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20 April 1965

Your Majesty,

I acknowledge with deep gratitude your kind letter of 10 April 1965 with which you sent a copy of the speech addressed by His Majesty King Constantine to the entire assembly of the Church leaders of the Greek Orthodox Faith in Greece. I have read the address with great interest.

Please accept, Your Majesty, the assurances of my deep homage and respect.

U Thant

Her Majesty
The Queen Mother Frederica
Royal Palace
Athens, Greece


cc: Mission of Greece
Mr. Lemieux

April 10th, 1965.

Dear Mr. U Thant,

Knowing your interest in the deeper sides of life, I am sending you a copy of the speech which my son, the King of the Hellenes, addressed to the entire assembly of the Church leaders of the Greek Orthodox Faith in our Country and which was unanimously approved by them.

Frederica R.



Your attention is drawn to these passages from King Constantine's speech. Suggestions are put forth to bring about a revival of the original Christian attitudes and a reinspiration of the Church. In view of the reforms proposed, this speech may well represent a very important landmark in Greek Orthodox Christianity. It may also serve to offer in these critical times a suggestion of possible value to other branches of Christianity.

SHORTENED VERSION OF H.M. THE KING'S ADDRESS TO THE
LEADERS OF THE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH
MARCH 14, 1965
DELIVERED IN THE ROYAL PALACE ATHENS

I have been taught by my father to consider this day a sacred one. I am happy therefore to see the Sunday of Orthodoxy celebrated today with the solemnity befitting this great feast of our church.

Thus the Queen and I have the pleasure of welcoming you in our home and I am given the opportunity of addressing you.

I trust that I interpret the feelings of all those here gathered, by reiterating the assurance of our deep reverence towards the Church of Constantinople and towards Her Primate the Oecumenic Patriarch Athenagoras.

Our Church, this living ark of revealed truth, has a glorious history and I am proud to have been born into it. From the very first days of Christianity and throughout the centuries of the Byzantine era, so marked by trials and changes, the Church has fought unceasingly for the uplift of the moral conscience of her flock and remained the vigilant guardian of the peoples' loyalty to true religion and precious reception of the Holy Spirit.

Throughout long periods of darkness and of open or concealed violence, Greek Orthodoxy has always been a ray of hope, love and freedom, the embodiment of the divine commandment and promise, "Ye shall know the truth and truth will make you free".

Whenever I visit our ancient Christian sanctuaries and historical monasteries so full of masterpieces, I realise with gratitude how immense a debt we, the Greeks of to-day, owe to the Orthodox Church.

Under these mystical domes, how many generations received nourishment for their spirit! With what sacrifices and courage was the torch of Greek culture, of freedom and of our religious heritage, kept alive through centuries of bondage! The Church, a faithful protector of Christian teachings, kept our great tradition intact and living. It is this tradition and its unrivalled architectural monuments that scholars and visitors from all over the world come to our country to admire and to study.

I remember with deep emotion the words of my beloved father when he addressed the Primate of Orthodoxy and their Beatitudes the Heads of the Other Eastern Churches, who took part in the celebration of the first millenium since the foundation of the monastic State on Mount Athos.

What spiritual strength I derived from the fact that my father considered his participation in that celebration as one of the most important events of his life! My father's words, imbued with deep faith in the universal mission of Orthodoxy, constitute for me a sacred spiritual trust.

Yet no single person, no group of persons, which make up a people, may live in the past alone. They may try to do so, but history catches up with them and forces them to face the changing conditions of the present, let alone prepare for the coming future.

We live to-day in highly critical times. The forces of irreligious materialism, unbelief, crime and violence encircle the world and try to enslave it.

Contrast this nefarious activity with Jesus' message of Peace on Earth and Goodwill to all Men and with the fact that so many who believe in this message remain passive and separated from each other. And I ask: Do not the Christian Churches of whatever denomination, bear some responsibility to make that message more loudly heard and more effectively practised? We should examine anew not only our position as facing the enemy forces of atheism, but also ourselves. More particularly we ought to find out what else we could do to spread the light of truth. We ought also to study how we could make more inspiring the sermons, instruction and education of the priests, the teaching in our schools and Sunday Schools.

The purpose of all this self-examination is to enable us to do better Christ's work on earth, in so far as we are trying to carry it on in His name. The main aim of this work is to help people to understand that God and the Holy Spirit are tremendous realities.

But success in this mission may only be achieved if it is itself inspired by the Holy Spirit. To-day more than ever, divine enlightenment is a necessity for all of us. We need absolutely that life-giving inspiration, which moved the Disciples of our Lord to go among all nations to preach the Gospel and which helped so many Christians to endure terrible persecutions and tortures.

Therefore I would beg you, to devote all your attention and energy to finding a way which would ensure the spreading of this inspiration to all the faithful and particularly to the clergy. I considered these matters as a faithful child of the Church, aware of the importance of its mission, and whilst so doing several ideas came to my mind. My wish to foster the progress of our Church and the dangers which we all face to-day cause me much anxiety; so I feel urged to put these ideas before you at this very moment and without any delay.

In doing this I am carrying out my beloved father's wishes since his sad passing away prevented him from putting them before you himself. He taught me much on this and prepared me for this great responsibility, which has been put into my hands. I therefore speak to you not only in my own name but in his name also.

The Greek youth particularly, students and workers, need young and cultured priests, who together with their teachers shall stand by them on the arduous road, which leads to virtue and to spiritual elevation. This is specially necessary nowadays when a wave of doubtful morality coming from abroad, through various channels, threatens to provoke among our youth an unprecedented deterioration of ethical values.

The impressive and beautiful rituals of our divine services were established, so as to lead the congregation's thoughts and feelings away from worldly cares. These divine services, when their symbolism and their deep meaning are explained to the people, lift the congregation towards the Most High.

Church attendance in this way is not only a duty imposed from outside, but a consolation as well as a source of inspiration and courage

But this result can be achieved only if the priests who take the leading part in these ceremonies are themselves sufficiently inspired, and have themselves experienced the inner strength by private prayers and wholehearted participation in divine liturgy.

If we do not have enough such priests, we must consider ways and means through which to increase their numbers to as many as the Church needs. For it is not enough for priests to perform correctly the external rites. They should be imbued with glowing faith and be prepared to devote their whole selves so as to be able, strengthened by Divine Grace, to attend to the spiritual needs of their human flock.

I suggest therefore that we should examine afresh the whole system of training and preparation of those called to this unwordly mission.

The first point to study in this connection is the moral character of the priest. The lay people should be able to find in him an example so that they may become better persons themselves. Almost without exception we all have to struggle against weaknesses of the human nature, so it is part of the priest's work to encourage us to seek goodness and to discourage us from surrendering to evil. He must show us that it is possible to be good.

The second point in connection with the priest's preparation is that he needs a deeper knowledge and broader understanding of the Church's history, doctrines, rites, symbols and beliefs. In all this he will be helped by the study of the texts of the Fathers of our Church in the light of which he will be able to point out again these truths, which in part or as a whole have been forgotten.

The third Point we should consider is whether the young cleric just out of the seminary needs adequate preparation to face the practical and moral problems which present themselves in the everyday life of their flock. As soon as he leaves the seminary and is ordained as a priest, he will come up against them constantly. This will happen whenever his parishioners come to him to confess their sins or to talk with him of their personal problems.

Therefore it may be useful if all seminary and Theological School graduates were attached to an older priest so as to learn directly and practically how to confront these problems.

The fourth point is how the priest will attain that divine inspiration which will transform both his interior life and his work. This of course is a gift of God's Grace; yet real and fervent prayer can attract it and thus help him to acquire the necessary strenght.

If the priest has experienced in his own heart the strength of the presence of the Holy Spirit, it will enable him to bless those who surround him and to serve them with sympathy and understanding.

On the other hand as perfect prayer does not constitute only an activity of the mind but one in which the whole soul of man participates in its desire for deeper communion with God, such participation can be obtained through contemplation as recommended by Fathers of our Church such as Basil the Great, St. Gregory Palamas, Simeon of Salonica, Nicodimos of the Holy Mountain and others.

Basil the Great says, "a mind which is not dispersed among external things, returns to itself and from itself it ascends to God" St. Simeon, the New Theologian, says that at first a person finds it difficult to succeed in contemplation but if he perseveres, he will find what he

never before experienced: the spirit seeing itself in full clearness. If the priests the monks and the novices are encouraged to practice meditation as they already are towards prayer, the results would have a far reaching effect on themselves and their flock. They and all of us would then be in a position to understand better why Jesus said: "The Kingdom of Heaven is within you". Every member of the Church from the most humble up to the most distinguished prelate should feel honoured by the knowledge that he helps the Church to recover its initial inspiration and thus renders it better able to fulfill its great mission.

I realise that these problems are difficult but they are not insoluble I am happy to be able to assure you that you will have by your side all the Greeks in your endeavour to find a solution to the questions which the Church is considering and in your effort to organise and to develop your apostolic mission.

As far as I am concerned and honouring the oath which I took upon assuming my duties as well as the trust that my father has left me, I feel the need to repeat now as I did then that I am and that I shall always be the guardian and the protector of our Holy Church.

I find that the time has come for us to become bolder in providing for the religious needs of the man of the twentieth century. Let us all work therefore actively so that our Church may recapture its past glory. This is not only urgently required by our times, but it is above all and for all time the eternal mission entrusted to the Church by its divine Founder and Leader.

We have to look only beyond our borders to see the number of people which have been forced into atheism and materialism by political theory on the one hand and a blind worship of a misunderstood and so called omnipotent science on the other. Let us not only observe the zeal of the promoters of spiritual disruption, but also take warning of the imminent menace which threatens us.

For many years the peace of the world, and this includes our country, has been gravely threatened. If ever a world war was to break out, we all know that modern nuclear weapons would make it unimaginably destructive.

It is true that public prayers are said for peace here as in other countries. But there is so much evil doing, selfishness, materialism and violence active in the world, that war would appear to be a divine retribution. Therefore when we pray for peace, these prayers mean that we do not only ask God to forgive us these sins but also to become less unworthy of His mercy and be spared the war. But prayers are not enough if we do not add to them actions. It is true that governments and armies are coping with the war danger. From a moral point of view however I feel that the Church, in sermons and Sunday Schools, would point out repeatedly that part of Jesus' message which calls upon us to quell violent passions such as anger, cruelty quarrelsomeness and hatred.

Your Beatitude and most reverend Bishops, I firmly believe that the hour has come of a great rally of all the spiritual forces of Christianity,

Let everyone remember that the only lasting solution to all the world's worst problems lies in our becoming more Christian in mind so that Christ may live again in us. May His message become a living reality in our times.

CVN/je

cc: Permanent Mission
Mr. Narasimhan
Mr. Lemieux

13 July 1971

My dear Under-Secretary,

Thank you for your very kind letter of 24 June which Ambassador Bitsios brought to me personally the other day.

I am grateful to you personally, and to your Government, for your reiterated invitation to visit Athens in the near future. Unfortunately, I am constrained under medical advice to restrict my travel to the minimum. I intend only to fulfill such firm commitments as I already have, and not to undertake new ones. In the circumstances, I am very much afraid that it may not be possible for me to include a visit to Greece as part of my European travel in September. I do hope that you will understand my difficulties in this regard.

With assurances of my highest consideration, I remain

Yours very sincerely,

U Thant

His Excellency
Mr. Ch. X. Palamas
Under-Secretary of State
for Foreign Affairs
Athens
Greece

THE UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE
FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS

(5)
Athens, 24 June 1971

My dear Secretary General

Ambassador Bitsios conveyed to me your friendly greetings and your kind words of appreciation for the policy of the Greek Government, and its efforts to strengthen peace and security in the Balkan area.

These words of appreciation uttered by you, Mr. Secretary General, the Head of the Organisation whose principles inspired this policy, are a precious encouragement for the Greek Government. I thank you.

While expressing my thanks for your friendly greetings may I use this opportunity to reiterate to you the hope I had expressed, when I saw you in New York last fall, that you might find it possible to pay a visit to Greece. This invitation of the Greek Government stands and awaits your favourable response.

May I add, that as matters develop in this Balkan area, your visit to Athens, would be a stimulating source of inspiration for the pursuance of our efforts. Couldn't you combine a visit to Greece with your trip to France in early September? We shall be delighted to receive you here.

His Excellency
U Thant
Secretary-General
of the United Nations
New York

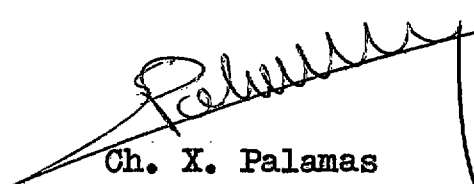
*Thanks, but I'm afraid that
under my doctor's instructions
I may have to curtail a good
deal of extensive travel.*

U Thant
C.V.
12/7/71

THE UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE
FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Thanking you again for your kind thoughts,
I would like to assure you, Mr. Secretary General, of
my most sincere feelings of friendship, deep esteem
and consideration.

Yours very sincerely


Ch. X. Palamas
Under-Secretary of State
for Foreign Affairs