THE MISSION OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN TODAY'S WORLD

The contribution of the Orthodox Church in the attainment of peace, justice, freedom, brotherhood and love between peoples and the removal of racial and other discrimination.

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The Church of Christ lives 'in the world', but is 'not of the world' (cf. Jn. 17:11 and 14-15).The Church is the sign and image of the Kingdom of God in history, proclaiming the good news of a 'new creation' (II Cor. 5: 17) and of 'new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness' (II Pt. 3: 13), of a world in which 'God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain' (Rev. 21: 4-5).

It is with this hope that the Church lives and foretastes it in particular when the Divine Eucharist is celebrated, bringing 'together' (I Cor. 11: 20) the scattered children of God (Jn. 111: 52) without regard to race, gender, age, social or any other station into a single body where 'there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus' (Gal. 3: 28; cf. Col. 3:11).

In this foretasting of a 'new creation', of a world transfigured, the Church lives in the countenances of her saints who, through their spiritual endeavours in Christ, have already in this life revealed the image of the Kingdom of God, proving and affirming by this that the hope of peace, justice and love is not a utopia, but the 'substance of things hoped for' (Heb. 11: 1), attained through the grace of God by means of the human person's spiritual endeavours.

In finding constant inspiration in this hope and the foretasting of the Kingdom of God, the Church cannot remain aloof from of the problems of the human person in each historical epoch, but shares his concern and everyday problems, taking upon herself, as the Lord did, the pain and wounds, the cause of which is evil that is active in the world and, like the Good Samaritan, with a word of 'patience and comfort' (Rom. 15: 4, Heb. 13: 22) and through active love, pours upon his wounds oil and wine (Lk. 10: 34). Her word, addressed to the world, has as its aim first of all not to judge and condemn the world (cf. Jn. 3: 17) and 12: 47), but to offer it as guidance the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, hope and the assurance that

the last word in history is not evil, no matter what form it may take, and that we should not allow evil to dictate the course of history.

Rooted in these principles, the accumulated experience and the teaching of her patristic, liturgical and ascetical tradition, the Orthodox Church shares the concerns and anxieties of modern-day humanity in relation to everyday problems that disturb the contemporary world and desires to act for their resolution so that in the world there should reign the 'peace of God, which passeth all understanding' (Phil. 4: 7), reconciliation and love.

1. *The Dignity of the Human Person*.

1. The dignity of the human person, proceeding from the creation of man in the image of God so that he may participate in the fulfillment of the God's design for the human person and the world, was the source of inspiration for the Church fathers who delved into the mystery of God's ordering of the world. As an example we can use St. Gregory the Theologian's words on the human person: 'The Creator makes a sort of second world, which is great in the small, he places on earth another angel, a worshipper composed of various natures, a contemplator of visible creation, a witness of the mysteries of creation as comprehended by the intellect, a king over all that is on the earth who is subject to the heavenly kingdom... a living being, prepared here and transported to another world and (which is the culmination of the mystery) who attains deification through striving for God' (Homily 45 *On Holy Pascha*, 7. PG 36, 632). The goal of the Word of God becoming man is the deification of the human person. 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* 4, 14. PG 22, 289).

For as the entire human race was contained in the old Adam, so too all of the human race is 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 St. John*, Book 9, PG 74, 273D - 275A). The teaching of the Church is the source of all Christian striving to preserve the dignity and majesty of the human person.

2. It is on this basis that it is essential to develop in all directions inter-Christian co-operation for the protection of human dignity and the preservation of peace so that the peace-keeping efforts of all Christians may become more relevant and effective.

3. The general recognition of the lofty value of the human person may become the cause for wider co-operation in the field of peace-keeping. The Orthodox Churches are called upon to help in religious dialogue and co-operation, and as a result of this to overcome all manifestations of fanaticism for the strengthening of friendship between peoples, the triumph of freedom and peace throughout the world for

the good of each human person, regardless of their race and religion. Of course, this co-operation excludes both syncretism and the attempt of one religion to dominate over all the others.

4. We are convinced that as 'labourers together with God' (I Cor. 3: 9) we can develop on local, national and international levels joint service for the good of humanity with all peoples of good will that strive for a peace that is pleasing to God. This ministry is a commandment of God (Matt. 5: 9).

2. *Freedom and Responsibility*.

1. One of the loftiest gifts of God to the human person both as a concrete bearer of the image of a personal God and as a member of a community of persons in the unity of the human race by grace reflecting the life and communion of the Divine Persons in the Holy trinity, is the gift of freedom. 'He who created the human person in the beginning made him free and autonomous, limiting him solely by the laws of the commandment' (St. Gregory the Theologian, Homily 14*, On love for the poor*, 25. PG 35, 892A). Freedom allows the human person to ascend to spiritual perfection, yet at the same time includes the danger of disobedience, the abandonment of submission to God and through this the fall, the tragic consequences of which is the existence of evil in the world.

2. The consequence of this evil are the imperfections and shortcomings which predominate in modern-day life: secularization, violence, moral laxity, negative phenomena such as narcotic and other forms of dependency that can be seen in certain young people, racism, the arms race, war the social catastrophes that result from them, discrimination against certain social groups, religious communities and whole peoples, social inequality; the limitation of human rights in the field of freedom of conscience, in particular religious freedom, disinformation and the manipulation of public opinion; economic backwardness, the disproportionate redistribution or complete absence of the essentials of life, the hunger of millions of people, the forced deportation of populations and the trade in human beings, the uncontrolled use of genetic biotechnologies and the end of human life - all of this causes infinite anxiety in the life of modern-day humanity.

3. Faced with this situation, which has led to a degradation of the notion of the human person, the duty of the Orthodox Church today is, by means of preaching, theology, worship and pastoral activity, to reveal the truth of freedom in Christ. 'All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not. Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth... for why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience?' (I Cor. 10: 23-24, 29). Freedom without responsibility and love leads eventually to the loss of freedom.

3. *Peace and Justice.*

1. The Orthodox Church has since time immemorial recognized and proclaimed that peace and justice occupy a central place in the life of peoples. Christ's revelation is characterized as the 'gospel of peace' (Eph. 6: 5), for Christ 'made peace through the blood of his cross' (Col. 1: 20) and 'came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh' (Eph. 2: 17). He became 'our peace' (Eph. 2: 14). This peace, 'which passeth all understanding' (Phil. 4: 7), as the Lord said to his disciples before his crucifixion, is wider and more important than the peace which the world promises: 'Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you' (Jn. 14: 27). For Christ's peace is the ripe fruit of all things united in Christ: the revelation of the dignity and majesty of the human person as the image of God, the manifestation of the organic unity of the human race and the world in him, the commonality of the principles of peace, freedom and social justice and, ultimately, the offering of the fruits of Christian love among people and the nations of the world. True peace is the fruit of the triumph on earth of all these Christian principles. It is the peace that is from above, of which the Orthodox Church constantly prays every day, beseeching it of almighty God who hears the prayers of those who approach him in faith.

2. From the above it becomes clear why the Church 'as the body of Christ' (I Cor. 12: 27) always prays for the peace of the whole world, which, according to St. Clement of Alexandria, is a synonym for justice (*Stromates* 4, 25. PG 8, 1369-72). And St. Basil the Great adds to this: '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 God' (Epistle 203, 2. PG 32, 737). As the same holy father writes, this is self-evident for a Christian: 'Nothing is so characteristic of Christian as to be a peace maker' (Epistle 114. PG 32, 528). Christ's peace is a mysterious power which flows from the reconciliation of the human person with the heavenly Father 'according to Christ's providence, 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, 2, 4. PG 3, 953).

3. At the same time it should be emphasized that the gifts of peace and justice also depend on human inter-action. The Holy Spirit grants spiritual gifts when the human person in repentance aims for peace and God's righteousness. These gifts of peace and justice are made manifest in the place where Christians exert efforts in the cause of faith, love and hope in our Lord Christ Jesus (I Thess. 1: 3).

4. Sin is a spiritual illness, the external symptoms of which are conflicts, division, crime and war with tragic consequences. The Church strives to remove not only the external symptoms of this illness but

also the illness of sin itself.

5. At the same time the Orthodox Church believes it her duty to encourage all those who genuinely serve the cause of peace (Rom. 14: 19) and show the way to justice, fraternity, true freedom and mutual love between all the children of the one heavenly Father as between all peoples who make up the one human family. She suffers with all people who in various parts of the world are denied the benefits of peace and justice.

4. *Peace and the Aversion of War*.

1. The Church of Christ condemns war as such, believing it to be a result of the evil and sin which exist in the world: 'From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?' (James 4: 1). All war threatens to destroy God's creation and life.

This applies in particular to wars with the use of weapons of mass destruction, the consequences of which are dreadful, for they cause the death of a huge number of people, while for those who remain alive life would not be worth living. Incurable diseases appear, genetic changes occur and other disasters happen which would have a catastrophic effect on future generations.

Extremely dangerous today are not only nuclear, chemical, biological but also other forms of weapons which create the illusion with those who possess them of superiority and dominance over the surrounding world. Such weapons create an atmosphere of fear and mistrust and are becoming the reason for a new arms race.

2. The Church of Christ, which has from the very beginning understood war to be the result of the evil and sin that exist in the world, encourages all initiatives and efforts aimed at its aversion by means of dialogue and other acceptable methods. In the instance when war becomes inevitable, the Church continues to pray and exercises her pastoral care for her children who take part in military maneuvers to defend their life and freedom, at the same time exerting all efforts for the rapid establishment of peace.

3. The Orthodox Church resolutely condemns various conflicts and wars caused by fanaticism justified by religious principles. Great concern is caused by the steady tendency towards increasing the discrimination and persecution of Christians and representatives of other religions according to their beliefs in the Middle East and in other parts of the world and the attempts to uproot Christianity from its traditional regions. In this way the existing inter-religious and inter-ethnic relations are threatened, and many Christians are forced to abandon their homeland. Orthodox Christians throughout the world

sympathize with their fellow Christians and all those subjected to persecution in this region, and call for the working out of a just and final solution to the region's problems.

Also condemned are wars inspired by nationalistic motives and which lead to ethnic cleaning, the changing of state borders and the seizure of territory.

5. *The Attitude of the Church Towards Discrimination.*

1. The Lord as King of peace (Heb. 7: 2-3) rejects violence and injustice (Ps. 10: 5) and condemns the inhuman treatment of one's neighbour (Mk. 25: 41-46; James 2:15-16). In his Kingdom, which is reflected in and is present on earth in his Church, there is no place for division, enmity or intolerance (Is. 11: 6; Rom. 12: 10).

2. The Orthodox Church takes up a firm position on this issue. She believes that God 'hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation' (Acts 17: 26) and that in Christ 'there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus' (Gal. 3: 28). To the question 'Who is my neighbour?' Christ replies with the parable of the merciful Samaritan woman (Lk. 10: 25-37), thereby teaching us to reject barriers built up by hatred and prejudice. The Orthodox Church confesses that every person, regardless of the colour of his skin, religion, race, gender, nationality and language, is created in the image and likeness of God and is an equal member of the human community. In following this belief, the Orthodox Church rejects discrimination according to the aforementioned reasons which presuppose a difference in dignity between people.

3. The Church, in respecting, the principles of human rights and equal treatment of people, values the application of these principles in the light of her teaching on the sacraments, the family, the position of both genders in the Church and the value of Church tradition as a whole. The Church has the right to bear witness and does bear witness to her teaching in the public sphere.

6. *The Mission of the Orthodox Church As a Testimony of Love in Ministry*.

1. In fulfilling her saving mission in the world, the Orthodox Church actively cares for all people who are in need of help, including the hungry, the poor, the sick, invalids, the elderly, the persecuted, the

captives and those in prison, the homeless, the orphans, the victims of catastrophes and military conflicts, the trade of people and contemporary forms of slavery. The efforts of the Orthodox Church in overcoming need and social injustice are the expression of her faith and ministry to Christ, who identifies himself with each person and more so with those in need: 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me' (Mt. 25: 40). In this multi-varied social ministry the Church can co-operate with various public institutions.

2. Conflict and enmity in the world bring with them injustice and inequality for those people and nations labouring for the benefit of God's creation. They deprive millions of people of basic benefits and lead to the degradation of the human person. They cause the mass migration of the population, engender conflict on national, religious and social grounds, which threaten the inner cohesion of society.

3. The Church cannot remain indifferent to the economic processes which have a negative impact on all humanity. She insists on the need not only of structuring the economy on moral principles, but also by means of actively ministering to the human person, following the teaching of St. Paul: 'How that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive' (Acts 20: 35). St. Basil the Great writes that 'each person should make it his business to help those in need and not satisfy his own needs' (Moral Rules, 42. PG 31, 1025A).

4. The gap between the rich and the poor is dramatically increasing as a result of the economic crisis. It is a result of unconstrained speculation by representatives of financial circles, the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few and a perverted financial activity which is devoid of justice, humanity and responsibility and which ultimately does not serve to satisfy the true needs of the human race. The only viable economy is that which combines efficiency with justice and social solidarity.

5. In these tragic circumstances the Church believes it to be her great responsibility to overcome hunger and all manifestations of poverty in the world. The fact that this is taking place in our time, when countries are living in conditions of a globalized economy, testifies to the serious crisis of identity in the modern world. Hunger not only poses a threat to the divine gift of life of whole peoples, but also offends the lofty dignity of the human person and thereby throws down a challenge to God. Therefore, if concern for the need to feed ourselves is a material issue, then the concern for feeding our neighbour is a spiritual issue (James 2:m 14-18). Consequently, the task of all the Orthodox Churches is to bear witness to their solidarity in relation to those brothers in need and help them in an effective way.

6. The Holy Church of Christ, which unites many peoples of the earth in her Catholic body, supports the idea of pan-human solidarity and closer co-operation of peoples and countries for the sake of resolving conflicts peacefully.

7. At the same time, the Church is concerned at the ever increasing imposition upon people of a the consumerist lifestyle, uprooted from Christian moral values. Consumerism, together with secular globalization, leads to the loss of peoples' spiritual roots, to historical loss of memory and the consigning to oblivion of traditions.

8. Modern-day mass media often comes under the control of the ideology of liberal globalism and in this way becomes the instrument for spreading consumerism and immorality. Especial concern is caused by the instances of a disrespectful and at times blasphemous attitude towards religious values, which provoke in society conflict and disorder. The Church warns her children of the danger of influencing consciousness through the media, when it is not used for the purpose of bringing people and nations together but to manipulate them.

9. The Church often encounters on her path to preaching and to fulfilling her saving mission of ministering to humanity the manifestation of secular ideology. Rooted in the experience of faith and recalling her true mission in relation to people by way of proclaiming the Kingdom of God and educating the consciousness of the unity of her flock, the Church of Christ is called with renewed force to express the content of her prophetic witness and reveal it to the world. In this way a broad field of activity is opened up to her, since as an essential element of her ecclesiological teaching she reveals to the divided world Eucharistic communion and unity.

10. The striving for a constant growth in prosperity and the immoderate growth of consumption inevitably leads to a disproportionate exploitation and exhaustion of natural resources. Nature, created by God for man to work and preserve it (cf. Gen. 2: 15), experiences the consequences of human sin: 'For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now' (Rom. 8: 20-22).

The ecological crisis, harnessed to climate change and global warming, makes it incumbent upon the Church to do everything within her spiritual power to aid the protection of God's creation from the consequences of human greed.

Greed, manifested in the gratification of material needs, leads to the spiritual impoverishment of the human person and the destruction of the environment. We ought not to forget that natural resources are the property not of man but of the Creator: 'The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein' (Ps. 23: 1).

It is in this way that the Orthodox Church emphasizes the need to protect God's creation by means of inculcating responsibility in the human person for the God-given environment, by means of discovering the value of the virtues of moderation and self-limitation. We ought to recall that not only today's but also future generations have the right to the natural wealth that the Creator has granted to us.

11. For the Orthodox Church the ability to research scientifically the world is a gift of God to the human person. At the same time, the Church points out the dangers that are hidden in the use of some scientific achievements. She proposes that the scientist is not only endowed with the freedom to research, but also the duty to stop his research when basic Christian and humane principles are violated. 'All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient' (I Cor. 6: 12). 'Goodness is not goodness if it is not done with a good disposition' (St. Gregory the Theologian, 1st Homily on Theology, 4, PG 36, 16C). This viewpoint of the Church is for many reasons necessary for a correct definition of the limits of freedom and the application of the fruits of science from which in almost all areas, and especially in biology, both success and dangers are expected. Simultaneously, we emphasize the undoubted sacred nature of human life from the moment of conception until natural death.

12. Recent years have been marked by the headlong development of the biological sciences and the biotechnologies connected to them; while many of these achievements have been considered to be beneficial for the human person, others are linked to moral dilemmas and may even be rejected. The Orthodox Church affirms that the human person is not merely a collection of cells, fibers and organs; it is wrong to believe that he can be defined simply by biological factors. The human person is created according to the image of God (Gen. 1: 27). The recognition of this fundamental principle leads us to the conclusion that during the process of scientific investigation, as well as in the practical application of the results of new discoveries and inventions we ought to observe the absolute right of the human person to be respected at all stages of his life. It is essential also to respect the will of God as made manifest in his creation. When research is being conducted, it is necessary to bear in mind moral and spiritual principles and Christians precepts. Appropriate respect is to be shown towards all of God's creation as when the human person uses it and when it is being researched, according to the commandment given to man by God (Gen. 2: 15).

13. In our present time of secularization faced with a spiritual crisis characteristic of modern-day civilization, there is an especial need to highlight the meaning of sanctity. The mistaken understanding of freedom as the right to do what one pleases has led to a growth in crime, the destruction and vandalism of holy objects, to disrespect for the freedom of one's neighbour and the sacred nature of life. Orthodox Tradition, formed by the embodiment in life of Christian truths, is the bearer of spirituality and is distinguished by its asceticism, which must be especially emphasized and demonstrated in our time

14. The Church does not cease to be pastorally concerned in a special way for children and young

people and for their upbringing in the Church. Of course, the pastoral responsibility of the Church extends to the divinely created institution of the family, which has always and immutably been rooted in the sacred mystery of Christian matrimony as a union between a man and a woman reflecting the union of Christ and the Church (Eph. 5: 22-32). This is especially relevant in view of the attempts to legalize in some countries and theological justify in some Christian communities forms of human cohabitation which go against Christian teaching and tradition.

15. In modern times, as throughout history, the prophetic and pastoral voice of the Church is addressed to the heart of the human person, calling upon him to accept and embody in life, according to St. Paul, 'whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report' (Phil. 4: 8), and even more so the sacrificial love of the crucified Lord as the only way which leads the world to peace, justice, freedom and love between peoples and nations.

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