

**ABOUT THE CRETE COUNCIL DOCUMENT:
“MISSION OF THE CHURCH IN TODAY’S WORLD”.
ORTHODOX CONSIDERATIONS ON THE “DIGNITY
OF HUMAN PERSON”**

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Great event for the church history of the last Christian millennium, the Holy and Great Council of Crete (June 16th-26th, 2016) has given birth to numerous reactions and controversies in the Orthodox world. However, due to its present missionary importance, the Sinaxis of the representatives of the Oikumenes Orthodox Autocephalous Churches cannot under any circumstances be separated and taken out from “*the range of the Ecumenical Councils, since it is founded on the Tradition of the Church and carries this on, nor by the present general context, which has undoubtedly been influenced by Vatican II and what it has generated throughout Christian world*”.¹ Canonical righteousness and Church’s missionary structure are illustrated by His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel in his keynote speech of the event: “*The Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Churches is at the same time a rare event, and the beginning of normality, because synodality is a canonical rule of the life of the local Churches, in order to express the unity of Orthodox faith, of sacramental life and of canonical discipline of the One, Holy, Universal (Catholic) and Apostolic Church. If synodality is a canonical rule at local level, it must also be a rule at universal pan-Orthodox level. Synodality or conciliarity is fulfilled in the sacramental concelebration of the Holy Eucharist, in order to express both the unity of Orthodox faith and the Mystery itself of the communion of the Church with her Head, our Lord*

¹ Pr. conf. univ. dr. SORIN ȘELARU, "The Orthodox Holy and Orthodox Synod: Between Sinax of Priests and Synod of Orthodoxy", in vol. *Orthodox Anthropology from ecclesial perspective: provocations of postmodernity*, Oltenia Metropolitan Publishing House, Craiova, 2018, p. 221.

*Jesus Christ. The autocephaly of the Orthodox Churches express their administrative and pastoral freedom, while the pan-Orthodox Eucharistic commemoration and pan-Orthodox synodality (conciliarity) express the unity of the entire Orthodoxy”.*²

Around the 1920’s, the primate metropolitan of Romania and the first patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Miron Cristea, formally raised the issue of the organization of a Holy Ecumenical Council.³ The question, however, was a very direct one: what were the necessary reasons to organize such an event within the Orthodox Church? Both theologians and historians have argued for and against across the centuries. “Most of them make reference to the absence of those controversial main topics which have been the motivation of the Seventh Ecumenical Councils, topics that were directly related to believers’ spiritual life, salvation, beliefs, all in all, spiritual life and death”. And if there were no new doctrine issues that were to weaken “believers’ salvation” then what would have been the reasons for such a Council? At that time the answer was as natural as possible: “we are dealing with a Council will”. The representatives of the Orthodox Church had a wish to “talk, to reunite, to meet each other once more officially, to be together, after nearly 1200 years. Their intention was, that looking back to have a kind of review, for present an assessment and, in the future, to make some plans together. It is true that there are also some delicate issues that require clarification, but they seemed not to be very painful on the agenda from the beginning and nor did they seem to enjoy the same level of attention and value by all the attenders”.⁴

The Holy and Great Council of Crete is itself the fruit of great

² *About the Holy and Great Council of Crete, June 16-26, 2016. Questions and Answers*, Ed. Basilica, Bucharest, 2017, p. 4.

³ In the interwar period, there were several urgent needs and issues to discuss about the life of the Church. Among these, it would be enough to recall: the timetable debates, the remarriage of widows and deacons, or the age of ordination. Apart from the fact that these problems were canonically articulated, their interpretation in the given context imposes an immediate need for clarification and answers. In this context, the Metropolitan Priest Miron Cristea submitted an "irenic letter" to the Ecumenical Patriarchate in the hope of identifying "opportune solutions to church problems that knocked at the door of all the countries of Orthodox faith, and to preserve unity, so precious and in the Orthodox Church of the East" (Pr. prof. dr. VIOREL IONIȚĂ, *Towards the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church*) *The decision of the Pan-Orthodox Meetings from 1923 to 2009*, translated by prof. Ecumenical Studies, University of Fribourg Switzerland, 2014, p. 3, Prof. Liviu Stan, *Regarding a future ecumenical council*, in "Orthodoxy", No. 3-4 / 1952, p.586).

⁴ Dr. ANTONIE PLĂMĂDEALĂ, *Let All Be One - Ut omnes unum sint*, Ed. IBMBOR, București, 1979, p. 84.

preparation and discussions within the Orthodox Church over several decades of theological search and analysis.⁵ In order to understand this event as living reality in the Orthodox Church historical and present context, this first requires a thorough analysis of the way in which the decisions stated by the *six official meeting documents* were taken and approved. According to the way they were debated and approved by the Council of Crete, these are as follows: 1. *The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World*; 2. *The Orthodox Diaspora*; 3. *Autonomy and the Means by Which it is Proclaimed*; 4. *The Sacrament of Marriage and its Impediments*; 5. *The Importance of Fasting and its Observance Today* and 6. *Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World*.⁶ However, one should also take into consideration the fact that, before this form was reached, there was preliminary intense preparation and debate. Therefore, several pan-Orthodox meetings were held in order to prepare these documents. The aim has always been that to highlight and offer solutions to *the Church's present challenges*. Thus, out of the ten proposals on the agenda of the First Pan-Orthodox Pre-Council Conference (1976), out of the ten debated topics only six were submitted to a final resolution. "At first glance, as Rev. Associate Professor Sorin Selaru points out, the six topics left on the agenda of the Council, or at least the way they were formulated might seem rather strange to the ordinary individual. Enumerating them is even more puzzling. Even if, as stated by the title of the first three of them there might seem to be a sort of connection between them, it is mere an illusion, since the first topic aims rather at a more theological-ethnic position of the Church about some mundane issues, whilst the following two are described by a canonical-administrative character. It may well be that, out of the desire to show to the world the Orthodox Church pastoral-missionary care, the last agenda topic, set out in 1976, to have become 2016 Council top list one".⁷

Most Orthodox theologians thought that the Council of Crete could be rightly seen as "***Church Mission Council***". There are several reasons for this and they are mainly related to today's Church context. This topic peculiarity is first revealed by the way in which the subjects have been approached, which was greatly a missionary one. As a result,

⁵ Here are the pan-Orthodox meetings and conferences from: Constantinople (1923), Vatoped (1930), Moscow 1948, Rodos I-IV (1961, 1962, 1964), Chambesy (1968, 1976, 1982, 1986, 2009).

⁶ See: <https://basilica.ro/documentele-oficiale-ale-sfantului-si-marelui-sinod-in-limba-romana>.

⁷ Pr. conf. univ. dr. SORIN ŞELARU, *Holy and Great Orthodox Synod: Between Sinax of Priests and Synod of Orthodoxy*, p. 225.

“the Council did not come up with new dogmas, but it has tried to contextualize the teaching of the Church, canonical tradition, liturgical and spiritual experience to present realities”. Secondly, more clearly stated, “the Council’s Encyclical content illustrates the mission of the Church in the world, family as an icon of Christ’s love for the Church, the education in Christ, Church’s point of view facing globalization, the phenomenon of extreme violence and migration, as well as Church’s dialogue with the world and other Christian communities as a sort of dialogue creed.” Last but not least, the document about “*The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today’s World*” has succeeded in achieving “a new mission meaning, in terms of religion service calling it as «*The liturgy after the liturgy*» and defining it as «*Christian confession*».”⁸

II. The reality, necessity and newness of “The Mission of the Church”

Various periods of time and their challenges offer meaningful evidence on the Church’s commitment from the very beginning, each and every time providing answers and solutions for each epoch. This work’s direction was an apologetic-identity one, always in favor of man’s perpetual ability to self-reveal when in relation to God, to himself and the reality of his existence. “If **the ancients** thought that *man* has a nature which cannot be changed, and **the Christians** thought that man has a created and fallen nature, but which can be truly changed, **the Moderns** think that man does not have a given or created nature but man is bound to become infinitely self-centered, which, given the conditions of the technological hypertrophy in the present world, opens through biotechnology and genetic manipulation the path of distortion. The paradox of the modern and postmodern man is that of self-affirmation of a free ontologically content will, of the struggle between freedom and truth. His secret suffering is the deprivation of truth in totalitarianism and the chronic lack of truth in liberal democracies”.⁹

“**The Evolution of the Orthodox Church towards Modernity**, taken into account since the fall of Constantinople (1453), is based on several specificity elements which have themselves marked the mission of the Church. Undergoing various historical social and political context stages, the Christian Eastern has finally promoted in its missionary work the utmost modern and essential topics for the modern and post-modern

⁸ CRISTIAN SONEA, *Mission Paradigms. From Edinburgh to the Council of Crete*, University of Cluj, 2016, pp. 225-226.

⁹ JOHN ICA jr., "Church, Society, Thought in the East, in the Occident and in Europe Today", in *The Social Thought of the Church. Fundamentals, documents, prospective analysis*, coord. Ioan I. Ica, Germano Marani, Ed. Deisis, Sibiu, 2002, p. 35.

Middle Ages economy, such as: *the individual's value, freedom and responsibility, peace and justice, the fight against war or discrimination*".¹⁰

The attempts to find a balance between different social condition people were also present in the old world and they were thoroughly debated by the philosophers and moralists of those times who sought to find their practical application. However, "pagan antiquity, whose culture offered us some wonderful elements, was, generally unable to rise in morality, except some interesting quotes, as, for example the Stoics', and of some generous deeds or individual virtues, which were nevertheless exceptions. Society has never known or allowed itself experience some great ideas, some heavenly feelings similar to those characterizing Christians' amazing life, i.e. of misunderstood love".¹¹

In order to be able to express freely on these human existence's true realities, the Orthodox Church undergone the trial of "the Third Rome and the Holy Russia's millennial ideology", succeeding in overcoming the idea of a "state and national, chiliarism and messianic religion". It was then followed by "the ritualistic-triumphalist, sentimentalist-pietistic and populist exaltation" of the Orthodox Empire, experiencing the medieval feeling of "fear" and "mystical respect for the Tsar and state and Church authorities" and end up with the Communist persecution.¹² During all these trials, the confessing work of the Church answered to a much higher call.¹³ Due to its Christological character, the

¹⁰ At the first Pan-Orthodox Conference in Rhodes (1961), a very long list of themes (about 150) was drawn up in order to organize a Holy and Great Orthodox Synod, "in which this Synod was to be pronounced." Among these is undoubtedly the anthropological theme, articulated in the First Document of the Synod of Crete (Pr. prof. DUMITRU STANILOAE, *Opinions on the future of the Holy and Great Orthodox Synod*, p. 425).

¹¹ TEODOR M. POPESCU, *Christian Charity in the Old Church*, in "BOR" Magazine, no. 1-3 / 1945, p. 21.

¹² "Against the backdrop of the social indifference and the religious investiture of the state to official Orthodoxy, which constituted the common social sin of the Church and the State, the accumulation of these unsolved social tensions and contradictions, but only suppressed authoritarians, would lead to the triumph of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and the transformation of the Orthodox Empire of the Czars into the Communist Empire of Violence, Lying and Evil (denounced by A. Soljenitin) which was for seven decades the Soviet Union "(JOHN ICA' jr., *Church, Society, Thought in the East, in the West and in Europe Today*, pp. 38-39).

¹³ The consciousness of the fact that "the kingdom of God is not of this world," makes the Christian "imitator of God," while being aware that "happiness does not mean to possess the neighbor, nor to be superior to weak, neither to be rich nor to force the inferior, and not to this is the imitation of God, but these are beyond the greatness of God "(A Diogene, ed., introduction and commentary by H.-I. Marrou (SC 33), Paris, 1965, pp. 62-66, 76-77).

Church has the ability to bring together both tradition and modernity, achieving man's constant return to the "truth of the Church" by "mastering the past". It is therefore clear the fact that "*the true orthodox way of thinking has always been the historical one*, it has always included the past, but it has never been dominated by it. Christ is «The same yesterday and today and forever», and the strength of the Church is not in the past, present or in the future, but in Jesus Christ".¹⁴

One of the Eastern Church's most debated missionary and apologetic issues, which is also modern with regard to the Orthodox Empire age, was related to *human being's theological assessment*. It was even stated the fact that the Russian thinking is an "*anthropocentric*" nature one. Starting with the oldest and ending up with the youngest philosophers and theologians in this field, they all have thought man as beyond his material condition, the one who ranges top and most importance place among the creatures of God. From a philosophical point of view, we are therefore revealed the fact that, for example, "*the mystery of the universe*" lies in the human being, which, if revealed could "solve the matter of God". In theology, on the other hand, i.e. Florensky, Bulgakov, Florovsky, Lossky or Evdokimov, explanations are much more complex. In man, or rather through him, the true mystery of existence is revealed. Man is the main character of the most extraordinary existential emergence, which embodies ontologically and achieves eternally God's plan, from the moment of birth to death and beyond that.

This time focused on Holy Scripture and the Holy Fathers as main argumentation sources, the Russian spirituality reveals through theology several options to understand existential reality. Generally speaking, man is portrayed both as the image and icon of God in the world; *a micro-cosmos and micro-theos*. From this moment on, Orthodox theology brings more clarification and offers answers to today's realities, mainly focusing on the eternal life, which is developed and asserted theonomously from this very world. From this starting point "*not only the knowledge of God having man as an incipit, but also the knowledge of man starting from God. Russian people are very aware of the fact that man is not known, but unknown, that He is a mystery*".¹⁵ We might say that Russian anthropology could be analyzed within various type of contexts: dogmatic, apologetic, liturgical and mystical. All these elements are almost always analyzed and assessed in today's context,

¹⁴ ALEXANDER SCHMEMANN, *A History of the Eastern Church*, translated from English and preface by pr. Vasile Gavrilă, Sofia, Bucharest, 2003, p. 422.

¹⁵ TOMAS SPIDLIK, *The Spirituality of the Christian East. Man and his destiny in the Russian religious philosophy*, translation of Maria-Cornelia Ica jr, Ed. Deisis, Sibiu, 2002, p. 23.

thus focusing on their practical utility and theology's dynamic side related to existence.¹⁶ Its newness is mainly based on a simple but extremely competent wisdom: "back to the Holy Fathers".¹⁷ Responsible assumption and spread of "dogmatic and canonical consciousness" is required in this study.¹⁸

Next, we would like to analyze from an apologetic point of view the document related to "*The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World*" as related to "human being's" "value" and condition.

III. About "*The Mission of the Church in Today's World*" Document

"*The Mission of the Church in Today's World*",¹⁹ the first official document of the Pan-Orthodox Council of Crete, is a reassertion of the necessary missionary and apologetic work in the world. Its importance is mainly due to the fact that "this topic was a proposition of the Synaxis on the agenda of the Holy and Great Council ... The present text submits a series of recommendations on the direction of the Orthodox Church facing today's world challenges on human being's affirmation and, as well as ensuring peace and stopping any kind of war, eliminating all kinds of discrimination in today's world, and the risks related to scientific research, particularly in the field of biotechnology, and also those related to the negative aspects of globalization, etc. Having to face all this, the Orthodox Church makes an appeal to "the heart of man and urges him, joining Apostle Paul also, to follow and live whatever is true, whatever is

¹⁶ In this sense, Bulgakov subscribes that "tradition should not be counted only as an ancestral gift, but also as an act that is taking place in our time ... There is a wrong modernism, of which, rightly, religious consciousness and true tradition to avoid. But in man there are legitimate and necessary aspirations for him to understand the tradition of his time and to seek in him the guide of contemporary consciousness, because the times and years are placed under the power of God and no age escapes him. Our Lord Jesus Christ calls all His peoples in His Church, and each one gives him a gift and a mission, both in general life and in his particular life, for the theological creation" (SERGEI BULGAKOV, *Orthodoxy*, trad. Nicholas Grosu, Ed. Paideia, Bucharest, 1997, p. 6).

¹⁷ G. FLOROVSKY, „The ways of Russian theology”, în *Aspects of Church History* (Collected Works of Georges Florovsky, 4), Belmont, Nordland, p. 207.

¹⁸ PATRICIU VLAICU, RĂZVAN PERȘA (editors), *Holy and Great Synod, eschatological event or canonical normality?*, The Works of the International Conference on Canon Law and Orthodox Theology, 25-28 April 2017, Cluj-Napoca, Cluj University Press, Cluj-Napoca, 2018, p. 7.

¹⁹ Originally titled "The Contribution of Local Orthodox Churches to Achieving Ideas of Peace, Freedom, Fraternity and Love among Peoples, and Removing Racial Discrimination and Others", in *The Third Presidential Conference of 1986, the text was revised in the Presinodal Sinax in January 2016* (see: Prof. dr. VIOREL IONIȚĂ, *Preparation, Works and Decisions of the Great Synod of the Orthodox Church*, in *The Theological Study Magazine (RT)*, No. 4/2016, p. 39).

noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy (Phil. 4:8); the sacrificial love of His Lord Crucified, the only way to a world of peace, righteousness, liberty, and love between people and nations” .²⁰

The main direction of this document and as such, the reasons for which it has been written are, undoubtedly, the life of the Church. This is the reason why, besides its noticeable missionary structure, the Council of Crete also developed an “ecclesiological direction”, materialized in various theological approaches and concerns. We are fully aware of the fact that this way of dealing with today's challenges has to be an ecclesiological-missionary one; the answers are given from inside out, from sharing grace to the so much desirous earth of receiving it. The ecclesiological approach has proved to be an extremely necessary one, particularly aiming at redefining the apologetic dialogue and strengthening the missionary work in the world. Thus, “*our closeness to the mystical Body of the Lord, to spiritual life, and to holiness is meant to be an answer to some spiritual concerns and to a pronounced movement of secularization of the contemporary world. In the ecclesiology of today, the theologians have tried to define what the Church is, to clarify what it can not be*”.²¹

With reference to the subject approached, in close connection with *her being*, the Church truly stands for what it can be called as *work or holy duty*. Its aim is to have a contribution to “*the achievement of peace, justice, freedom, brotherhood and love among peoples, and the elimination of racial and other type of discriminations*”. These are largely the topic and direction of this document. In order to support these missionary directions, the council’s attenders have drawn up an argumentative sketch which summarizes the most important support ideas when related to today’s reality.

“Mission of the Church” document first and foremost states the fact that **the world was created by God “out of love”, its purpose is to join its Creator “eternally”**.²² Hence, we are extremely aware of the fact that that through His saving and redemptive work, Christ the Eucharist is always present and alive in His Church “to the end of the ages”. Therefore, “each and every time the Holy Eucharist is carried out”, the Church brings “*together (1 Corinthians 11:20) the scattered*

²⁰ Prof. dr. VIOREL IONITA, *Preparation, Works and Decisions of the Grand Synod of the Orthodox Church*, pp. 39-40.

²¹ † Dr. IRINEU POPA, Archbishop of Craiova and Metropolitan of Oltenia, *Church in the Current or the Current of the Church*, Ed. Of the Romanian Academy, Bucharest, 2018, p. 7.

²² Cf. In, 3:16.

children of God (John 11:52), regardless their race, sex, age, social origin or any other nature, into a body where “*there is neither Jew, nor Gentile; neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female*” (*Galatians 3:28, Colossians 3:11*), in a world of reconciliation, peace and love”.

On the other hand, the missionary work of the Church supports on **a permanent state of watchfulness**. It is that “*now, but not yet*” that Orthodox theology preaches in such a meaningful way.²³ The true proof which advocates for this condition is that of the saints of God, “who by means of their asceticism and virtues, have become yet faces of the Kingdom of God, thus proving and illustrating the fact that the expectation of a world of peace, justice, and love is not a utopia, but *«faith in what we hope»* (Hebrews 11: 1), which is possible through the grace of God and man’s spiritual need”.

Far from being just a mere metaphysical issue, the Church is **to be discovered through its work in the reality of our daily activities and preoccupations**. She is not insensitive to man’s existential burden and hardships, but it comforts and heals “all sickness and sufferance of the people”. “For His Word to the world does not have as His purpose to judge or to condemn the world (John 3:17, 12, 47), but to offer as guide the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, the hope and the assurance that evil in any form, will not have the last word in history and is not to be allowed to set its course”.

The message she conveys is as present as her care for man. Therefore, the words of the Savior: “*go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the holy Spirit*” (*Matthew 28:19*) are as a matter of fact, the real “everlasting mission of the Church”. As a result, “this mission must not be carried out violently or through various forms of proselytism, but based on care, humility and respect for each and every individual and each people’s culture specificity. All Orthodox Churches must share this effort”.

²³ The engagement of the creatures in this eschatological movement is thus defined by the temporal interval, “as an extension that shows that rational creatures are progressing, coming closer to the One who is appropriated, that is, to God in the praised Trinity.” By this we come to better understand the triad: birth-motion-rest. “According to this principle, IPS Father Dr. Irineu Popa says, The name is the coming of the Father's Son to us (expansion - diastoly), and the deification is our return to the Father (contraction - sistoly) at Parusie.” To reach this moment, God is waiting for us from our final answer. That is why our Orthodox faith teaching states that eschatology, as a reality confirmed in our existence, “does not hold so much to the end of the world, but represents the phenomenon that dips the dough of history” (*Expecting Him Who Is and Who Comes The Atoner*, Ed. Metropolitan of Oltenia, Craiova, 2017, C.II, A.2, pp. 456-458, p. 551).

IV. “The Dignity of the Human Person”

The first paragraph of the document “The Mission of the Church in Today’s World” highlights the Orthodox position on the “*Dignity of the Human Person*” (A), thus, defining the anthropological character of the missionary work. This is furthermore clearly structured into four interdependent and interpreted from a biblical-patristic point of view for the beginning, developing progressively into “interreligious understanding and cooperation through quiet and social coexistence of all nations” (A, 3), “*for we are God’s fellow workers*”.²⁴ In the process of this synergy, “the dignity of the human person” is undoubtedly more important than the “absence of military conflicts” of any kind. This is taken into account since “the dignity of the human person is a corner stone of social life, since authentic peace, according to the document, *«is the ripe fruit of the restoration of all things in Him, the revelation of the human person’s dignity and majesty as an image of God, the manifestation of the organic unity in Christ between humanity and the world, the universality of the principles of peace, freedom, and social justice, and ultimately the blossoming of Christian love among people and nations of the world»*.

Thus, the peace cannot exist without justice and freedom, and particularly without recognition of the unique dignity of human person”.²⁵

Based on all these ideas we will further try to analyze the main ideas of this subchapter from an Orthodox point of view.

A.1. Firstly, “*The Dignity of the Human Person*” in the context of “The Mission of the Church in Today’s World” derives from “**man’s creation in the image and likeness of God** and his mission as planned by God for him and for the world. This has been a source of inspiration for the Fathers of the Church who have deepened the mystery of divine economy. Given the context, St. Gregory the Theologian points out the fact that the Creator *«placed man on the earth him, a new Angel, a mingled worshipper, fully initiated into the visible creation, but only partially into the intellectual; king of all upon earth, (...) a living creature, trained here and then moved elsewhere; and to complete the mystery, deified by its inclination to God (theosis)»*.²⁶ The purpose of the incarnation of the Word of God is man’s deification. Christ, renewed

²⁴ Cf. I Cor. 3, 9.

²⁵ NATALLIA VASILEVICH, *The dignity of the human person - precondition and purpose of the interreligious dialogue in the teaching of the Holy and Great*, the document was presented to Odhir Osce at the seminar on "Inter-Religious Dialogue for Promoting Peace and Non-Discrimination", Baku, 10-11 October 2016.

²⁶ GREGORY THE THEOLOGIAN, *The Word* 45.7. PG 36, 632AB.

the Old Adam in Himself,²⁷ «and He deified humanity with Himself, being the first fruits of our hope» (EUSEBIU, *Demonstratio Evangelica*, 4, 14. PG 22, 289A)”.

Heathen world failed in eliminating social barriers that separated people ones from the others. Although, “it has also known love, but not the divine one” this existential reality had played a great role when referring to the dignity of the human person’s freedom. But Christianity has come up with something new. The children of the Church “have changed and renewed their moral life only through this, through their evangelical love, the love for their fellow and fellow meant all men, even the enemy. It is Christianity that has extended the range of man to all men through love, and has identified his fellow in the parable of the Sower who is merciful both to the stranger and his enemy”.²⁸ Fellow was considered to be in the old world, a man of the same nation, same faith, or same social position. For the Jews, the others were repugnant, for the Greeks, the foreigners were barbarians, for the Romans, the wanderer was the man who lacked citizenship and civil rights and could not attend Rome’s life. Although, they had been able to reach the level when they considered each and every individual as a person, the Stoics were unable to see each man as a fellow. Love and mercy were mere utopias, and experiencing them was considered to be a weakness. The man created by Stoic philosophy was not to be touched by any feeling, desire, emotion, he had to be emotionless. Indifference was the philosophical ideal, and any involvement was limited to mere charity.

One of the greatest Fathers of the Eastern Church, St. Basil the Great, portrays in his works vivid images of his time on the divine origin and evangelical man’s real qualities. He points out the fact that “*man is the being who is beyond value of all the other things that exist in the world and all that God has created*”.²⁹ And he is also wondering: “Which other creature of those who live on the earth was created in the image of God? Who was meant to live under his commandments and ruling all that lives on the earth, in the water and in the air? Even if he is inferior to the angels ... he has also been endowed with the ability to know his creator?”.³⁰

²⁷ cf. Ephesians 2, 15.

²⁸ Deacon. prof. TEODOR DAMȘA, *Christian Love and Mercy*, in the "Mitropolia Banatului" Magazine, no. 7-9 / 1980, p. 441.

²⁹ ANTONIE PLĂMĂDEALĂ, *Social Ideas in the Work of St. Basil the Great*, vol. "Basilian Studio 1", 2nd ed., Basilica Publishing House, Bucharest, 2009, p. 397.

³⁰ ST. BASIL THE GREAT, *Psalms*, Ps. 48:8.

Also, St. Gregory of Nyssa thought that man came to the world “only and exclusively as a result of the Creator's love”. Through this work, God did not want His light to remain unseen, “nor His Greatness unrevealed, nor His goodness unshared, nor any other attributes that we identify in the divine nature, could be unused, as to be unshared and none be blessed for getting them”. All this was sent in order to become a part of the existence of the one “who was brought into the world in order to share divine goodness. For, he alone is the pinnacle of the divine creation, man bears within himself the ability to find himself “in the infinity of his Creator”,³¹ innerly having inherited something from “God’s nature”.³²This, from St. Gregory of Nyssa’s point of view, offers an explanation for man’s eternal wish for God, “for as the eye gets to share the sunrays due to the fact that nature has endowed him with the ability that attracts kindred elements to those existing in his eyes, in the same way God must have seeded in man something kindred to Himself, so that by this man got to wish for God”.³³

In terms of resemblance to God, man is at the boundary between *material and spiritual*. The image of God is mirrored by these two ontological elements; man is both a micro-cosmos and micro-theos. In this antagonistic relation, man plays the role of a link between heaven and earth, between the world and God, who is “called to evolve together with creation towards the new and original heaven and earth, of the Kingdom of God”.³⁴ In other words, “both the body and soul, consciously created by God at the same time, represent one human nature and they are meant to be together eternally”.³⁵

Wandering far away from the divine grace and love because of our forefather, Adam’s fall into the sin, “at the fullness of time”,³⁶

³¹ Prof. dr. DUMITRU STANILOAE, *Studies of Dogmatic Theology*, Metropolia Olteniei Publishing House, Craiova, 1990, p. 23.

³² In the speech given in the Areopagus, the Apostle Paul confesses before the Athenians about the "unknown God," "Who made the world and all that are in it, being the Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made by hands" (Apostles 17, 24). At the same time he remembers "that we live and move in Him and we are, as some of your poets have said, for we have Him and we are" (verse 28), thus making reference to the poem of Aratos.

³³ ST. GREGORY OF NYSSA, *The Great Catechic Word. About the Order of God (of Life) and of the True Effect*, IBMBOR Publishing House, Bucharest, 2011, p.29.

³⁴ Prof. dr. DUMITRU POPESCU, *Jesus Christ Pantocrator*, Ed. IBMBOR, Bucharest, 2005, p. 172.

³⁵ Prof. dr. ION BRIA, *Treaty of Dogmatic and Ecumenical Theology*, vol. I, Andreiana Publishing House, Sibiu, 2009, p. 207.

³⁶ Gal. 3, 24.

through the Word of God, man was granted the right to correct himself. Related to the way man can again reach his call and supreme, St. Basil the Great is again the one who points out the fact that virtue of humility is essential to social interpersonal relations. "There is nothing left to be proud of, oh, man! For glory and your hope lie in giving up all that is yours and look for future life in Christ, whose fruit we are even given now, while we still live this earthly life, since we fully live through the grace and gift of God. «For God is the One working in you both to will and to work according to His good pleasure».³⁷ God reveals by His Spirit the hidden wisdom which He ordained before the ages for our glory; God gives power to those who work".³⁸

Being in a constant search for divine justice, the Holy Fathers have illustrated the fact that the icon of God is to be found in all men, therefore denouncing: oppression, inequality, selfishness, wealth and its wrong use, hatred, disobedience, pride, subjugation, slavery, in a word all the bad things of their time and all time.³⁹

A.2. By virtue of the iconic gift man benefits due to the act of his creation by God, the Church advocates for "*essential inter-Christian cooperation in every direction for the protection of human dignity and of course for the good of peace, so that the peace-keeping efforts of all Christians without exception may acquire greater weight and significance.*"

The eternal value of interreligious dialogue was the "participative part" of Orthodox theology based on which Christians could argue, "during their discussions with others sharing different beliefs and ideologies, man's value as an "image" who wishes to be in the "likeness" of God; being created and living on the earth as a one of a kind and free person. "True dialogue takes place in partners' ultimate personal depth, and as such it becomes a human phenomenon. It belongs to the person

³⁷ Phil. 2, 13.

³⁸ ST. BASIL THE GREAT, *Homilies and Speeches ...*, p. 234.

³⁹ "Do not ask me the meaning of the Lord's commandments! He knew the Lawmaker to reconcile with the law what seems impossible! Your heart is like a balancing, puzzled in which part it inclines: to true life or to the enjoyment of this world. But people who judge wisely must be convinced that wealth is given for administration, and not for pleasure, they must rejoice that some who separate themselves from foreign goods, and not be as sorry as losing their own goods. Why do you feel sorry for what your soul is crying when you hear, "Sell your wealth!" Even if wealth would accompany you in future life, you should not be so dear to her, that her goodies darken her. And if wealth is still here, why not sell it to win it?" (IBIDEM, pp. 111-112).

who opens in order to be understood and confesses in order to make others understand ... Argued against by some, ignored by others, often misunderstood and many times forgotten, dialogue is the core of our Christian life, with a past that is as old as our faith”.⁴⁰

One of the most representative Romanian theologians, both a hierarch and representative of the Romanian Orthodox Church within the interreligious dialogue commissions, was the case of **Metropolitan Nestor Vornicescu of Oltenia** (October 1st 1927 – May 17th 2000). Proving prodigious experience in the field, Metropolitan Nestor has long been an active member of the Christian Peace Commission (CCP). This allowed him to be an active participant in numerous ecumenical meetings which he attended over the years, being an untired advocator “for peace among people of different Christian creeds”.⁴¹ His original idea is that the greatest gift the Apostles received from Christ was the power of the word to “teach all nations” to the ends of the world. Therefore, Saint Apostle Paul's teachings have become universal references “for the protection of human dignity, and of course, the good of peace”. “Proving to be great listeners and accomplishers of the divine word, the Holy Apostles have preached peace for all Christians, but also for all men. Holy Apostle Paul is the Apostle of the Gentiles, revealing to them the interpretations of the divine teaching, but he is nonetheless the Apostle of Peace among the Gentiles. «If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men»” – St. Paul addresses to the Romans (12, 18). He asks them to be confident in the fact that through the spirit of peace they will succeed; they will succeeded in annihilating the enemy's arrogance, by not riposting to hatred with hatred, but on the contrary, by offering infinite help meant to prove the fact that they are Christians; to show and prove gentle attitude to an enemy who believes that he is strong, so that he realizes how powerless he is, to see that he is helpless in his arrogance. «Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good» (Rm. 12:21). In Metropolitan Father's thinking, “Christian is the land of

⁴⁰ Pr. conf. univ. ADRIAN BOLDIȘOR, *Importance and Current of Interreligious Dialogue*, Metropolia Olteniei Publishing House, Craiova, 2015, pp. 7-8.

⁴¹ Father CONSTANTIN PĂTULEANU, “Metropolitan Nestor Vornicescu and the Ecumenical Movement”, in the vol. *Metropolitan Nestor. Shepherd of Oltenians*, Metropolia Olteniei Publishing House, Craiova, 2007, pp. 145-152; Pr. lect. univ. dr. ADRIAN BOLDISOR, “Contribution of IPS Nestor Vornicescu to the Promotion of Inter-Christian and Inter-Religious Diligence centered on the issue of peace”, in the volume *Theology and Pastoral Service in the Life and Work of Metropolitan Firmilian Marin and Nestor Vornicescu*, coord. Deacon. dr. Ioniță Apostolache, Dr. Lucian Dindirică, Publishing Houses of Metropolitan of Oltenia and The Citadel, Craiova/Targoviste, 2014, p. 199.

love and peace in the world". This idea is to be found in all of us through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. "The Holy Church is, by definition, a Church of Peace, therefore, the «Sacrament of Reconciliation», «The Word of Reconciliation» and peace are an absolute and eternal commandment, a holy Christian duty, of greatest responsibility, which cannot be skipped by any of those who wait for the joy of *adoption*".⁴²

1986 was recognized as "The International Year of Peace" by the United Nations (UN). Given the context, we identify many messages and different positions with a general reference to the universal character of Christian peace. The Romanian Orthodox Church's position was represented by Metropolitan Nestor's voice, who firmly believed that the mission of the Orthodox Church, who represents "the protection of peace and life, is also a holy duty and permanent mission; he was also aware of the fact that all the efforts were to be made together with other religious creeds and also joining all the representatives of peace in the world in order to set a new direction of the events so that reason rule, to ensure man's fundamental right to existence, to peace, to happiness".⁴³ Therefore, as a solution so that these necessities were met, he considered compulsory that the Orthodox Church were opened to dialogue, since "good understanding and fruitful cooperation is lively felt, lived in the life of the Church, of Orthodoxy which, through doctrine, its principles and traditions for her followers, regardless their nation, preaches love and goodwill, sacrificial dedication. Based on its principles and practice, Orthodoxy enriched its ecumenical development by its heritage of faith and virtues and she has showed openness, wish for closeness, knowledge and mutual appreciation, through interdenominational meetings and conferences, through conjoint prayers and services for Christian unity and in the same time a measure of solidarity with all mankind in order to protect life and peace".⁴⁴

As regards the matter discussed (A.2) we could conclude by the fact that "since our Savior Jesus Christ has given back to man his

⁴² See here: Dr. NESTOR VORNICESCU, Archbishop and Metropolitan, *Peace on Earth*, Ed. Metropolitan of Oltenia, Craiova, 1986; Rev. IONIȚĂ APOSTOLACHE, *Words of the soul, people and places in the history of the Oltenian Church. Christian testimonies from the pages of the Lumina newspaper*, Trinitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 2017, pp. 137-140.

⁴³ Let's meet the third millennium peacefully. (1) In the unit, with responsibility, we should work together to defend the gift of life, in *Peace on Earth*, pp. 388-389.

⁴⁴ Let's meet the third millennium peacefully. (2) Dialogue - Spring of Good Understanding and Collaboration for Peace and Life of the World in Volume "Peace on Earth", p. 413 (For the first time the article was published in the "Church, Missionary and Patriotic Guidebook" 4, Craiova, 1987).

attribute as face which got darkened by his fall into sin and placed him at the right level in order to have the chance to reach the likeness of God by exercising virtues such as love, righteousness and goodness ... the Orthodox Church is bound to advocate for a permanent dialogue between people of different Christian creeds and religions in order to set the direction of true life as it is normal. Each and every Christian has a duty to get engaged in the problems of his time in order to exercise practically the message of the Bible as realization of the will of God".⁴⁵

A.3. 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.*

Man's place and value in the Church and society is a highly nowadays-debated topic. Ever since ancient times, Roman society (the classical and post-classical era) defines slaves' existential status as closely related to the will of their masters. As a result of the fact that slaves had no legal personhood (the possibility of exercising rights and obligations in society), they were according to their Roman state's point of view simple things (res). They were mere assets of their masters' wealth who could sell or give them as gifts according to the latter's own will. They could be punished in any way and even murdered by virtue of the rights the owner had over his possessions. Marriage between slaves did not exist legally, therefore, the relations that they could establish were limited to mere factual connections which could not happen without the master's consent. With the republic, slaves' rights get to know a new stage, this time much more human; they get the right to be free or even to become Romanian citizens if their master agreed with this.⁴⁶

Slavery represented for the Church of the early centuries the most abject form of human exploitation that could ever characterize pagan societies. The fight against this phenomenon has become one of the main patristic literature debates in the early Christian ages. The Cappadocian Fathers represented by St. Basil the Great and Saint John Chrysostom

⁴⁵ Pr. lect. univ. dr. ADRIAN BOLDIȘOR, *Contribution of IPS Nestor Vornicescu to the promotion of the inter-Christian and inter-religious dialogue centered on peace*, p. 208.

⁴⁶ EMIL MOLCUȚ, *Romanian Private Law*, Revised and Added Edition, Universul Juridic Publishing House, Bucharest, 2007, pp. 35-49

engaged themselves in an intense struggle to change the old mentalities which have destroyed and depreciated interpersonal relationships for hundreds of years. Relying on the word of the Bible, especially on the text of Galatians III, 28: “*There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus*”, the Holy Fathers preach equally social equality. Although, they could not ask for complete abolition of slavery, a thing which was impossible to achieve in a slave society, the Church Fathers succeeded in changing the relationships between masters and slaves, improving a lot the latter’s conditions.⁴⁷

In order that these wounds were healed, there was the need of the word become reality. This was the purpose which St. Basil the Great had in his mind when he became the founder of numerous social charity homes close to Caesarea: old people's homes, canteens, rehabilitation centers, hospitals, and even vocational training schools. All these were called Basiliades and they were the place where people, regardless of their belief or social condition, were treated equally. This philanthropic system has gradually turned into a true city of Christian love and mercy. This perfect combination between word and deed is meant by the Holy Father to illustrate the fact that true life “the only means of achieving perfection is this one: to sell what you have, to share your wealth with your poor fellows, and especially not to care for those of this life, and not tie your soul to anything that exists here”.⁴⁸ He thought that genuine spiritual life is giving up to the world, both for the world and for living in solitude. We speak, therefore, of a complete repudiation of the earthly, which was reinforced and sealed by the call of the Savior: “*Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me*”.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ While some were spending their lives in mild morals, in loud parties and in luxury, the poor lived the plight of their drama, full of shortcomings and illness, often leaving their heads. To ensure their daily subsistence, many of them were forced to sell their children as slaves, or to throw themselves into the ruthless hands of the swindlers. Throughout this time, the fortunes of the rich were increasing in height, through high interest rates, through the slave trade, through war bonkers, and other dishonest means. Against all these injustices, St. Basil the Great stands up, countering the mercy of his time of mercy and Christian love toward his neighbor. In order to shape the society of time, St. Basil either speaks out the existing passions (for example, Homilies: About Greed, To the Rich, Contra Luxus, Against the Usurers, etc.), or comforted by parental exhortations the sad souls of the troubled (*Homilies*: Remember about yourself, About Thanksgiving, About Faith, Humility, etc.).

⁴⁸ STELIANOS PAPADOPOULOS, *The Life of St. Basil the Great*, dialect translation by Cornel Coman, Bizantină Publishing House, Bucharest, 2003, p. 30.

⁴⁹ Mark 8, 34.

Missionary work of the Church in the time of St. Basil the Great relied on a great support, i.e. the Oriental monastic tradition, which the Holy Father thoroughly researched. His various visits to the monastic space of Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine and Egypt, brought to light *the true image of need*, as well as “common awareness of the human person high value”.⁵⁰ This time, St. Basil reveals the true philosophy of a society built upon the commandments of the Savior Christ. He portrays its members as following: “They were not inflexible except their own place. Among them there were many scholars, philosophers, who, trained in the ancient way of the schools in Alexandria, had brought to the desert a different heritage of knowledge. Nowhere else, *new science, theology*, had more fervent, conscientious, educated followers. They had no trouble arguing with their old study mates or buddies. After having disagreed and silenced heretical sophists, they joyfully opened their arms and hearts to Orthodox bishops and confessors who came to seek shelter together with them”.⁵¹

A.4. We are convinced that, as *God’s fellow workers* (I Cor 3:9), we can advance to this common service together with all people of good will, who love peace that is pleasing to God, for the sake of human society on the local, national, and international levels. This ministry is a commandment of God (Mt 5:9”).

“*God’s fellow work*”, which Apostle Paul preaches about, is therefore a clear direction towards the “good of mankind”. Orthodox teaching relies at this point on “Trinity” character of the Church resulting into dialogue and communion. There is an interpersonal journey” to the encounter with God. “Human person cannot develop himself isolated, the path of man’s self-fulfillment both as individual and human community, necessarily transits the other, relying on permanent openness and dialogue of his own identity with the alterity of others. But the dialogue is not only an exchange of words and ideas, but also an exchange of gifts (I Romans, 11-12), an exchange that makes the transition from antagonism to partnership, from separation to reconciliation”.⁵²

⁵⁰ Chroniclers of the day talk about this mysterious journey of the Holy Father into the heart of the orthodox monasticism. From this experience was born the wonderful "Monastic Rules", a true legislation of the Vasilian monasticism, valid until today. In this context, we mention that the moral outlook that it offers, often reported at interpersonal level, is more than relevant to our approach.

⁵¹ ST. BASIL THE GREAT, *Ascetics*, PSB vol. 18, translation, introductions, indices and notes by Iorgu D. Ivan, IBMBOR Publishing House, 1989, p. 19.

⁵² IOAN I. ICA jr. *Church, Society, Thought in the East, the West and Today in Europe*, p. 44.

One of the greatest Orthodox theologians, Father Professor Dumitru Staniloae, persuasively approaches the topic of “human person” in the context of the missionary work of the Church in Today’s world.⁵³ His dogmatic view is essential today in the process of understanding and interpreting the documents of the Council of Crete. The most popular ecclesiological principle which Rev. Prof. Staniloae illustrates in relation to the role, place and fellow work of the human person in the Church, and society is that of “open Catholicity”. His thinking is firmly based on the fact that “*the Eucharist is the only core of the Church and the exclusive power of the Church through which the Church remains what she is and continues to develop and progress towards the eschatological kingdom of God. Furthermore, the Romanian Father thinks that not only communion with the other local Churches turns a local Church into a full or complete Church. The Church is Catholic, universal since she is the Mystical Body of Christ the Savior*”.⁵⁴

Relying on the Catholic character of the Church, the Orthodox apologetics advocates for a liturgical and community reason as solutions to the theonomous directions of our existence. This need is greatly analyzed in Father Professor Dumitru Staniloae’s theology. He is often in favor of the ability of Orthodox ecclesiology to define itself in relation to sensitive chain of real experiences using terms such as “*open Catholicity*” or “*community through love*”.⁵⁵ The Romanian Father considers Catholic Church as “the future of a perfect communion” where *man fulfills himself as a rational being*. “This is how we see the Church”, states Rev. Professor Dumitru Staniloae, on the one hand, she is perfect, a perfect communion, on the other hand, it is our mission to turn her into

⁵³ "Anthropology of Father Staniloae is conceived and developed in the context of God-man-creation relationship. As a collaborator of God, the reality of the world is connected with man, because through it he is known and reflected through him. Starting from here, one can say that the purpose of creation is accomplished by bringing man to existence in order to achieve a dialogue between the Supreme Person and the created person. Father Stăniloae takes the view of Saint Maxim the Confessor, according to which man is both the factor and the main beneficiary of the dynamism of the world, as a laboratory, which keeps all unites, naturally ensuring the connection of the extremities of the divisions "(Prof. Dr. Sterea Tache, "Cosmology and anthropology of Father DUMITRU STANILOAE - Recovery of the Patristic Theology of Man and World", in the volume *Pastoral and Missionary Implications of the Mystical Theology of Father Dumitru Staniloae*, Ed. Cuvântul Vieții, Bucharest, 2013, pp. 57-58).

⁵⁴ His Eminence, Prof. IRINEU POPA, *Church Nowadays...* p. 454.

⁵⁵ We will report in our approach especially to the two reference studies of Prof. DUMITRU STĂNILOAE, *Open Sobornicity*, in the "Orthodoxy" Magazine, no. 2/1971, p. 165-180 and the *Community by Love*, Orthodoxy, no. 1/1963, pp. 52-70.

such a communion. She is given as a perfect virtual communion, since she bears all grounds; all chances to get renewed as such a communion based on our efforts. Christ, states Mark the Ascetic, is enclosed at the time of Baptism in the believers' deep-rooted part of their being, in their heart, and He makes Himself known by consciousness, felt by it through their work".⁵⁶

Always stimulated by the desire of social fulfilment, modern man learns today that his greatest enemy is *loneliness*. As a paradox or not, though he lives in society, he often feels isolated, desolate and worthless, "not finding a man", to show his value, to listen to him, and push him into the "healing bath". Those healed by the grief of social loneliness regain, first of all, by their integration into ecclesial communion, the condition as "*man*".⁵⁷ Total openness to society, through which we can fulfill ourselves socially and at the same time we can save is mandatory. For Father Dumitru Staniloae, this Christian openness to society, with all its wounds and imperfections, becomes the imperative of a "community through love". "Our presence, as Christians, at today people's social life emanations, states father professor, must be highly valued since Christian can not be fully fulfilled as a man except when in a community where he lives all modern problems of his existence, and not isolated into to a communion concerned only with religious matters. The Church has never agreed to the fact that she has to imprison her believers into a community concerned only with matters of faith, but since they are also real human beings, she wants to have a contribution to their development so that they become productive elements of the human community open to complex life, concerned about all the matters of existence. Between believers' communion life in the Church and their social life with all men, complexly unfolded at the level of their real existence, there must be a

⁵⁶ Rev. prof. DUMITRU STANILOAE, *Union through love*, p. 54.

⁵⁷ We recall here the example of the wretched Wife of Vitezda, who for 38 years waited for "water disturbance," but "no man to cast him into the bath" (cf. 5: 1-15). "The sick," commented the pr. Prof. Vasile Mihoc, with the physical powers and, perhaps, the spiritually diminished spiritual ones, would have been considered by those around him who did not even take him into account and let him lie in his bed, a man. Healed, he regains his status of man. But what Christ has left is far more than a restoration of a healthy man's body. Healing has been offered to him as a gift, as a grace, which will no longer leave him. "He who is healed" is the expression that defines him not only as the weak man "the man," but the man entered into an indelible and unforgettable relationship with Jesus. He will not cease from now on to confess Jesus, to say that Jesus was the one who made him healthy (v. 15)" (see Prof. dr. VASILE MIHOC, *Meditations on Triod's and Pentecost Sunday's Gospel*, Teofania Publishing House, Sibiu, 2003, p. 140).

relationship similar to the principle of communicating vessels. And this relationship is more possible today than ever, for both our Church and our nation direct us towards communion life”.⁵⁸

Social communities permanently communicate each other, breath the same air of everyday concerns and habits. There is only one thing that this social structure lacks: the chance, the realm and the prospects of salvation. They are all offered by the ecclesial communion of the body of Christ. The Church is, therefore, the place where “*individuals not only do save themselves, but they also fulfill themselves or they save themselves since they fulfill themselves*”.⁵⁹ This social achievement, labelled by Churches soteriologically is selfless and fully supported by ecclesial communities. Father Professor Dumitru Staniloae sees these possibilities as similar to Paul’s Scriptural ethos, stating that “in order to keep true communion is necessary that «no one should seek their own good, but the good of others», as the Apostle does not seek his own profit «but the profit of the many so that they may be saved».⁶⁰ For « We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves »⁶¹ And this is how society turned into community, has become the individual’s most efficient support, without which, individual having only limited powers, cannot fulfill himself and therefore cannot save himself”.⁶²

Believers’ genuine social future and as such the dignity of human person have always been valued by the holy work of the Church. That is the reason why we could consider the Holy Sacraments as dynamic elements when it comes of defining theonomous rationality. They are actually active participation “in the grace of the Holy Spirit, in the birth of a new life. This personal transmission of the gifts of the Holy Spirit to the faithful reborn by Baptism is continued within the Church with Christmation”.⁶³

⁵⁸ Rev. prof. DUMITRU STANILOAE, *Union through love*, p. 55.

⁵⁹ The Holy Apostle Paul's exhortation is made to the Thessalonians in the spirit of church communion: "Please, brethren, dare the uncircumcised, encourage the weak to the soul, support the helpless, be patient to all . Take heed that no one will reward evil with evil, but always follow the good to one another and to all "(1 Thessalonians 5: 14-15).

⁶⁰ I Cor. 10, 24.

⁶¹ Rm. 15, 1.

⁶² Rev. prof. DUMITRU STANILOAE, *Union through love*, p. 56.

⁶³ CHRISTOS YANNARAS, *Elements of Faith. An Introduction to Orthodox Theology*, translation Prof. dr. Constantin Coman, Bizantin, Bucharest, 2007, pp. 165-166.

V. Conclusions

Developing a very interesting dogmatic synthesis, the Russian theologian Paul Evdokimov was of the opinion that “the Church developed Trinitarianism axial truth in the fourth century. The first eight centuries witness Christological cycle, which is replaced by the pneumatological cycle in the ninth century. The latter reaches its climax through Hesychasm in the fourteenth century and the teachings of Saint Gregory Palamas and the formulations of the Councils of Constantinople become its dogmatic shield. Patristic development: «*God became man, that man might become God*», considers human being’s «deification» as the ultimate goal of salvation. It is greatly deepened in the light of the theology of the Holy Spirit and the doctrine of uncreated energies”.⁶⁴

At the same time, our great theologian, Father Professor Dumitru Staniloae, made some important remarks on the “preparation of the Holy and Great Council”. Having systematically analyzed the steps taken by the Orthodox Church since the first Pan-Orthodox Conference in Rhodes, father professor seizes the opportunity of affirmation of “the Church as a communion of prayer and love, as obvious reality for the sacred, as place of feeling God, as power beyond nature”. The effort to understand and accept this reality actually relies on “strengthening peace aspirations accomplishing fraternity between people and nations”; the key for all these is only “the dignity of the human person”. The plea he develops in favor of a necessary reunion of the Holy and Great Council relies on the duty the Orthodox Church has in its missionary-pastoral work. “Orthodoxy must recall the fact that Christianity is first of all an element of spiritualization, a work of the Spirit of Christ in the world, and of human sensitization for God and the reality of others. Today man’s social high claims point out the fact that he has already reached the level when this aspect of Christianity can be both understood and useful”.⁶⁵

ABSTRACT:

The words of Father Professor Dumitru Staniloae have largely found their meaning in the documents of the Council of Crete. “The Mission of the Church in Today’s World” asks itself for a present apologetic message renewal. The theological debate on what are the meanings of “the dignity of the human person” is therefore more than a necessity of

⁶⁴ PAUL EVDOCHIMOV, *L’Esprit Saint dans la tradition orthodoxe*, Edition du Cerf, Paris, 1969, p. 60.

⁶⁵ Prof. dr. DUMITRU STANILOAE, *Opinions on the future of the Holy and Great Orthodox Synod*, p. 433.

our days. Under these conditions inter-Christian and inter-religious dialogue take place, overcoming radical fundamentalism. By grasping the fact that “God is everything in all the things”, we will be able to overcome any preconception and become true confessors of the gospel in the nowadays world.

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