

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 Primate 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.*)