



The HOLY SYNOD
of the
ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA

**Pastoral Letter on the Emancipation Proclamation:
One Hundred and Fifty Years Later**

I.

January 1, 2013 marks the 150th anniversary of President Abraham Lincoln's signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. Within the context of United States history, this document signified a major ideological turning point in the course of the Civil War. Even with its inherent flaws (i.e., the Proclamation freed only those slaves within the Confederacy) the moral high ground was being set for the eventual abolition of slavery nationwide. Thus, by January of 1865 Congress had passed the 13th Amendment. By December of the same year all the States had ratified the Amendment.

As Orthodox Christians we are aware that documents and laws, in and of themselves, cannot eradicate evil. They may be able to change outward behavior but cannot change a hardened heart and closed mind. In the case of slaves in America, our history, subsequent to 1865, clearly shows that neither the Emancipation Proclamation nor the 13th Amendment put an end to the de-personalization, and consequently the de-humanization, brought upon one human being by another. In the United States and abroad, racist and ultra-nationalist groups are thriving. Globally, the tyranny of slavery continues to manifest itself in various ways including poverty, the unavailability of education especially to girls and women, horrific working conditions accompanied by unjust wages, the abduction and/or manipulation of children recruited for local gangs and militias, and the exploitation of men, women and children in the industries of prostitution and pornography.

Because Orthodox theology is grounded in the person, it has, over the course of 2000 years, sought to articulate and uphold the equal glory, honor and dignity of every person as being created in the image and likeness of God. Indeed, each person is a reflection of the Tri-Personal God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

II.

The pernicious and sinister manifestations of slavery continue into our time. As a global phenomenon, human trafficking often targets young women and children, both boys and girls, who are exploited and dehumanized by those who are ultimately driven by the insatiable lust for power and profit.

Human trafficking is a global commodity in which the harvesting of human victims has never been lacking, neither in the past nor in the present. In spite of national and international agencies dedicated to exposing and eradicating human trafficking, the buying and selling of human beings remains a multi billion dollar industry whereby the poor, the weak and the abandoned are the exploited victims. For

many vulnerable persons around the world, unstable economies, together with political and religious repression, are also factors that have eroded the hope of being clothed with the dignity and freedom we Orthodox Christians associate with a person's new life in Christ.

III.

As the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation draws near, Orthodox Christians in the United States understand that our freedom in Christ compels us to come closer to the world that we are to serve, protect, heal and transfigure. The Church cannot ignore God's world – God's creation. She cannot ignore God's people, especially those deprived of their freedom.

At the same time the Church must not delude herself into thinking that human trafficking and all forms of slavery can vanish solely through the passage of legislation or through the establishment of institutions and agencies. Ultimately, slavery can be stopped and erased from existence only through authentic repentance, i.e., a changing of the mind and heart.

In the desert of human despair - in the wilderness of human trafficking - it is Christ our Lord and Savior who calls us all to repentance. The historical record shows that Christians and Christian churches supported institutions of slavery and were implicated in these institutions. Christ's call to repentance requires radical social and economic changes. Through her own life and by her example the Church is to show the way of repentance that ultimately leads to life with the Triune and Tri-personal God. In this way the words of the Prophet Isaiah quoted by our Lord at the beginning of His public ministry will ring true: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." (*Isaiah 61:1-2; Luke 4:18-19*)

THE HOLY SYNOD of the ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA

The Most Reverend **NATHANIEL**
Archbishop of Detroit and the Romanian Episcopate
Locum Tenens of the Metropolitan See

The Most Reverend **NIKON**
Archbishop of Boston, New England and the Albanian Archdiocese
Locum Tenens of the Diocese of the South

The Most Reverend **TIKHON**
Archbishop of Philadelphia and the Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania

The Most Reverend **BENJAMIN**
Archbishop of San Francisco and the Diocese of the West
Locum Tenens of the Diocese of Alaska

The Most Reverend **ALEJO**
Archbishop of Mexico City and the Diocese of Mexico

The Right Reverend **MELCHISEDEK**
Bishop of Pittsburgh and the Diocese of Western Pennsylvania

The Right Reverend **MICHAEL**
Bishop of New York and the Diocese of New York and New Jersey
Administrator of the Orthodox Church in America

The Right Reverend **IRENEE**
Bishop of Quebec City
Administrator of the Archdiocese of Canada

The Right Reverend **ALEXANDER**
Bishop of Toledo and the Bulgarian Diocese
Locum Tenens of the Archdiocese of Washington, DC

October 23, 2012
Feast of the Apostle James, Brother of Our Lord, 2012