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Ecumenical Patriarch’s 2018 Christmas Message warns about new forms of nestorianism and monophysitism



In this year’s Christmas Message, His Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew warns about contemporary ‘nestorianism’ understood as secularization and scientism, and a new form of ‘monophysitism’ represented by tendencies to demonize the body and natural man, by puritanism and the syndromes of “purity,” by fruitless introverted spirituality and various mysticisms.

Patriarchal Proclamation of Christmas 2018 by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew

+ Bartholomew

By God’s Mercy Archbishop of Constantinople-New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch

To the Plenitude of the Church

Grace, Mercy and Peace from the Savior Christ Born in Bethlehem

Venerable brothers and beloved children in the Lord,

We glorify the Most-Holy and All-Merciful God, that we are again deemed worthy this year to reach the festive day of Christmas, the feast of the pre-eternal Son and Word of God's Incarnation "for us and for our salvation."

Through the "eternal mystery" and "great miracle" of the divine Incarnation, the "great wound," namely humankind sitting in darkness and shadow, is rendered into "children of light and day,"[1] while the blessed road of deification by grace is opened for us. In the theandric mystery of the Church and through her holy sacraments, Christ is born and takes shape in our soul and existence.

Maximus the Confessor theologizes that "the Word of God, though born once in the flesh, is ever willing to be born spiritually in those who desire Him. Thus, He becomes an infant and fashions Himself in us by means of the virtues; indeed, He reveals Himself to the extent that we are capable of receiving Him."[2]

God is not an abstract "idea," like the god of the philosophers, or an unapproachable God enclosed in absolute transcendence. He is "Emmanuel," "God with us,"[3] closer to us than we are to ourselves, "more akin to us than our very own selves." [4]

Faith in the inaccessible and fleshless Divinity does not transform our life; it does not remove the polarization between matter and spirit; nor does it bridge the gap between heaven and earth.

The Incarnation of the Divine Word is the revelation of truth regarding God and humankind, which saves the human race from the dark labyrinths of materialism and anthropomonism, as well as from idealism and dualism.

The Church's condemnation of nestorianism and monophysitism signals the rejection of two broader tendencies of the human soul: on the one hand rendering anthropocentrism absolute, and on the other idolizing an idealistic understanding of life and truth, both of which are especially widespread deviations in our age.

Contemporary “nestorianism” is expressed as a spirit of secularization, as scientism and the absolute prioritization of utilitarian knowledge, as the absolute autonomy of economy, as self-saving arrogance and atheism, as the “non-civilization” of individualism and eudemonism, as legalism and moralism, as the “end of decency” and identification of sacrificial love and repentance with the so-called “morality of the weak.”

By the same token, “monophysitism” is today represented by tendencies to demonize the body and natural man, by puritanism and the syndromes of “purity,” by fruitless introverted spirituality and various mysticisms, by disregarding the intellect, art and civilization, by denying dialogue and rejecting differences, with the dangerous expresser—supposedly in the name of the “one and only truth”—namely a religious fundamentalism nurtured by absolutism and rejections, while feeding violence and division.

It is evident that both a nestorianizing deification of the world and a monophysitizing demonization of it leave the world and history, civilizations and cultures, exposed to the powers of the “present age,” cementing their autonomy and impasses.

Christian faith is the certainty of our salvation by the God of love, who graciously assumed our nature and once again granted us “the likeness” lost through the fall, making us worthy of true life in His Body, the Church.

The theandric mystery is expressed throughout the entirety of life in the Church. The Incarnate Savior received “the flesh of the Church”[5] and showed, “first and alone,” “the true man, who is perfect on account of both character and life as well as all other aspects.”[6]

The Church of Christ is the place of “common salvation,” “common freedom” and hope in the “common kingdom.” It is the way of living the liberating truth, the core of which is expressing the truth in love. This love transcends the boundaries of mere human action, because its source and prototype lie in divine philanthropy, which transcends human reason. “In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent His only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us … Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”[7] God is present wherever love exists.

This saving truth must also be expressed in the way we celebrate the sacred Nativity of our Savior, who visited us from on high. A feast is always a “fullness of

time," a time of self-knowledge, of thanksgiving for the magnitude of divine philanthropic love, of witness to the truth of the theandric mystery and of freedom in Christ.

The Christ-pleasing celebration of the Divine Word's Incarnation is an act of resistance against secularization, against discoloration of the feast and its conversion into a "Christmas without Christ," as well as against a celebration of Having, of consumerism and vanity—indeed, into a world filled with social tensions, reversal and confusion of values, of violence and injustice, where the "Jesus child" is once again faced with the inexorable interests of numerous, multifaceted powers.

Honorable brothers and beloved children,

Generations come and pass, while forthcoming developments are difficult to foresee. Genuine faith, though, does not face dilemmas. The Word became flesh, the "truth has come" and "darkness has subsided." We already participate in the Kingdom while still on our journey toward the completion of the incarnate Divine Economy.

We possess the unshakeable certainty that the future belongs to Christ, Who is "the same yesterday and today and forever;"[8] that the Church of Christ is and shall remain a place of holiness and godliness, a renewal of man and world, a foretaste of the glory of the Kingdom; that it will continue "to give the witness of the Gospel" "to distribute the gifts of God in the world: His love, peace, justice, and reconciliation, the power of resurrection and expectation of eternity."[9] The contemporary ideology of some "post-Christian" age is baseless. "After Christ," everything is and remains "in Christ" to the ages.

We humbly kneel before the Divine Infant of Bethlehem and His All- Holy Mother, who holds Him in her arms, while venerating the Incarnate "most perfect God," and bestow upon the children of the Holy and Great Church of Christ throughout the world—from the ever-vigilant Phanar—our Patriarchal blessing for the Holy Twelve Days of Christmas, wishing you a healthy, fruitful and joyous new year in the Lord's favor.

Christmas 2018
Bartholomew of Constantinople

Your fervent supplicant before God

[1] 1 Thess. 5:5.
[2] Maximus the Confessor, Capita theologica et oeconomica, PG 90, 1181.

[3] See Matt. 1:23.
[4] Nicholas Cabasilas, The Life in Christ, VI, PG 150, 660.
[5] John Chrysostom, Homily on exile, PG 52, 429.
[6] Nicholas Cabasilas, The Life in Christ, VI, PG 150, 680.
[7] 1 John 4:9-11.
[8] Heb. 13:8.
[9] Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church (Crete 2016), Preamble.

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