

Message from Patriarch Bartholomeos I

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ARS LITURGICA

Art at the service of the Liturgy

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National Office for the Cultural Heritage of the Church — Italian Bishops' Conference

MESSAGE FROM BARTHOLOMEOS I, ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH

Dear Fr. Enzo, Prior of the Community in Bose

Beloved brothers and sisters,

Participants of the Liturgical Colloquium,

It is with great joy that we communicate with you in order to address and bless your international scholarly gathering to explore the theme of "Liturgical Art: art in the service of liturgy."

If, as the Psalmist intoned, our Lord is "exceedingly beautiful" (Ps. 44.2); and if, as Fyodor Dostoevsky wrote, "beauty will save the world," then the liturgy is the place where art and architecture coincide to convey the communication between heaven and earth, as well as the communion between God and the world.

Indeed, what liturgy does in terms of spiritual song and art, architecture achieves in terms of material space and geometrical creation. Ultimately, space and geometry share the same language as liturgy and art. They articulate the same truth; they speak the language of theology. What is this truth? What is this theology?

The Orthodox tradition professes and proclaims that the Word of God, who is by nature inconceivable, was nevertheless conceived in the human womb of a Virgin Mother, Mary of Nazareth. Through the Theotokos, the incomprehensible divinity of the heavenly Father is somehow mysteriously and mystically – not unlike what happens in icons and not unlike what occurs through architecture – comprehended and contained within the human heart. As the Fathers profess, the uncircumscribable and inaccessible nature of the living God is rendered describable and accessible in human flesh and material creation.

Art and architecture, then, are a visible reminder of a heavenly vocation. They are pointers, signifying a supreme reality. This is precisely why the wood of portable icons will often be carved inward; for, the icon is an invitation to another, inner world. Moreover, frescoes on walls will often be painted at just above average human proportions; this is because frescoes express an invitation to rise higher than daily expectations. And this is why religious architecture draws the faithful either inward (to the heart) or upward (to the heavens); for the bricks and the mortar serve as an invitation to inner conversion and cosmic transformation.

In a word, liturgy and art are best understood in terms of encounter and relationship. Those who worship and those who create are drawn into a relationship with God Himself! In full awareness, then, of this awesome vision of both liturgy and art, we convey to all of you our most fervent prayers for successful deliberations and for continued

contributions in this crucial field of your academic research and artistic creativity.

His holiness

the ecumenical patriarch Bartholomeos