastoral charge for the Metropolis was undertaken with vibrant zeal, knowledge and enthusiasm by the newly appointed Archbishop of Thyateira Athenagoras Kokkinakis in 1964. During his time greater changes took place throughout this Eparchy, such as the establishment of new Communities, the creation of the Central Educational Committee (KES), the founding of the Archdiocese's Clergy Fraternity, its Association of Greek Orthodox Communities, the organisation of the Clergy-Laity Conferences of its Communities, and the procurement of church buildings. I should mention in particular the fact that during the tenure of Archbishop Athenagoras Kokkinakis, the Archdiocese's Office Building and Archbishop's Residence (Thyateira House) was purchased and its services were undertaken by him. Also, four new Auxiliary Bishops were ordained, two of whom are still with us today. Athenagoras launched the Archdiocesan magazine 'The Orthodox Herald', which continues to be published today. Amongst other things, he published, in small and large formats, a bi-lingual edition of the Divine Liturgy of St John Chrysostom, as well as a Catechism (The Thyateira Confession). During his tenure the first Greek School was established on the premises of St Andrew's Church in Kentish Town, London. Archbishop Athenagoras Kokkinakis was fortunate to have many notable assistant Clergy, many of whom were elevated to the rank of Bishop. Athenagoras Kokkinakis died on 9th September 1979 and was buried at Hendon Cemetary.

Third Period, 1979 – 1988

Following the death of my ever-memorable predecessor Athenagoras Kokkinakis, the Oecumenical Patriarchate

Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain

Archbishop's Concluding Speech

elected and appointed as Leader of this Eparchy the Metropolitan of Axomi, of the Patriarchate of Alexandria, the late Methodios Fouyias (1979 – 1988), who carried out his ministry with zeal. Amongst other developments during his tenure, the Hellenic College (1980 – 2005) was established under the influence of the former King of the Hellenes, Constantine, as well as the Greek Primary and Secondary School and 6th Form College, thanks to the financial aid and initiative of the Greek Government in 1983. In addition, the Community of St Eleutherios, Leyton in London, and the Community of the Holy Trinity and St Luke in Birmingham were established.

1988 – today

Following the withdrawal of my late predecessor Methodios, the Patriarchate unanimously elected the present Archbishop as Leader of this biblical Eparchy, then an Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese, bearing the honoured title of the once brilliant diocese of Tropaëou. During my service as Archbishop, great emphasis has been placed on Education, Divine Worship and Christian Catechism. In the year 2000, the first Greek Orthodox Denominational Primary School was founded. New Communities have been set up, new Clergy ordained and appointed, including two new Bishops, much property has been acquired, including new church buildings and flats, the brand new Church of St Panteleimon in Harrow has been built, the Community of Stoke-on-Trent established, and the apartment block of the Community of the Dormition of the Mother of God in Birmingham constructed. A further two editions of the Divine Liturgy of St John Chrysostom and three editions of an Orthodox Prayer Book have been published. In addition, the Pocket Calendar and Year Book of the Archdiocese has continued to be published without interruption as well as the bi-lingual weekly Bulletin of Spiritual Edification, together with other publications. I am not exaggerating when I say that in the last twenty years more than 40 buildings have been purchased, churches and places of residence, and the Archbishop's Offices and Residence and its Chapel have been refurbished.

In today's speech I do not wish to go into the numerous problems which daily concern our Parishes, Schools, the Archdiocese and our People throughout the United Kingdom and Ireland. These are for the most part familiar to all - you experience them every day, and each one of you strives to solve them and to find ways for our ecclesiastical and community life to not only continue smoothly and without interruption, but to develop, to flourish, and for our children and grandchildren to remain within our sacred Orthodox Tradition. We should all possess a spirit of unity and close co-operation and sacred solidarity, should share in an offering of love our common problems and concerns. Let us look with optimism and sturdy faith to the future, while serving our common interests with knowledge and erudition, without small-mindedness, without antagonism. Rather let us work together in harmony and concord and mutual love, always having as our criterion the glory of Christ and the progress of His Church.

As I already mentioned, today we are at the threshold of a new era in the life and future of the Church in this country. During the relatively short period since this Eparchy of the Oecumenical Throne was founded, an astonishing development has taken place, which many find remarkable and admirable, while others feel a just sense of pride for what has been achieved by the Orthodox here. This Conference has no ambition to make any radical decisions, to have great debates and discussions concerning the Church's future in the United Kingdom and Ireland, even though this Conference in itself should make us think responsibly about the near and distant future, although "only the gods know the future", as a poet put it. Only God knows the future, and not only the future of this Archdiocese, but also the future of the whole Church and all humanity is in His hands. But we, as faithful stewards and good servants, should serve the Lord's Vineyard with wisdom, prudence and loyalty, and with foresight to make provision for the future "as stewards of the spiritual mysteries", for the Gospel of Christ to become known throughout the world. To be fruitful requires much work, divine faith which moves mountains, continuous and unceasing prayer. Apart from the grace and blessing of God, the Church requires knowledge and erudition, theology and wisdom, money, good and faithful stewards, competent administration and organisation, and, of course, love, which covers a multitude of sins and the other human weaknesses and infirmities of our fallen nature.

Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain

Archbishop's Concluding Speech

I would now like to come back to my thoughts about this Clergy-Laity Conference, which with so much effort, care and provision has been organised by the Archdiocese and its Leaders. I would like to mention especially those who had the sacred responsibility of organising it, and to them I would like now to express my thanks and gratitude for working with such diligence and eagerness.

The Apostle Paul in his epistles often mentions the Church, its labourers, its service, its goals and disappointments, and generally of the service which each person contributes to the Divine-Human Institution that is the Church, of which Christ Himself said, "the gates of hell will not prevail against it". With sacred pride, the divine Paul writes: "I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it". (1 Cor. 3:10). The Church is a divinely established institution, a theanthropic organism, and comprises a part of the revelation and manifestation of God's wisdom and the Mystery of Divine Economy, which began before all time and was made manifest in time through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Therefore, no one has the right to think of the Church as a personal or family affair. All work together for the progress of the Church and to equip the saints for the glory of God the Trinity. As St Paul characteristically writes: "This is how you ought to regard us: as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed". (1 Cor. 4:1). And he continues, saying, "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow". (1 Cor. 3:6-7). All things depend upon the grace, blessing and providence of God, so no one may boast that anything is his own achievement.

I mention these things as an example, to remind you all of the grace and providence of God toward His Church, to the members of His body which are the faithful, that is, all those who have believed in Christ and have been baptised in His holy and venerable name and have entrusted their temporal and future lives to His love for mankind. Our own contribution, our efforts, should be made in this context and with that faith and certainty that Christ cares for and looks after His Church and can make 'children out of stones', as St John the Baptist said to the Jews when they boasted of being "the sons of Abraham". I am sure that the Orthodox Church in this country will continue to continue its upward journey, and will become a powerful factor in this country's life. Together with other Christians, the Orthodox should contribute to the revival of Christianity, despite the view of many that the United Kingdom has ceased to be a Christian country. The decline of religion, secularisation and consumer society and their consequences govern the public and private life of the British people, of which Orthodox Christians are also a part. It is our hope that gradually all Orthodox Christians who live in this country today, the number of which has dramatically increased since the fall of communism, will together continue to work for the confidence, rebirth and renewal of the Christian identity and faith of those who live in the United Kingdom and elsewhere.

In this connection, I would like to mention a recent poll which was carried out in London which states that more than 70% of the British people openly profess that they are Christians, which is comforting and encouraging. Returning now to my thoughts regarding our Orthodox Archdiocese, the Members of which are today highly dedicated and have a deep love for the God of our Fathers and are closely bound to His Church: what is a cause for concern is the younger and future generations, who are born and reared in this country and who experience, as we all have experienced, the spiritual atmosphere of the social, spiritual, cultural and religious life of this country. What is our contribution to the next step for Orthodox Christianity in this country?

This is a matter which we called to examine, how to man our churches and schools with young people who will carry the burden of the future, to serve our common interests, our churches and schools, and to enrich our Tradition with theology and learning and pass on the baton of faith to others with knowledge and humility in Christ. For this we need willingness and hard work, prayer and faith in God and man and our trust in them, trust that they are able with courage and wisdom to bear this heavy burden that is the spiritual deposit of Eastern Orthodox Christianity in this country. Do not forget our recent history. When the Oecumenical Patriarchate founded this Eparchy, it knew of the challenges and problems, and yet it went ahead and made its prophetic decision which led to action, life, a spiritual icon, a song and hymn of doxology to God glorified in Trinity. And God Who increases the deposit of grace blessed that small Flock, multiplied it and magnified it, until it became the fruitful tree it is today, a vibrant vineyard, from which many are nurtured and nourished by the good word, the word of immortality, the word of sacred joy and

Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain

Archbishop's Concluding Speech

hope, life and salvation in Christ Jesus.

I said at the beginning that this Conference is one of praise and thanksgiving to the Founder of all good things, the Triadic God, for all that has been done until today for us to enjoy in the Lord and to behold. And so with optimism and trust in God and His grace, we shall continue to the end, without faltering or losing heart. It was wisely said that much can be done by a few - the faithful and those dedicated to working for good - in spite of the adversities and obstacles which lie before them.

We should not get lost and drowned in the sorrows of life, by vexations and difficulties and the cares of daily living and the slander of wicked and evil men, by the discord and traps laid by the devil, which sow in our soul and in our ministry the seed of doubt, faithlessness, wickedness, confusion, murder, sin, and all those things which the devil knows. Amongst the things Christ says to the angel of Thyateira are these words: "But to the rest of you in Thyateira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden. Only hold fast what you have until I come". (Rev. 2:24-25). What matters today, brethren and fathers, is that we preserve our faith in Christ – that which we have received from the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church – we must keep it, enrich it with our works and sincere confession in Christ Jesus. May we be able to pass it on to the next generations that they may continue the Orthodox Christian Tradition until the end of time when Christ the God-man "shall come in his glory with his holy angels" and will call us to account, will judge the living and the dead, according to His own true word. I am not saying all of this simply to preach at you and to remind you of the tradition of Christ, for which countless holy souls have laboured until death and remained faithful to the Gospel of Salvation, the Gospel of eternal life which refugees from Cyprus, Greece, Egypt, the Middle East and Eastern Europe brought with them and for which they struggled from the time they arrived on this hospitable and blessed land, especially since the time thousands took up residence in the great cities of this country, such as London, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Cardiff, Glasgow, Edinburgh, and other places where a holy altar has been erected and where our divine worship and tradition continue according to our Orthodox faith and practice. We reside here under the jurisdiction of the Oecumenical Throne of Consantinople, which despite adverse conditions, continue to give light and to bear witness "to those near and far" until this very moment. All this I say as a sacred and devout commemoration of all those who have left this world and have left their sacred bones buried beneath the soil of this hospitable country. It is an obligation we owe to them.

At this point I would like to thank especially all those brothers and sisters who have sought spiritual shelter in the Orthodox Church and, united with those Orthodox refugees and regardless of nationality, have journeyed with us with devotion and zeal, and with their dedication contribute positively to the progress and bright future of Orthodoxy in this land. I would especially like to welcome all those Clergy, and particularly the English Clergy, who have embraced Orthodoxy and have come under the jurisdiction of the Oecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, and carry out with great ardour and obedience their ministry to the Church. All of the local Communities, whether Greek, English, Slavonic or Arab-speaking, comprise members of Christ's Body and His Orthodox Church. I say this to thank them and congratulate them fervently and to assure them of the love and profound esteem we have for them and their ministry and all they have done for the progress and witness of the Orthodox Church in these lands.

I would like to conclude this rather long and loving commemoration in honour of the faithful of this biblical Eparchy of the Oecumenical Throne by reminding you of its astonishing progress and development, following eighty-eight years of history and life, by the grace of God. During the last 60 years it has broadened and soared and has stretched out throughout the United Kingdom and Ireland, which is its canonical and ecclesiastical jurisdiction. Bear in mind that when the first Metropolitan of Thyateira, Germanos Strenopoulos, arrived in the United Kingdom, he had not so much as a home to live in, and found only one church in London, the Lay Leaders of which did not take kindly to his presence, while today we have a dignified place of residence and central offices in London, 25 churches in this city, and 100 in the rest of the British Isles, as well as other property both in and out of London, 4 bishops, more than 100 Priests and Deacons who man our churches, an organised central office which operates 24 hours a day. The Archdiocese has at its service hundreds of lay people, men and women, who voluntarily serve with an exalted sense of responsibility our common interests, our finances and other practical aspects of the Communities, Schools, and other

Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain

Archbishop's Concluding Speech

establishments. The Archdiocese today has many, good, educated and distinguished clergy, particularly the senior clergy, and who have a missionary zeal and who continuously officiate, preach and pastor with great love and dedication our People, which is no longer made up only of settlers and refugees. Within the Archdiocese are many converts, English, Irish, Scottish, Welsh, and others, who consciously and with knowledge embraced the Orthodox Faith and Tradition. All of these things have prompted me to make this spiritual retrospective journey into the past 88 years since the first Hierarchy of Thyateira set foot on this land. With much patience, wisdom and profound faith, he worked to organise the Diocese under his charge. And we continue that work until this very day, on which God has deemed us worthy to gather together on the sacred premises which we acquired 40 years ago, to pray, to discuss, to share in hospitality, and to thank from the bottom of our hearts the local Leaders and People, and to confirm our dedication to the Orthodox Church of the United Kingdom and Ireland and our respect and love toward the Oecumenical Patriarchate.

Rightly, then, is this Clergy-Laity Conference dedicated to the unending, mystical and manifest praise to the Triune God, Who blesses the labours of those who have at some time or another served this Archdiocese, Clergy and Laity, which constitute its Flock, the visible Body of the Church and the mystical Body of Christ. It is at the same time a commemoration, a thanksgiving to all those living and departed, who have contributed in a variety of ways to the progress of the Archdiocese, with prayer and practice and active love. May the grace of God bless their work that we too may have as our own the living vision that we enjoy today as a Church, as an Orthodox presence in this hospitable country.

I am certain that each of you, on returning to his or her parish, will go back stronger, more faithful, more optimistic, wiser in God, and being enriched by divine grace and the communion of love and nourishment which we experienced yesterday and today on the premises of this Cathedral Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God, will continue your contribution and ministry for the progress and development of the local parish, and will help yourselves and one another to delve deeper into the knowledge and understanding of the faith. Every one of you will, I hope, display a spirit of responsibility and humility, gladness and goodness to your brethren. You will foster virtue and discernment and kindness, something St Paul emphasises, saying, "outdo one another in honour". You will extend practical love one to another, for love covers a multitude of sins. Love which our Lord Jesus Christ taught us by His life, and which shall rule the lives of us all, Clergy and Lay Leaders, our families, colleagues, assistants, friends and enemies. Only thus shall we have hope amongst ourselves in God and in our fellow man. Only thus can each of us reach perfection, according to the Lord's will, as St Paul again characteristically says: "Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ". (Eph. 4:13).

And so with the Apostle Peter, let us say: "Therefore, beloved, since you have been forewarned, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ". (2 Peter 3:17-18).

I would like to end with a hymn of Pentecost: "The Holy Spirit gives all things: makes prophecies flow, perfects priests, taught the unlettered wisdom, revealed fishermen to be theologians, welds together the whole institution of the Church". To Him be the glory both now and until the end of time. Amen.