

Patriarchal Proclamation of Christmas 2014

Prot. No. 1377

† 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 Saviour Christ, born in Bethlehem

Beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord,

*“Christ is descending from the heavens;
let us meet Him!”*

God has appeared on earth and, at the same time, we have seen **the perfect man** together with the inconceivable **value of the human person**. Today especially, we experience the condition of humanity after the fall, as we daily affirm with the Psalmist that “all have gone astray, they are all alike corrupt; there is none that does good – no, not one!” (Psalm 13.3; Rm 3.12-13)

Before the incarnation of Christ, humanity could never imagine the inconceivable value of the human person, which was weakened and distorted after the fall. Only the most illumined people could perceive, even before the time of Christ, the value of the human person and the response to the Psalmist's question: “What is man that God would remember him?” (Psalm 8.5), which they proclaimed in the Psalmist's words: “You have made man a little lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honour.” (Psalm 8.6)

It is this supreme value of the human person that the divine-human Lord revealed. And since that time, we each year have heard repeated declarations on the same subject by states, governments and social groups as well international treaties about respecting the human person and human rights.

We witness with great surprise the constantly repeated “drama of Bethlehem.” It is a drama because it is no longer a joyous event when we ignore the Son and Word of God born in a manger, when humanity as His creation is not respected as a “divine image.”

Our Holy Orthodox Church and its theology teach us that humanity and the human body deserve the utmost respect because they were united to God in the incarnate Lord. Therefore, all of us are obliged to intensify our efforts for the supreme value of the human person to be respected by everyone.

It is with great sorrow and deep regret that the Ecumenical Patriarchate follows the ongoing and increasing waves of violence and brutality, which continue to plague various regions of our planet and especially the entire Middle East, and in particular the native Christians there, often in the name of religion. We will never cease to declare to all from this Sacred Centre of Orthodoxy – to our brother Primates of the Orthodox and other Christian Churches, the leaders and representatives of other religions, the heads of state and every person of good will everywhere, but above all to our fellow human beings that, whether motivated or not by others,

they place their own lives at risk in order to deprive others of their lives; for they, too, are created by God – that there can be no form of true and genuine religiosity or spirituality without love toward the human person. Any ideological, social or religious expression that either despises humanity created in the image of God or else teaches and permits the death of our fellow human beings, especially in the savage and primitive ways that we see, surely has nothing to do with the God of love.

Dear brothers and sisters, as we turn our attention to the situation prevailing in our world today, we condemn the tragic events stemming from hatred of other religions and enmity toward people, which we witness so frighteningly close to us as we hear and see the terror so readily through social media. In response, we offer as the only powerful antidote to contemporary violence the “ultimate poverty” of God, which always acts as love and which surprised the wise men and the entire world. This is the mystical power of God, the mystical power of the Orthodox Church, and the mystical power of the Christian faith. **This is the power that conquers and overcomes every form of violence and evil through love.**

This is our humble assessment of world affairs this Christmas. We pray that everyone may experience the joy of utmost respect for the human person, of our fellow human being. We also pray for the cessation of every form of violence, which can only be overcome through the love promoted and provided by the “angel of great counsel,” the “prince of peace,” our Savior Christ.

May the grace, boundless mercy and goodwill of the newly-born and incarnate Lord of glory, peace and love be with you all.

Christmas 2014

Your fervent supplicant to God,

† BARTHOLOMEW

Archbishop of Constantinople-New Rome,
and Ecumenical Patriarch