

Message from Ignatius IV, patriarch of Antioch

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Bose, 7-10 September 2011

XIX International Ecumenical Conference

on Orthodox spirituality

God is the one who made our service to the New Covenant possible; Spiritual Covenant and not one made of stone

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In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Dear Rev. Father Enzo together with his brotherhood and sisterhood,

I send to you and to the conferees in Bose this year these few words with my sincere love and prayers.

Firstly, I address to you with the words of St Paul:

"We are not like the many that make business from the Word of God, but we speak through Christ words of righteous men; words of the apostles of God, under the presence of God. You are our epistle, written in our hearts, which is known and read by all the people. Indeed, it is clear that you are the epistle of Christ, which we have established and not written in ink, but through the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in tables of flesh and blood; thus, in your hearts. God is the one who made our service to the New Covenant possible; Spiritual Covenant and not one made of stone; because the letter kills but the Spirit gives life".

Our story in the Church is not a story of a letter, but rather of life. When St Paul wrote this epistle to the Corinthians, he was writing as though he didn't acknowledge what he himself had written. He was telling them, "even if there were in front of you texts written in ink, we didn't write that in you; we have already written on the tables of your hearts and not on paper".

The most dangerous thing would be to consider that the word of God is a word written on papers. It won't be actually the word of God, unless it is written on the tables of our hearts: on your hearts. Haven't you been baptized and born again? This is what has been added to the life of the faithful. It was not by mere coincidence that St Paul wrote to the Corinthians to warn them from the letter of the Mosaic Law, that he alluded as the text written on tables of stone, and that was given to Moses on Mount Horeb. He was warning them even from this text, from its literal meaning, to tell them that what stands behind the letter is of greater importance than the letter itself.

One ought to ask oneself, after so many years of dealing with what is related to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, the following question: what has one gathered at the end of the day? Normally, one has to have had gathered holiness, and more strength and transcendence in the Spirit. Is this a matter of fact? Or all what it is about are words that produce more words, and eventually, words lead the human being astray to a certain mentality which is not interrelated with faith at all.

The utmost aim of any theological teaching of the Church is the spiritual renewal of the human being. In case we didn't obtain this, we would be practically arriving to a dead end. In the Church, there is not any word. The Church "believed, and therefore, She spoke".

To conclude, I renew my sincere wishes for the success of this conference, hoping it becomes an opportunity for holiness.

? Ignatius IV

Patriarch of Antioch and all the East

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