

ORTHODOX THEOLOGY IN DIALOGUE

OTD, No. 4/2018

Published With the Blessing of
†IRINEU,
Archbishop of Craiova and Metropolitan of Oltenia

ISSN: 2668-5353
ISSN-L: 2668-5353

IV. APOLOGETICA:

**REFLECTIONS ON THE MISSION OF THE
ORTHODOX CHURCH AFTER THE HOLY AND
GREAT COUNCIL OF CRETE. INTER-CHRISTIAN
AND INTER-RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES**

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Key Words: *Orthodox Mission, the Holy and Great Council, Crete, Inter-Christian, Inter-Religious Perspectives*

1. Steps to Crete

The Holy and Great Council of Crete took place from 19th to 26th June 2016. Before this Council were to be held and take place there were also previous attempts to reunite all representatives of the Orthodox Churches in order to try and sort out the issues the Orthodox believers face. The patriarchal and synodical encyclical of Ecumenical Patriarch Joachim III in 1902, through which the Primate of the Orthodox Autocephalous Churches were called to collaborate to face the problems concerning the Orthodox Church at that time was the spark which initiated the preparation of a great Pan-Orthodox council. The Ecumenical Patriarch Photios II convened the meeting of an inter-Orthodox preparatory committee in 1930 at the monastery of Vatopedi on Mount Athos, during which they established an initial list of 17 topics, which were raised to be addressed, including inter-Orthodox relations, the relations of the Orthodox Church with other Churches and Christian confessions, the question of the calendar and various questions of disciplinary order. This council was necessary following the significant changes that the Orthodox Church had witnessed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century by the emergence of new Autocephalous Churches, and the challenges the new century threw at the Church, already shaken by the First World War.

Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras have revived the idea of convening a Council after the Second World War, by two patriarchal letters addressed to the Primate of the Patriarchal and Autocephalous Orthodox Churches in 1951 and 1952. In 1961 the first Pan-Orthodox

Conference meets in Rhodes and officially launched the process of the preparation of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church. The Conference approved a list of topics to be addressed by the Council and were classified in eight categories. This list was restricted to ten subjects by the First Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference of Chambésy in 1976, which focus on three main areas: inter-Orthodox relations, the relations of the Orthodox Church with the rest of Christian world and the witness of the Orthodox Church in the contemporary world. Ten subjects appeared on the agenda of the Holy and Great Council: The issue of the calendar; The impediments to marriage; The adaptation of the rules of fasting to contemporary conditions; The relations of the Orthodox Church with other Churches and Christian confessions; The relations of the Orthodox Church to the ecumenical movement; The relations of the Orthodox Church in the world; The issue of the Orthodox diaspora; Autocephaly and the manner of its proclamation; Autonomy and the manner of its proclamation; The diptychs of the Orthodox Church. The First Pan-Orthodox Pre-Conciliar Conference of Chambésy in 1976 established a process for the preparation of the Holy and Great Council. A Secretariat for the preparation of the Holy and Great Council was established at the Orthodox Centre of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Chambésy. It was to receive proposals for each Patriarchal or Autocephalous Orthodox Church in relation to each of the ten established themes and to produce a report to be subsequently examined by an inter-Orthodox preparatory committee convened by the Ecumenical Patriarch who was to meet as many times as necessary until a consensus would be reached between the various Patriarchal and Autocephalous Orthodox Churches on the subject.

The text reflects the consensus reached and was then sent by the Secretariat to the Holy Synod of each local Orthodox Church to be ratified, or to be commented on again. The final comments of each Church were to be sent to the Secretariat, which took them into account for the final text, which was to be discussed and adopted unanimously by a Pan-Orthodox Pre-Conciliar Conference convened by the Ecumenical Patriarch. This consisted the last step for the development of texts on different topics and the Council to be discussed and adopted by the Council. The Second Pan-Orthodox Pre-Conciliar Conference of Chambésy in 1982 adopted the text on the issue of the impediments to marriage, of the adaptation of the rules of fasting to contemporary conditions, of the question of the calendar. The Third Pan-Orthodox Pre-Conciliar Conference of Chambésy in 1986 adopted the text on *The contribution of the Orthodox Church to the realization of peace, justice,*

liberty, fraternity and love among peoples, and the elimination of racial discrimination and other forms of discrimination, the relationship of the Orthodox Church to the ecumenical movement, the relationship of the Orthodox Church with the Christian world, and adopted bylaws of the preparatory Pre-Conciliar Conferences and the inter-Orthodox preparatory committees where all the decisions should be taken by consensus, except for procedural matters to be taken by two-thirds of the heads of delegations present. The Fourth Pan-Orthodox Pre-Conciliar Conference of Chambésy in 2009 adopted the final text on the Orthodox diaspora. This Pan-Orthodox Pre-Conciliar Conference adopted the working procedure of these episcopal assemblies.

When the Synaxis of the Primate of the Orthodox Churches gathered in Constantinople at the seat of the Ecumenical Patriarchate at the Phanar in March 2014, it was decided to convene a special inter-Orthodox commission to review a few texts of the second and third Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conferences of 1982 and 1986. This Synaxis of the Primate of the Orthodox Churches adopted the rule that all decisions in the Council's work will be taken unanimously on the principle of consensus. It had been decided that the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church would be convened by the Ecumenical Patriarch in Constantinople in 2016. The Council will be presided as established by the Ecumenical Patriarch, while the Primate of the other Orthodox Churches will be seated to his right and to his left. Each Church will send a delegation consisting of its Primate and 24 bishops.

The special inter-Orthodox Commission met at the Orthodox Centre of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Chambésy in October 2014, February 2015 and March-April 2015 and reviewed the texts on the relationship of the Orthodox Church to the ecumenical movement, on the relationship of the Orthodox Church with the Christian world and combined them together in a single document entitled *The relationship of the Orthodox Church with the rest of the Christian world*. The text on *The contribution of the Orthodox Church to the realization of peace, justice, liberty, fraternity and love among peoples, and the elimination of racial discrimination and any other form of discrimination* has also been revised and corrected. The text on the rules of fasting had a few minor editorial corrections.

The Fifth Pan-Orthodox Pre-Conciliar Conference of Chambésy of October 2015 approved the text on *Autonomy and the manner of its proclamation*, developed in 2009 by the Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission. It also examined the draft documents of the Pan-Orthodox Council reviewed by the Special Inter-Orthodox Commission from the

meetings of October 2014, February and March-April 2015. The documents *The relations of the Orthodox Church with the rest of the Christian world* and *The importance of fasting and its observance today* were approved. The document *The contribution of the Orthodox Church to the realization of peace, justice, liberty, fraternity and love among peoples and to the elimination of racial discrimination and other* was renamed *The mission of the Orthodox Church in the contemporary world* and could not reach unanimity and as a result was not signed by the heads of delegations of the Churches of Russia and Georgia.

Among the ten themes on the agenda of the Holy and Great Council, two could not reach a consensus at the meetings of inter-Orthodox preparatory commissions: the question of autocephaly and the manner of its proclamation and the question of the diptychs. The Synaxis of the Primates of the Orthodox Churches met in Chambésy in January 2016 decided that these two issues will not be examined by the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, but will be during another subsequent council. This Synaxis has even decided to remove the issue of the calendar from the agenda because some local Orthodox Churches have stated that they do not desire and are not ready for a calendar reform. The Synaxis considerably reworked the text on the impediments to marriage that is now entitled *The sacrament of marriage and its impediments*. This text was not signed by the Churches of Antioch and of Georgia. The Church of Antioch did not sign also the decisions of the Synaxis of 2016. Bearing in mind that the two texts on the relationship of the Orthodox Church to the ecumenical movement and the relationship of the Orthodox Church with the Christian world had been combined into one, it resulted that the six items on the agenda of the Council, approved by the 2016 Synaxis, with the relevant texts are: *The mission of the Orthodox Church in the contemporary world; The Orthodox diaspora; Autonomy and the manner of its proclamation; The sacrament of marriage and its impediments; The importance of fasting and its observance today; The relationship of the Orthodox Church with the rest of the Christian world*. The Synaxis also adopted the text of the *Regulation of the organization and operation of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church*. This text was not signed by the Church of Antioch.

Given the difficult political situation in the Middle East, the Synaxis of the Primates of January 2016 decided not to assemble the Council in Constantinople and finally decided to convoke the Holy and

Great Council at the Orthodox Academy of Crete.¹ Official Documents of the Holy and Great Council of Crete were: *Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, Message of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, The Importance of Fasting and Its Observance Today, Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World, Autonomy and the Means by Which it is Proclaimed, The Orthodox Diaspora, The Sacrament of Marriage and its Impediments, The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World.*

The echoes before and after the Council of Crete were both positive and negative. But one cannot carry out an objective analysis of the impact that this Orthodox meeting has had unless there is a real dialogue between the Orthodox Christians and believers sharing other creeds and beliefs. The *Encyclical* of the Holy and Great Council of Crete also treats the possibility and necessity of the dialogue in broad lines: “The Church manifests sensitivity towards those who have severed themselves from communion with her and is concerned for those who do not understand her voice. Conscious that she constitutes the living presence of Christ in the world, the Church translates the divine economy into concrete actions using all means at her disposal to give a trustworthy witness to the truth, in the precision of the apostolic faith. In this spirit of recognition of the need for witness and offering, *the Orthodox Church has always attached great importance to dialogue*, and especially to that with non-Orthodox Christians. Through this dialogue, the rest of the Christian world is now more familiar with Orthodoxy and the authenticity of its tradition. It also knows that the Orthodox Church has never accepted theological minimalism or permitted its dogmatic tradition and evangelical ethos to be called into question. Inter-Christian dialogues have provided Orthodoxy with the opportunity to display her respect for the teaching of the Fathers and to bear a trustworthy witness to the genuine tradition of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. The multilateral dialogues undertaken by the Orthodox Church have never signified, and do not signify, nor will they ever signify, any compromise in matters of faith. These dialogues are a witness to Orthodoxy, grounded on the Gospel message «come and see» (John 1.46), see, namely, that «God is love» (1 John 4.8). In this spirit, the Orthodox Church throughout the world, being the revelation of the Kingdom of God in Christ, experiences the entire mystery of the divine Economy in her sacramental life, with the holy Eucharist at its center, in

¹ “Towards the Council”, <<https://www.holycouncil.org/towards-the-council>>, 30.11.2018.

which she offers to us not nourishment that is perishable and corruptible, but the very life-streaming Body of the Lord, the «heavenly Bread» which «is a medicine of immortality, an antidote for not dying but living in God through Jesus Christ, and a purgative expelling evil» (Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 20, PG 5.756). *The holy Eucharist constitutes the innermost core also of the conciliar functioning of the ecclesial body, as well as the authentic confirmation of the Orthodoxy of the faith of the Church*, as Saint Irenaeus of Lyon proclaims: «Our teaching is in accord with the Eucharist and the Eucharist confirms our teaching» (*Against Heresies*, 4. 18, PG 7.1028). Proclaiming the Gospel to all the world in accord with the Lord's command and «preaching in His name repentance and remission of sins to all the nations» (Luke 22.47), we have the obligation to commit ourselves and one another and our whole life to Christ our God and to love one another, confessing with one mind: «Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Trinity consubstantial and undivided». Addressing these things in Council to the children throughout the world of our most holy Orthodox Church, as well as to the entire world, following The Church Fathers and the Conciliar decrees so as to preserve the faith received from our Fathers and to «uphold good ways» in our daily life in the hope of the common resurrection, we glorify God in Three Hypostases with divine songs: **«O Father almighty, and Word and Spirit, one nature united in Three Persons, God beyond being and beyond divinity, in You we have been baptized, and You we bless to the ages of ages».** (*Paschal Canon*, Ode 8).²

As about the present paper, I will focus on several main Orthodox topics on the Inter-Christian and Inter-Religious dialogue as they were debated before the Council of Crete and the way they were approached during the Council. Together with other topics they are of a high interest for the modern Christian world and they require careful attention in the near or distant future: globalization, world peace, race and nationalism, religious freedom, migration and diaspora, the importance of religious education, inter-religious dialogue.

2. The Orthodox Church and the Phenomenon of Globalization

The term “globalization” has started to be more and more used in the late of the last century, particularly with reference to the intense development of world socio-economic and cultural processes, in a close relation to the spread of democratic institutions. “Globalization has become the notion,

² “Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church”, <<https://www.holycouncil.org/-/encyclical-holy-council>>, 30.11.2018.

the concept, or the key idea by which we understand the transition of human society into the third millennium”.³

This has led to the emergence of new social structures and new ways through which ethnic and religious nations and communities interact one to the other. Not few were the times when these realities have resulted into hostilities of certain individuals or even whole communities who have considered the phenomenon of globalization as a risk element and the greatest threat to their own identity.

The process of globalization is a dual one in its nature; it can be both a great asset for humanity and an imminent threat. Its importance lies precisely in its duality. Over the centuries, Christians have proved to be very reluctant in coping on with this dual meaning. But our daily reality and present life must be considered from an eschatological point of view; this is the only way provincialism and confessionalism are left aside, as well as the “modern myths” of the globalized society that analyzes everything individually. The eschatological vision is the optimistic answer given by Christians to the present world lacking trust and optimism.⁴

When it comes to sociology of religion, the term “globalization” started to be used once Roland Robertson's articles were published, from whose point of view this phenomenon is a “compression of the world”: an acceleration process triggered by the encounter between cultures, nations and civilizations in the way in which the world “decreases”. This interpretation was a version of the theory that equalled modernity with universality, secularism with intercultural convergence. There is also an antithetic talk of the “globalization of religion” *versus* “globalization and

³ EMMANUEL CLAPSIS, “The Challenge of a Global World”, in: *The Orthodox Churches in a Pluralistic World. An Ecumenical Conversation*, Edited by Emmanuel Clapsis, WCC Publications, Geneva. Holy Cross Orthodox Press, Brookline, Massachusetts, 2004, p. 51. “The word «globalization» has acquired a special meaning and is used to summarize certain developments and trends that have characterized the final quarter of the second millennium. In the area of economics in particular, this term denotes the process by which the economies of different countries have become fully integrated into a worldwide economic system, one that has concentrated production, trade, and information around the globe in a few geographical centers. The ensuing process of internationalization has led to a greater degree of mutual dependence among societies around the world” (Archbishop ANASTASIOS YANNOULATOS, *Facing the World. Orthodox Christian Essays on Global Concerns*, Translation by Pavlos Gottfried, WCC Publications, Geneva, 20003, p. 179).

⁴ JOHN CHRYSAVGIS, “Orthodox Spirituality and Social Activism: Reclaiming Our Vocabulary – Refocusing Our Vision”, in: *The Orthodox Churches in a Pluralistic World. An Ecumenical Conversation*, p. 133.

religion". No matter what were the answers given to these issues, the impact of globalization upon religion has never been something to disagree with. Given this context, the representatives of different religious traditions have made up their mind for one of two alternatives: to adopt culture protective strategies or to choose an active engagement in the process of globalization.

Whether globalization is rejected or not, religious traditions must be aware of the impact this phenomenon has on the world, generally speaking and on each and every individual, particularly speaking. One of the key changes brought about by globalization was related to the whole world's "de-territorialisation", followed by "re-territorialisation", with great impact on religions that are no longer spread only in certain areas of the world but lacking others.

An important moment in terms of globalization place and role in Christians' life took place at World Council of Churches (WCC) from Harare (1998), when the issue how Christians related to the phenomenon of globalization was brought up. With Harare, Christians of all beliefs and creeds became aware of the importance of globalization challenges and thought about the way in which the evangelical message has to be sent through present world. The participants agreed during this General Assembly that globalization is a fact of life and reinforced the idea that this phenomenon needs to be analyzed by making joint effort. Throughout these discussions, the Orthodox also brought their important contribution and approached urgent issues that were to be analyzed.⁵

On the phenomenon of globalization, an Orthodox view was formulated a year later at the meeting in Davos by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, who emphasized the idea that Christian Churches have given birth to another way of globalization related to the formulation of "spiritual ecumenicity". It differs from the phenomenon of globalization since it is based on brotherly love and respect for the human person, whilst globalization aims to unite all cultures into a single one in agreement with those who exert great influence over the others.⁶ The process which is meant to unite all of them into a singular way of

⁵ *Turn to God, Rejoice in Hope. Orthodox Reflections On the Way to Harare. The report of the WCC Orthodox Pre-Assembly Meeting and selected resource materials*, Edited by Thomas FitzGerald and Peter Bouteneff, World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1998.

⁶ "Moral Dilemmas of Globalisation: Address Given by His All Holiness The Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew at the 1999 Annual Davos meeting of the World Economic Forum", <https://www.patriarchate.org/lecture/-/asset_publisher/4xqHyd1IywNL/content/moral-dilemmas-of-globalisation-address-given-by-his-all-holiness-the-ecumenical-patriarch-bartholomew-at-the-1999-annual-davos-meeting-of-the-world-e>, 30.11.2018.

thinking can not be agreed with Christianly; this idea was also shared and highlighted by Archbishop Christodoulos, who pointed out the fact that the phenomenon of globalization is intended to create a new era when all people will be the same. In other words, it means nothing else than mere worldwide syncretism exacerbation, with effect on all religions, cultures and historical traditions.⁷ According to this interpretation, globalization has become a global phenomenon exerting quite negative effects on people.⁸

One of the most familiar criticisms to the phenomenon of globalization is related to encouraging and favouring the economic interests of certain Western countries resulting into culture unification and uniformization according to certain subjective plans. Although, globalization gives birth to an interactive network between cultures without resulting into a single one that would consist of mixed heterogeneous elements; however, this process might have an influence upon traditional cultures resulting not into their disappearance or limitation, but to interrelations and cultural exchanges. In terms of world globalization, traditional cultures belong to a complex and dialectic process which is based on reshaping them both in contact with other cultures and between them when different ideas and forms of life are to be met in the same area. This process can either lead to the disappearance of traditional cultures or to their interchange based on elements from less developed economically, politically, socially or culturally cultures when compared to the Western ones.

On the other hand, globalization is not always so “global” as the term might mean. It bears a more exclusive and parochial character. There are some fields where our society is rather transnational than “global” as denominated.⁹ In this context, Orthodox Christians’ spiritual ecumenicity refers to human beings’ unity based on love and cooperation relationship, beyond any racial and ethnic aspects.

Love knows no limits and includes all people, regardless of religion, since all men are created in the image of God. From this point of view, Orthodox ecumenicity differs radically from what the phenomenon of globalization means; especially from an economic point of view: love is based on men’s mutual love, whereas the phenomenon of globalization is mainly focused on economy, resulting into the uniformization of

⁷ CHRISTODOULOS Archbishop of Athens and All Greece, *Rooting of Joy and Hope. The Word and Role of Orthodoxy in the European Union*, Athens, 2001, p. 14.

⁸ EMMANUEL CLAPSIS, “The Challenge of a Global World”, p. 55.

⁹ His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, *Encountering the Mystery. Understanding Orthodox Christianity Today*, Doubleday, New York, 2008, p. 154.

consciousnesses with the purpose of obtaining economic benefits. Having a look at the way globalization is understood nowadays, it can be said that economic development particularly and globalization generally have lost their value when they focused only on the good of some to the expense of others. Thus, globalization can be considered as a two-edged sword.¹⁰

Considering these observations as a starting point, it must be pointed out the fact that the Orthodox Church does not oppose the economic progress which plays a significant role for humanity as a whole. However, though globalization is often understood today economically, our Savior Jesus Christ teaches that man shall not live by bread alone.¹¹ But, for our fellow bread doesn't bear only a material dimension, but a spiritual one, also, and thus it reaches to transcend present economic reality which can in this way become a helper to humanity.¹²

These ideas were debated and analyzed during the Holy and Great Council of 2016, when the Orthodox Church approached the impact of the phenomenon of globalization on present world: "The contemporary *ideology of globalization*, which is being imposed imperceptibly and expanding rapidly, is already provoking powerful shocks to the economy and to society on a world-wide scale. Its imposition has created new forms of systematic exploitation and social injustice; it has planned the gradual neutralization of the impediments from opposing national, religious, ideological and other traditions and has already led to the weakening or complete reversal of social acquisitions on the pretext of the allegedly necessary readjustment of the global economy, widening thus the gap between rich and poor, undermining the social cohesion of peoples and fanning new fires of global tensions. In opposition to the levelling and impersonal standardization promoted by globalization, and also to the extremes of nationalism, the Orthodox Church proposes the protection of the identities of peoples and the strengthening of local identity. As an alternative example for the unity of humanity, she proposes the articulated organization of the Church on the basis of the equality of the local Churches. The Church is opposed to the provocative threat to contemporary man and the cultural traditions of peoples that globalization involves and the principle of the «autonomy of the economy» or «economism», that is, the autonomization of the economy from man's essential needs and its transformation into an end in itself.

¹⁰ His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, *Encountering the Mystery. Understanding Orthodox Christianity Today*, p. 162.

¹¹ Matthew 4.4.

¹² His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, *Encountering the Mystery. Understanding Orthodox Christianity Today*, pp. 159-160.

She therefore proposes *a viable economy founded on the principles of the Gospel*. Thus, guided by the words of the Lord, «man shall not live by bread alone» (Luke 4.4), the Church does not connect the progress of humanity only with an increase in living standards or with economic development at the expense of spiritual values”.¹³

3. The Orthodox Church and the Matter of World Peace

Christianity as well as the other religions have given different answers to the realities of modern society. Some communities have isolated themselves from the present society whereas others have integrated into the new modern systems. Orthodox ethos, without giving up its identity, cannot ignore the new realities Christians live. This means to keep a permanent dialogue with the modern world without giving up own tradition and true faith. In the world we live in, dialogue is the only option people have to solve their existential problems and issues.¹⁴ Modern globalization, with all its positive and negative effects, is based on and asks for dialogue in order to find solutions so that people of different cultures and civilizations to live peacefully and harmoniously. Thus, dialogue should also bear an inner feature which is to characterize both local and global dialogue. Therefore, dialogue becomes the ground of global peace, which should not be considered only as a means of avoid warfare, but as creative effort in order to give birth to optimal conditions which are to allow people’s free development, regardless of their nationality or the areas they live in.¹⁵

¹³ “In a global society, oriented towards ‘having’ and individualism, the Orthodox Catholic Church presents the truth of life in and according to Christ, the truth freely made incarnate in the everyday life of each man through his works «till evening» (Ps 103), through which he is made co-worker of the eternal Father [«We are co-workers with God» (1 Cor 3.9)] and of His Son [«My Father is working still, and I am working» (John 5.17)]. The grace of God sanctifies in the Holy Spirit the works of the hands of the man who works together with God, revealing the affirmation in them of life and of human society. Christian asceticism is to be placed within this framework; this differs radically from all dualistic asceticism that severs man from life and from his fellow man. *Christian asceticism and the exercise of self-restraint*, which connect man with the sacramental life of the Church, do not concern only the monastic life, but are characteristic of ecclesial life in all its manifestations, as a tangible witness to the presence of the eschatological spirit in the blessed life of the faithful”. (“Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church”, <<https://www.holycouncil.org/-encyclical-holy-council>>, 30.11.2018.).

¹⁴ EMMANUEL CLAPSIS, *Orthodoxy in Conversation. Orthodox Ecumenical Engagements*, WCC Publications, Geneva. Holy Cross Orthodox Press, Brookline, Massachusetts, 2000, p. 136.

¹⁵ IOANNIS PETROU, “Peace, Human Development and Overcoming Violence”, in: *Violence and Christian Spirituality. An Ecumenical Conversation*, Edited by Emmanuel Clapsis, WCC Publications, Geneva, 2007, p. 24.

The public discourse of the Church is based on understanding the way believers develop relationships with the other people. Public or private relations that the Orthodox establish with the representatives of other beliefs and ideologies rely upon the way in which the others are assessed from a Christian point of view, with direct reference to all Orthodox doctrinal and liturgical tradition. Finally, fear and rejection of the other have their roots in the rejection of the Other, of God Himself, being related to the original sin, to the fact that Adam rejected his Creator, a sin that has its roots in the feeling of fear of the Other as Superior Alterity.¹⁶

Orthodox teaching insists on the idea of reconciliation between unity and diversity. Thus, when we refer to God, we confess the teaching on the Holy Trinity, One Being and Three Persons. Our Savior Jesus Christ talked to people of different religious beliefs during His earthly life. The presence and the actions of the Holy Spirit in the world are manifestations of communion; the eschatological event strengthens the idea of inter-human relations. True original communion takes place when differences between people are acknowledged. The Incarnation of the Word of God has illustrated the highest way in which God communicates with the world, expressing His love. Christ reunites all in His love and changes them.

This relationship cannot be imagined outside the Cross, the Supreme Sacrifice of the Incarnate Son of God. The Holy Spirit is historically and globally active, uniting all those that are separated. He is the One Who brings eternity in time and opens the world to eschatological realities, renewing and transforming existence in order to be prepared to receive future divine realities. As such, Christians' relations with other people are not based on their past, but on their future. The Church deviates from its original Christian message when its peculiarity is detached from the relationship with the universal love of God.¹⁷

Church, the Mystical Body of the Lord, must not only live the Gospel, but also preach it without changing anything in its message. A theological discourse review according to modern and today's categories can be a threat to believers because it might result into confusion, especially when it regards the many moral aspects to which present man

¹⁶ EMMANUEL CLAPSIS, *Orthodoxy in Conversation. Orthodox Ecumenical Engagements*, pp. 140-141.

¹⁷ EMMANUEL CLAPSIS, *Orthodoxy in Conversation. Orthodox Ecumenical Engagements*, p. 142.

must relate to. Orthodox advocate for the unity of faith but not for personal choices according to each person's skills and selfish pleasures and lusts. Believers must reconcile their beliefs with their actions for the benefit of the others without losing the path of the teachings they have been given. They firmly have to point out the idea of universal evangelical message which includes and goes beyond both man's private and public historical life. The discourse of the Church relates to our time people's claims, without giving up the original faith and liturgical life teachings.

At the same time, one must not make the mistake and believe that any kind of difference can be sorted out with the help of dialogue. There are situations when certain opinions and actions can not be tolerated. There are situations when believers' teachings and moral life come into conflict with certain contemporary beliefs asserted by most people, yet. In such cases, true faith must not be given up to for the exclusive and only reason of agreeing with certain social, political or economic structures. In order not to lose their identity, Christians must know and take into account all life aspects as lived in our century: "This is a necessary exercise: to examine thoughtfully our present situation, the historical antecedents and the trends leading into the future for our global society".¹⁸

An important issue related to the phenomenon of globalization is to ensure and maintain peace on earth. Globalization has diversified knowledge in all areas, but it has also led to some kind of extreme naturalism. The same thing happened in politics, too. "If in the Middle Ages the dominant consciousness was expressed through religion, in the modern age it is expressed mainly through politics".¹⁹

In the present globalized age, religious element is to be found in different social institutions, not as a substitute for politics, but as one of its components which not only does it denounce violence, but it also often uses faith in order to favour long professed violent behavior. Nowadays, certain religions and religious movements support citizens regardless of political options, others express a tendency to get the place of politics by submitting a religious like political agenda, thus promoting a type of "religious nationalism". This taking over in the field of politics is not to be understood as secular power; but it is a way to ruin the

¹⁸ Archbishop DEMETRIOS of America, "The Orthodox Churches in a Pluralistic World. An Ecumenical Conversation", in: *The Orthodox Churches in a Pluralistic World. An Ecumenical Conversation*, p. 4.

¹⁹ NIKOS KOTZIAS, "Violence, Religion and Globalization", in: *Violence and Christian Spirituality. An Ecumenical Conversation*, p. 15.

existing political order. Religion interference into politics has unavoidably as its consequence aggressive war. This happens when religion is considered a mere human intellectual product, all religions justifying their involvement in violence related matters.

Religions in general and the Church in particular have exerted a strong transnational influence over time; they were considered globalization forerunners, “proto” or “micro” globalization types. Under these circumstances, present globalized age is characterized by transnational nature, which resulted into all life level insecurity. Both individuals and communities and societies are looking for a meaning of their own identity which is clothed in numerous features. Social and institutional diversity should not represent a violence source; this would never be allowed in a multicultural society. In globalized world, both people and societies must be understood as multiple identity ones. People have both common and non-identical views, thus advocating for tolerance. Reducing human person to only one feature ends up into intolerance.

Religious violence is often considered a combination of three elements: modernism, nationalism revival, and religious belief. This is how we have come to talk about “nationalist belief” and “religious patriotism”. Under these circumstances, the Church must support multiculturalism and dissolve any form of fanaticism, keeping dialogue alive in order to eliminate marginalization of any kind, of any form of violence, thus, showing respect for diversity.²⁰

Today’s world is a complex, interdependent, multicultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious and pluralistic one. Given the context, Christians need to find ways to communicate and collaborate with people and communities of different religions, ideologies, cultures and beliefs in order to promote reconciliation and peace. This collaboration does not mean giving up specificity of the way in which peace is imagined by each and every of this world’s participants, but a type of theology based on involvement and cooperation with other religious communities must be carried out. Thus, the Third Pre-Synodal Pan-Orthodox Conference (1986) reinforced the call for Orthodox Christians to be active in promoting peace, for the peace of Christ is the perfect fruit of all re-enumeration in God; of organic manifestation unity into Him, of the human race and of the world; of universality in the body of Christ; of the ideas of peace, liberty, equality and social justice, and finally of fruitfulness of Christian love among the people of the world’s nations. Real peace is the fruit of earth victory of all these Christian ideals. It is

²⁰ NIKOS KOTZIAS, “Violence, Religion and Globalization”, p. 19.

the highest peace that the Orthodox Church always prays for in its daily prayers, asking it from God, Who can all accomplish and listens to the prayers of those who address Him faithfully.²¹ As such, real examples, pastoral projects and opportunities must be analysed which are to enable Orthodox Christians to take part into present social changes and bring their contribution to a culture of peace. Christians need to be increasingly aware of the need to transmit the message of peace and justice worldwide as an original confession of faith. These ideas were again on the agenda of the Holy and Great Council of Crete held in 2016: “She believes that *God has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth* (Acts 17:26) and that in Christ *there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus* (Gal 3:28). To the question: *Who is my neighbor?*, Christ responded with the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37). In so doing, He taught us to tear down all barriers erected by enmity and prejudice. The Orthodox Church confesses that every human being, regardless of skin color, religion, race, sex, ethnicity, and language, is created in the image and likeness of God, and enjoys equal rights in society. Consistent with this belief, the Orthodox Church rejects discrimination for any of the aforementioned reasons since these presuppose a difference in dignity between people”.²²

Peace knows no religious frontiers. Through inter-Christian and inter-religious dialogue and collaboration, communities have to overcome misunderstandings, stereotypes, caricatures, and other inherited or acquired preconceptions. Their voices in favour of peace must also be heard in public areas. Orthodox tradition reiterates the idea that violence and war arise from the hearts of sinful people. But peace starts with consciousness and heart changes. Thus, the matter of peace is based on three essential elements: every human person’s inner peace, vertical peace, that is peace with God, and horizontal peace, that is peace from all over the world, as it is stated in the Divine Liturgy. Peace is not an abstract notion but an ontological and spiritual happening.²³ Our Saviour

²¹ “Hotărârile celei de A III-a Conferințe Panortodoxe Presinodale Chambésy-Geneva, Elveția, 20 octombrie-6 noiembrie 1986”, in: Pr. Prof. dr. Viorel Ioniță, *Hotărârile întrunirilor panortodoxe din 1923 până în 2009 – Spre Sfântul și Marele Sinod al Bisericii Ortodoxe*, Ed. BASILICA a Patriarhiei Române, București, 2013, p. 208.

²² “The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today’s World”, <<https://www.holycouncil.org/-/mission-orthodox-church-todays-world>>, 30.11.2018.

²³ Georgios I. Mantzaridis, “Orthodox Observations on Peace and War”, in: *Just Peace. Orthodox Perspectives*, Edited by Semegnish Asfaw, Alexios Chehadeh, Marian Gh. Simion, WCC Publications, Geneva, 2012, p. 117.

Jesus Christ said He did not come to bring peace to the world²⁴, but He also said that He brought peace to all. If all accept Christ and live in peace, then the whole world will be at peace.²⁵ There is not even a single element to account for war in the Gospel of the Lord, whose source is represented by a series of injustices. True peace is the one based on men's justice and freedom God has guaranteed to human beings through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit as both gift and vocation.²⁶ From an Orthodox point of view, external peace exists only if each human person's internal peace first exists. Otherwise, external peace is merely a utopia. Finally, the contribution the Orthodox Church has related to bringing peace in the world lies in achieving inner peace, peace of heart.

4. Orthodoxy, Ethnicity and Nationalism

Based on scriptural truth, which Christian anthropology²⁷ relies on, the Church considers humanity's unity as profound and deep, whereas ethnic divisions are superficial and non-essential. The only division between nationalities is to be identified in the words of Jesus Christ: "And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats".²⁸

The saints who have worked through the power of Christ to save the world by receiving power from Him are mentioned in the service of the Church. Thus, together with the historical wealth of the Church, there are also her catholicity and diversity, for the saints belong to different places, cultures and periods, from wherever the Good News spread. The saints are portrayed in icons in the context they lived, bearing personal features. Celebrating all saints points out the fact that the Gospel must be preached throughout the world beyond parish or regional church boundaries. There are several cultural contexts in this reality, starting with the Apostolic Age until our times. "The Church is a community of faith which brings together persons of diverse cultures, nations, races and languages. There is a profound pluralism in the life of the Church which is truly a global body. Yet, the Church is not to be seen as an ethnic club or a multinational business".²⁹ The Church is the community of all

²⁴ Matthew 10, 34.

²⁵ John 14, 27.

²⁶ EMMANUL CLAPSIS, "The Peaceable Vocation of the Church in a Global World", in: *Just Peace. Orthodox Perspectives*, p. 163.

²⁷ Acts 17, 26.

²⁸ Matthew 25, 32.

²⁹ Thomas Fitzgerald, "Ethnic Conflicts and the Orthodox Churches. An Introduction", in: *The Orthodox Churches in a Pluralistic World. An Ecumenical Conversation*, p. 140.

believers who are in communion with the Holy Trinity.³⁰ Body unification is not something that lies in language, culture or nationality, but in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church.³¹

Orthodox Christians reinforce the idea that there is a type of humanity's theocentric identity based on scriptural truth according to which man is created "in the image of God".³² God is the Father of all, and this truth is independent on our faith, actions or beliefs, but it is engraved in the act of creation; it is the gift of God. Christians also share another relationship with Christ, offered by the Sacrament of the Holy Baptism when men unite with Him in a more personal way, thus enhancing relations with other men initiated since the creation moment. "The various other factors which are part of our particular human identity, such as our human relationships as well as race, nationality and gender, are not destroyed through our relationship with Christ. As part of our identity, they too are meant to express our deepest relationship with Christ. They can be transfigured through Christ and contribute to our salvation".³³

Any change in the factors that contribute to personal identity can turn them into idols related to race, gender, language, culture, ethnicity, or even religion.³⁴ "When we create idols, our deepest identity as sons and daughters of God is distorted. The idolization of race, gender, ethnicity, nation, language, culture status, money or religion can lead to disastrous consequences, not only for our own personal identity but also for those around us. The creations of idols can easily lead to racism, sexism, chauvinism, discrimination and the violation of human rights. The creation of idols by persons can lead to violence, war and death".³⁵ Love for a particular nation does not imply hatred or exclusion of the others. Both love and hatred for a nation can turn it into an idol. One of the worst consequences of this idol-based approach is the split of the Church, a consequence of ethnic and cultural differences.

In this regard, an illustrative episode is the one of the encounter between our Saviour Jesus Christ and the Samaritan woman in the New Testament.³⁶ Even today, there are still many people who continue to

³⁰ Ephesians 2, 21-22.

³¹ Ephesians 5, 23.

³² Genesis 1, 26.

³³ THOMAS FITZGERALD, "Ethnic Conflicts and the Orthodox Churches. An Introduction", p. 141.

³⁴ Matthew 23.1-39; Mark 2.27; John 5.1-16.

³⁵ THOMAS FITZGERALD, "Ethnic Conflicts and the Orthodox Churches. An Introduction", p. 142.

³⁶ John 4, 1-42.

think that the Samaritan woman was at least three times accused and guilty: she was a woman, she was Samaritan, and she was adulterous. From the Jewish's point of view, the Samaritans were engaged in a religious but also ethnic conflict with the Jews. However, although He should have never talked to her, Jesus talks to the woman. The Saviour considers her as a person, beyond the other individual features. As a result of this dialogue, the woman acknowledges the truth that her conversation partner is the Messiah who the people she belonged to, were waiting for, her example was followed also by her co-nationals. The Apostles were surprised by what had happened, meaning that they still had not understood the universal message of the Lord. They were amazed at the fact that the Saviour Jesus Christ had talked to a Samaritan woman. Thus, their Teacher overcame not only ethnic pride and sexism barriers, but also part of the culture of those times. Starting from this happening, it must be said that the Gospel dissolves idols, addressing all people, regardless of these limitations. It changes the stereotypes and preconceptions of all cultures, carrying on to be a challenge day by day. Thus, the Church, the Mystical Body of the Lord, is not a mere community that preaches the Gospel but lives and spreads the message to all humanity. It works to reconcile the whole of society.

In the Church, there are no racial or any other kind of limitations and she is spread worldwide to the ends of the earth. At the same time, the Church is local since she is in direct relationship with certain people. Catholicity cannot be separated from the reality of holiness, healing, reconciliation, and virtue. The close connection between the preaching of truth, the service "in the Spirit and in truth", and living in virtue must never be overlooked. During the Divine Liturgy, Christian truly experiences the words: "Let us love each other", illustrating the close relationship between faith and love, between love for God and love for our fellow.

Still continuing to be one of the topical issues that has given birth to many controversies over the years, the issue of the relationship between Orthodoxy, ethnicity and nationalism, with special attention to the issues of autocephaly, diaspora and ethnophilism, was also approached during the Holy and Great Council of Crete in 2016: "The Orthodox Church expresses her unity and catholicity "in Council". Conciliarity pervades her organization, the way decisions are taken and determines her path. The Orthodox Autocephalous Churches do not constitute a federation of Churches, but the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. Each local Church as she offers the holy Eucharist is the local presence and manifestation of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. In regard to the Orthodox Diaspora in various countries of the world, it was decided to

continue with the institution of Episcopal Assemblies until such time as canonical rigor can be implemented. These assemblies are composed of the canonical bishops appointed by each Autocephalous Church and these bishops continue to remain subject to their respective Churches. The due function of these Episcopal Assemblies guarantees respect for the Orthodox principle of conciliarity”.³⁷

5. The Orthodox Church and Religious Freedom

Related to religious freedom, common principles of Orthodoxy and other religions have been illustrated over the centuries: religious freedom is a fundamental right, based on revealed truth according to which all men are created in the image of God. Freedom is a divine gift and fundamental value, which is to be acknowledged, valued and protected. The relationship between freedom and religion is an interdependent one and one can never claim that there is an antithetic relationship between the two. The gift of freedom implies responsibility, and the way in which man becomes aware and expresses responsibility effects his own dignity and helps him set up his relationships with the religious environment in which he lives. All human beings have the moral duty to pursue the realization of good and justice in society and fight against evil. Responsible freedom is the essential ground for worship freedom. Society must acknowledge this type of freedom, as man’s inviolate right. To create necessary conditions in order to preserve communities’ religious identity is also the duty of a pluralistic, multicultural society, which is bound to acknowledge the important role of religion in society and comply with the principle of religious freedom by legislation. Militant secularism, religious fundamentalism, and relativistic pluralism are obstacles that need to be overcome in order to protect religious identity and acknowledging the dignity of the human person asks for complying with all types of religious or secular beliefs as long as they do not represent a threat to the religious freedom of both the human being and society. Starting from these principles, “over the last six centuries of Balkan history, faith in the right to equality, dignity, and freedom has been kept alive by the Orthodox Church in the hearts of the oppressed people. Moreover, at critical moments in the lives of these peoples, their religious leaders have stood in the front lines of their struggle to achieve human rights”.³⁸

³⁷ “Message of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church”, <<https://www.holycouncil.org/-/message>>, 30.11.2018.

³⁸ Archbishop ANASTASIOS YANNOULATOS, *Facing the World. Orthodox Christian Essays on Global Concerns*, p. 67.

The danger of non-complying with the human rights does not come only from the head bodies, but also from local structures that endanger man's existence. Placing great emphasis on rights has as its consequence a form of individualism and abuses against man. Therefore, individual rights must be in accordance with general rights, but also with the rights of future generations. This is a general situation when rights go beyond. Human rights are not to be followed only generally, but they concern the actions of each and every person, for sin beginning is still selfishness and self-love. Therefore, an important role is played by personal responsibility which makes man responsible both for his actions and his fellow's. "In Orthodox tradition, the pursuit of freedom is directed toward a different, higher plane: it is directed, above all, at achieving inner peace, which is a necessary condition for the fully developed human personality. This quest for freedom is a central feature of Orthodox Christian thought and life, and it explains the emphasis in Orthodoxy on self-control, on the ascetic life, on limiting one's needs, on fasting, and so forth".³⁹

By developing individualism, Orthodoxy fights against man, his fellow and human beings' abuses. The likeness of man to God is reached through freedom to love. Therefore, the right of every human being is to become what he was created to become, that is, to change from face to likeness to God. Starting from here, "Orthodox Christian thought enables us to delve more deeply into the meaning of human rights and to do what is necessary to prevent human rights declarations from remaining dry, legal documents. It also helps us broaden the scope of human rights to encompass other essential issues as well, such as the right to pursue one's own true nature and purpose in life".⁴⁰

Having a responsible look at history, one should never forget the fact that the world in we live is a changed world after man's fall into sin, which is omnipresent.⁴¹ This does not mean complete absence of good in the world. The most important thing is that each and every man sees the good, not the evil that rules the world. Orthodox theology preaches the fact that the world has been deprived of freedom and holiness; it, thus, became dependent on sin; this image, however is not a negative one, but a theological reflection of what the present moment represents. Admitting that we are not truly free in this world is not a natural thing, especially at

³⁹ Archbishop ANASTASIOS YANNOULATOS, *Facing the World. Orthodox Christian Essays on Global Concerns*, p. 73.

⁴⁰ Archbishop ANASTASIOS YANNOULATOS, *Facing the World. Orthodox Christian Essays on Global Concerns*, p. 75.

⁴¹ John 14, 30.

a time when there is so much talk about freedom and human rights. Freedom is a divine gift which is renewed by man's spiritual effort.⁴²

All men, saints and believers, live in a world defined by evil reality, theologically known as "the fall of Adam". This reality got different interpretations and meanings in Western theology ("original sin") when compared to the Oriental ("the reality of our mortality"), which defines the condition of man's present experience. "Given that such a fundamental difference of understanding exists, it is not surprising that several other concepts, such as (individual or national) freedom and (personal or social) justice, vary in meaning according to the way we perceive sin and mortality".⁴³ Orthodox grasp of freedom is closely related to the one of sin. Thus, terms such as "freedom" and "rights" base their explanation on the way fundamental theological realities are interpreted. Freedom "presupposes respect in equal measure for all people and segments of society. Freedom cannot ultimately either exclude or discriminate".⁴⁴

Nowadays, the speech about freedom got the meaning to make a choice; freedom became synonymous with choice. But for Orthodox teaching, freedom means something else, starting with the different way in which sin and mortality are grasped. Freedom is not a mere choice between life and death, between good and evil. God is the One Who can guarantee the ultimate possibility of right choice of good and his discernment of evil. God is the One Who can certify the ultimate possibility of the right choice of good and its differentiation from evil.

The approach on the issue of freedom and human rights starts from the fact that they seem to be unconditional realities and absolute concepts. But from a theological point of view, true freedom is based on the relationship with divine grace. Man's freedom relies on the absolute and unconditional freedom of God; therefore, it is beyond the way we understand freedom and justice. God ensures freedom and justice, and at the same time, He transcends them. This truth is based on the fact that man is created by God in His image and wishes to be similar to Him; this teaching is the basis of human freedom, the freedom to live in the fullness.⁴⁵ Man is truly free only when he is full of the Holy Spirit, when

⁴² His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, *Encountering the Mystery. Understanding Orthodox Christianity Today*, pp. 120-121.

⁴³ His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, *Encountering the Mystery. Understanding Orthodox Christianity Today*, p. 122.

⁴⁴ His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, *Encountering the Mystery. Understanding Orthodox Christianity Today*, p. 123.

⁴⁵ 2 Corinthians 3, 17.

he is guided by Him. The biblical phrase “in the image of God” means “in the image of Christ”; therefore man is a *Christ bearer*. It also means “in the image of the Holy Trinity”: supreme interpersonal communion. Since they are created in the image of the Holy Trinity, men are also called to create interpersonal perihoresis based on the divine Trinitarian model. And this should not only be achieved in the immediate familiar environment, but for all human levels, throughout all society and life fields. Thus, our social life is structured according to the pattern of the Holy Trinity, and this must be lived not only on a personal level but also between nations, so that “God may be all in all”.⁴⁶

True human freedom is to be revealed in the age that is to come; the moment when humanity and all creation is to meet their Creator. Human beings are to stand in front of God together with all creation, human freedom is to be reconciled and reunited, once and for all, with the divine plan. This is the eschatological dimension of freedom. Up to that moment, however, we live in a world of spiritual tension and irreconcilable choices. Freedom becomes both the source of dignity and the root of sorrow. The Church Fathers notice that God can do anything except one thing: He can not force man to love Him, since freedom’s ultimate phase is love. “To say to someone «I love you» or «You are loved» is to assure that person that he or she will never die; it is to affirm that he or she is utterly free”.⁴⁷

Orthodoxy does not understand God as mere passive reality Who can be known only intellectually, but He can be known in a dynamic and apophatic way. Apophatism excludes the exclusive intellectual knowledge of God; therefore, Orthodox theology makes a distinction between the essence of God and divine energies. If divine essence can not be known, energies can be known, experienced and defined, with the help of divine grace. Thus, the apophatic way to understand God is the beginning of human freedom. God’s freedom decides and defines human freedom, human rights are submitted to the justice of God; they are in relation with truth and love.

Man can not be defined exhaustively since he is created in the image of God. Human being must also be analyzed apophatically since man is a *microtheos*, an icon of God, as Saint Maximus the Confessor states. At the same time, man is a *microcosmos*, a world in another world. “Indeed, the role and vocation of the human person is precisely to

⁴⁶ 1 Corinthians 15, 28.

⁴⁷ His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, *Encountering the Mystery. Understanding Orthodox Christianity Today*, p. 125.

reconcile these two icons: God and the world. The final destiny of humanity is to render God present in the soul, in society, and in the soul of the world”.⁴⁸ Man is a mediator between God and the world. He can only achieve this role during the process of deification (*theosis*), which is a dynamic one and is based on complete engagement. Hence the idea that all human beings have equal value and share the same privileges.

No person has final judgment over another person or action since they can not know all the other human beings’ actions in all their complexity. People cannot perfectly define others; there is always something to be known, since life is free in God, the One Who gives life to everyone. In this regard, Apostle Paul portrays freedom as strength against death and victory over mortality.⁴⁹ All men are called to become “partakers of the divine nature”.⁵⁰ Thus, human freedom is not a type of personal freedom, but interpersonal one. We cannot be truly free when isolated, giving up our relationship with other human beings. We can only be free if we are part of the human community joining the others. Freedom is never unattended, but always social. True freedom proves only if we become people, only in the encounter with the other. Orthodox concept of deification (*theosis*) bears more than mere individual or personal connotation: it also means social justice which it supports. Society changes if the image of God in us is exploit the true source of freedom and social justice. It is freedom that transforms both man and the environment.⁵¹

For the Orthodox Church, consideration for cultural diversity and the religious toleration spreading are the grounds of true life. Orthodox Christian celebrates the complete creation diversity which is to be identified in different forms in the surrounding world. This diversity is perfectly united only in the Church, the Mystical Body of the Lord. To ignore the value diversity has means a rejection of God’s wonderful creation. Diversity has its foundation in the existence of God as the Holy Trinity, One Being and Three Persons. All human beings are created in the image of God, regardless of religion, race, ethnicity etc. Human being dignity is a gift of God, and any attempt to unrespect this dignity is an insult to God.⁵²

⁴⁸ His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, *Encountering the Mystery. Understanding Orthodox Christianity Today*, pp. 127-128.

⁴⁹ Romans 8, 10-11.

⁵⁰ 2 Peter 1, 4.

⁵¹ Romans 8, 19-23.

⁵² His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, *Encountering the Mystery. Understanding Orthodox Christianity Today*, p. 192.

Realities we live in this world have imposed to people of different faiths to live together in the same areas beyond national borders which had been set in the past centuries. Their neighbors, except their different religions, have also different ways in which they live and understand life, history, and culture. These realities make us reflect on our own belief and the way we relate to our fellows, learning to live in an environment based on toleration and dialogue. This is the Christian mystery of communion between men. The opposite of this approach is defined by actions of intolerance, reaching the point of racialism and fundamentalism. These actions are nothing else than a form of assault on God Who created man in His image, offering him freedom as an absolute gift. Having a suspicious look at the one next to us means nothing else than encouraging xenophobia, that is, fear of strangers, which is deeply rooted in Adam's action to move away from God, his Creator. This is par excellence example of alienation. For Christians, the other human beings are not foreigners, but brothers and sisters⁵³, and this requires sustained effort to reconcile all people.⁵⁴ This action can only be supported by promoting tolerance and consideration for diversity mirrored in God's all creation.

The Orthodox Church values this world in the light of the *Parable of the Tares*.⁵⁵ The Church cannot stand aside from what is called "secularized society", but she considers all humanity as the creation of God called to deification. Humanity is not created to become secularized, but to be deified by divine grace. The Orthodox Church reiterates the idea of God's presence in the world and people's lives; human actions are guided by divine grace. There is no secularized realm, no secularized human life dimension, no secularized fortress, no secularized sword.⁵⁶ The Orthodox Church bases her belief on human rights on the Gospel, Prophets and her commandments. Therefore, human rights are inviolate realities and they can only be valued in relation to God.

The argument on the issue of the universality of human rights starts from the idea that the language used is of Western origin, from a cultural, philosophical, theological and political point of view, and these rights can not be used in relation to other civilizations and religious systems. Different societies think differently and can embrace certain

⁵³ Leviticus 19.18; Deuteronomy 6.5; Matthew 22.37-39.

⁵⁴ His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, *Encountering the Mystery. Understanding Orthodox Christianity Today*, p. 193.

⁵⁵ Matthew 13, 24-30.

⁵⁶ JOHN A. MCGUCKIN, "The issue of human rights in Byzantium and the Orthodox Christian tradition", in: *Christianity and Human Rights. An Introduction*, Edited by John Witte, Jr. and Frank S. Alexander, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 181.

external principles.⁵⁷ Supporting extreme differences between cultures is exaggerated, as it is the case of Samuel Huntington. Cultural relativism starts from the idea that as long as human rights originate in the West, they cannot become rules in other parts of the world. But all religious communities need human rights both to be protected and to challenge them. Religious communities must not allow human rights be enforced externally, but reidentify them internally.

The Orthodox Church's focus on liturgical life and eschatological direction are no justification for indifference and detachment in terms of injustice, violence and oppression. For the Orthodox they must be the starting point of a moral and spiritual life towards the development of human personality who engages responsibly in the creation of God, working for the good of all. Orthodoxy does not consider human rights independently of the innate relationship between man and God. Human rights acceptance must be identified in the belief related to humanity's divine origins: permanent dependence on God and ultimate fulfillment in His kingdom.⁵⁸

God the Holy Trinity is the explanation for which humanity is at the same time one and multiple, same and different, united and diverse. People, beyond their cultural, national, racial and religious differences, are endowed with inner dignity mirrored by great relationships. Acknowledging Christ's identification with the poor, the abandoned and oppressed makes Christians serve them by protecting the dignity they have been given by God. Human existence is existence in communion. All human beings share same values and rights within this network of relationships. Orthodox grant priority to communion and personal relations to individual rights, without defaming rights that advocate for people's dignity and equality. "Orthodoxy nurtures a willingness to accept people as they are, with deep respect for their freedom and without requiring them to adopt Christian views. This makes it easier to communicate with others, including those who belong to other religions or hold other ideologies. It also instills deep respect for human rights and an eagerness to work with others to attain universal acceptance for human rights and to defend them".⁵⁹

These truths of faith were also stated in the *Declaration of Justice*

⁵⁷ Rev. Dr. EMMANUEL CLAPSIS, "Human Rights and the Orthodox Church in a Global World", in: *ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΑ*, 2/2016, p. 117.

⁵⁸ Rev. Dr. EMMANUEL CLAPSIS, "Human Rights and the Orthodox Church in a Global World", p. 125.

⁵⁹ Archbishop ANASTASIOS YANNOULATOS, *Facing the World. Orthodox Christian Essays on Global Concerns*, p. 76.

and Human Rights at the Third Pre-Synodal Pan-Orthodox Conference in 1986: The perfection of the human person, both as an secluded bearer of God's personal image and as a community of people who mirror –through the unity of the human race – the life of the Holy Trinity and the communion of the Divine Persons, is achieved through the divine gift of freedom, through which man acquiring self-consciousness at the same time acquires the possibility to make the difference between good and evil (*Genesis* 2, 16-17). Therefore, freedom is a divine gift to man, which enables him to progress continually, ascending to spiritual perfection.⁶⁰ The same ideas were approached and deepened during the Holy and Great Council of Crete in 2016. “*Human rights* are today at the center of political debate as a response to contemporary social and political crises and upheavals and in order to protect the freedom of the individual. The approach to human rights on the part of the Orthodox Church centers on the danger of individual rights falling into individualism and a culture of «rights». A perversion of this kind functions at the expense of the social content of freedom and leads to the arbitrary transformation of rights into claims for happiness, as well as the elevation of the precarious identification of freedom with individual license into a «universal value» that undermines the foundations of social values, of the family, of religion, of the nation and threatens fundamental moral values. Accordingly, the Orthodox understanding of man is opposed both to the arrogant apotheosis of the individual and his rights, and to the humiliating debasement of the human person within the vast contemporary structures of economy, society, politics and communication. The tradition of Orthodoxy is an inexhaustible source of vital truths for humanity. No one has honored man and cared for him as much as the God-man Christ and his Church. A fundamental human right is the protection of the principle of religious freedom in all its aspects - namely, the freedom of conscience, belief, and religion, including, alone and in community, in private and in public, the right to freedom of worship and practice, the right to manifest one's religion, as well as the right of religious communities to religious education and to the full function and exercise of their religious duties, without any form of direct or indirect interference by the state”.⁶¹

⁶⁰ “Hotărârile celei de A III-a Conferințe Panortodoxe Presinodale Chambésy-Geneva, Elveția, 20 octombrie-6 noiembrie 1986”, pp. 205-206.

⁶¹ “Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church”, < <https://www.holycouncil.org/-/encyclical-holy-council> >, 30.11.2018. „The Church, in the spirit of respecting human rights and equal treatment of all, values the application of these principles in the light of her teaching on the sacraments, the family, the role of both genders in the Church, and the overall principles of Church tradition. The Church

6. The Orthodox Church and the Matter of Migration and Diaspora

The matter related to diaspora has come up lately with reference to the phenomenon of worldwide migration. A religious concept that referred to the Jewish people outside of the Holy Land, diaspora gained a lay meaning. From an Orthodox point of view, the issues arose in the Western dioceses that must belong to some Patriarchates from other countries. If one speaks of an “Orthodox diaspora”, this implies the existence of a center and dependence to it, as well as a common point of view regarding the main issues believers face, regardless of nationality.⁶²

Together with the concept of “diaspora”, “transnational” also makes reference to the phenomenon of migration; it is closely related to the notion of “national state”. This mainly refers to the influences exerted on migrants by the inhabitants of the territories where they settle or by other Orthodox they come into contact with. Thus, a great number of issues arise about the ethnicity of believers who live in other countries. There are also transnational relationships between different parishes of some patriarchates that lay the bases of good understanding relationships among an unorthodox population.

Starting from the challenges and attempts to find solutions to the various issues raised by the phenomenon of migration, the experiences of the Orthodox Churches can be a true guide related to the approaches on the issues of dialogue with those of different faiths and ideologies who live together with Orthodox believers. “If we Orthodox expect others in a multicultural setting not only to recognize our presence but also to accept the particular gifts of our Church, are we in our turn prepared to accept the gifts of those others with their particular culture, religion or morality?”⁶³ In the context of pluralist democracies in modern societies, dialogue is the only option to get in touch with those of different beliefs, ideologies, nationalities, ethnicities, or cultures. “The recognition that another person, despite his or her difference, is a genuine human person or that the life of a community is an expression of a particular culture

has the right to proclaim and witness to her teaching in the public sphere”. (“The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today’s World”, <<https://www.holycouncil.org/-/mission-orthodox-church-todays-world>>, 30.11.2018.).

⁶² MARIA HÄMMERLI and JEAN-FRANÇOIS MAYER, „Introduction”, in: *Orthodox Identities in Western Europe. Migration, Settlement and Innovation*, Edited by Maria Hämmerli and Jean-François Mayer, Ashgate Publishing Limited, Dorchester, 2014, p. 16.

⁶³ EMMANUEL CLAPSIS, *Orthodoxy in Conversation. Orthodox Ecumenical Engagements*, p. 128.

implies, furthermore, that we recognize in the other some shared elements of common humanity or culture”.⁶⁴

As a great example of receiving guests, the Sacred Scripture reminds us of Abraham’s hospitality⁶⁵, for whom the Strangers Who visited him were not a danger. He treats Them with all his kindness, sharing with Them both his friendship and his food. According to Orthodox tradition, the Three Angels who visited Abraham represent the true image of the Holy Trinity; God as a Communion of Persons. As a result of his hospitality, Abraham is promised that he will be the father of a great people. This front opening icon as portrayed by the Orthodox tradition represents an invitation for each and every of us to come and take a seat at the table with God and foreigners, thus overcoming preconceptions and arrogance. Therefore, icon becomes a symbol of the presence of God in our midst when we show hospitality to other people, free of reticence and suspicion. It is the image par excellence of the encounter and communion between men and God, a symbol of religious toleration that casts away any fear of our fellow.⁶⁶ Man is the image of Trinitarian God, the Church-Communion is engraved in his nature.

There are also other passages that highlight the importance of hospitality in the Scripture.⁶⁷ In the light of these examples and advice, our role in this world and the place we are to go to in our future life rest on the way we have treated foreigners.⁶⁸ Orthodox tradition supports scriptural teaching according to which we are advised to welcome strangers, since all men are equal before God and before the laws of this world. People’s religious rights must be complied with, including the right to move, to manifest one’s own religious belief, and to education.

The Great and Holy Council of Crete in 2016 also expressed their opinions on the phenomenon of migration and the attitude Orthodox Christians should have: “The contemporary and ever intensifying *refugee and migrant crisis*, due to political, economic and environmental causes, is at the center of the world’s attention. The Orthodox Church has always treated and continues to treat those who are persecuted, in danger and in need on the basis of the Lord’s words: «I was hungry and you gave me to

⁶⁴ EMMANUEL CLAPSIS, *Orthodoxy in Conversation. Orthodox Ecumenical Engagements*, p. 138.

⁶⁵ Genesis 18.

⁶⁶ His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, *Encountering the Mystery. Understanding Orthodox Christianity Today*, pp. 191-192.

⁶⁷ Leviticus 19, 33-34; Deuteronomy 10, 19; Psalm 145, 9; Matthew 25, 31-46; Luke 10.30-37; 17, 18; John 4, 9; Hebrews 13, 1-2.

⁶⁸ Matthew 25, 31-46.

eat, I was thirsty and you gave me to drink, and was a stranger and you took me in, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to me», and «Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these my brethren, you did for me» (Matt 25.40). Throughout its history, the Church was always on the side of the «weary and heavy laden» (cf. Matt 11.28). At no time was the Church's philanthropic work limited merely to circumstantial good deeds toward the needy and suffering, but rather it sought to eradicate the causes which create social problems. The Church's «work of service» (Eph 4.12) is recognized by everyone. We appeal therefore first of all to those able to remove the causes for the creation of the refugee crisis to take the necessary positive decisions. We call on the civil authorities, the Orthodox faithful and the other citizens of the countries in which they have sought refuge and continue to seek refuge to accord them every possible assistance, even from out of their own insufficiency". The *Encyclical* of the Holy and Great Council of Crete also mentions the negative consequences of the present phenomenon of migration on Orthodox Christians from all over the world: "The Orthodox Church follows with much pain and prayer and takes note of the *great contemporary humanitarian crisis*: the proliferation of violence and military conflicts; the persecution, exile and murder of members of religious minorities; the violent displacement of families from their homelands; the tragedy of human trafficking; the violation of the dignity and fundamental rights of individuals and peoples, and forced conversions. She condemns unconditionally the abductions, tortures, and abhorrent executions. She denounces the destruction of places of worship, religious symbols and cultural monuments. The Orthodox Church is particularly concerned about the situation facing Christians, and other persecuted ethnic and religious minorities in the Middle East. In particular, she addresses an appeal to governments in that region to protect the Christian populations – Orthodox, Ancient Eastern and other Christians – who have survived in the cradle of Christianity. The indigenous Christian and other populations enjoy the inalienable right to remain in their countries as citizens with equal rights. We therefore urge all parties involved, irrespective of religious convictions, to work for reconciliation and respect for human rights, first of all through the protection of the divine gift of life. The war and bloodshed must be brought to an end and justice must prevail so that peace can be restored and so that it becomes possible for those who have been exiled to return to their ancestral lands. We pray for peace and justice in the suffering countries of Africa and in the troubled country of Ukraine. We reiterate

most emphatically in conciliar unity our appeal to those responsible to free the two bishops who have been abducted in Syria, Paul Yazigi and John İbrahim. We pray also for the release of all our brothers and sisters being held hostage or in captivity”.⁶⁹

7. The Orthodox Church and Religious and Inter-Religious Education

There is the question of common expression of the Christian message to the whole world, which has led to the involvement of Orthodox Churches in present ecumenical programs. Different, even contradictory, views have thus emerged, starting from considering this involvement as an extension of the Orthodox confession in the world and to the point where it is seen as a giving up to the Orthodox ethos, a true heresy. Theological education should include these dilemmas and set the curricula and methodology able to allow the transmission of original Orthodox teaching to younger generations and enjoy the results of theological research.

Starting from these considerations, the Third Pre-Synodal Panorthodox Conference (1986) drew out a synthesis of ecclesiological and mysiological teaching reflecting the life of the Church: Orthodoxy can and must bring a positive contribution to the reinitialization of the original relationship between present international dialogue and Christian ideals par excellence of peace, freedom, brotherhood, love, and social justice between nations; popularizing Christian faith about man and world as she used to carry out all along her history in order to succeed in changing spiritual and cultural identity of the world. Christian faith of divine origin and the unity of the human race and the world – always intimately connected to holiness, independence and ultimate dignity of the human person – are inherently at the basis of present international dialogue for peace, social justice and human rights. The idea of these universal ideals, which is the basis of present dialogue, would be almost unthinkable without Christian teaching on the ontological unity of the human race.⁷⁰

In further Orthodox documents, the idea of permanent participation of the Orthodox Churches at various types of inter-Christian and inter-religious actions and activities was reinforced. There were also, however, conservative voices on the engagement into dialogues with

⁶⁹ “Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church”, < <https://www.holycouncil.org/-/encyclical-holy-council> >, 30.11.2018.

⁷⁰ “Hotărârile celei de A III-a Conferințe Panortodoxe Presinodale Chambésy-Geneva, Elveția, 20 octombrie-6 noiembrie 1986”, p. 207.

representatives of different religions or confessions. These meetings start from the relationship between the unity of the Church and the unity of humanity, with reference to the actions taken for justice, peace, development, rebirth, and the effort to build up relationships with people who have good intentions. Another direction developed by the Orthodox Churches is to have a common agenda meant to give the same answer to the main issues raised during the discussions. In this regard, an important topic was that of the inter-religious discussions when the Orthodox got involved. An important role in analyzing and sorting out many issues during inter-Christian and inter-religious discussions is played by the Orthodox theological institutions who have brought their contributions to the Orthodox taking part into the discussions with the representatives of different confessions and religions. In this regard, not few were the times when the Orthodox were true pioneers in promoting dialogue.⁷¹ In a message addressed to the *Christian-Religious Education Association* in 2012, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I stated on the role of religious education in the present world: “Indeed, you are to accomplish this task faithfully and honestly, with an open mind and heart, avoiding sectasianism and nationalism. Many, if not most, of you are called to serve as religious educators in your capacity as lay men and women, which itself underlines the crucial and central role of the laity in the body of Christ. Finally, your task is rendered still more difficult because the parents of these children are themselves often ignorant of basic Orthodox tenets and principles, while secular society resists any emphasis on religious education”.⁷²

Taking into account all these elements, the Holy and Great Council of Crete in 2016 analyzed and debated the importance of religious education for today Orthodox Christians and the impact a good theological preparation must have in nowadays society. “In our time, new tendencies can be observed in the realm of upbringing and education in regard to the content and aims of education as well as in the way childhood, the role of both teacher and student and the role of the

⁷¹ GEORGES LEMOPOULOS, “Orthodox participation in the ecumenical movement and the role of theological education: A few questions in the form of Introductory Thoughts”, in: *Orthodox Perspectives on Ecumenical Theological Education. The Ecumenical Movement in the Theological Education and in the Life of Orthodox Churches*, Edited by †Gennadios of Sassima, †Lautențiu of Ardeal, Pavel Aurel, Daniel Buda, Volos Academy Publications, Volos, 2014, p. 51.

⁷² His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, “Greeting to the Orthodox Christian Religious Education Association”, in: *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 57:1-4, 2012, p. 11.

contemporary school are viewed. *Since education relates not only to what man is, but also to what man should be* and to the content of his responsibility, it is self-evident that the image we have of the human person and the meaning of existence determine our view of his education. The dominant secularized individualistic educational system that troubles young people today is of deep concern to the Orthodox Church. At the center of the Church's pastoral concern is an education that looks not only to the cultivation of the intellect, but also to the edification and development of the whole person as a psycho-somatic and spiritual being in accordance with the triptych, *God, man and world*. In her catechetical discourse, the Orthodox Church caringly calls on the people of God, especially the young people, to a conscious and active participation in the life of the Church, cultivating in them the «excellent desire» for life in Christ. Thus, the fullness of the Christian people finds an existential support in the divine-human communion of the Church and experiences in this the resurrectional perspective of *theosis* by grace”.⁷³

8. The Orthodox Church and Inter-Religious Dialogue

Starting from the Sacred Scripture and Holy Tradition, one can illustrate the importance of inter-religious dialogue for Christianity both in the past and in our times. “As the world continues to bring us all closer to one another, we Christians have a pressing obligation to engage in dialogue with people of other religious beliefs. In order for such dialogue to be sincere, we must first have respect for the personality and the freedom of those with whom we speak, as well as sincere love and understanding. We must also acknowledge the inspiration that exists in other religious experiences. Nevertheless, this openness toward dialogue does not mean that we stop bearing witness to our Christianity. Precisely the opposite. Every time we engage in dialogue we also interpret and elucidate the testimony of our Christian faith. We have an obligation to speak with people and to offer the priceless treasure that we possess. We cannot remain silent about the things that God's love has revealed to us and has bestowed on us. These include, above all, our certainty that God is *love* and that all people are called upon to participate in a communion of love with the trinitarian God. If we are to be persuasive, however, what we say must grow out of our lives and our experience”.⁷⁴

⁷³ “Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church”, < <https://www.holycouncil.org/-/encyclical-holy-council> >, 30.11.2018.

⁷⁴ Archbishop ANASTASIOS YANNOULATOS, *Facing the World. Orthodox Christian Essays on Global Concerns*, pp. 152-153.

During the meeting in Addis Ababa (1971), when the bases of a program within WCC were laid, that was meant to promote inter-religious dialogue, Metropolitan George Khodr of Mount Liban highlighted its role and importance in the context of the realities our world faces. “The increasing need for unity makes dialogue imperative if we wish to avoid a *de facto* syncretism of resurgent religions all claiming universality. In face of this resurgence of religions and a plurality which shows no signs of yielding to the Gospel, the question arises as to whether Christianity is so inherently exclusive of other religions as has generally been proclaimed up to now”.⁷⁵ This is not only an isolated issue but it is related to all Christian life and must begin with theological significance of the term “oikonomia”. Economy is not simply limited to historical manifestations, but turns us into full partakers into the life and mystery of God. “Oikonomia” is closely related to the notion of “kenosis” of the Son, which begins with the Incarnation and, if we have a look at the Old Testament, with the act of man’s creation. Man’s relationship with God refers not only to the Jewish people, but to the whole of humanity, God is also confessed by in other traditions. “Christ is hidden everywhere in the mystery of his lowliness. Any reading of religions is a reading of Christ. It is Christ alone who is received as light when grace visits a Brahmin, a Buddhist or a Muhammadan reading his own scriptures. Every martyr for the truth, every man persecuted for what he believes to be right, dies in communion with Christ. The mystics of Islamic countries with their witness to suffering love lived the authentic Johannine *agape*. For if the tree is known by its fruits, there is no shadow of doubt that the poor and humble folk who live for and yearn for God in all nations already receive the peace which the Lord gives to all whome He loves (*Lk. 2.14*)”.⁷⁶

These truths partially derive from one of a kind event of the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ that encompasses all the edges of the earth and, on the other hand, from the event of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended over all men. The religions of the world are divine mercy school like which must be patiently patience and appropriately grasped. There is a universal community that can enrich religious experience, but all must be seen in the light of the teachings of our Savior Jesus Christ. As such, there are individual gifts in other religions, too which can be identified beyond historical symbols and forms. Christians have a duty

⁷⁵ GEORGES KHODR, “Christianity in a Pluralistic World – The Economy of the Holy Spirit”, in: *The Ecumenical Movement. An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices*, Edited by Michael Kinnamon and Brian E. Cope, WCC Publications, Geneva, 1997, p. 402.

⁷⁶ GEORGES KHODR, “Christianity in a Pluralistic World – The Economy of the Holy Spirit”, p. 403.

to communicate with those of different religions by giving up pride and confessional superiority. Their aim is to identify Christian meanings present in other religions, also so that, from here, to be able to preach Christ to the people, the One who unites them all. “The task of the witness in a non-Christian context will be to name whome others have already recognized as the Beloved. Once they have become the friends of the Bridegroom it will be easy to name him. The entire missionary activity of the Church will be directed towards awakening the Christ who sleeps in the night of the religions. It is the Lord Himself who alone knows whether men will be able to celebrate and authentically glorious Paschal meal together before the coming of the heavenly Jerusalem. But we already know that the beauty of Christ shining in our faces is the promise of our final reconciliation”.⁷⁷

The ideas on the relationship between Christianity and other religions have been drawn up during several meetings attended by the representatives of the Orthodox Churches, most of them held in Chambésy, Switzerland. The adopted documents emphasized the importance and necessity of the participation of the Orthodox Churches in meetings with the representatives of different Christian beliefs and religions. The Oriental Churches issued their own documents which approached the issue of inter-religious dialogue, one of the most popular texts bore the signature of Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios: *The Dialogue with the Religions of the World*.⁷⁸

Oikonomia was formulated in 1971 by the Pre-Commission before the Great and Holy Council of the Orthodox Church. Five years later, at the recommendation of the Secretariat that was to take care of the preparation of the Holy Orthodox Council, the First Pre-Synodal Pan-Orthodox Conference did not pay much attention to this text, especially after contradictory discussions on the limitations of the Church and the ecclesiological nature of other communities. At the same time, it has been strengthened the fact that the Orthodox Churches bring their contribution to the understanding and promotion of inter-religious dialogue and, as such, they mediate the fight against religious fanaticism of any kind. It was also analyzed and debated the need for reconciliation

⁷⁷ GEORGES KHODR, “Christianity in a Pluralistic World – The Economy of the Holy Spirit”, p. 406.

⁷⁸ ALINA PATRU, “Interfaith Dialogue as an area for Orthodox Involvement in Ecumenism”, in: *Orthodox Handbook on Ecumenism. Resources for Theological Education*, Editors Pantelis Kalaitzidis, Thomas FitzGerald, Cyril Hovorun, Aikaterini Pekridou, Nikolaos Asproulis, Guy Liagre, Dietrich Werner, Regnum Books International, Oxford, 2013, p. 664.

between people belonging to different religions in order to ensure the fulfillment of the ideals of freedom, reconciliation between nations and peace in the world, in service of today's man, regardless of his race or religion.⁷⁹

These proposals were summed up and deepened during the Third Pre-Synodal Pre-Orthodox Conference held in Chambésy in 1986, when the document *The Contribution of the Orthodox Church to achieving Peace, Justice, Freedom, Brotherhood and Love between Nations and eliminating Any Racial and Other Types of Discrimination* was adopted. This paper focused on several topics which set the directions of the way in which the Orthodox should collaborate both with the representatives of other Christian beliefs as well as other religions and ideologies: *The dignity of the human person, the foundation for peace; The value of human freedom; On peace and justice; Peace as a means of stopping war; Racial and other types of discrimination; The prophetic mission of Orthodoxy: the testimony of love in the service of our fellows.*⁸⁰

On January 7th 2000, in the *Message* from Beethleem, the Primates of the Orthodox Churches emphasized the need for dialogue with those of different religions and ideologies, thus once again reaffirming the ideal of peaceful cohabitation of religious groups and minorities all over the world without affecting human beings' freedom of thought and each and every man's belonging to his own nation: "We look to the other great religions, particularly the monotheistic ones of Judaism and Islam, and we are prepared to build up even further the presuppositions for dialogue with them, looking to achieve a peaceful coexistence of all peoples... The Orthodox Church rejects religious intolerance and condemns religious fanaticism wherever these phenomena may appear".⁸¹ In this way, "the Orthodox stance may be critical of other religions as systems and organic units, but towards the people who live in the climate of other religions and Confessions the stance is always one of respect and love according to the exemple of Christ. For man continues to bear within himself the «image» of God and

⁷⁹ "Hotărârile primei Conferințe Panortodoxe Presinodale Chambésy, Elveția, 21-28 noiembrie 1976", in: Pr. prof. dr. VIOREL IONIȚĂ, *Hotărârile întrunirilor panortodoxe din 1923 până în 2009 – spre Sfântul și Marele Sinod al Bisericii Ortodoxe*, p. 196.

⁸⁰ "Hotărârile celei de A III-a Conferințe Panortodoxe Presinodale Chambésy-Geneva, Elveția, 20 octombrie-6 noiembrie 1986", pp. 203-214.

⁸¹ Archbishop ANASTASIOS YANNOULATOS, *Mission in Christ's Way. An Orthodox Understanding of Mission*, Holy Cross Orthodox Press. Brookline, World Council of Churches Publications, Geneva, 2010, pp. 227-228.

the possibility of «likeness» by virtue of the innate components of his existence – free will, a mind capable of reason, the disposition and the possibility of love”.⁸²

The Holy and Great Council of Crete in 2016 resumed the ideas of previous meetings on the importance of inter-religious dialogue. “As a presupposition for a wider co-operation in this regard the common acceptance of the highest value of the human person may be useful. The various local Orthodox Churches can contribute to inter-religious understanding and co-operation for the peaceful co-existence and harmonious living together in society, without this involving any religious syncretism”.⁸³

Dialogue is a gift of God. The Creator is permanently in dialogue with human beings created in His image. Dialogue is the fundamental experience of our lives and can only take place in an environment characterized by respect and responsibility, with the aim of mutual understanding as well as sorting out misunderstandings. It is important for the participants in the dialogue to make the difference between the historical context, specific traditions and beliefs and the ultimate truth. Heresy emerges when one part of truth is selected and absolutized in a fundamentalist way, thus leaving aside the other aspects. God’s plan is

⁸² Archbishop ANASTASIOS YANNOULATOS, *Mission in Christ’s Way. An Orthodox Understanding of Mission*, p. 225.

⁸³ “The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today’s World”, <<https://www.holycouncil.org/-/mission-orthodox-church-todays-world>>, accesat: 30.11.2018. “The explosions of fundamentalism observed within various religions represent an expression of morbid religiosity. Sober inter-religious dialogue helps significantly to promote mutual trust, peace and reconciliation. The oil of religious experience must be used to heal wounds and not to rekindle the fire of military conflicts. The Orthodox Church unequivocally condemns the extension of military violence, persecutions, the expulsion and murder of members of religious minorities, forced conversions, the trafficking of refugees, the abductions, torture and abhorrent executions. She denounces the destruction of churches, religious symbols and cultural monuments. Very particularly, she expresses her deep concern about the situation of Christians and of all the persecuted minorities in the Middle East. She calls on the governments in the region to protect the indigenous Orthodox and other Christians and all the populations who have an inalienable right to remain in their countries as citizens with equal rights. Our Council appeals to all parties involved to make systematic efforts without delay to bring to an end the military conflicts in the Middle East and wherever armed hostilities persist and to enable all those displaced to return to their homes. We address our appeal particularly to those in positions of power to act so that peace and justice may prevail in the countries of origin of the refugees. We urge the civil authorities, the citizens and the Orthodox Christians in the countries in which the persecuted are taking refuge to continue to offer help to the limit or even beyond the limit of their abilities”. (“Message of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church”, <<https://www.holycouncil.org/-/message>>, 30.11.2018.).

for all people created by love and it never changes, although human beings and historical situations can change. “We are convinced that despite cultural, religious, and racial differences, we are closer to one another than we could ever imagine”.⁸⁴

ABSTRACT:

The Orthodox Church has been given the fullest of truth by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, truth honored and valued in the communion of the Saints. For men, to grasp divine truth is a progressive process part of a permanent development. Each and every person walks along this path together with other people, without being the same as the others. Every person is offered and understands truth according to their own religious experience and skills to understand. Ultimate truth exists and it has been revealed completely, but the way in which it is grasped varies from one person to another. “This is not a narrowly doctrinal vision of theological truth. However, it is an essentially spiritual vision for worldly reality, one that removes arrogance from authority and opens new ways of approaching believers of other religions. It presupposes magnanimity and charity, faith and hope, tolerance and reconciliation. It opposes forceful conversion and conflict, imposition and intolerance, aggression and violence”.⁸⁵ This approach prevents us from assigning to God intentions and plans which are exclusively ours. Thus, whenever we have a dialogue with those of different beliefs and ideologies, we must always start from God’s sacrificial love for all men.

⁸⁴ His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, *Encountering the Mystery. Understanding Orthodox Christianity Today*, p. 221.

⁸⁵ His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, *Encountering the Mystery. Understanding Orthodox Christianity Today*, p. 224.

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