

THE DOCUMENTS OF THE HOLY AND GREAT COUNCIL OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH



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ENCYCLICAL OF THE HOLY AND GREAT COUNCIL OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH Crete 2016

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

With a hymn of thanksgiving, we praise and worship God in Trinity, who has enabled us to gather together during the days of the feast of Pentecost here on the island of Crete, which has been sanctified by St. Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, and his disciple Titus, his “true son in the common faith” (Tit 1.4), and, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to conclude the sessions of this Holy and Great Council of our Orthodox Church – convened by His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, by the common will of Their Beatitudes the Primates of the most holy Orthodox Churches – for the glory of His most holy Name and for the great blessing of His people and of the whole world, confessing with the divine Paul: “Let people then regard us thus: as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Cor 4.1).

The Holy and Great Council of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church constitutes an authentic witness to faith in Christ, the God-man, the Only-begotten Son and Word of God who, through His Incarnation, through all His work on earth, through His Sacrifice on the Cross and through His Resurrection, revealed the Triune God as infinite love. Therefore, with one voice and one heart we address this message of “the hope that is in us” (cf. 1 Pet 3.15) not only to the sons and daughters of our most holy Church, but also to every human being, “whether near or far off” (Eph 2.17). “Our hope” (cf. 1 Tim 1.1), the Savior of the world, was revealed as “God with us” (cf. Matt 1.23) and as God “for our sake” (Rom 8.32), who “desires that all people may be saved and come to the knowledge of truth” (1 Tim 2.4). Proclaiming His mercy and not concealing His great blessings, in remembrance of the Lord’s words that “heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away” (Matt 24.35) and “filled with joy” (1 John 1.4), we announce the Gospel of faith, hope and love, looking forward to that “day without evening, without succession and without end” (Basil the Great, *On the Hexaemeron II*, PG 29.54). The fact that we have “our citizenship in heaven” (Phil 3.20) in no way negates, but rather strengthens our witness in the world.

In this we follow the tradition of the Apostles and of the Fathers of our Church who proclaimed Christ and the saving experience through Him of the Church’s faith, and who spoke of God in the “manner of fishermen casting a net,” that is to say in an apostolic manner, to the people of every age in order to transmit to them the Gospel of freedom “for which Christ has set us free” (cf. Gal 5.1). The Church lives not for herself. She offers herself for the whole of humanity in order to raise up and renew the world into new heavens and a new earth (cf. Rev 21.1). Hence, she gives Gospel witness and distributes the gifts of God in the world: His love, peace, justice, reconciliation, the power of the Resurrection and the expectation of eternal life.

I. The Church: Body of Christ, image of the Holy Trinity

1. The one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church is a *divine-human communion in the image of the Holy Trinity*, a foretaste and experience of the eschaton in the holy Eucharist and a revelation of the glory of the things to come, and, as a continuing Pentecost, she is a prophetic voice in this world that

cannot be silenced, the presence and witness of God's Kingdom "that has come with power" (cf. Mark 9.1). The Church, as the body of Christ, "gathers" the world (Matt 23.37) to Him, transfigures it and irrigates it with "the water welling up to eternal life" (John 4.14).

2. The tradition of the Apostles and Fathers – following the words of the Lord, the founder of the Church, who at the Last Supper with his disciples, instituted the sacrament of the holy Eucharist - highlighted the Church's characteristic as the "body of Christ" (Matt 25, 26; Mark 14.22; Luke 22.19; 1 Cor 10.16-17; 11.23-29), and always connected this with the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son and Word of God from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary. In this spirit, emphasis was always placed on the indissoluble relation both between the entire mystery of the divine Economy in Christ and the mystery of the Church, and also between the mystery of the Church and the mystery of the holy Eucharist, which is continually confirmed in the sacramental life of the Church through the operation of the Holy Spirit.

The Orthodox Church, faithful to this unanimous apostolic tradition and sacramental experience, constitutes the authentic continuation of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, as this is confessed in the Symbol of faith and is confirmed in the teaching of the Fathers of the Church. Thus, she is conscious of her greater responsibility not only to ensure the authentic expression of this experience in the ecclesial body, but also to offer a trustworthy witness to the truth to all humankind.

3. The Orthodox Church, in her unity and catholicity, is *the Church of Councils*, from the Apostolic Council in Jerusalem (Acts 15.5-29) to the present day. The Church in herself is a Council, established by Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit, in accord with the apostolic words: "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (Acts 15.28). Through the Ecumenical and Local councils, the Church has proclaimed and continues to proclaim the mystery of the Holy Trinity, revealed through the incarnation of the Son and Word of God. The Conciliar work continues uninterrupted in history through the later councils of universal authority, such as, for example, the Great Council (879-880) convened at the time of St. Photios the Great, Patriarch of Constantinople, and also the Great Councils convened at the time of St. Gregory Palamas (1341, 1351, 1368), through which the same truth of faith was confirmed, most especially as concerns the procession of the Holy Spirit and as concerns the participation of human beings in the uncreated divine energies, and furthermore through the Holy and Great Councils convened in Constantinople, in 1484 to refute the unionist Council of Florence (1438-1439), in 1638, 1642, 1672 and 1691 to refute Protestant beliefs, and in 1872 to condemn ethno-phyletism as an ecclesiological heresy.

4. The holiness of man (*anthropos*) cannot be conceived apart from the Body of Christ, "which is the Church" (cf. Eph 1.23). *Holiness proceeds from the One who alone is Holy*. It is participation of mankind in the holiness of God, in "the communion of the Saints," as is proclaimed by the words of the priest during the Divine Liturgy: "The Holy Gifts for the holy," and through the response of the faithful: "One is Holy, one is Lord, Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father. Amen." In this spirit, Saint Cyril of Alexandria underscores that Christ, "Being holy by nature as God (...) is sanctified on our behalf in the Holy Spirit (...) and (Christ) performed this on our behalf, not on his own behalf, so that from him and in him, who first received this sanctification, the grace of being sanctified may thus pass to all humanity ..." (*Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 11, PG 74, 548).

According to St. Cyril, Christ is our "common person" through the recapitulation in his own humanity of the entire human race, "for we were all in Christ, and the common person of humanity comes to life again in him" (*Commentary on the Gospel of John*, XI, PG 73. 157-161), and hence also he is the sole source of man's sanctification in the Holy Spirit. In this spirit, holiness is man's participation both in the sacrament of the Church and also in her sacred mysteries, with the holy Eucharist at the center, which is "a living sacrifice, holy, and pleasing to God" (cf. Rom 12.1). "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: 'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' But rather, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Rom 8.35-37). The saints embody the eschatological identity of the Church as an eternal doxology before the earthly and heavenly Throne of the King of Glory (Ps 23.7), providing an image of the Kingdom of God.

5. The Orthodox Catholic Church comprises fourteen local Autocephalous Churches, recognized at a pan-Orthodox level. The principle of autocephaly cannot be allowed to operate at the expense of the principle of the catholicity and the unity of the Church. We therefore consider that *the creation of the Episcopal Assemblies in the Orthodox Diaspora*, comprising all the recognized canonical bishops, who in each area are appointed to their respective assembly, and who remain under their canonical jurisdictions, represents a positive step towards their canonical organization, and the smooth functioning of these assemblies guarantees respect for the ecclesiological principle of conciliarity.

II. The mission of the Church in the world

6. *The apostolic work* and the proclamation of the Gospel, also known as *mission*, belong at the core of the Church's identity, as the keeping and observation of Christ's commandment: "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt 28.19). This is the "breath of life" that the Church breathes into human society and makes the world into Church through the newly-established local Churches everywhere. In this spirit, the Orthodox faithful are and ought to be Christ's apostles in the world. This mission must be fulfilled, not aggressively, but freely, with love and respect towards the cultural identity of individuals and peoples. All Orthodox Churches ought to participate in this endeavor with due respect for canonical order.

Participation in the holy Eucharist is a source of missionary zeal for the evangelization of the world. By participating in the holy Eucharist and praying in the Sacred Synaxis for the whole world (*oikoumene*), we are called to continue the "liturgy after the Liturgy" and to offer witness concerning the truth of our faith before God and mankind, sharing God's gifts with all mankind, in obedience to the explicit commandment of our Lord before His Ascension: "And you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1.8). The words of the Divine Liturgy prior to Communion, "Dismembered and distributed is the Lamb of God, who is dismembered and not divided, ever eaten, yet never consumed," indicate that Christ as the "Lamb of God" (John 1.29) and the "Bread of Life" (John 6.48) is offered to us as eternal Love, uniting us to God and to one another. It teaches us to distribute God's gifts and to offer ourselves to everyone in a Christ-like way.

The life of Christians is a truthful witness to the renewal in Christ of all things – "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, all things have become new" (2 Cor 5.17) – and an invitation addressed to all people for personal and free participation in eternal life, in the

grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and in the love of God the Father, in order to experience the communion of the Holy Spirit in the Church. “For the mystery of salvation is for those who desire it, not for those who are being coerced” (Maximus Confessor PG 90.880). The re-evangelization of God’s people in contemporary secularized societies, as well as the evangelization of those who have not yet come to know Christ, is the unceasing duty of the Church.

III. The Family: Image of Christ’s love towards the Church

7. The Orthodox Church regards the indissoluble loving union of man and woman as a “*great mystery*” ... of Christ and the Church (Eph 5.32) and she regards the family that springs from this, which constitutes the only guarantee for the birth and upbringing of children in accord with the plan of divine Economy, as a “*little Church*” (John Chrysostom, *Commentary of the Letter to the Ephesians*, 20, PG 62.143), giving to it the appropriate pastoral support.

The contemporary crisis in marriage and the family is a consequence of the crisis of freedom as responsibility, its decline into a self-centered self-realization, its identification with individual self-gratification, self-sufficiency and autonomy, and the loss of the sacramental character of the union between man and woman, resulting from forgetfulness of the sacrificial ethos of love. Contemporary society approaches marriage in a secular way with purely sociological and realistic criteria, regarding it as a simple form of relationship – one among many others – all of which are entitled to equal institutional validity.

Marriage is a Church-nurtured workshop of life in love and an unsurpassed gift of God’s grace. The “high hand” of the “conjoining” God is “invisibly present, harmonizing those being joined together” with Christ and with one another. The crowns that are placed on the heads of the bride and groom during the sacramental rite refer to the dimension of sacrifice and complete devotion to God and one another. They also point to the life of the Kingdom of God, revealing the eschatological reference in the mystery of love.

8. *The Holy and Great Council addresses itself with particular love and care to children and to all young people.* Amid the medley of mutually contradictory definitions of childhood, our most holy Church presents the words of our Lord: “Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 18.3) and “whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it (Luke 18.17), as well as what our Savior says about those who “prevent” (Luke 18.16) children from approaching Him and about those who “scandalize” them (Matt 18.6).

To young people the Church offers not simply “help” but “truth,” the truth of the new divine-human life in Christ. Orthodox youth should become aware that they are bearers of the centuries-old and blessed tradition of the Orthodox Church and also the continuers of this tradition who will courageously preserve and will cultivate in a dynamic way the eternal values of Orthodoxy in order to give life-giving Christian witness. From among them will come the future ministers of the Church of Christ. The young people thus are not simply the “future” of the Church, but also the active expression of her God-loving and human-loving life in the present.

IV. Education in Christ

9. 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 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.

V. The Church in the face of contemporary challenges

10. The Church of Christ today finds herself confronted by extreme or even provocative expressions of the ideology of secularization, inherent in political, cultural and social developments. A basic element of the ideology of secularization has ever been and continues to be the full autonomy of man from Christ and from the spiritual influence of the Church, by the arbitrary identification of the Church with conservatism and by the historically unjustified characterization of the Church as an alleged impediment to all progress and development. In contemporary secularized societies, man, cut off from God, identifies his freedom and the meaning of his life with absolute autonomy and with release from his eternal destiny, resulting in a series of misunderstandings and deliberate misinterpretations of the Christian tradition. The bestowal on man from above of freedom in Christ and his advancement "to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4.13) is thus seen to go against man's tendencies for self-salvation. Christ's sacrificial love is regarded as incompatible with individualism while the ascetic character of the Christian ethos is judged as an unbearable challenge to the happiness of the individual.

The identification of the Church with conservatism, incompatible with the advancement of civilization, is arbitrary and improper, since the consciousness of the identity of the Christian peoples bears the indelible imprint of the diachronic contribution of the Church, not only in their cultural heritage, but also in the healthy development of secular civilization more generally, since God placed man as steward of the divine creation and as a co-worker with Him in the world. *The Orthodox Church sets against the "man-god" of the contemporary world the "God-man" as the ultimate measure of all things.* "We do not speak of a man who has been deified, but of God who has become man" (John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* iii, 2 PG 94.988). The Church reveals the saving truth of the God-man and His body, the Church, as the locus and mode of life in freedom, "speaking the truth in love" (cf. Eph 4.15), and as participation even now on earth in the life of the resurrected Christ. The divine-human character ["not of the world" (John 18.36)] of the Church, which nourishes and guides her presence and witness "in the world," is incompatible with any kind of conformation of the Church to the world (cf. Rom 12.2).

11. Through the contemporary development of science and technology, our life is changing radically. And what brings about a change in the life of man demands discernment on his part, since, apart

from significant benefits, such as the facilitation of everyday life, the successful treatment of serious diseases and space exploration, we are also confronted with the negative consequences of scientific progress. The dangers are the manipulation of human freedom, the use of man as a simple means, the gradual loss of precious traditions, and threats to, or even the destruction of, the natural environment.

Unfortunately, science, by its very nature, does not possess the necessary means to prevent or address many of the problems it creates directly or indirectly. *Scientific knowledge does not motivate man's moral will*, and even though aware of the dangers, he continues to act as if unaware of them. The answer to man's serious existential and moral problems and to the eternal meaning of his life and of the world cannot be given without a spiritual approach.

12. In our age, there is a very prevalent enthusiasm for the impressive developments in the fields of Biology, Genetics and Neurophysiology. These represent scientific advances, the wide-ranging applications of which will, in all likelihood, create serious anthropological and moral dilemmas. *The uncontrolled use of biotechnology at the beginning, during, and at the end of life, endangers its authentic fullness.* Man is experimenting ever more intensively with his own very nature in an extreme and dangerous way. He is in danger of being turned into a biological machine, into an impersonal social unit or into a mechanical device of controlled thought.

The Orthodox Church cannot remain on the sidelines of discussions about such momentous anthropological, ethical and existential matters. She rests firmly on divinely taught criteria and reveals the relevance of Orthodox anthropology in the face of the contemporary overturning of values. Our Church can and must express in the world her prophetic consciousness in Christ Jesus, who with His Incarnation assumed the whole man and is the ultimate prototype for the renewal of the human race. She projects the sacredness of life and man's character as a person from the very moment of conception. The right to be born is the first of human rights. The Church as a divine-human society, in which each human constitutes a unique being destined for personal communion with God, and she resists every attempt to objectify man, to turn him into a measurable quantity. No scientific achievement is permitted to compromise man's dignity and his divine destination. Man is not defined only by his genes.

Bioethics from an Orthodox point of view is founded on this basis. At a time of conflicting images of man, Orthodox bioethics, in opposition to secular autonomous and reductionist anthropological views, insists on man's creation in God's image and likeness and his eternal destiny. The Church thus contributes to the enrichment of the philosophical and scientific discussion of bioethical questions through her scriptural anthropology and the spiritual experience of Orthodoxy.

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.

14. *The roots of the ecological crisis are spiritual and ethical*, inhering within the heart of each man. This crisis has become more acute in recent centuries on account of the various divisions provoked by human passions – such as greed, avarice, egotism and the insatiable desire for more – and by their consequences for the planet, as with climate change, which now threatens to a large extent the natural environment, our common “home”. The rupture in the relationship between man and creation is a perversion of the authentic use of God’s creation. The approach to the ecological problem on the basis of the principles of the Christian tradition demands not only repentance for the sin of the exploitation of the natural resources of the planet, namely, a radical change in mentality and behavior, but also asceticism as an antidote to consumerism, the deification of needs and the acquisitive attitude. It also presupposes our greatest responsibility to hand down a viable natural environment to future generations and to use it according to divine will and blessing. In the sacraments of the Church, creation is affirmed and man is encouraged to act as a steward, protector and “priest” of creation, offering it by way of doxology to the Creator – “Your own of your own we offer to You in all and for all” – and cultivating a Eucharistic relationship with creation. This Orthodox, Gospel and Patristic approach also turns our attention to the social dimensions and the tragic consequences of the destruction of the natural environment.

VI. The Church in the face of globalization, the phenomenon of extreme violence and migration

15. 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 mankind, 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. 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 mankind only with an increase in living standards or with economic development at the expense of spiritual values.

16. The Church does not involve herself with politics in the narrow sense of the term. Her witness, however, is essentially political insofar as it expresses concern for man and his spiritual freedom. *The voice of the Church was always distinct and will ever remain a beneficial intervention for the sake of humanity*. The local Orthodox Churches are today called to promote a new constructive synergy with

the secular state and its rule of law within the new framework of international relations, in accordance with the biblical saying: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's" (cf. Matt 22.21). This synergy must, however, preserve the specific identity of both Church and state and ensure their earnest cooperation in order to preserve man's unique dignity and the human rights which flow therefrom, and in order to assure social justice.

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 mankind. 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.

17. We are experiencing today an increase of violence in the name of God. The explosions of fundamentalism within religious communities threaten to create the view that fundamentalism belongs to the essence of the phenomenon of religion. The truth, however, is that *fundamentalism*, as "zeal not based on knowledge" (Rom 10.2), *constitutes an expression of morbid religiosity*. A true Christian, following the example of the crucified Lord, sacrifices himself and does not sacrifice others, and for this reason is the most stringent critic of fundamentalism of whatever provenance. Honest interfaith dialogue contributes to the development of mutual trust and to the promotion of peace and reconciliation. The Church strives to make "the peace from on high" more tangibly felt on earth. True peace is not achieved by force of arms, but only through love that "does not seek its own" (1 Cor 13.5). The oil of faith must be used to soothe and heal the wounds of others, not to rekindle new fires of hatred.

18. 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 Ibrahim. We pray also for the release of all our brothers and sisters being held hostage or in captivity.

19. 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 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.

VII. Church: witness in dialogue

20. 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 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 holy 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.)

† Bartholomew of Constantinople, Chairman

† Theodoros of Alexandria

† Theophilos of Jerusalem

† Irinej of Serbia

† Daniel of Romania

† Chrysostomos of Cyprus

† Ieronymos of Athens and All Greece

† Sawa of Warsaw and All Poland

† Anastasios of Tirana, Durrës and All Albania

† Rastislav of Presov, the Czech Lands and Slovakia

Delegation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate

- † Leo of Karelia and All Finland
- † Stephanos of Tallinn and All Estonia
- † Elder Metropolitan John of Pergamon
- † Elder Archbishop Demetrios of America
- † Augustinos of Germany
- † Irenaios of Crete
- † Isaiah of Denver
- † Alexios of Atlanta
- † Iakovos of the Princes' Islands
- † Joseph of Proikonnisos
- † Meliton of Philadelphia
- † Emmanuel of France
- † Nikitas of the Dardanelles
- † Nicholas of Detroit
- † Gerasimos of San Francisco
- † Amphilochios of Kisamos and Selinos
- † Amvrosios of Korea
- † Maximos of Selyvria
- † Amphilochios of Adrianopolis
- † Kallistos of Diokleia
- † Antony of Hierapolis, Head of the Ukrainian Orthodox in the USA
- † Job of Telmessos
- † Jean of Charioupolis, Head of the Patriarchal Exarchate for Orthodox Parishes of the Russian Tradition in Western Europe
- † Gregory of Nyssa, Head of the Carpatho-Russian Orthodox in the USA

Delegation of the Patriarchate of Alexandria

- † Gabriel of Leontopolis
- † Makarios of Nairobi

- † Jonah of Kampala
- † Seraphim of Zimbabwe and Angola
- † Alexandros of Nigeria
- † Theophylaktos of Tripoli
- † Sergios of Good Hope
- † Athanasios of Cyrene
- † Alexios of Carthage
- † Ieronymos of Mwanza
- † George of Guinea
- † Nicholas of Hermopolis
- † Dimitrios of Irinopolis
- † Damaskinos of Johannesburg and Pretoria
- † Narkissos of Accra
- † Emmanouel of Ptolemaidos
- † Gregorios of Cameroon
- † Nicodemos of Memphis
- † Meletios of Katanga
- † Panteleimon of Brazzaville and Gabon
- † Innokentios of Burudi and Rwanda
- † Crysostomos of Mozambique
- † Neofytos of Nyeri and Mount Kenya

Delegation of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem

- † Benedict of Philadelphia
- † Aristarchos of Constantine
- † Theophylaktos of Jordan
- † Nektarios of Anthidon
- † Philoumenos of Pella

Delegation of the Church of Serbia

- † Jovan of Ohrid and Skopje
- † Amfilohije of Montenegro and the Littoral
- † Porfirije of Zagreb and Ljubljana
- † Vasilije of Sirmium
- † Lukijan of Budim
- † Longin of Nova Gracanica
- † Irinej of Backa
- † Hrizostom of Zvornik and Tuzla
- † Justin of Zica
- † Pahomije of Vranje
- † Jovan of Sumadija
- † Ignatije of Branicevo
- † Fotije of Dalmatia
- † Athanasios of Bihac and Petrovac
- † Joanikije of Niksic and Budimlje
- † Grigorije of Zahumlje and Hercegovina
- † Milutin of Valjevo
- † Maksim in Western America
- † Irinej in Australia and New Zealand
- † David of Krusevac
- † Jovan of Slavonija
- † Andrej in Austria and Switzerland
- † Sergije of Frankfurt and in Germany
- † Ilarion of Timok

Delegation of the Church of Romania

- † Teofan of Iasi, Moldova and Bucovina

- † Laurentiu of Sibiu and Transylvania
- † Andrei of Vad, Feleac, Cluj, Alba, Crisana and Maramures
- † Irineu of Craiova and Oltenia
- † Ioan of Timisoara and Banat
- † Iosif in Western and Southern Europe
- † Serafim in Germany and Central Europe
- † Nifon of Targoviste
- † Irineu of Alba Iulia
- † Ioachim of Roman and Bacau
- † Casian of Lower Danube
- † Timotei of Arad
- † Nicolae in America
- † Sofronie of Oradea
- † Nicodim of Strehia and Severin
- † Visarion of Tulcea
- † Petroniu of Salaj
- † Siluan in Hungary
- † Siluan in Italy
- † Timotei in Spain and Portugal
- † Macarie in Northern Europe
- † Varlaam Ploiesteanul, Assistant Bishop to the Patriarch
- † Emilian Lovisteanul, Assistant Bishop to the Archdiocese of Ramnic
- † Ioan Casian of Vicina, Assistant Bishop to the Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese of the Americas

Delegation of the Church of Cyprus

- † Georgios of Paphos
- † Chrysostomos of Kition
- † Chrysostomos of Kyrenia

- † Athanasios of Limassol
- † Neophytos of Morphou
- † Vasileios of Constantia and Ammochostos
- † Nikiphoros of Kykkos and Tillyria
- † Isaias of Tamassos and Oreini
- † Barnabas of Tremithousa and Lefkara
- † Christophoros of Karpasion
- † Nektarios of Arsinoe
- † Nikolaos of Amathus
- † Epiphanius of Ledra
- † Leontios of Chytron
- † Porphyrios of Neapolis
- † Gregory of Mesaoria

Delegation of the Church of Greece

- † Prokopios of Philippi, Neapolis and Thassos
- † Chrysostomos of Peristerion
- † Germanos of Eleia
- † Alexandros of Mantinea and Kynouria
- † Ignatios of Arta
- † Damaskinos of Didymoteixon, Orestias and Soufli
- † Alexios of Nikaia
- † Hierotheos of Nafpaktos and Aghios Vlasios
- † Eusebios of Samos and Ikaria
- † Seraphim of Kastoria
- † Ignatios of Demetrias and Almyros
- † Nicodemos of Kassandria
- † Ephraim of Hydra, Spetses and Aegina

- † Theologos of Serres and Nigrita
- † Makarios of Sidirokastron
- † Anthimos of Alexandroupolis
- † Barnabas of Neapolis and Stavroupolis
- † Chrysostomos of Messenia
- † Athenagoras of Ilion, Acharnon and Petroupoli
- † Ioannis of Lagkada, Litis and Rentinis
- † Gabriel of New Ionia and Philadelphia
- † Chrysostomos of Nikopolis and Preveza
- † Theoklitos of Ierissos, Mount Athos and Ardameri

Delegation of the Church of Poland

- † Simon of Lodz and Poznan
- † Abel of Lublin and Chelm
- † Jacob of Bialystok and Gdansk
- † George of Siemiatycze
- † Paisios of Gorlice

Delegation of the Church of Albania

- † Joan of Koritsa
- † Demetrios of Argyrokastron
- † Nikolla of Apollonia and Fier
- † Andon of Elbasan
- † Nathaniel of Amantia
- † Asti of Bylis

Delegation of the Church of the Czech lands and Slovakia

- † Michal of Prague
- † Isaiah of Sumperk
- † Jeremy of Switzerland, Chief of the Panorthodox Secretariat of the Holy and Great Council

MESSAGE OF THE HOLY AND GREAT COUNCIL OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

To the Orthodox people and to all people of good will

To God, "the Father of mercies and all comfort," we address a hymn of thanksgiving and praise for having enabled us to gather during the week of Pentecost (18-26 June 2016) on Crete, where the Apostle Paul and his disciple Titus preached the Gospel in the early years of the life of the Church. We give thanks to the Triune God who was well pleased that in one accord we should bring to a conclusion the work of the Holy and Great Council that was convoked by His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch. Bartholomew by the common will of their Beatitudes the Primate of the local Orthodox Autocephalous Churches.

Faithfully following the example of the Apostles and our god-bearing Fathers we have once again studied the Gospel of freedom "for which Christ has set us free" (Gal. 5: 1). The foundation of our theological discussions was the certainty that the Church does not live for herself. She transmits the witness of the Gospel of grace and truth and offers to the whole world the gifts of God: love, peace, justice, reconciliation, the power of the Cross and of the Resurrection and the expectation of eternal life.

1) The key priority of the Council was to proclaim **the unity** of the Orthodox Church. Founded on the Eucharist and the Apostolic Succession of her Bishops, the existing unity needs to be strengthened and to bear new fruits. The One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church is a divine-human communion, a foretaste and experience of the *eschaton* within the Holy Eucharist. As a continuous Pentecost, she is a prophetic voice that cannot be silenced, the presence of and witness to the Kingdom of the God of love. The Orthodox Church, faithful to the unanimous Apostolic Tradition and her sacramental experience, is the authentic continuation of the one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church as confessed in the Creed and confirmed by the teaching of the Church Fathers. Our Church lives out the mystery of the Divine Economy in her sacramental life, with the Holy Eucharist at its center.

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.

During the deliberations of the Holy and Great Council the importance of the Synaxes of the Primate which had taken place was emphasized and the proposal was made for the Holy and Great Council to become a regular Institution to be convened every seven or ten years.

2) Participating in the Holy Eucharist and praying for the whole world, we must continue the 'liturgy after the Divine Liturgy' and give the **witness of faith** to those near and those far off, in accordance

with the Lord's clear command before His ascension, "And you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth (Ac. 1: 8). The re-evangelization of God's people in modern, secularized societies and the evangelization of those who have still not come to know Christ remain an unceasing obligation for the Church.

3) In response to her obligation to witness to the truth and her apostolic faith, our Church attaches great importance to **dialogue**, primarily with non Orthodox Christians. In this way the remainder of the Christian world comes to know more precisely the authenticity of the Orthodox Tradition, the value of patristic teaching and the liturgical life and faith of the Orthodox. The dialogues conducted by the Orthodox Church never imply a compromise in matters of faith.

4) 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.

5) Modern secularisation seeks the autonomy of man (*anthropos*) from Christ and from the spiritual influence of the Church, which it arbitrarily identifies with conservatism. Western civilization, however, bears the indelible mark of the diachronic contribution of Christianity. The Church, moreover, highlights the saving significance of Christ, the God-man, and of His Body, as the place and mode of life in freedom.

6) In contrast to the contemporary approach to **marriage**, the Orthodox Church regards the indissoluble loving relationship of man and woman as "a great mystery... of Christ and the Church". Similarly, she calls the family which springs from this and which constitutes the only guarantee for the upbringing of children a "little church".

The Church has always emphasised the value of **self-restraint**. Christian asceticism, however, differs radically from every dualistic asceticism which severs man from life and from his fellow man. On the contrary, she connects this with the sacramental life of the Church. Self-restraint does not concern only the monastic life. The ascetic *ethos* is a characteristic of Christian life in all its manifestations.

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Apart from the specific topics about which it decided, the Holy and Great Council notes in brief the following important contemporary issues:

7) In regard to the matter of the relations between Christian faith and the natural sciences, the Orthodox Church avoids placing scientific investigation under tutelage and does not adopt a position on every scientific question. She thanks God who gives to scientists the gift of uncovering unknown dimensions of divine creation. The modern development of the **natural sciences** and of technology is bringing radical changes to our life. It brings significant benefits, such as the facilitation of everyday life, the treatment of serious diseases, easier communications and space exploration, and so on. In spite of this, however, there are many negative consequences such as the manipulation of freedom, the gradual loss of precious traditions, the destruction of the natural environment and the questioning of moral values. Scientific knowledge, however swiftly it may be advancing, does not motivate man's will, nor does it give answers to serious moral and existential issues and to the search for the meaning of life and of the world. These matters demand a spiritual approach, which the Orthodox Church attempts to provide through a bioethics which is founded on Christian ethics and Patristic teaching. Along with her respect for the freedom of scientific investigation, the Orthodox Church at the same time points out the dangers concealed in certain scientific achievements and emphasises man's dignity and his divine destiny.

8) It is clear that the present-day **ecological crisis** is due to spiritual and moral causes. Its roots are connected with greed, avarice and egoism, which lead to the thoughtless use of natural resources, the filling of the atmosphere with damaging pollutants, and to climate change. The Christian response to the problem demands repentance for the abuses, an ascetic frame of mind as an antidote to overconsumption, and at the same time a cultivation of the consciousness that man is a "steward " and not a possessor of creation. The Church never ceases to emphasise that future generations also have a right to the the natural resources that the Creator has given us. For this reason, the Orthodox Church takes an active part in the various international ecological initiatives and has ordained the 1st September as a day of prayer for the protection of the natural environment.

9) Against the levelling and impersonal standardization that is promoted in so many ways, Orthodoxy proposes **respect for the particular characteristics** of individuals peoples. It is also opposed the making of the economy into something autonomous from basic human needs and turning it into an end in itself. The progress of mankind is not connected only with an increase in living standards or with economic development at the expense of spiritual values.

10) The Orthodox Church does not involve herself in politics. Her voice remains distinct, but also prophetic, as a beneficial intervention for the sake of man. Human rights today are at the center of politics as a response to the social and political crises and upheavals, and seek to protect the citizen from the arbitrary power of the state. Our Church also adds to this the obligations and responsibilities of the citizens and the need for constant self-criticism on the part of both politicians and citizens for the improvement of society. And above all she emphasises that the **Orthodox ideal** in respect of man transcends the horizon of established human rights and that " greatest of all is love", as Christ revealed and as all the faithful who follow him have experienced. She insists also that a fundamental human right is the protection of religious freedom--namely, 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.

11) The Orthodox Church addresses herself to **young people** who seek for a plenitude of life replete with freedom, justice, creativity and also love. She invites them to join themselves consciously with the Church of Him who is Truth and Life. To come, offering to the ecclesial body their vitality, their anxieties, their concerns and their expectations. Young people are not only the future, but also the dynamic and creative present of the Church, both on a local and on a world-wide level.

12) The Holy and Great Council has **opened our horizon** towards the contemporary diverse and multifarious world. It has emphasised our responsibility in place and in time, ever with the perspective of eternity. The Orthodox Church, preserving intact her Sacramental and Soteriological character, is sensitive to the pain, the distress and the cry for justice and peace of the peoples of the world. She "proclaims day after day the good tidings of His salvation, announcing His glory among the nations and His wonders among all peoples" (Psalm 95).

Let us pray that "the God of all grace, who has called us to his eternal glory in Christ, will, after we have suffered a little, Himself restore, establish, and strengthen and settle us. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen" (1 Peter 5.10-11).

THE IMPORTANCE OF FASTING AND ITS OBSERVANCE TODAY

1. Fasting is a divine commandment (Gen 2:16-17). According to Basil the Great, fasting is as old as humanity itself; it was prescribed in paradise (*On Fasting*, 1, 3. PG 31, 168A). It is a great spiritual endeavor and the foremost expression of the Orthodox ascetic ideal. The Orthodox Church, in strict conformity with the apostolic precepts, the synodal canons, and the patristic tradition as a whole, has always proclaimed the great significance of fasting for our spiritual life and salvation. The annual liturgical cycle reflects the entire patristic teaching on fasting, the teaching on constant and unceasing watchfulness of the human person, and our participation in spiritual struggles. Accordingly, the Triodion praises fasting as grace that is full of light, as an invincible weapon, the beginning of spiritual struggles, the perfect path of virtues, the nourishment for the soul, the source of all wisdom, life imperishable, an imitation of the angelic life, the mother of all good things and virtues.

2. As an ancient institution, fasting was mentioned already in the Old Testament (Deut 9:18; Is 58:4-10; Joel 2:15; Jonah 3:5-7) and affirmed in the New Testament. The Lord Himself fasted for forty days before commencing His public ministry (Lk 4:1-2) and provided instructions on how to practice fasting (Mt 6:16-18). Fasting is generally prescribed in the New Testament as a means of abstinence, repentance, and spiritual edification (Mk 1:6; Acts 13:2; 14:23; Rom 14:21). Since the apostolic times, the Church has proclaimed the profound importance of fasting and established Wednesday and Friday as days of fasting (*Didache* 8, 1), as well as the fast before Pascha (Irenaeus of Lyons, as cited in Eusebius, *Church History* 5, 24. PG 20 497B-508AB). In ecclesiastical practice that has existed for centuries, there has always been diversity with regard not only to the length of the fast before Easter (Dionysius of Alexandria, *Letter to Basilides*, PG 10, 1277), but also the number and content of other periods of fasting which became customary under the influence of various factors, primarily, of the liturgical and monastic traditions, with a view to proper preparation for the great feasts. Thus, the indissoluble link between fasting and worship indicates the extent and purpose of fasting and reveals its spiritual nature. For this reason, all the faithful are invited to respond accordingly, each to the best of his or her strength and ability, while not allowing such liberty to diminish this holy institution: *“See that no one make thee to err from this path of doctrine... If thou art able to bear the whole yoke of the Lord, thou wilt be perfect; but if thou art not able, what thou art able, that do. But concerning meat, bear that which thou art able to do”*(*Didache* 6, 1-3).

3. As a spiritual endeavor, the true fast is inseparable from unceasing prayer and genuine repentance. Repentance without fasting is fruitless (Basil the Great, *On Fasting* 1, 3. PG 31, 168A), as fasting without merciful deeds is dead, especially nowadays when the unequal and unjust distribution of goods deprives entire nations of their daily bread. *“While fasting physically, brethren, let us also fast spiritually. Let us loose every knot of iniquity; let us tear up every unrighteous bond; let us distribute bread to the hungry, and welcome into our homes those who have no roof over their heads...”* (*Sticheron* at Vespers on Wednesday of the First Week of Lent; cf. Is 58:6-7). Fasting cannot be reduced to simple and formal abstinence from certain foods. *“So let us not be selfish as we begin the abstinence from foods that is the noble fast. Let us fast in an acceptable manner, one that is pleasing to God. A true fast is one that is set against evil, it is self-control of the tongue. It is the checking of*

anger, separation from things like lusts, evil-speaking, lies, and false oaths. Self-denial from these things is a true fast, so fasting from these negative things is good” (Basil the Great, *On Fasting*, 2, 7. PG 31, 196D). Abstinence from certain foods during the fast and temperance, not only with regard to what to eat but also how much to eat, constitutes a visible aspect of this spiritual endeavor. *“In the literal sense, fasting is abstinence from food, but food makes us neither more nor less righteous. However, in the spiritual sense, it is clear that, as life comes from food for each of us and the lack of food is a symbol of death, so it is necessary that we fast from worldly things, in order that we might die to the world and after this, having partaken of the divine nourishment, live in God”* (Clement of Alexandria, *From the Prophetic Eclogae*. PG 9, 704D-705A). Therefore, the true fast affects the entire life in Christ of the faithful and is crowned by their participation in divine worship, particularly in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.

4. The forty-day fast of the Lord exemplifies fasting for the faithful, initiating their participation in the obedience in the Lord, that through it *“we might recover by its observance that which we have lost by not observing it”* (Gregory the Theologian, *Homily 45, On Holy Pascha*, 28. PG 36, 661C). The Christocentric understanding of the spiritual dimension of fasting – in particular the fast of Great Lent – is a general rule in the entire patristic tradition and is characteristically epitomized by St Gregory Palamas: *“When you fast like this you not only suffer with Christ and are dead with Him, but you are also risen with Him and reign with Him forever and ever. If through such a fast you have been planted together in the likeness of His death, you shall also share in His resurrection and inherit life in Him”* (*Homily 13, On the Fifth Sunday of Lent*, PG 151, 161AB).
5. According to the Orthodox Tradition, the *“measure of spiritual perfection is the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”* (Eph 4:13), and all who want to attain this should strive and grow accordingly. For this very reason, *asceticism* and spiritual struggle, like the refinement of the perfect, are endless in this life. Everyone is called to strive, to the best of his or her abilities, to reach the lofty Orthodox standard, which is the goal of deification by grace. Indeed, while they should do all things that they were commanded, they should nonetheless never vaunt themselves, but confess that *“they are unprofitable servants and have only done that which was their duty to do”* (Lk 17:10). According to the Orthodox understanding of the spiritual life, all people are obligated to maintain the good struggle of the fast; however, in a spirit of self-reproach and humble recognition of their condition, they must rely upon God’s mercy for their shortcomings, inasmuch as the Orthodox spiritual life is unattainable without the spiritual struggle of the fast.
6. Like a nurturing mother, the Orthodox Church has defined what is beneficial for people’s salvation and established the holy periods of fasting as God-given protection in the believers’ new life in Christ against every snare of the enemy. Following the example of the Holy Fathers, the Church preserves today, as she did in the past, the holy apostolic precepts, synodal canons, and sacred traditions, always advancing the holy fasts as the perfect ascetic path for the faithful leading to spiritual perfection and salvation, while proclaiming the necessity to observe all the fasts throughout the year, namely, the fasts of Great Lent, Wednesdays and Fridays, testified in the sacred canons, as well as the fasts of the Nativity, the Holy Apostles, and the Dormition of the Theotokos; there are also the single-day fasts on

the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, on the eve of the Epiphany, and on the day commemorating the Beheading of John the Baptist, in addition to the fasts established for pastoral reasons or observed at the desire of the faithful.

7. The Church, however, has also established, with pastoral discernment, boundaries of philanthropic dispensation (*oikonomia*) concerning the rules of fasting. In this regard, the Church has considered physical infirmity, extreme necessity, and difficult times where she has ordained the application of the principle of ecclesiastical *oikonomia*, through the responsible discernment and pastoral care of the body of bishops in the local Churches.
8. It is a fact that many faithful today do not observe all the prescriptions of fasting, whether due to faint-heartedness or their living conditions, whatever these may be. However, all these instances where the sacred prescriptions of fasting are loosened, either in general or in particular instances, should be treated by the Church with pastoral care, *“for God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live”* (Ezek 33:11), without, however, ignoring the value of the fast. Therefore, with regard to those who find it difficult to observe the prevailing guidelines for fasting, whether for personal reasons (illness, military service, conditions of work, etc.) or general reasons (particular existing conditions in certain regions with regard to climate, as well as socioeconomic circumstances, i.e., inability to find lenten foods), it is left to the discretion of the local Orthodox Churches to determine how to exercise philanthropic *oikonomia* and empathy, relieving in these special cases the “burden” of the holy fast. All this should take place within the aforementioned context and with the objective of not diminishing the importance of the sacred institution of fasting. The Church should extend her philanthropic dispensation with prudence, undoubtedly to a greater extent when it comes to those fasts, on which the ecclesiastical tradition and practice have not always been uniform. *“It is good to fast, but may the one who fasts not blame the one who does not fast. In such matters you must neither legislate, nor use force, nor compel the flock entrusted to you; instead, you must use persuasion, gentleness and a word seasoned with salt”*(John of Damascus, *On the Holy Fasts*, Homily 3, PG 95, 68 B).
9. Fasting for three or more days prior to Holy Communion is left to the discretion of the piety of the faithful, according to the words of Saint Nicodemus the Hagiorite: *“... fasting before partaking of Communion is not decreed by the divine Canons. Nevertheless, those who are able to fast even a whole week before it, are doing the right thing”* (*Commentary of the 13th canon of Sixth Ecumenical Council*, Pedalion – English translation 307). However, the totality of the Church’s faithful must observe the holy fasts and the abstinence from food from midnight for frequent participation in Holy Communion, which is the most profound expression of the essence of the Church. The faithful should become accustomed to fasting as an expression of repentance, as the fulfillment of a spiritual pledge, to achieve a particular spiritual end in times of temptation, in conjunction with supplications to God, for adults approaching the sacrament of baptism, prior to ordination, in cases where penance is imposed, as well as during pilgrimages and other similar instances

RELATIONS OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH WITH THE REST OF THE CHRISTIAN WORLD

1. The Orthodox Church, as the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, in her profound ecclesiastical self-consciousness, believes unflinchingly that she occupies a central place in the matter of the promotion of Christian unity in the world today.
2. The Orthodox Church founds the unity of the Church on the fact of her establishment by our Lord Jesus Christ, and on the communion in the Holy Trinity and in the sacraments. This unity is expressed through the apostolic succession and the patristic tradition and is lived out in the Church up to the present day. The Orthodox Church has the mission and duty to transmit and preach all the truth contained in Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition, which also bestows upon the Church her catholic character.
3. The responsibility of the Orthodox Church for unity as well as her ecumenical mission were articulated by the Ecumenical Councils. These stressed most especially the indissoluble bond between true faith and sacramental communion.
4. The Orthodox Church, which prays unceasingly “for the union of all,” has always cultivated dialogue with those estranged from her, those both far and near. In particular, she has played a leading role in the contemporary search for ways and means to restore the unity of those who believe in Christ, and she has participated in the Ecumenical Movement from its outset, and has contributed to its formation and further development. Moreover, the Orthodox Church, thanks to the ecumenical and loving spirit which distinguishes her, praying as divinely commanded that *all men may be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth* (1 Tim 2:4), has always worked for the restoration of Christian unity. Hence, Orthodox participation in the movement to restore unity with other Christians in the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church is in no way foreign to the nature and history of the Orthodox Church, but rather represents a consistent expression of the apostolic faith and tradition in a new historical circumstances.
5. The contemporary bilateral theological dialogues of the Orthodox Church and her participation in the Ecumenical Movement rest on this self-consciousness of Orthodoxy and her ecumenical spirit, with the aim of seeking the unity of all Christians on the basis of the truth of the faith and tradition of the ancient Church of the Seven Ecumenical Councils.
6. In accordance with the ontological nature of the Church, her unity can never be perturbed. In spite of this, the Orthodox Church accepts the historical name of other non-Orthodox Christian Churches and Confessions that are not in communion with her, and believes that her relations with them should be based on the most speedy and objective clarification possible of the whole ecclesiological question, and most especially of their more general teachings on sacraments, grace, priesthood, and apostolic succession. Thus, she was favorably and positively disposed, both for theological and pastoral reasons, towards theological dialogue with other Christians on a bi-lateral and multi-lateral level, and towards more general participation in the Ecumenical Movement of recent times, in the conviction that through dialogue she gives a dynamic witness to the fullness of truth in Christ and to

her spiritual treasures to those who are outside her, with the objective aim of smoothing the path leading to unity.

7. In this spirit, all the local Most Holy Orthodox Churches participate actively today in the official theological dialogues, and the majority of these Churches also participate in various national, regional and international inter-Christian organizations, in spite of the deep crisis that has arisen in the Ecumenical Movement. This manifold activity of the Orthodox Church springs from a sense of responsibility and from the conviction that mutual understanding and cooperation are of fundamental importance if we wish never to "put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ (1 Cor 9:12).
8. Certainly, while the Orthodox Church dialogues with other Christians, she does not underestimate the difficulties inherent in this endeavor; she perceives these difficulties, however, on the path towards toward a common understanding of the tradition of the ancient Church and in hope that the Holy Spirit, Who *"welds together the whole institution of the Church, (Sticheron at Vespers of Pentecost), will "make up that which is lacking"* (Ordination Prayer). In this sense, the Orthodox Church in her relations with the rest of the Christian world, relies not only on the human efforts of those involved in dialogue, but especially on the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the grace of the Lord, who prayed *"that...all may be one"* (Jn 17:21).
9. The contemporary bilateral theological dialogues, announced by the Pan-Orthodox meetings, express the unanimous decision of all local most holy Orthodox Churches who are called to participate actively and continually in them, so that the unanimous witness of Orthodoxy to the glory of the Triune God may not be hindered. In the event that a certain local Church chooses not to assign a representative to a particular dialogue or one of its sessions, if this decision is not pan-Orthodox, the dialogue still continues. Prior to the start of the dialogue or of the session, the absence of any local Church ought to be discussed at all events by the Orthodox Committee of the dialogue to express the solidarity and unity of the Orthodox Church. The bi-lateral and multi-lateral theological dialogues need to be subject to periodical evaluations on a pan-Orthodox level.
10. The problems that arise during the theological discussions within Joint Theological Commissions are not always sufficient grounds for any local Orthodox Church unilaterally to recall its representatives or definitively withdraw from the dialogue. As a general rule, the withdrawal of a Church from a particular dialogue should be avoided; in those instances when this occurs, inter-Orthodox efforts to reestablish representational fullness in the Orthodox Theological Commission of the dialogue in question should be initiated. Should one or more local Orthodox Churches refuse to take part in the sessions of the Joint Theological Commission of a particular dialogue, citing serious ecclesiological, canonical, pastoral, or ethical reasons, this/these Church(es) shall notify the Ecumenical Patriarch and all the Orthodox Churches in writing, in accordance with pan-Orthodox practice. During a pan-Orthodox meeting the Ecumenical Patriarch shall seek unanimous consensus among the Orthodox Churches about possible courses of action, which may also include— should this be unanimously deemed necessary—a reassessment of the progress of the theological dialogue in question.

11. The methodology followed in the theological dialogues aims at both the resolution of the received theological differences or of possible new differentiations, and to seek the common elements of the Christian faith. This process requires that the entire Church is kept informed on the various developments of the dialogues. In the event that it is impossible to overcome a specific theological difference, the theological dialogue may continue, recording the disagreement identified and bringing it to the attention of all the local Orthodox Churches for their consideration on what ought to be done henceforth.
12. It is clear that in the theological dialogues the common goal of all is the ultimate restoration of unity in true faith and love. The existing theological and ecclesiological differences permit, however, a certain hierarchical ordering of the challenges lying in the way of meeting this pan-Orthodox objective. The distinctive problems of each bilateral dialogue require a differentiation in the methodology followed in it, but not a differentiation in the aim, since the aim is one in all the dialogues.
13. Nevertheless, it is essential if necessary for an attempt to be made to coordinate the work of the various Inter-Orthodox Theological Committees, bearing in mind that the existing unity of the Orthodox Church must also be revealed and manifested in this area of these dialogues.
14. The conclusion of any official theological dialogue occurs with the completion of the work of the relevant Joint Theological Commission. The Chairman of the Inter-Orthodox Commission then submits a report to the Ecumenical Patriarch, who, with the consent of the Primates of the local Orthodox Churches, declares the conclusion of the dialogue. No dialogue is considered complete before it is proclaimed through such a pan-Orthodox decision.
15. Upon the successful conclusion of the work of any theological dialogue, the pan-Orthodox decision about the restoration of ecclesiastical communion must, however, rest on the unanimity of all the local Orthodox Churches.
16. One of the principal bodies in the history of the Ecumenical Movement is the World Council of Churches (WCC). Certain Orthodox Churches were among the Council's founding members and later, all the local Orthodox Churches became members. The WCC is a structured inter-Christian body, despite the fact that it does not include all non-Orthodox Christian Churches and Confessions. At the same time, there are other inter-Christian organizations and regional bodies, such as the Conference of European Churches, the Middle East Council of Churches and the African Council of Churches. These, along with the WCC, fulfill an important mission by promoting the unity of the Christian world. The Orthodox Churches of Georgia and Bulgaria withdrew from the WCC, the former in 1997, and the latter in 1998. They have their own particular opinion on the work of the World Council of Churches and hence do not participate in its activities and those of other inter-Christian organizations.
17. The local Orthodox Churches that are members of the WCC participate fully and equally in the WCC, contributing with all means at their disposal to the advancement of peaceful co-existence and co-operation in the major socio-political challenges. The Orthodox Church readily accepted the WCC's decision to respond to her request concerning the establishment

of the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the World Council of Churches, which was mandated by the Inter-Orthodox Conference held in Thessaloniki in 1998. The established criteria of the Special Commission, proposed by the Orthodox and accepted by the WCC, led to the formation of the Permanent Committee on Consensus and Collaboration. The criteria were approved and included in the Constitution and Rules of the World Council of Churches.

18. Remaining faithful to her ecclesiology, to the identity of her internal structure, and to the teaching of the ancient Church of the Seven Ecumenical Councils, the Orthodox Church's participation in the WCC does not signify that she accepts the notion of the "equality of Confessions," and in no way is she able to accept the unity of the Church as an inter-confessional compromise. In this spirit, the unity that is sought within the WCC cannot simply be the product of theological agreements, but must also be founded on the unity of faith, preserved in the sacraments and lived out in the Orthodox Church.
19. The Orthodox Churches that are members of the WCC regard as an indispensable condition of their participation in the WCC the foundational article of its Constitution, in accordance with which its members may only be those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior in accordance with the Scriptures, and who confess the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in accordance with the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. It is their deep conviction that the ecclesiological presuppositions of the 1950 Toronto Statement, *On the Church, the Churches and the World Council of Churches*, are of paramount importance for Orthodox participation in the Council. It is therefore very clear that the WCC does not by any means constitute a "super-Church." *The purpose of the World Council of Churches is not to negotiate unions between Churches, which can only be done by the Churches themselves acting on their own initiative, but to bring Churches into living contact with each other and to promote the study and discussion of the issues of Church unity. No Church is obliged to change her ecclesiology on her accession to the Council... Moreover, from the fact of its inclusion in the Council, it does not ensue that each Church is obliged to regard the other Churches as Churches in the true and full sense of the term.* (Toronto Statement, § 2).
20. The prospects for conducting theological dialogues between the Orthodox Church and the rest of the Christian world are always determined on the basis of the canonical principles of Orthodox ecclesiology and the canonical criteria of the already established Church Tradition (Canon 7 of the Second Ecumenical Council and Canon 95 of the Quinisext Ecumenical Council).
21. The Orthodox Church wishes to support the work of the Commission on "Faith and Order" and follows its theological contribution with particular interest to this day. It views favorably the Commission's theological documents, which were developed with the significant participation of Orthodox theologians and represent a praiseworthy step in the Ecumenical Movement for the rapprochement of Christians. Nonetheless, the Orthodox Church maintains reservations concerning paramount issues of faith and order, because the non-Orthodox Churches and Confessions have diverged from the true faith of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

22. The Orthodox Church considers all efforts to break the unity of the Church, undertaken by individuals or groups under the pretext of maintaining or allegedly defending true Orthodoxy, as being worthy of condemnation. As evidenced throughout the life of the Orthodox Church, the preservation of the true Orthodox faith is ensured only through the conciliar system, which has always represented the highest authority in the Church on matters of faith and canonical decrees. (Canon 6 2nd Ecumenical Council)
23. The Orthodox Church has a common awareness of the necessity for conducting inter-Christian theological dialogue. It therefore believes that this dialogue should always be accompanied by witness to the world through acts expressing mutual understanding and love, which express the "ineffable joy" of the Gospel (1 Pt 1:8), eschewing every act of proselytism, uniatism, or other provocative act of inter-confessional competition. In this spirit, the Orthodox Church deems it important for all Christians, inspired by common fundamental principles of the Gospel, to attempt to offer with eagerness and solidarity a response to the thorny problems of the contemporary world, based on the prototype of the new man in Christ.
24. The Orthodox Church is aware that the movement to restore Christian unity is taking on new forms in order to respond to new circumstances and to address the new challenges of today's world. The continued witness of the Orthodox Church to the divided Christian world on the basis of the apostolic tradition and faith is imperative.

We pray that all Christians may work together so that the day may soon come when the Lord will fulfill the hope of the Orthodox Churches and there will be "one flock and one shepherd" (Jn 10:16).

AUTONOMY AND THE MEANS BY WHICH IT IS PROCLAIMED

The Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church concerned itself with the matter of *Autonomy and the Means by Which it is Proclaimed*. Therefore, the respective document, which was submitted by the Fifth Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference (Chambésy, October 10-17, 2009) was discussed and was approved with some minor amendments as follows:

The questions of the text examined by the Council addressed: a) the concept, nature, and various forms of the institution of autonomy; b) the prerequisites for a local Church to request autonomy from the autocephalous Church to which it belongs; c) the exclusive prerogative of an autocephalous Church to initiate and complete the process of granting autonomy to a certain segment of its canonical jurisdiction – autonomous Churches shall not be established in the geographical areas of the Orthodox Diaspora; d) the impact of this ecclesial act on the relations between the proclaimed autonomous Church and with the autocephalous Church to which it belongs as well as with the other autocephalous Orthodox Churches.

1. The institution of autonomy is a canonical expression of the relative or partial independence of a particular ecclesial region from the canonical jurisdiction of the autocephalous Church to which it canonically belongs.
 - a. The implementation of this institution through ecclesial praxis has given rise to various degrees of dependence with respect to the relationship of the autonomous Church to the autocephalous Church to which it canonically refers.
 - b. The election of the Primate (First Hierarch) of an autonomous Church is approved or executed by the appropriate ecclesiastical entity of the autocephalous Church. The Primate of the autonomous Church commemorates and is canonically related to the primate of the autocephalous Church.
 - c. In the application of the institution of autonomy, we find various forms of its implementation in ecclesial praxis defined by the degree of dependence of the autonomous Church on the autocephalous Church.
 - d. In some forms of autonomy, the degree of dependence of an autonomous Church is also expressed through the participation of its primate in the Synod of the autocephalous Church.

2. The initiation and completion of the process for granting autonomy to a region within the canonical jurisdiction of an autocephalous Church is the canonical prerogative of the autocephalous Church. The Church proclaimed autonomous refers to the autocephalous Church. Accordingly:
 - a. A local Church that requests autonomy, after showing that it has fulfilled all necessary ecclesial, canonical and pastoral prerequisites, may submit its application to the autocephalous Church to which it has its reference, explaining the serious reasons prompting such a request.
 - b. Upon receiving the application, the autocephalous Church considers, in Synod, all of the prerequisites and reasons for the submission, and decides whether or not to

grant autonomy. In the event of a favorable decision, the autocephalous Church issues a *Tomos*, which defines the geographical boundaries of the autonomous Church and its relationship with the autocephalous Church to which it refers, in accordance with the established criteria of ecclesial Tradition.

- c. The primate of the autocephalous Church informs the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the other autocephalous Orthodox Churches of the proclamation of the autonomous Church.
 - d. The autonomous Church realizes its inter-Orthodox, inter-Christian, and inter-religious relations through the autocephalous Church from which it received autonomy.
 - e. Each autocephalous Church may only grant autonomy within the borders of its canonical geographical region. Autonomous Churches are not established in the region of the Orthodox Diaspora, except by pan-Orthodox consensus, upheld by the Ecumenical Patriarch in accordance with prevailing pan-Orthodox practice.
 - f. In the event that two autocephalous Churches grant autonomous status within the same geographical ecclesial region, prompting contestation over the status of each autonomous Church, the parties involved appeal—together or separately—to the Ecumenical Patriarch so that he may find a canonical solution to the matter in accordance with prevailing pan-Orthodox practice.
3. The implications for the autonomous Church with respect to its relationship to the autocephalous Church, following its proclamation of autonomy, are as follows:
- a. The Primate of the autonomous Church only commemorates the name of the primate of the autocephalous Church.
 - b. The name of the Primate of the autonomous Church is not entered into the Diptychs.
 - c. The autonomous Church receives holy chrism from the autocephalous Church.
 - d. The bishops of the autonomous Church are elected, appointed and judged by its own appropriate ecclesiastical organ. In the event that the autonomous Church finds this absolutely impossible, it receives assistance from the autocephalous Church to which it refers.

THE ORTHODOX DIASPORA

The Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church concerned itself with the matter of the canonical organization of the Orthodox Diaspora. Therefore, the respective documents were discussed concerning the *Orthodox Diaspora* and the *Rules of Operation of Episcopal Assemblies* in the Diaspora, which were submitted by the Fourth Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference (Chambésy, 2009), and by the Synaxis of Primates of the Autocephalous Orthodox Churches (January 21-28, 2016), approving them with some minor amendments as follows:

1.
 - a. It is affirmed that is the common will of all of the most holy Orthodox Churches that the problem of the Orthodox Diaspora be resolved as quickly as possible, and that it be organized in accordance with Orthodox ecclesiology, and the canonical tradition and practice of the Orthodox Church.
 - b. Likewise, it is affirmed that during the present phase it is not possible, for historical and pastoral reasons, an immediate transition to the strictly canonical order of the Church on this issue, that is, the existence of only one bishop in the same place. Therefore, it has been decided to keep the Episcopal Assemblies instituted by the Fourth Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference until the appropriate time arrives when all the conditions exist in order to apply the canonical exactness (akribeia).
2.
 - a. The Council proposes that, for the transitional period while the canonical solution of the issue will be prepared, “Episcopal Assemblies” of all canonically recognized bishops in each region should be created (or founded) in each of the regions defined below. The bishops will continue to be subject to the same canonical jurisdictions to which they are subject today.
 - b. These assemblies will consist of all the bishops in each region who are in canonical communion with all of the most holy Orthodox Churches, and will be chaired by the first among the hierarchs of the Church of Constantinople and, in the absence of thereof, in accordance with the order of the diptychs. These Assemblies will have an Executive Committee composed of the first hierarchs of the different jurisdictions that exist in the region.
 - c. The work and the responsibility of these Episcopal Assemblies will be the concern for manifesting the unity of Orthodoxy, the development of common action of all the Orthodox of each region to address the pastoral needs of Orthodox living in the region, a common representation of all Orthodox vis-à-vis other faiths and the wider society in the region, the cultivation of theological scholarship and ecclesiastical education, etc. Decisions on these subjects will be taken by consensus of the Churches who are represented in the particular assembly.
3. The regions in which Episcopal Assemblies will be created in a first stage are defined as follows:

1. Canada
 2. United States of America
 3. Latin America
 4. Australia, New Zealand and Oceania
 5. Great Britain and Ireland
 6. France
 7. Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg
 8. Austria
 9. Italy and Malta
 10. Switzerland and Lichtenstein
 11. Germany
 12. Scandinavian countries (except Finland)
 13. Spain and Portugal
4. The bishops of the Diaspora, living in the Diaspora and possessing parishes in multiple regions, will be members of the Episcopal Assemblies of those regions.
 5. The Episcopal Assemblies do not deprive the member bishops of their administrative and canonical competencies, nor do they restrict their rights in the Diaspora. The Episcopal Assemblies aim to form a common position of the Orthodox Church on various issues. In no way does this prevent member bishops from remaining responsible to their own Churches and expressing the views of their own Churches to the outside world.
 6. The chairmen of the Episcopal Assemblies convene and preside at all joint meetings of the bishops of their region (liturgical, pastoral, administrative, etc.). As for matters of a more general concern that require, by the decision of the Assembly of Bishops, a pan-Orthodox approach, the Assembly's chairman refers it to the Ecumenical Patriarch for further pan-Orthodox actions in accordance with the established pan-Orthodox procedure.
 7. The Orthodox Churches are bound to avoid actions that could hinder the above process for a canonical resolution of the issue of the Diaspora, such as the conferment of hierarchal titles that already exist, and to do their utmost to facilitate the work of the Episcopal Assemblies and the restoration of normal canonical order in the Diaspora.

RULES OF OPERATION OF EPISCOPAL ASSEMBLIES IN THE ORTHODOX DIASPORA**Article 1.**

1. All Orthodox Bishops of each region, from those regions defined by the The Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, who are in canonical communion with all the local Autocephalous Orthodox Churches, form each Episcopal Assembly.
2. Those Orthodox Bishops who do not reside in the region, but who have pastoral ministry in parishes in the Region, are also members of the Episcopal Assembly.
3. Retired Bishops and Bishops visiting the Region, inasmuch as they meet the requirements of paragraph (1), may be invited to participate in the Assembly, but without voting rights.

Article 2.

The purpose of the Episcopal Assembly is to manifest the unity of the Orthodox Church, to promote collaboration between the churches in all areas of pastoral ministry, and to maintain, preserve and develop the interests of the communities that belong to the canonical Orthodox Bishops of the Region.

Article 3.

The Episcopal Assembly will have an Executive Committee composed of the Primatial Bishops of each of the canonical Churches in the Region.

Article 4.

1. The Episcopal Assembly and its Executive Committee will have a Chairman, one or two Vice-Chairmen, a Secretary and a Treasurer, and any other positions of responsibility that the Assembly may designate.
2. The Chairman is ex officio the first among the Bishops of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and, in the absence thereof, in the order of Diptychs. The Chairman of the Episcopal Assembly convenes the meetings thereof, directs its work and presides over its colleagues. Regarding issues that were discussed during the meeting of the Episcopal Assembly, and on which a unanimous decision was reached, the President (or another member of the Episcopal Assembly charged by him), presents the common position of the Orthodox Church in the Region to government, society and to other religious organizations.
3. The Vice-Chairmen are appointed ex officio from the Member Bishops of the Assemblies, from the next ranking Churches, in accordance with the order of the Diptychs of the Orthodox Churches. The Secretary, Treasurer and other positions of responsibility are chosen by the Assembly, and have the possibility not to originate from the ranks of the bishops.

Article 5.

1. The competencies of the Episcopal Assembly are:

- a. to safeguard and contribute to the unity of the Orthodox Church of the Region in its theological, ecclesiological, canonical, spiritual, philanthropic, educational and missionary obligations.
 - b. The coordination and leadership of activities of common interest in areas of pastoral care, catechesis, liturgical life, religious publishing, mass media, religious education, etc.
 - c. Relations with the non-Orthodox Christians and members of other religions.
 - d. Anything that entails obligations of the Orthodox Church in Her relations with society and government.
 - e. The preparation of a plan to organize the Orthodox of the Region on a canonical basis.
2. The definition of the scope of these competencies should in no way interfere with the responsibility of each Bishop for his eparchial jurisdiction, or restrict the rights of his Church, including its relations with international agencies, governments, civil society, mass media, other legal undertakings, national and treaty organizations, as well as other religions.

For specific linguistic, educational and pastoral issues of a particular Church, the Episcopal Assembly may also collaborate with the ecclesiastical authority of the Church in question, so that the diversity of national traditions may secure the unity of Orthodoxy in the communion of faith and in the bond of love.

Article 6.

1. The Episcopal Assembly receives and records the election of Bishops of the Region, and their reference to the most holy autocephalous Orthodox Churches.
2. It examines and determines the canonical status of local communities in the Region that have no reference to the most holy autocephalous Orthodox Churches.
3. It must record every decision relating to clerics promulgated by their bishops, in order that this decision is applied among all the Orthodox Churches in the Region.

Article 7.

1. The Episcopal Assembly meets once a year, at the invitation of the Chairman. It may meet as often as it is deemed necessary by the Executive Committee, or at the written request that shows cause of one third of the members of the Assembly.
2. The Executive Committee meets once every three months and whenever necessary at the invitation of the Chairman or at the written request that shows cause of one third of its members.
3. The invitations to the Assembly, in the absence of exceptional circumstances, are to be sent two months in advance; and for the Executive Committee, one week in advance. They are to be accompanied by the agenda items and related documents.

4. The agenda must be approved at the first session of the Assembly, and should only be amended by a decision of the members present, by means of an absolute majority of the votes.

Article 8.

The quorum for the Executive Committee is two thirds of its members and for the Assembly, an absolute majority of members, including the Chairman.

Article 9.

The work of the Episcopal Assembly is conducted in accordance with the principles of the Orthodox conciliar tradition and is directed by its Chairman, who has the responsibility for supervising the implementation of its decisions.

Article 10.

1. The decisions of the Episcopal Assembly are taken by consensus.
2. In matters of more general concern which require, by the decision of the Assembly of Bishops, a Pan-Orthodox approach, the Assembly's chairman refers it to the Ecumenical Patriarch for further Pan-Orthodox actions.

Article 11.

1. Upon the decision of the Episcopal Assembly, it is possible to form from its members Committees for Mission as well as for Liturgical, Pastoral, Financial, Educational, Ecumenical and other issues, chaired by one of the Bishop-Members of the Assembly.
2. The members of these Committees, clergy or laity, are appointed by the Executive Committee. In addition, advisers and experts may be invited to participate in the Assembly or in the Executive Committee, without voting rights.

Article 12.

1. The Episcopal Assembly may establish its own Internal Regulations in order to supplement and adjust the above provisions, in accordance with the needs of the Region and in respect to the canon law of the Orthodox Church.
2. All legal and financial issues relating to the functioning of the Assembly are to be decided in the light of the civil laws of the countries of the Region, in which members of the Assembly exercise their jurisdiction.

Article 13.

The formation of a new Episcopal Assembly, the partition or abolition of an existing Episcopal Assembly, or the merger of two or more of these Assemblies, occurs following the decision of the Synaxis of the Primate of the Orthodox Churches, at the request of a particular Church, or the request of the Chairman of a particular Episcopal Assembly to the Ecumenical Patriarch.

THE SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE AND ITS IMPEDIMENTS

I. On Orthodox Marriage

1. The institution of the family is threatened today by such phenomena as secularization and moral relativism. The Orthodox Church maintains, as her fundamental and indisputable teaching, that marriage is sacred. The freely entered union of man and woman is an indispensable precondition for marriage.
2. In the Orthodox Church, marriage is considered to be the oldest institution of divine law because it was instituted simultaneously with the creation of Adam and Eve, the first human beings (Gen 2:23). Since its origin, this union not only implies the spiritual communion of a married couple—a man and a woman—but also assured the continuation of the human race. As such, the marriage of man and woman, which was blessed in Paradise, became a holy mystery, as mentioned in the New Testament where Christ performs *His first sign*, turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana of Galilee, and thus reveals His glory (Jn 2:11). The mystery of the indissoluble union between man and woman is an icon of the unity of Christ and the Church (Eph 5:32).
3. Thus, the Christocentric typology of the sacrament of marriage explains why a bishop or a presbyter blesses this sacred union with a special prayer. In his letter to Polycarp of Smyrna, Ignatius the God-Bearer stressed that those who enter into the communion of marriage *must also have the bishop's approval, so that their marriage may be according to God, and not after their own desire. Let everything be to the glory of God (V, 2)*. Therefore, the sacredness of the God-established union and the lofty spiritual content of married life explain the affirmation: *So that marriage should be honored among all, and the bed undefiled (Heb 13:4)*. That is why the Orthodox Church condemns any defilement of its purity (Eph 5:2-5; 1 Thes 4:4; Heb 13:4ff).
4. The union of man and woman in Christ constitutes “a small church” or an icon of the Church. Through God’s blessing, the union of man and woman is elevated to a higher level, for communion is greater than individual existence because it initiates the spouses into the order of the Kingdom of the All-Holy Trinity. A necessary condition of marriage is faith in Jesus Christ, which must be shared by the bridegroom and the bride, man and woman. Consequently, unity in Christ is the foundation of marital unity. Thus, marital love blessed by the Holy Spirit enables the couple to reflect the love between Christ and the Church as a mystery of the Kingdom of God—as the eternal life of humanity in the love of God.
5. Protecting the sacredness of marriage has always been crucially important for the preservation of the family, which reflects the communion of the persons yoked together both in the Church and in society at large. Therefore, communion achieved through the sacrament of marriage does not merely serve as an example of a typical natural relationship, but also as an essential and creative spiritual force in the sacred institution of the family. It alone ensures the safety and formation of children, both for the spiritual mission of the Church as well as in the life of society.
6. It was always with the necessary strictness and proper pastoral sensibility, in the compassionate manner of Paul, Apostle of the Gentiles (Rom 7:2-3; 1 Cor 7:12-15, 39), that

the Church treated both *the positive preconditions* (difference of sexes, legal age, etc.) and *the negative impediments* (kinship by blood and affinity, spiritual kinship, an existing marriage, difference in religion, etc.) for the joining in marriage. Pastoral sensibility is necessary not only because the biblical tradition determines the relationship between the natural bond of marriage and the sacrament of the Church, but also because Church practice does not exclude the incorporation of certain Greco-Roman natural law principles that acknowledge the marital bond between man and woman as *a communion of divine and human law* (Modestin) compatible with the sacredness of the sacrament of marriage attributed by the Church.

7. Given our current context, which is unfavorable for the sacrament of marriage and the sacred institution of family, hierarchs and shepherds must actively cultivate their pastoral work in order to protect the faithful, standing by them to fortify their hope shaken by many hardships, and asserting the institution of the family upon an unshakable foundation that neither rain, nor river, nor wind can destroy, since this foundation is the rock which is Christ (Mt 7:25).
8. The pressing issue in society today is marriage, which is the center of the family, and the family is what justifies marriage. Pressure to recognize new forms of cohabitation constitutes a real threat for Orthodox Christians. This variously-manifested crisis in marriage and family profoundly concerns the Orthodox Church not only in light of negative consequences for the fabric of society, but also in light of its threat to particular relationships within the bounds of the traditional family. The main victims of these trends are the couples themselves, and especially the children, since regrettably the children often endure great suffering from an early age, while nonetheless bearing no responsibility for the situation.
9. A civil marriage between a man and a woman registered in accordance with the law lacks sacramental character since it is a simple legalized cohabitation recognized by the State, different from a marriage blessed by God and the Church. The members of the Church who contract a civil marriage ought to be regarded with pastoral responsibility, which is necessary to help them understand the value of the sacrament of marriage and the blessings connected with it.
10. The Church does not allow for her members to contract same-sex unions or any other form of cohabitation apart from marriage. The Church exerts all possible pastoral efforts to help her members who enter into such unions understand the true meaning of repentance and love as blessed by the Church.
11. The grave consequences brought about by this crisis of the institutions of marriage and the family are manifested in the frightening increase in the number of divorces, abortions, and other problems of family life. These consequences constitute a great challenge to the mission of the Church in the modern world, which is why the shepherds of the Church are obligated to make every possible effort to address these problems. The Orthodox Church lovingly invites her children and all people of good will to defend this fidelity to the sacredness of the family.

II. On Impediments to Marriage and the application of economy

1. Concerning impediments to marriage due to kinship by blood, kinship by affinity and adoption, and spiritual kinship, the prescriptions of the canons (Canons 53 and 54 of the Quinisext Ecumenical Council) and the church practice derived from them are valid as applied today by local autocephalous Orthodox Churches, determined and defined in their charters and their respective conciliar decisions.
2. A marriage that is not completely dissolved or annulled and a third marriage constitute absolute impediments to entering into marriage, according to Orthodox canonical tradition, which categorically condemns bigamy and a fourth marriage.
3. In accordance with the rigor (*akribeia*) of the holy canons, entering into a marriage after monastic tonsure is forbidden (Canon 16 of the Fourth Ecumenical Council and Canon 44 of the Quinisext Ecumenical Council).
4. Priesthood in itself does not constitute an impediment to marriage, but in accordance with the prevailing canonical tradition (Canon 3 of the Quinisext Ecumenical Council), after ordination entrance into marriage is forbidden.
5. Concerning mixed marriages of Orthodox Christians with non-Orthodox Christians or non-Christians:
 - i. Marriage between Orthodox and non-Orthodox Christians is forbidden according to canonical *akribeia* (Canon 72 of the Quinisext Ecumenical Council).
 - ii. With the salvation of man as the goal, the possibility of the exercise of ecclesiastical *oikonomia* in relation to impediments to marriage must be considered by the Holy Synod of each autocephalous Orthodox Church according to the principles of the holy canons and in a spirit of pastoral discernment.
 - iii. Marriage between Orthodox and non-Christians is categorically forbidden in accordance with canonical *akribeia*.
6. The practice adopted in implementing ecclesiastical Tradition with respect to impediments to marriage should also take into account the relevant provisions of state legislation, without going beyond the limits of ecclesiastical economy (*oikonomia*).

THE MISSION OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN TODAY'S WORLD

The contribution of the Orthodox Church in realizing peace, justice, freedom, fraternity and love between peoples, and in the removal of racial and other discriminations.

*For God so loved the world that he gave his Only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (Jn 3:16). The Church of Christ exists in the world, but is not of the world (cf. Jn 17:11, 14-15). The Church as the Body of the incarnate Logos of God (John Chrysostom, *Homily before Exile*, 2 PG 52, 429) constitutes the living "presence" as the sign and image of the Kingdom of the Triune God in history, proclaims the good news of a *new creation* (II Cor 5:17), of *new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells* (II Pt 3:13); news of a world in which *God will wipe away every tear from people's eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain* (Rev 21:4-5).*

Such hope is experienced and foretasted by the Church, especially each time the Divine Eucharist is celebrated, bringing together (I Cor 11:20) the *scattered children of God* (Jn 11:52) without regard to race, sex, age, social, or any other condition into a single body where *there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female* (Gal 3:28; cf. Col 3:11).

This foretaste of the *new creation*—of a world transfigured—is also experienced by the Church in the countenance of her saints who, through their spiritual struggles and virtues, have already revealed the image of the Kingdom of God in this life, thereby proving and affirming that the expectation of a world of peace, justice, and love is not a utopia, but the *substance of things hoped for* (Heb 11:1), attainable through the grace of God and man's spiritual struggle.

Finding constant inspiration in this expectation and foretaste of the Kingdom of God, the Church cannot remain indifferent to the problems of humanity in each period. On the contrary, she shares in our anguish and existential problems, taking upon herself—as the Lord did—our suffering and wounds, which are caused by evil in the world and, like the Good Samaritan, pouring oil and wine upon our wounds through words of *patience and comfort* (Rom 15:4; Heb 13:22), and through love in practice. The word addressed to the world is not primarily meant to judge and condemn the world (cf. Jn 3:17; 12:47), but rather to offer to the world the guidance of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God—namely, the hope and assurance that evil, no matter its form, does not have the last word in history and must not be allowed to dictate its course.

The conveyance of the Gospel's message according to the last commandment of Christ, *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you* (Matt 28:19) is the diachronic mission of the Church. This mission must be carried out not aggressively or by different forms of proselytism, but in love, humility and respect towards the identity of each person and the cultural particularity of each people. All the Orthodox Church have an obligation to contribute to this missionary endeavor.

Drawing from these principles and the accumulated experience and teaching of her patristic, liturgical, and ascetical tradition, the Orthodox Church shares the concern and anxiety of contemporary humanity with regard to fundamental existential questions that preoccupy the world today. She thus desires to help resolve these issues, allowing the *peace of God, which surpasses all understanding* (Phil 4:7), reconciliation, and love to prevail in the world.

A. The Dignity of the Human Person

1. The human person's unique dignity, which stems from being created in the image and likeness of God and from our role in God's plan for humanity and the world, was the source of inspiration for the Church Fathers, who entered deeply into the mystery of divine *oikonomia*. Regarding the human being, St. Gregory the Theologian characteristically emphasizes that: *The Creator sets a sort of second world upon the earth, great in its smallness, another angel, a worshipper of composite nature, contemplator of visible creation, and initiate of intelligible creation, a king over all that is on earth... a living being, prepared here and transported elsewhere and (which is the culmination of the mystery) deified through attraction towards God (Homily 45, On Holy Pascha, 7. PG 36, 632AB)*. The purpose of the incarnation of the Word of God is the deification of the human being. Christ, having renewed within himself the old Adam (cf. Eph 2:15), *made the human person divine like himself, the beginning of our hope* (Eusebius of Caesarea, *Demonstrations on the Gospel*, Book 4, 14. PG 22, 289A). For just as the entire human race was contained in the old Adam, so too, the entire human race is now gathered in the new Adam: *The Only-begotten One became man in order to gather into one and return to its original condition the fallen human race* (Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Book 9, PG 74, 273D–275A). This teaching of the Church is the endless source of all Christian efforts to safeguard the dignity and majesty of the human person.
2. On this basis, it is essential to develop 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.
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.
4. We are convinced that, as *God's fellow workers* (1 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).

B. Freedom and Responsibility

1. Freedom is one of God's greatest gifts to the human being. *He who created man in the beginning made him free and self-determined, limiting him solely by the laws of the commandment* (Gregory the Theologian, *Homily 14, On Love for the Poor*, 25. PG 35, 892A). Freedom renders the human being capable of progressing toward spiritual perfection; yet, it also includes the risk of disobedience as independence from God and consequently the fall, which tragically gives rise to evil in the world.
2. The consequences of evil include those imperfections and shortcomings prevailing today, including: secularism; violence; moral laxity; detrimental phenomena such as the use of addictive substances and other addictions especially in the lives of certain youth; racism; the

arms race and wars, as well as the resulting social catastrophes; the oppression of certain social groups, religious communities, and entire peoples; social inequality; the restriction of human rights in the field of freedom of conscience—in particular religious freedom; the misinformation and manipulation of public opinion; economic misery; the disproportionate redistribution of vital resources or complete lack thereof; the hunger of millions of people; forced migration of populations and human trafficking; the refugee crisis; the destruction of the environment; and the unrestrained use of genetic biotechnology and biomedicine at the beginning, duration, and end of human life. These all create infinite anxiety for humanity today.

3. Faced with this situation, which has degraded the concept of the human person, the duty of the Orthodox Church today is—through its preaching, theology, worship, and pastoral activity—to assert the truth of freedom in Christ. *All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being...for why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience?* (I Cor 10:23-24, 29). Freedom without responsibility and love eventually leads to loss of freedom.

C. Peace and Justice

1. The Orthodox Church has diachronically recognized and revealed the centrality of peace and justice in people's lives. The very revelation of Christ is characterized as a *gospel of peace* (Eph 6:15), for Christ has brought *peace to all through the blood of his Cross* (Col 1:20), *preached peace to those afar and near* (Eph 2:17), and has become *our peace* (Eph 2:14). This peace, *which surpasses all understanding* (Phil 4:7), as the Lord Himself told His disciples before His passion, is broader and more essential than the peace promised by the world: *peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you* (Jn 14:27). This is because the peace of Christ 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. The reign of all these Christian principles on earth gives rise to authentic peace. It is the peace from above, for which the Orthodox Church prays constantly in its daily petitions, asking this of the almighty God, Who hears the prayers of those that draw near to Him in faith.
2. From the aforementioned, it is clear why the Church, as *the body of Christ* (I Cor 12:27), always prays for the peace of the whole world; this peace, according to Clement of Alexandria, is synonymous with justice (*Stromates* 4, 25. PG 8, 1369B-72A). To this, Basil the Great adds: *I cannot convince myself that without mutual love and without peace with all people, in as far as it is within my possibilities, I can call myself a worthy servant of Jesus Christ* (*Epistle* 203, 2. PG 32, 737B). As the same Saint notes, this is self-evident for a Christian, for *nothing is so characteristic of a Christian as to be a peacemaker* (*Epistle* 114. PG 32, 528B). The peace of Christ is a mystical power that springs forth from the reconciliation between the human being and the heavenly Father, *according to the providence of Christ, Who brings all things to perfection in Him and who makes peace*

ineffable and predestined from the ages, and Who reconciles us with Himself, and in Himself with the Father (Dionysius the Aeropagite, *On the Divine Names*, 11, 5, PG 3, 953AB).

3. At the same time, we are obligated to underline that the gifts of peace and justice also depend on human synergy. The Holy Spirit bestows spiritual gifts when, in repentance, we seek God's peace and righteousness. These gifts of peace and justice are manifested wherever Christians strive for the work of faith, love, and hope in our Lord Jesus Christ (I Thes 1:3).
4. Sin is a spiritual illness, whose external symptoms include conflict, division, crime, and war, as well as the tragic consequences of these. The Church strives to eliminate not only the external symptoms of illness, but the illness itself, namely, sin.
5. At the same time, the Orthodox Church considers it is her duty to encourage all that which genuinely serves the cause of peace (Rom 14:19) and paves the way to justice, fraternity, true freedom, and mutual love among all children of the one heavenly Father as well as between all peoples who make up the one human family. She suffers with all people who in various parts of the world are deprived of the benefits of peace and justice.

4. Peace and the Aversion of War

1. The Church of Christ condemns war in general, recognizing it as the result of the presence of evil and sin in the world: *Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?* (Jm 4:1). Every war threatens to destroy creation and life.

This is most particularly the case with wars with weapons of mass destruction because their consequences would be horrific not only because they lead to the death of an unforeseeable number of people, but also because they render life unbearable for those who survive. They also lead to incurable diseases, cause genetic mutations and other disasters, with catastrophic impact on future generations.

The amassing not only of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, but of all kinds of weapons, poses very serious dangers inasmuch as they create a false sense of superiority and dominance over the rest of the world. Moreover, such weapons create an atmosphere of fear and mistrust, becoming the impetus for a new arms race.

2. The Church of Christ, which understands war as essentially the result of evil and sin in the world, supports all initiatives and efforts to prevent or avert it through dialogue and every other viable means. When war becomes inevitable, the Church continues to pray and care in a pastoral manner for her children who are involved in military conflict for the sake of defending their life and freedom, while making every effort to bring about the swift restoration of peace and freedom.
3. The Orthodox Church resolutely condemns the multifaceted conflicts and wars provoked by fanaticism that derives from religious principles. There is grave concern over the permanent trend of increasing oppression and persecution of Christians and other communities in the

Middle East and elsewhere because of their beliefs; equally troubling are the attempts to uproot Christianity from its traditional homelands. As a result, existing interfaith and international relations are threatened, while many Christians are forced to abandon their homes. Orthodox Christians throughout the world suffer with their fellow Christians and all those being persecuted in this region, while also calling for a just and lasting resolution to the region's problems.

Wars inspired by nationalism and leading to ethnic cleansing, the violation of state borders, and the seizure of territory are also condemned.

E. The Attitude of the Church Toward Discrimination

1. The Lord, as King of righteousness (Heb 7:2-3) denounces violence and injustice (Ps 10:5), while condemning the inhumane treatment of one's neighbor (Mt 25:41-46; Jm 2:15-16). In His Kingdom, reflected and present in His Church on earth, there is no place for hatred, enmity, or intolerance (Is 11:6; Rom 12:10).
2. The Orthodox Church's position on this is clear. 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.
3. 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 has the right to proclaim and witness to her teaching in the public sphere.

F. The Mission of the Orthodox Church As a Witness of Love through Service

1. In fulfilling her salvific mission in the world, the Orthodox Church actively cares for all people in need, including the hungry, the poor, the sick, the disabled, the elderly, the persecuted, those in captivity and prison, the homeless, the orphans, the victims of destruction and military conflict, those affected by human trafficking and modern forms of slavery. The Orthodox Church's efforts to confront destitution and social injustice are an expression of her faith and the service to the Lord, Who identifies Himself with every person and especially with those in need: *Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me* (Mt 25:40). This multidimensional social service enables the Church to cooperate with various relevant social institutions.
2. Competition and enmity in the world introduce injustice and inequitable access among individuals and peoples to the resources of divine creation. They deprive millions of people

of fundamental goods and lead to the degradation of human person; they incite mass migrations of populations, and they engender ethnic, religious, and social conflicts, which threaten the internal cohesion of communities.

3. The Church cannot remain indifferent before economic conditions that negatively impact humanity as a whole. She insists not only on the need for the economy to be grounded upon ethical principles, but that it must also tangibly serve the needs of human beings in accordance with the teaching of the Apostle Paul: *By laboring like this, you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that he said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'* (Acts 20:35). Basil the Great writes that *each person should make it his duty to help those in need and not satisfy his own needs*(*Moral Rules*, 42. PG 31, 1025A).
4. The gap between rich and poor is dramatically exacerbated due to the financial crisis, which normally results from the unbridled profiteering by some representatives of financial circles, the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few, and perverted business practices devoid of justice and humanitarian sensitivity, which ultimately do not serve humanity's true needs. A sustainable economy is that which combines efficiency with justice and social solidarity.
5. In light of such tragic circumstances, the Church's great responsibility is perceived in terms of overcoming hunger and all other forms of deprivation in the world. One such phenomenon in our time—whereby nations operate within a globalized economic system—points to the world's serious identity crisis, for hunger not only threatens the divine gift of life of whole peoples, but also offends the lofty dignity and sacredness of the human person, while simultaneously offending God. Therefore, if concern over our own sustenance is a material issue, then concern over feeding our neighbor is a spiritual issue (Jm 2:14-18). Consequently, it is the mission of all Orthodox Churches to exhibit solidarity and administer assistance effectively to those in need.
6. The Holy Church of Christ, in her universal body—embracing in her fold many peoples on earth—emphasizes the principle of universal solidarity and supports the closer cooperation of nations and states for the sake of resolving conflicts peacefully.
7. The Church is concerned about the ever-increasing imposition upon humanity of a consumerist lifestyle, devoid of Christian ethical principles. In this sense, consumerism combined with secular globalization tends to lead to the loss of nations' spiritual roots, their historical loss of memory, and the forgetfulness of their traditions.
8. Mass media frequently operates under the control of an ideology of liberal globalization and is thus rendered an instrument for disseminating consumerism and immorality. Instances of disrespectful—at times blasphemous—attitudes toward religious values are cause for particular concern, inasmuch as arousing division and conflict in society. The Church warns her children of the risk of influence on their conscience by the mass media, as well as its use to manipulate rather than bring people and nations together.
9. Even as the Church proceeds to preach and realize her salvific mission for the world, she is all the more frequently confronted by expressions of secularism. The Church of Christ in the

world is called to express once again and to promote the content of her prophetic witness to the world, grounded on the experience of faith and recalling her true mission through the proclamation of the Kingdom of God and the cultivation of a sense of unity among her flock. In this way, she opens up a broad field of opportunity since an essential element of her ecclesiology promotes Eucharistic communion and unity within a shattered world.

10. The yearning for continuous growth in prosperity and an unfettered consumerism inevitably lead to a disproportionate use and depletion of natural resources. Nature, which was created by God and given to humankind to *work and preserve* (cf. Gen 2:15), endures the consequences of human sin: *For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now* (Rom 8:20-22).

The ecological crisis, which is connected to climate change and global warming, makes it incumbent upon the Church to do everything within her spiritual power to protect God's creation from the consequences of human greed. As the gratification of material needs, greed leads to spiritual impoverishment of the human being and to environmental destruction. We should not forget that the earth's natural resources are not our property, but the Creator's: *The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness, the world, and those who dwell therein* (Ps 23:1). Therefore, the Orthodox Church emphasizes the protection of God's creation through the cultivation of human responsibility for our God-given environment and the promotion of the virtues of frugality and self-restraint. We are obliged to remember that not only present, but also future generations have a right to enjoy the natural goods granted to us by the Creator.

11. For the Orthodox Church, the ability to explore the world scientifically is a gift from God to humanity. However, along with this positive attitude, the Church simultaneously recognizes the dangers latent in the use of certain scientific achievements. She believes that the scientist is indeed free to conduct research, but that the scientist is also obliged to interrupt this research when it violates basic Christian and humanitarian values. According to St. Paul, *All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful* (1 Cor 6:12), and according to St. Gregory the Theologian, *Goodness is not goodness if the means are wrong* (1st Theological Oration, 4, PG 36, 16C). This perspective of the Church proves necessary for many reasons in order to establish proper boundaries for freedom and the application of the fruits of science, where in almost all disciplines, but especially in biology, we can expect both new achievements and risks. At the same time, we emphasize the unquestionable sacredness of human life from its conception.
12. Over the last years, we observe an immense development in the biological sciences and in corresponding biotechnologies. Many of these achievements are considered beneficial for humankind, while others raise ethical dilemmas and still others are deemed unacceptable. The Orthodox Church believes that the human being is not merely a composition of cells, bones, and organs; nor again is the human person defined solely by biological factors. Man is created in the image of God (Gen 1:27) and reference to humanity must take place with due

respect. The recognition of this fundamental principle leads to the conclusion that, both in the process of scientific investigation as well as in the practical application of new discoveries and innovations, we should preserve the absolute right of each individual to be respected and honored at all stages of life. Moreover, we should respect the will of God as manifested through creation. Research must take into account ethical and spiritual principles, as well as Christian precepts. Indeed, due respect must be rendered to all of God's creation in regard to both the way humanity treats and science explores it, in accordance to God's commandment (Gen 2:15).

13. In these times of secularization marked by a spiritual crisis characteristic of contemporary civilization, it is especially necessary to highlight the significance of life's sacredness. The misunderstanding of freedom as permissiveness leads to an increase in crime, the destruction and defacement of those things held in high regard, as well as the total disrespect of our neighbor's freedom and of the sacredness of life. Orthodox Tradition, shaped by the experience of Christian truths in practice, is the bearer of spirituality and the ascetic ethos, which must especially be encouraged in our time.
14. The Church's special pastoral care for young people represents an unceasing and unchanging Christ-centered process of formation. Of course, the pastoral responsibility of the Church also extends to the divinely-granted institution of family, which has always been and must always be founded on the sacred mystery of Christian marriage as a union between man and woman, as reflected in the union of Christ and His Church (Eph 5:32). This is especially vital in light of attempts in certain countries to legalize and in certain Christian communities to justify theologically other forms of human cohabitation that are contrary to Christian tradition and teaching. The Church hopes for the recapitulation of everything in the Body of Christ, it reminds every person coming into the world, that Christ will return again at His Second Coming *judging the living and the dead* (1 Pet 4, 5) and that *His Kingdom shall have no end* (Lk 1:33)
15. In our times, just as throughout history, the prophetic and pastoral voice of the Church, the redeeming word of the Cross and of the Resurrection, appeals to the heart of humankind, calling us, with the Apostle Paul, to embrace and experience *whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report* (Phil 4:8)—namely, the sacrificial love of Her Crucified Lord, the only way to a world of peace, justice, freedom, and love among peoples and between nations, whose only and ultimate measure is always the sacrificed Lord (cf. Rev 5:12) for the life of the world, that is, endless Love of God in the Triune God, of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, to whom belongs all glory and power unto the ages of ages.