

Bishop Mouneer's Opening Address

Global South Conference

All Saint's Cathedral - Cairo, Egypt

3 October, 2016

My dear Brothers and Sisters,

I would like to welcome you all here at All Saints Cathedral, Cairo. It is a great privilege for us here in Egypt to host the Global South Conference for the second time. The first time was in 2005 at the Red Sea. We call this conference "The Sixth Trumpet," and I wonder why our predecessors called these meetings "Trumpets"? Perhaps because they wanted to emphasize one of the meanings of the word "trumpet", which is "To proclaim widely or loudly". This is exactly what they tried to do every time they met and this is what we hope to do as well during the coming few days: "to proclaim widely and loudly the way, the truth, and the life which we found in Jesus." May the Lord give us the grace by which we humbly and faithfully fulfill this call.

Last year, we were supposed to meet in Tunisia, but the meeting was cancelled for security reasons. Today I am glad to welcome you here in Egypt, or as we call it "Om El Donya", the mother of the world, because of its ancient civilization.

My brothers and sisters, it is my prayer that this conference would be a time of joy and thankfulness. We indeed need to rejoice for what God is doing in our provinces. I pray also that we would be moved by the spirit to fulfill the mission of Christ that we are entrusted to accomplish. May we encounter the Glory of God and discern His voice to us during these coming days.

As we gather here in Egypt as Global South churches, we know that God has given us treasures and experiences to encourage and instruct us in our mission and ministry. We thank God for the growth of the church in China and Southeast Asia through many hardships. We also thank God for the East Africa revival.

In this conference, we will reflect on the Christian heritage from North Africa and Egypt. We are reminded of the great and ancient church of Alexandria and many church fathers and mothers who were persecuted and martyred for the sake of their faith in Christ. Their blood has become the seed of the church in Egypt and North Africa. They have been so faithful to God. I especially want to remind you of St. Athanasius, who stood firm against the Arian heresy while it was spreading all over the Roman Empire and it was supported by the Emperor himself. That is why St. Athanasius was known as "Contra Mundum" (against the world) because he stood against the false teaching which was adopted by the majority in the church then. He was persecuted, deposed, and put in exile for many years. In the end, the Arians disappeared and the Orthodox church of Alexandria flourished and is still growing today.

My brothers and sisters, what does the story of St. Athanasius say to us today? I think it says we must stay faithful to the teaching of Jesus Christ, which we once received through the apostles. It also says that the truth will prevail at the end. You may have noticed the theme we chose for this conference "...found faithful." As it is written in the first letter of Paul to the Church in Corinth, "...it is required of stewards that they be found faithful," 1 Corinthians 4:2. This is what we hope and pray for, to be faithful stewards. My brothers and sisters, we need to be found faithful, until the time when "the

Lord himself will descend from heaven...with the sound of the trumpet of God." 1

Thessalonians 4:16.

I would need a lot of time to speak about other faithful church fathers like St. Cyril of Alexandria, St. Clement, St. Cyprian and many others who shaped the Christian mind of the world during the first millennium through their faithful stance. I am happy that Bishop Bill Musk, Dr. Michael Glerup and Dr. Ashley Null will share more about the North African fathers in their plenary talks.

I am sure you know that we meet today in a very crucial time; a challenging time for the whole world and for the church, both in the west and in the Global South. Because of this, our conference is both historical and strategic. I am sure we are all aware of the major challenges that we face as we meet today. My hope is that during the coming days, we will study, discuss, pray, and find the ways to deal with these challenges.

One of the major challenges we face as a church is the false teachings which some churches are now adopting and propagating. These teachings undermine the authority of the Scripture, the majority interpretation of the texts and the tradition of the church. An example of this is the redefining of marriage by either permitting same-sex marriage or by indirect approval of it through prayers of blessing. This was described by the Primates at their meeting in Canterbury last January as "*a fundamental departure from the faith and teaching held by the majority of our Provinces on the doctrine of marriage.*" Lambeth Conference resolution 1:10 represents this standard teaching that is held by the majority of the Provinces of the Anglican Church, which recognizes marriage only between man and woman.

It is important here to say that this does not mean we are homophobic when we reject the unbiblical views on human sexuality. Similarly, it does not mean that we are heterophobic when we reject polygamy. We should love, embrace, and pastorally care for everyone but without compromising the teaching which is accepted by the majority in the Church. It is said that the whole truth is revealed to the whole church. Unfortunately, unilateral decisions taken by a few provinces have torn the fabric of the communion over the last 13 years. We made every effort to save the communion but sadly some provinces went on their own way without any regard to warnings from the rest of the communion. My brothers and sisters, I want to weep as Jesus did over Jerusalem.

It is sad indeed that some western churches and organizations use their wealth and influence to push their own agendas in the Global South. I see this as a new form of ideological slavery. We need to be aware of this, and resist all kinds of slavery, whether financial or ideological. As Os Guinness wrote, "The church that cannot say 'No' to all that contradicts its Lord is a church that is well down the road to cultural defeat and captivity."

We too in the Global South have our own weaknesses and challenges as well. Polygamy, tribalism, corruption, and harsh treatment of women denote the lack of sound Christian teaching and theological formation. This requires from us serious attention and hard work. We also need to deal with the false teaching of the prosperity gospel - Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons, which are spreading especially in Africa. Unless we promote theological education, we will not be able to combat these false teachings.

Other challenges that the church faces today are persecution, religious restrictions, the use of violence in the name of religion, and terrorism. In response to

this, we need to follow the examples of those saints who were ready to sacrifice their lives for the sake of Christ. Again, I quote Os Guinness by saying, "Christians today need to be broad-shouldered - made so by carrying the weight of the cross as we are commanded." I need to share with you that Egypt has succeeded to a great deal in fighting terrorism. We feel much safer now than three years ago.

Poverty is also a major challenge in the Global South. 1.2 billion people live on less than 1.9 U.S. dollars per day. In this regard, we need to encourage our people to get rid of the spirit of dependency on Western foreign aid. We also need to encourage NGOs to promote micro and moderate businesses to overcome poverty. It is also important for us to deal with health issues as well as education in order to tackle the problem of poverty in a more comprehensive way. Let me share with you some alarming statistics:

- 40 million people are living with HIV/AIDS.
- Africans account for 90% of victims of malaria worldwide.
- 1.1 billion people in the Global South do not have access to clean water. 2.6 billion lack access to basic sanitation.
- 1.8 million child deaths occur every year due to diarrhea.
- 2.2 million child deaths occur every year due to lack of immunizations.
- 200 million girls and women alive today have undergone FGM.
- 75% of the world's illiterate people are located in South Asia, the Middle East, and sub-Saharan African.
- Women make up 67% of illiterate people around the world.



We cannot turn a deaf ear as we hear these figures. Jesus sent us to the world in order to heal the sick, feed the hungry, and bring peace and reconciliation and to proclaim the Kingdom of God. In other words, we need to actively engage with our societies in order to proclaim the "better life" which we find in Jesus Christ. In addition to what I mentioned before, there is another major crisis in regard to refugees.

- The civil war in Syria has led to over 4.8 million refugees being forced to flee the country.
- Wars in South Sudan and Somalia are forcing similar numbers of refugees out of their countries.
- Many other refugees are economic migrants who risk their lives in order to find a job.
- 80% of human trafficking victims are women. 50% are children.

My dear brothers and sisters, we can not just watch this human misery and do nothing. We have to be involved in peacemaking where there is conflicts, provide health where there is sickness, bring hope where there is despair. Again I quote Os Guinness: We need to be, "Christians with hearts that can melt with compassion, but with faces like flint and backbones of steel who are unmanipulable, unbribeable, undeterrable, and unclubbable, without ever losing the gentleness, the mercy, the grace and the compassion of our Lord."

My brothers and sisters, we spent almost two decades reacting to the unilateral decisions and the changes in the theology and practice made by some churches in the

West. But, now, it is time for us to also give needful attention to the challenges that are before us in the Global South. We cannot continue to focus on the faults of others while neglecting the needs of our own people. The mission in front of us is huge as we are to advance the good news and build up new generations, rooted in Christ and established in the faith.

It is also important to learn a lesson from the crisis which the Anglican Communion went through in order to avoid similar problems in the future. To achieve this, we need to have a theological framework that binds us together. This could be in the form of a Statement of Faith or a Covenant that we all accept and subscribe to. We also need to have a strong structure that guarantees the sustainability of our ministries in the Global South.

My dear brothers and sisters, our own unity is very important in this stage. Without unity, we cannot face these major challenges. I hope that our conference will be fruitful and brings hope to our people and the whole church of Christ.

Finally, let me end with the words of Jesus: "As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work." John 9:4.