

ENCYCLICAL LETTER OF THE NAVITY OF CHRIST BY HIS BEATITUDE THE POPE AND PATRIARCH OF ALEXANDRIA AND ALL AFRICA

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THEODOROS II

BY THE GRACE OF GOD POPE AND PATRIARCH OF ALEXANDRIA, THE ENTIRE LAND OF EGYPT AND ALL AFRICA

TO THE PLENITUDE OF THE APOSTOLIC AND PATRIARCHAL THRONE OF ALEXANDRIA

GRACE AND MERCY AND PEACE FROM OUR LORD AND GOD AND SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST BORN IN BETHLEHEM

My dear brothers and sisters,

Our path to salvation has always been either a path of convergence to the will of our Creator or a path of deviation from it due to the predomination of our own will. Our vacillation between the divine and our own will, has sealed and will continue to seal – often tragically – our path to our natural destination, which is none other than to become partakers of God by Grace.

Being in the paradise of communion with our Creator, we have forgotten the benevolence of Creation and raised the banner of rebellion, in breach of the contract we made with God. Yet God, with paternal affection and love, has not abandoned us in the tragedy of our fall. Condescending to our weakness, He revealed His will and, through Moses, offered us indicators or a just and fraternal living.

And when the fullness of time had come, God gave us a gift greater even than the gift of Creation. He gave us the gift of Adoption. He sent His Only Begotten Son to lighten our path of return to the embrace of the Father. This time God's contract with the people was summarized in one single commandment: **Love one another**. Sincere love was proclaimed as an attitude and way of life. A way of life measured by our readiness to recognize in the face of others, not simply our fellow human beings, but our brothers and sisters.

Yet today we forget God's will. We want to decide whether to accept or reject the gift of a new life. We want to regulate the end of our earthly life. We want to give new meaning to the God-given institution of family. We want to govern creation not as rational stewards, but as nothing but ruthless exploiters. We want either to suppress faith in God, or to transform it into a means of enforcing misanthropic ideologies.

And, since we have marginalised God and have removed conventional borders through technology, fear has come to erect new walls. We feel fear, because there are people around us who are determined to trample on the lives of others, in order to impose their own will misanthropically. We feel like the Alexandrian poet who desperately confesses: *"Without reflection, without mercy, without shame, they built strong walls and high, and compassed me about"*.

The world that was deeply wounded by the absurdity of the two world wars, now face a threat which is not at all conventional, but rather excessively disproportionate. The image of God in us has become so tarnished, as we have succumbed to our own will, making the prospect of likeness to God to seem hopelessly distant.

Yet, Christ, who is born tonight, said to us: "And surely I am with you always, to

the very end of the age". Christ who loves mankind pledged to remain beside us. What do we owe Christ in return? What we owe Him is our conscience's peaceful revolution with the banner of love's commandment, the mandate we signed with God. This peaceful revolution is required to reverse the pendulum of history from our own will to the will of God.

Do we have the extenuating circumstance of ignorance or of misunderstanding the divine will? No! Because the truth was expressed in the Gospels and it was summarized in one single word: **mercy**. Our Lord told us to feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, clothe the naked, host those in need, soothe the pain of the sick, visit those in prison. In other words, share, love, partake of the pain of others. Show concern for the rights of others, and do not tolerate the hypocrisy of the many.

My dear brothers and sisters,

The Elder Joseph the Hesychast, said: *"God does not want to save us on His own will... He always helps, He is always beside us, but He also wants us to work, to do what we can"*. God respects our freedom, but always looks forward us to stretching out our hand. He looks for us to cooperate, to do whatever we can, so that we can achieve what our Lord, who is born today, promised us: **the return to full communion with God**.

Many years!

THEODOROS II

†Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa

In the Great City

of Alexandria

Nativity of Christ 2016