

Christmas 2020 Sermon

On October 28th, 1940, Mussolini demanded that Metaxas, Prime Minister of Greece, allow the Italian army free passage to enter and occupy strategic sites in Greece without opposition.

Faced with this demand, Metaxas delivered the now famous response “**Oxi.**” Despite Greece’s ultimate fall to Axis powers, Metaxas’ response resulted in delaying the advance of the Axis powers so that this battle was “*decisive in determining the future course of the Second World War.*”

In the same decade, in 1934, in Swiss Theologian Karl Barth gave a similar and defiant **Nein!**

*In this case it was to defend the Christian faith from the onslaught of a socialist theology that under Hitler’s Nazi regime strove to develop a German National Church that sought to **relegate God into the patron saint of human ethics and values** and paint Jesus one of the great teachers of this religion.*

The Nazis attempt to create a "German Christian" church based on this corrupted view of God, Jesus, and Creation sparked the **Barmen Declaration**, written by Barth, Bonhoeffer, and other pastors who proclaimed the revelation of Jesus Christ against the "truth" of Hitler’s Socialist Theology. In part this declaration stated,

We reject the false doctrine that the Church could and should recognize as a source of its proclamation, beyond and besides this one Word of God, yet other events, powers, historic figures and truths as God's revelation.

Christ is the Way and the Truth and the Life and no one comes to the Father except through Him.

John 14:6

To these modern-day martyrs for the faith, to be a Christian did not mean being religious in a particular way, but to be human—**not a type of human**, but the image that Christ creates in us. Bishop Zizioulas would continue this by saying that humanity must exist in communion with God his Creator.

This is at the core of the Christian importance of Christmas.

To the ancient Greeks for someone to be a person means that he has something added to his being; his personhood is not his true “hypostasis.” “Hypostasis” still meant “nature” or “substance.”

For the ancient Romans being a person was tied to their standing and relationship to others in their societal circle.

Each of these ancient ideas is rooted in nature, meaning that it is based on “something” to be added to the person in order to obtain wholeness and is rejected by Christianity.

Neither of these ideas is the ontological essence of what it means to be “made in the image and likeness of God.

With the incarnation of Christ, humanity was granted the opportunity to rediscover the fullness of their “personhood” that was lost by Adam and Eve in the Garden. Their sin became the inward focus on who they were, their nature, resulting in their loss of communion with their Creator. This is the beauty of our resurrectional icon where Christ-God lifts Adam and Eve as the first to be restored in His image and to once again BE IN COMMUNION with God the Creator.

This is what Barth, Bonhoeffer and the Protestant pastors were saying in their **Barmen Declaration**.

*The absolute rejection of false doctrine that the Church recognize as a source of its proclamation, ANYTHING that is **beyond and besides** the one Word of God.*

Christmas 2020 Sermon

*We must listen to this pleas to stop focusing on what we can add to our personhood, our humanity, and focus on Christ who tells us that **HE is the Way and the Truth and the Life***

But this is precisely the difficulty that we as modern and rational creatures fail to do. As Paul Tillich would describe it:

We are certain only as long as we look at the content of our certainty and our rational and irrational experiences. Looking at our own person we discover its weakness, its vulnerability and we discover the small amount of probability which our reasoning can give to the idea of God and to the reality of the Christ. Through our focus on the contradictions in the emotional side of our religious life, we alternate between ecstatic confidence and despairing doubt.

But Jesus nor Paul nor the disciples speaks in terms of probability or of the value of accumulated experiences. Jesus did not offer recipes that show the way to God as other teachers of religion do. He always claimed that **HE is the Way and the Truth and the Life.**

The Church Fathers claim that *“true knowledge is not a knowledge of the essence or the nature of things, but of how they are connected within the communion event.”* This is what Christ brings to us; the call, *not the command*, to abide in Him, to be in His Body, and to be in Communion with God. This is what Luke reveals to us in the opening paragraphs of his Gospel.

“Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.”

In the event of Christmas, God becomes His Creation, through the Holy Spirit and the willingness of the Virgin Mary as the fulfillment of the Will of the Father, the final Covenant with His Creation. Christmas calls us to rediscover what it means to be truly human.