

# HIS BEATITUDE RECEIVES AWARD FROM THE PREFECTURE OF ATHENS

**His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa,** was honoured on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2009 by the Prefecture of Athens, within the framework of the functions for the "Ambassadors of Hellenism", which took place at the Megaro Mousikis Athinon, in the presence of His Beatitude Archbishop Ieronymos of Athens and All Greece and many representatives of the political and spiritual world of Greece.

Filled with emotion, His Beatitude spoke to the 200 invited guests saying:

**"My heart is filled with joy and emotion at this special moment.** I am here among you, under the dome of this majestic temple of the spirit and of melody, the Megaron Mousikis of Athens, to participate in the honour which is given to the unforgettable ambadress of Greek culture Melina Mercouri since 1997 and to receive the award of this institute to me, and through me, to the Apostolic and Patriarchal Throne of St Mark.

"Ambassador of Hellenism"! This is an expression of great honour and even greater responsibility. Ambassador of a renowned culture, whose beginnings stem from the ancient Greek world, which sought the component elements of a nation, which it summarized in three structural characteristics: those of "one blood, one language, one religion".

The "**one blood**" refers to the common origin, the common blood, that which for us Greeks is the boast and the crown of our glory. This is the blood which our people did not hesitate to sacrifice in its heroic struggles through the ages, in order to protect its ideals. This common blood is the binding link of Hellenism, wherever it has reached and achieved great things, as is still evident today in contemporary universal reality.

The "**one language**" is our way of communicating, our common language. The much-heard of and unconquerable Greek language, the richest in the world in emotional expression, in the expression of the power of Greek thought, even in the revelation of the truths in heaven of this Gospel word. This language became the means of civilizing other countries and the way in which the salvific messages of Jesus Christ were transported to the ends of the universe.

The third element is "**one faith**", our common belief in one God, the "unknown" God which the Apostle Paul met in the thoughts of the ancient Athenians or the Revealed and eternally Sacrificed God in the faith of Christians. It is this faith that gives strength for struggles, becomes a bottomless source of hope, a laver of regeneration, grace and expectancy. This is the faith that Hellenes took with them everywhere, wherever they went. It is from this faith that they drew strength, gathered around it, and took refuge in it, in the bustle of strange cultures, different races and various religions. During the Christian ages, the roots of the tree of faith in the Triune God our Church watered with the blood of its children, with the blood of Patriarchs, clergy and the fullness of the Church, so that it remained unshaken, strong and unchanged. The flame of the oil lamps in front of the icons of Christ and the All-Holy Virgin Mother, was not extinguished and the censer, together with the Hellenic word of the Gospel, became the comfort of the Hellenes, their boast and pride.

In ancient times Hellenes were spread around the entire then-known "universe", from the pillars of Hercules, known today as Gibraltar, to as far away as India and

from the Caucasus to the shores of North Africa, sealing the local cultures which they met with the immortal Hellenic spirit. According to this view Hellenes are called also "those who participate in our education". Democracy, free thought and its public expression, personal faith and its expression of worship, love of one's country and the healthy competitive spirit, its natural intellect and recording it, are indicative principles and simultaneously also springs of free Hellenic thought which offered only spiritual fruit to mankind, drawing nations and cultures to it and forming universal principles and values.

With this all in mind, the ancient Church of the Alexandrenes takes pride, because during its two thousand year journey of martyrdom, it has not ceased caring for the spiritual upliftment of its flock, both Greek-speaking and indigenous. The endless concern of the Patriarchs for education and culture, through the establishment of schools and educational institutes from the land of the Nile to the ends of the African continent and the formation of libraries, the leading one being the Patriarchal Library of Alexandria, are proof of the efforts of protecting and passing on the spiritual treasure of the Hellenes to all who have come under the supervision of the Patriarchal Throne of St Mark.

My dear friends,

Together with the duty of maintaining our ancestral heritage, our Patriarchate, being dedicated to the Gospel command of preaching the faith of Jesus Christ "to all the world", builds souls and gives strength and hope to our African brothers and sisters. The missionary effort which has been undertaken reminds us of pre-Christian ages and the journeys of the Apostles.

Our Church feels this responsibility towards the people of Africa, which stems from the great mercy of God for mankind, as well as from the universality of the preaching of the humble Nazarene, which was directed to all men "from the ends to the ends of the universe".

Our thoughts, our concern and our prayers daily are about how we will lead more people to the "knowledge of eternal Truth", without ignoring the complete absence of the most necessary means of life, for which we make every possible effort to correct this.

**With the grace and blessing of God**, Missionary Centres operate in all African countries for the evangelization of the nations and for the covering of their needs. Together with the personal care of the Patriarch and the Hierarchs of the Throne, at all the Metropolises and Dioceses of Africa, new educational institutes, technical schools, clinics and hospitals, old age homes, residences for the poor and orphanages are continually being built, and these give free care, food and education to our suffering brothers and sisters. Boreholes are also being drilled so that clean drinking water can be had by all, bursaries for schools and universities are given for the progress of young Africans, families who live in abject poverty and total neglect are supported. There are many more details which require much time to be mentioned.

Dear friends,

In speaking of Mission in the endless African reaches, we are essentially speaking of **sacrificial love**. It is a work of martyrdom, of witnessing for Christ, a complete dedication without a middle path. Missionaries offer everything, they become the sacrifice on the altar of humanitarianism for the humble citizen of Africa, in whose heart the confidence is born that there is a loving God for him or her too and someone, the Missionary, who cares for him and his struggles and is compassionate towards him, offering him all these precious things which the

developed world takes for granted. So it is that the Apostolic work is extended through the ages and through time and the God of love is revealed to all nations.

The races are transformed in this manner, humans are renewed spiritually, the honest Africans are illumined by hope in the Grace of the Holy Spirit. This is communion of the struggling people with God and fellow man, which, naturally, reveals the endless divine mercy to the lives of our "black" brothers and sisters, without distinction of colour, race, language or origin.

**With these few thoughts, in a spirit of humility and knowledge of my paternal duty,** I address you in love and express once again my deepest gratitude for this huge honour which is now a starting point for new strength and moral support in the missionary journey which is difficult yet filled with heavenly gifts and miracles.

Please be assured that our glorious Patriarchate, faithful to the heritage of its founder, the Apostle Mark, will remain alert just as a loving mother does, and will show concern, and will remain to fight for Greek Orthodox values and principles in this century, in the contemporary and constantly changing universal community. Working prudently and self sacrifice, in honesty with history and true to Orthodoxy.

We know that we are not alone in our struggles. Both in the land of the Nile , the country of the peaceful co-existence of Christians and Muslims, as well as in our blessed country, the love of our people and our leaders prevails. The Libyan Peninsula which lies between the two countries, is not a natural obstacle or a dividing line, but rather a bridge of love, strengthening and of collaboration. So, I thank the Greek Government for its support and assistance to the work of the Patriarchate and I also thank the hospitable land of Egypt and His Excellency President Hosni Mubarak for his protection and support of it.

In once again expressing the gratitude of the Church of the Alexandrenes, I pray that "the Father of mercies and God of all requests" will always be with you, guiding your footsteps "ti all good works".

**His Beatitude also thanked** His Beatitude Ieronymos Archbishop of Athens for the contribution of the Church of Greece to the multifaceted missionary and humanistic work of the Patriarchal Throne. Addressing His Excellency the Minister of Culture Mr. Antonios Samaras, representative of the Greek Government, His Excellency the Deputy Chairman of the Parliament Mr. Nerantzis, Parliamentarian Mrs. Anna Diamantopoulou, representative of the Opposition and the representatives of the other political parties, he expressed fervent thanks for their presence at the function and for their general support, as well as to the host of the evening, Mr Ioannis Sgouros, Governor of Athens, for the enormous honour afforded him.

His Beatitude, who is the first Primate to receive this award, was accompanied by His Eminence Elder Metropolitan Petros of Aksum, representative of His Beatitude in Athens , and His Grace Gabriel, Bishop of Mareotis, Patriarchal Vicar of Alexandria. Also present were the Chairman of the Office Bearers of the Alexandrian Throne Professor Theodoros Panagopoulos, The Archon Megas Logothetis Mr Spyridon Kamalakis, et al.