

ADDRESS OF HIS EMINENCE ARCHBISHOP GREGORIOS OF  
THYATEIRA AND GREAT BRITAIN AT THE EXHIBITION  
*“Immortalised by Art”* – 29<sup>th</sup> October 2018

Dear Friends,

I am very moved to be here this evening at a unique event, one at which eight artists have come together to celebrate my life and pastoral ministry as Archbishop of Thyateira and Great Britain on the occasion of my 90<sup>th</sup> birthday yesterday.

This event has been encouraged by the Association of Greek Orthodox Communities in Great Britain, together with the World Federation of Overseas Cypriots. I am deeply grateful to them and I congratulate the artists Eleftherios Foulidis, Alexios Gennaris, Alexandros Kapraras, Michael Minas, Yorgos Papadopoulos, Doros Partasides, Despina Symeou and Kerry Zacharia, who have made use of their God-given talents to create these beautiful works of art.

In the first place, we must recognise that, for the Christian, the inspiration for true works of art comes from God the Creator Who, inspiring the artist by the wonderful works to be seen around them, stimulates their talents and abilities. It is therefore a God-given gift.

Of course, what we see here are different expressions of artistic talent, aspects of creative thinking, using differing forms, primary materials and methods to achieve a final result which is pleasing to the eye but which speaks to the inner sensitivities of the viewer – to their soul, if you like – and which, perhaps, induces a certain questioning. And it may be that this is what the organisers had in mind when they decided on the title of this exhibition, since the items on view ‘immortalise’ the Immaculate Faith and the heights of the ineffable teaching of our Church through the use of artistic talent. Of course, I recognise that certain of the depictions deliver an impression of my humility. However, while the artists may be attempting to preserve a certain image of myself, I would dispute that I have thereby been immortalised! Indeed, I do not know whether humility and immortality go together. I leave it to the thinkers, the theologians and holy men and women to give us an answer.

Our Holy Orthodox Church places great emphasis on the use of colour and light (as well as other means – such as music and embryonic drama) to reach into man’s soul. We are all aware of the divine images displayed in different places throughout our churches, whether as icons painted on panels or as murals or mosaics. The teaching-importance of such depictions was emphasised by Pope St. Gregory I of Rome, who wrote that they function as do books and thereby help the illiterate appreciate more fully the sacred history of our Salvation and the revelation of the Mystery of the Triune God as to our future and our relations with Him.

In the Orthodox Tradition, work to produce such images is so sacred that it is prepared for by prayer and fasting. Each icon has a spiritual significance - it is not just a 'pretty picture'. Some of the early work in mosaics by Byzantine artists can be compared to modern expressionism, while later murals have a depth of feeling which western art discovered only later on. Monochrome has also been used to convey the same message. It is true that many of the superb examples of this art are studied for their technical excellence, quality, innovation and implementation - and that Institutes exist for such study. But this should not distract us from the spiritual purpose of such art, which should be viewed in conjunction with the teaching of the Church and the writings of the Fathers. There are many instances where an icon or a mural is the 'pictorialisation' of hymns of the Church. On other occasions, it draws its inspiration from scenes from the life of our Lord, His blessed Mother and the Saints, is related to passages from Holy Scripture, or depicts holy personages.

However, and as this evening's exhibition makes clear, there are other approaches and materials that can be used to express spirituality and provoke a reaction in the depths of man's soul and its instincts. Take for example the use of coloured glass that has developed into the work of the accomplished stained glass artist. Photography has been able to bring together various aspects of art to produce its own skilled depiction of images that move us to joy or tears and that create lasting impressions that influence our life and outlook about man's destiny. It is an art that can be used to bring together various disassociated images into an harmonic unity. Textiles can in addition to practical uses also assist in creating a spiritual atmosphere - whether or not they include a figural depiction within its warp and weft or a design imposed on it as a print. These are only some of the skills that are on view here this evening.

In all these items, I recognise the skill, patience, imagination and dedication of the artists to their field of excellence. I thank you for the trouble that you have taken to present these works of art as a spiritual bouquet to celebrate my various anniversaries. I also wish to express my gratitude to those who have encouraged these artists to cultivate their talents, with such amazing and positive results, as well as to all those who have been involved in preparing and setting up this exhibition.

And, finally, I want to express my gratitude to all of you who have come out this evening to this 'Private View' on the premises of an organisation that is 'motivated by the love of God ... to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to meet [and enrich] human needs in His Name without discrimination [and boundaries]'. Thank you for being here. Thank you for your good wishes and for the kindness that you have shown towards my person and my humble ministry for His glory and for Mankind for which God became Man in the person of the Incarnate Christ, our Lord and Saviour. May Almighty God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - bless and keep you all in health to work for the manifestation of His wonders and the beautiful world in which we live, also enjoying happiness and prosperity, under the shadow of His wings and in the true Faith that He has revealed to us.

Amen.