Christians and politics. A comment on the text: "For the Life of the World" of the Ecumenical Patriarchate

By Dimitrios Keramidas*

Christianity's position towards Politics as a theological issue

> From its very beginning, Christianity was social in character. The whole context of Christian existence is social and organic. Christian worship is indeed public worship, *publica et communis oratio* in the words of St. Cyprian. Therefore, to build the Church of Christ means to build a new society, and consequently to rebuild human society on a new basis[1].

The above quotation from George Florovsky clearly describes the context within which the Christian social ethos is developed[2]. Christianity in its

* Dimitrios Keramidas, holds a PhD in Theology, and is lecturer at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas "Angelicum", Rome.

1. G. Florovsky, «Τὸ κοινωνικὸ πρόβλημα στὴν Ἀνατολικὴ Ὀρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία», in: G. Florovsky, *Χριστιανισμὸς καὶ πολιτισμός*, thransl. N. Pournaras, P. Pournaras Publications, Thessaloniki [2]2000 (title of the prototype: *Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*, vol. 2: Christianity and Culture, Nordland, Belmond [MA] 1974), pp. 165-166.

2. We are talking about a social "ethos" and not "teachings" of the Church because, on the one hand, in Orthodox theology, at least until recently, a systematic teaching on moral and social issues had not been developed and, on the other hand, because Orthodox Church's magisterium was generally expressed more "apophatically", in contrast with the Catholic Church's "affirmative" positions. This apophatic attitude acted comprehensively – since it allowed room for a broad exercise of the ecclesiastical economy for the faithful's specific needs-, but it often left Orthodoxy exposed to major social issues, since it had not formed its own moral and social principles related to them. That is why the text "For the Life of the World", as we shall see, speaks of an Orthodox "social ethos", and the Moscow Patriarchate text: "The Basis of Social Principles of the Russian Orthodox

public action builds society - in fact, a new society. Indeed, according to Florovsky, from the apostolic years onwards "the Church was not simply an 'assembled community' or voluntary association, for religious purposes only. It was, and demanded, to be a separate and autonomous 'society', a distinct 'polity'"[3]. Although the leading Russian theologian indicated the need for a social transformation, he did not hesitate to speak of the "antinomies", as he called them, of Christian history: the dilemma between "world" and the "desert", that is Church's compromise with the State for the "redemption of society", the "the renovation of the whole historical existence" or –on the contrary– for the *fuga mundi*, the attempt for the human life to be organized in opposition to the world[4]. He argued that both attitudes are aiming at the new creation's realization, the sanctification –and, ultimately, the salvation– of man.

If this is the case, does the end of the Christian Empires mean the end of Christian social action? Or can any conversion to evangelical values now only take place in the context of monastic life, especially in Orthodoxy, where monasticism is seen by many as the supreme realization of Christian morality?[5] And if the latter is the case, how is the new society -in which Christianity is evangelized- to be built, since monasticism is the pre-eminently non-"secular" –and, to some extent, "private"– expression of Christianity? Although the question requires a broader analysis, we think that for Florovski the "desert" is only one aspect –however important– of the Gospel's transformative dynamic, that is diffused in all areas of Christian spirituality and action.

Expanding the issue's interpretive horizon, it is worth recalling the distinction made by John Meyendorff between three types of Christian eschatologies:

The first type is a way of understanding the Kingdom of God and Christian mission, as well as a form of political theology; it is not

Church", adopted in 2000, spoke of "social concepts".

3. G. Florovsky, «Ἀντινομίες τῆς χριστιανικῆς ἱστορίας. Αὐτοκρατορία καὶ ἔρημος», in: *Χριστιανισμὸς καὶ πολιτισμός*, *op.cit.*, p. 89.

4. *Op.cit.*, pp. 123, 125.

5. See how in textbooks on Christian Ethics the latter's sources are the *Philokalia*, the *Lives of Saints*, the *ascetic "memoranda"*, etc. See, among others, G. Mantzaridis, *Χριστιανικὴ Ἠθική*, P. Pournaras Publications, Thessaloniki [4]1995, pp. 41-47.

interested in the transformation of the world, since it considers it as *fallen* (*«πεπτωκότα»*). Christians should only look forward to the Heavenly Kingdom and prepare for it. In its most radical form, it is the eschatology sought by monasticism and the attitude of Christians in times of persecution.

The second type is the one that seeks *the transformation of history and its structures* (state power, legislation, social values, etc.) through the Christianization of the world. It is about the realization of "*Jerusalem on earth*" either in the form of the Christian empire or in that of the Christian states according to the principle *cuius regio eius religio*.

Finally, the third type, which we can call biblical, is the *prophetic* one; it constantly fights against evil and the corrupting forces that exist in the world, but knows that the latter is temporary as opposed to the eternal Kingdom of God. In other words, we are dealing with the presence of Christians in the world and at the same time their non-assimilation by it, in a dialectical tension between history and the end of time[6].

These eschatological types have been developed in the Church's consciousness and practice not by replacing one another, but rather by coexisting: The primitive Church was equally "apocalyptic" and "prophetic", while the State's Christian institutional transformation led to anchoritism and the search for a more internalized, personal eschatology. Persecutions have existed in various historical periods, but State-Church cohesion has always been the main issue in the social self-definition of Byzantine and post-Byzantine Orthodox Christianity.

Nevertheless, from the beginning of its historical presence, the Church has claimed the right not to be marginalized from public life. Apostolic preaching, missionary work, and the very liturgical life of the Church have all had a profoundly "public" character. Monasticism was also open to social and political affairs, not strictly private. At its peak, however, the demand for social transformation, according to Meyendorff's second type of eschatology, took shape in the 4th century AD with the end of the persecutions, the "Constantinian conversion", and the Christianization of the Roman Empire. This example has since been defended in various

6. J. Meyendorff, "The Christian Gospel and Social Responsibility: The Orthodox Tradition in History", in: J. Meyendorff, *Living Tradition*, SVSP, Crestwood NY 1980, pp. 188-191.

ways by the Churches of East and West, even when they found that modern states had adopted the principle of neutrality in their relations with Christianity.

Church and politics according to the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church

As far as contemporary Orthodoxy is concerned, in the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church that took place in Crete (2016), secularization and the State's separation from the Church were not seen as the "end of religion", nor as the completion of the Church's secular course, but as an invitation to be in contact with a -now- non-theocratic civilization. This is reflected in the Synod's missionary text: "The Mission of the Orthodox Church in the Modern World", which states[7] the following:

> On the path that the Church is following, preaching and exercising its saving mission for humanity, it is increasingly and more regularly confronted with the different manifestations of secularization. The Church of Christ is called upon to restate and reveal its prophetic witness to the world, based on the experience of faith, while recalling its true mission, by proclaiming the Kingdom of God and fostering a sense of unity among its flock.

But the Encyclical of the Synod also gave an outline of Church-State relations, based on the well-known biblical passage of *Matthew* 22, 21:

> The Church is not involved in politics in the strict sense of the word, but its witness is essentially political, as its main concern is man and his spiritual freedom. The *word of the Church* has always been distinct and will remain likewise in perpetuity an *indebted intervention on behalf of man*. The local Orthodox Churches are called today to build a new constructive partnership with the secular state of law in the new context of international relations, following the biblical "*So give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's*" (*Matthew* 22, 21)[8].

7. § 6, 9.
8. § 16.

The Church adopts an attitude of not being "intimately" involved with politics, of witnessing and cooperating with secular authority for the sake of the human person[9]. This cooperation implicitly presupposes the existence of two distinct subjects: the Church and the State. These two parties cooperate without one becoming the other, i.e. without the Church becoming the State or the State becoming the Church. If this does not happen, then there can be no talk of "cooperation" but of "mono-activity" or even "self-activity" on behalf of the Church[10].

Similar to the two aforementioned synodal texts is the Message of the Holy and Great Synod; it is worth noting that it is not addressed only to the members of the Orthodox Church, but also to "every good-willing person". It states that "the Orthodox Church does not get involved in politics. Its word and discourse remain *distinct* but also *prophetic*, as an intervention for man's sake"[11]. At the core of the Church-State relations lies the distinction of roles and the Church's prophetic voice (not her voicelessness!). Moreover, the Church should remind the citizens and politicians of their duty and responsibility to improve society. Thus, Christianity's "political" message is love: "The orthodox concern for man goes beyond the horizon of established human rights, that the 'greatest of all' is love, as revealed by Christ and experienced by those who faithfully followed Him"[12]. Human rights include the protection of religious freedom, freedom of conscience, freedom of belief (individual and collective), free exercise of worship, religious education, and the

9. The same paragraph further states: "This collegiality must preserve the individuality of Church and State and ensure their sincere cooperation for the benefit of protecting man's unique dignity and the rights deriving therefrom, as well as of social justice".
10. We would say that "self-activity" is the Church's action for herself; yet the Church acts for the other (i.e. in the spirit of communion, "for the world") and never for herself. Besides, the Church is what she is, not by some "metaphysical" power of her own, but by the degree that she is Christ's "Bride" and "Body" (in the context of the Trinitarian loving communion, of course). Christ is the end of a course of faith. This is why the Church is not humanity's end, but rather the Kingdom of Heaven's medium or image, which it serves.
11. *Message* of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, 10 (the emphasis is ours).
12. Op.cit.

exercise of religious duties "free from all state interference"[13]. Love offers existential meaning to these rights since without it they would remain in the realm of individual self-fulfillment and not of mutual coexistence[14].

Christians and politics in "For the Life of the World" text

The text "For the Life of the World. The Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church" was published in the spring of 2020 at the urging of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, in order to deepen the teaching of the Holy and Great Synod and more specifically its missionary text[15]. The authors

13. Op.cit.

14. Through love, the right to worship does not apply to an individual believer, but to a community of believers. Again, through love, worship's free exercise by non-Christians allows both the places of prayer and the different religious communities to coexist.

15. For the text's Greek version (translated by N. Asproulis) see the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America's website: https://www.goarch.org/el/social-ethos?p_p_id=56_INSTANCE_km0Xa4sy69OV&p_p_lifecycle=0&p_p_state=normal&p_p_mode=view&p_p_col_id=column-1&p_p_col_count=1&_56_INSTANCE_km0Xa4sy69OV_languageId=el_GR [24.08.2022]. The text -the fruit of editing by Orthodox theologians of the climate of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, mainly from the diaspora-, was approved by the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in January 2020 and published in the spring of the same year. Its aim is to become a theological tool for today's pastoral challenges concerning the social mission of the Orthodox Churches, specifying the general principles contained in the teaching of the 2016 Holy and Great Council (mainly in the missionary text and the synodal Encyclical), but also to participate in the process of the Synod's "reception" by the body of the Church. For an introduction to the text, see f. J. Chryssavgis, «Ἡ Ἁγία καὶ Μεγάλη Σύνοδος, Νέος Κορωνοϊὸς καὶ Κοινωνικὴ Διδασκαλία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας: Ἕνα νέο κείμενο ἀπὸ θεολόγους τοῦ Οἰκουμενικοῦ Πατριαρχείου», in: K. Zorbas (ed.), *Κοινωνικὴ κρίση καὶ Πανδημία. Μελετώντας τὰ Κείμενα τῆς Ἁγίας καὶ Μεγάλης Συνόδου: Προβληματισμοὶ γιὰ τὴν κοινωνικὴ κρίση καὶ τὴν πανδημία τοῦ Covid-19*, Akritas Publications, Athens 2021, p. 65 et seq. Father John Xrysaugis notes, "At some point in the long Byzantine period, Eastern Christianity, unfortunately, stopped dealing with issues related to the present and began to focus on repeating of past answers [...]. It preferred pious rhetoric or abstract rationalism, ritualistic formality or estranged mysticism – because all these, after all, more easily projected the outward appearance of a traditional authenticity or patristic fidelity [...] the over-emphasis on monasticism (as a withdrawal in the heart) and mysticism (as a fascination with another world or a world elsewhere) provided the appropriate justification, a disengagement from this world in the Christian East. This attitude had various consequences for its ecclesiology, liturgy, and ethos". *Op.cit*., pp. 74-76.

acknowledge that "in our time, the Church frequently finds itself ill-prepared to respond to the realities of pluralism and globalization, or for that matter of individualism and secularization. In many societies, the Church is tempted simply to stand in opposition to the world, often sweepingly denouncing and despising all its forms and fashions. (Preface). For this reason, the text "aspires to reflect the worldview and mission of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, as expressed both down the centuries, up to the present day. Though the structure and style of this text are rather formal, the commission strove to avoid empty abstraction and to offer concrete moral proposals. The document's intentions are purely pastoral, moreover; its analysis of the present is meant to be compassionate, its critiques strictly constructive, and its exhortations studiously humble"[16]. The text "is at most an invitation to further and deeper reflection on the parts of the faithful. More to the point, the social ethos of the Church is fulfilled not simply through the implementation of ethical prescriptions, but also and most fully in the liturgical expectation of the divine Kingdom"[17].

The text has the following structure:
1. Introduction
2. The Church in the public sphere
3. The course of human life
4. Poverty, wealth, and civil law
5. War, peace and violence
6. Ecumenical relations and relations with other religions
7. Orthodoxy and human rights
8. Science, technology, and the natural environment
9. Conclusion

16. *Op.cit*. (the emphasis is ours).
17. § 79. Interestingly enough, the editors state that the text was published "for the benefit of our faithful throughout the world, so that it may serve as a solid basis for reflection and conversation on issues and challenges of vital importance facing the world today" (Preface). This reference, together with the "official" style and structure of the text (Prologue), gives it a heightened moral and canonical authority, which is not strictly limited to the faithful of the diaspora, but extends to the entire flock of the Ecumenical Patriarchate around the world and -potentially- to the faithful of the other Orthodox Churches as well.

Chapter 2, which is of interest to us, states: "Christian hope lies in the Kingdom of God and not in the kingdoms of this world"[18]. Certainly, this is not a denial of the world as such, but of "all those practices and structures of sin, oppression, and violence that corrupt the fallen world"[19]. The Orthodox Church, the text continues, "cannot judge all forms of human government as equivalent with one another, even though all fall far short of the Kingdom"[20], even though in the "course of history" "she has lived under diverse forms of government –empires, totalitarian regimes, liberal democracies, nations with Christian establishments, nations with other established creeds, secular states– some of which have proved amicable to the institutional Church, some hostile, and some indifferent"[21].

It follows, then, that the Church does not prefer a particular political system over another. The Christian attitude towards the state and authority is neither determined nor dependent on the constitution as such, but on what its implementation means for believers and citizens: "The Church should, of course, seek to live at peace with all persons in whatever lands it inhabits, and to offer that peace to everyone; and in most cases, this requires obedience to the laws that exist in those lands"[22]. Christians "may and often must participate in the political life of the societies in which they live, but must do so always in service to the justice and mercy of God's Kingdom"[23]. Therefore, the Church

18. § 8. It is worth noting here the grammatical difference between the divine "kingdom" («Βασιλείας»=singular number, with B capitals) and human "kingdoms" («βασιλείων» plural number, with B lowercase).
19. *Op.cit.*
20. § 9.
21. § 8.
22. § 9.
23. Paragraph 8 of the text explains the nature of the "Charter" of Christian political morality: "No matter what the political regime to which they have been subject, however, the principal home of Christians in this world is in the celebration (at times open, at times in secret) of the holy Eucharist, where they are enjoined to "set aside all earthly care" (Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom) and to enter at once both into the unity of the body of Christ in history and into the joy of God's Kingdom beyond history. The Eucharist, in being celebrated and shared by the faithful, ever and again constitutes the true Christian polity and shines out as an icon of God's Kingdom as it will be realized in a re-deemed, transfigured, and glorified creation. As such, the Eucharist is a prophetic

serves the values of the Kingdom (love, justice, freedom, the dignity of the human person) in her prophetic and discerning collaboration with the State. If in the process these ideals disappear, then the passage *Matthew* 22, 21 can be replaced by another one: *Acts* 5, 29 ("*We must obey God rather than human beings*"):

> At times, this may entail participation not by way of perfect obedience, but by way of the higher citizenship of civil disobedience, even rebellion. The Kingdom of God alone is the Christian's first and last loyalty, and all other allegiances are at most provisional, transient, partial, and incidental[24].

In other words, the Christian position is extremely radical as far as the attitude of Christians towards the state is concerned, since Christians are free to move between the "yes" and the "no" of cooperating with it. The Christian constitution par excellence is that of the Kingdom of God; there they foretaste "that final redemption of all social order in God's Kingdom and have been entrusted with a sign to exhibit before the nations, by which to call them to a life of peace and charity under the shelter of God's promises"[25].

In logical continuity with the preceding, the text states that where today's political order, freedom, human rights, and democracy are respected, Christians living in these societies "should not take such values for granted, but should instead actively support them, and work for the preservation and extension of democratic institutions and customs within the legal, cultural, and economic frameworks of their respective societies"[26]. This is because many people are often tempted to be nostalgic for what is frequently described as the "sole ideal Orthodox polity"[27]. "The special advantages of the Church under Christian rule may have allowed for the gestation and formation of a distinct Orthodox ethos within the political spaces inhabited by Orthodox Christians, but

sign as well, at once a critique of all political regimes insofar as they fall short of divine love and an invitation to all peoples to seek first the Kingdom of God and its justice".
24. § 10.
25. § 8.
26. § 10.
27. *Op. cit.*

they also had the unfortunate additional effect of binding the Church to certain crippling limitations"[28]. Thus, the idea that there was –or that it can be restored– a "golden" age of Christianity is altogether wrong, since in all ages there must be a prophetic tension between the Kingdom and the world.

Therefore, the idea of a "Christian nationalism'' is wrong; according to the Christian concept, "there is only one human race, to which all persons belong, and all are called as one to become a single people in God the creator. There is no humanity apart from the one universal humanity that the Son of God assumed in becoming human, and it embraces all persons without distinction or discrimination"[29]. This means that the Church is a stranger both to ethno-racialism, "the subordination of the Orthodox faith to ethnic identities and national interests", and to the most insidious ideologies of identity, including "belligerent forms of nationalism and blasphemous philosophies of race" and the rise of new forms of political and nationalist extremism has even resulted in the infiltration of various Orthodox communities by individuals committed to race-theory"[30]. The Orthodox Church "condemns their views without qualification and calls them to a complete repentance and penitential reconciliation with the body of Christ"[31]. If the nation's historical preservation is not the purpose of the Church's social action, then, according to the text, Orthodox Christians "should support the language of human rights, not because it is a language fully adequate to all that God intends for his creatures, but because it preserves a sense of the inviolable uniqueness of every person, and of the priority of human goods over national interests, while providing a legal and ethical grammar upon which all parties can, as a rule, arrive at certain basic agreements"[32]. Perhaps a differentiation from the text of the Council in Crete cannot be overlooked here, since

28. *Op.cit.*
29. § 11.
30. The reference here is to the recent outbreak of racial incidents in the United States; still, it can also cover manifestations of political and nationalist extremism that exist in many corners of the globe, from the war in Ukraine to the authoritarian regimes of Europe, the Middle East, Asia, and North Africa.
31. *Op.cit.*
32. § 12 (the emphasis is ours).

the approach to human rights seems more positive than in the Holy and Great Council – this reference, though, is always connected, as in Crete, with the human person's supreme value.

> Orthodox Christians must recognize that a language of common social accord, one that insists upon the inviolability of human dignity and freedom, is needed for the preservation and promotion of a just society; and the language of human rights has the power to accomplish this with admirable clarity[33].

The rhetoric concerning human rights is therefore the one that predominantly serves the human person's value. These rights now dominate public debate and concern –among other things– social and cultural pluralism. The Church "must in fact support those government policies and laws that best promote such pluralism. More than that, it must thank God for the riches of all the world's many cultures, and for the gracious gift of their peaceful coexistence in modern societies"[34].

The text refers to the need in a democratic society for religion to maintain its public position; otherwise, society risks becoming "oppressive"[35]. On the other hand, the authors of the text point out that "the dissolution of the ancient compact between state and church –or throne and altar– has also been a great blessing for Christian culture. It has freed the Church from what was all too frequently a slavish and unholy submission to earthly power and a complicity in its evils"[36].

---

33. *Op.cit.*
34. *Op.cit.*
35. § 13.
36. *Op.cit.* On this point, the text seems to propound the idea that democratic states are the opposite of the oppressive "despotism" and that only in states inspired by democratic principles can the Church have a public role. This statement, although at first sight self-evident, is important to the extent that within Orthodoxy (as well as in other Christian traditions) there is a belief that a non-pluralistic, confessional-like democracy is the most appropriate constitution for Christianity. In this regard, N. Matsoukas argued how "the newer democratic theories of the people are nothing more than a quest for charismatic power. Limiting the power of the rulers and ruling classes means more and guaranteed participation of the social body [to the exercise of power]". N. Matsoukas, *Τὸ πρόβλημα τοῦ κακοῦ*, P. Pournaras Publications, Thessaloniki ^{3}1992, p. 244. It is self-evident that democracy is the political system that allows Christians to participate in social goods when they are in the majority or in the minority.

It is noteworthy, moreover, that the text considers that "God has providentially allowed for the reduction of the Church's political enfranchisement in most of the lands of ancient Christendom, so that it may more faithfully conduct and promote its mission to all nations and persons"[37]. A State that does not impose religious or confessional uniformity offers the Church the possibility of appealing more directly to each individual's conscience[38].

Furthermore, paragraph 14 of the text states that the State-Church "symphonia", as established after the Constantinian conversion of the Empire to Christianity (a model of relations that has been maintained until the modern nation-states belonging to the Orthodox tradition), can "continue to guide the Church in her attempts to work with governments toward the common good and to struggle against injustice. It cannot, however, be invoked as a justification for the imposition of religious orthodoxy on society at large, or for the promotion of the Church as a political power. Rather, it should serve to remind Christians that this commitment to the common good –as opposed to the mere formal protection of individual liberties, partisan interests, and the power of corporations– is the true essence of a democratic political order" (the emphasis is ours)[39]. This is because "without the language of the common good at the center of social life, democratic pluralism all too easily degenerates into pure individualism, free market absolutism, and a spiritually corrosive consumerism"[40].

37. *Op.cit*.

38. Florovsky, «Τὸ κοινωνικὸ πρόβλημα στὴν Ἀνατολικὴ Ὀρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία», op.cit., p. 169: "Of course, the Church could never have resisted the temptation calling some secular power to help her, either the state or public opinion, or to exert some other form of social pressure".

39. § 14 We can consider as "religious orthodoxy" the constitutional safeguarding of the Orthodox Church as the prevailing or dominant religion of a state, without this being translated into the Gospel's substantial integration in the life of society, in the relations between believers. A "religious orthodoxy" does indeed have a secure public role; still, in its effort to safeguard it, insists on projecting its "political" position in society, with all that this may mean for its preaching and mission, for its prophetic attitude towards secular institutions, for its outward looking towards the other rather than closing in on itself.

40. Perhaps the concept of the "common good" –derived from the social sciences– (incorporated into the rhetoric of the Catholic Church's social teaching) could be better defined in the text. Clearly, the Church and Christians are concerned with the good of

In conclusion, the text does not seem to see forms of State-Church unity as a panacea, without rejecting them entirely. On the contrary, it accepts the principles of democracy, pluralism, and human rights which, on the one hand, guarantee the Church's public presence and, on the other hand, serve the evangelical values without denominational constrictions. Finally, it rejects Christian nationalism in all of its ideological and institutional forms and accepts the Kingdom of God's primacy over all earthly and secular kingdoms.

Conclusion

What can the texts we have examined mean for the place of Christians in the modern world? We believe that some general conclusions can be drawn, without, of course, being definitive[41]. First of all, what we have outlined can be applied to the situation of Orthodox Christians living in states or societies that either do not (or no longer) have an "Orthodox"

all humanity, far from religious egotism. However, the concept of the "common good" must be perceived as an extension of Christian anthropology – the discourse on man, which is primarily a discourse on God. In other words, we would say that the Church serves man concretely and not a rather abstract idea of the common good. The Church is defined not as the "communion of citizens" (where the common good is realized par excellence), but according to the Holy Eucharist and always in relation to the Kingdom of God. In serving man, the Church serves, under the prism of love, humanity, and therefore the common good, which transcends all fundamentalism, racism, nationalism, and intolerance. And here it is worth underlining the inspiring provision of the Holy and Great Synod's missionary text of which, immediately after the introduction, speaks in its first paragraph about the "value of the human person".

41. We must acknowledge that the text, although inspired, expresses the concerns and worries of the diaspora's theologians and hierarchs. In other words, we don't know how theologians of Churches in countries of Orthodox tradition, advocating different models of Church-State relations would have written it. This somewhat "Western" origin of the text comes into contrast with the "Eastern" origins of Orthodox political theology, i.e. the perpetuation of Constantine the Great's model (as well as the demand for the "Westernization" of Orthodox theology). This can be seen, among other things, in the Russian Church's social text published in 2000; in contrast to what we find in Crete's missionary, the idea of the State and the Nation is fundamental for the Orthodox social doctrine's development. And if the Council of Crete confirmed the condemnation of ethno-racialism, experience can confirm –rather than deny– the existence of ethno-racial narratives in local Orthodox Churches.

sign or cannot claim their "Orthodox" identity, as is the case with the Orthodox in the Balkans and Eastern Europe. The Orthodox brethren of the diaspora (or even of the countries where they are engaged in foreign missionary work) did not participate in struggles aimed at recalling Orthodoxy's historical contribution in the formation of the ethno-religious identities of the societies where they settle (as is the dominant narrative of the Orthodox Churches of the Balkans and, of course, Russia)[42]. Christians of these communities' active political participation promotes the Christian ideals of freedom, justice, fellowship, inter-Christian and inter-religious cooperation for the dignity of man, rapprochement with every human being, and peaceful coexistence of peoples and religions.

Unquestionably, a relationship between Christians [and Churches] and States relationship thus defined does not develop confessionally and does not commit Christians to solely seek the confirmation of the institutional role that their Church had in the past (and which it now finds difficult to recover, even in the Orthodox States)[43]. A non-denominationally

42. As a matter of course, Church's institutional existence requires some form of legal relationship with the state. In the Orthodox case, the historical presence of the Church created an Orthodox "world", an Orthodox "universe", as Alexander Schmemann noted in his *Diary* in 1974. However, the change of external (political, social, etc.) circumstances did not always lead to the change of the Orthodox worldview. "The Orthodox conscience has not yet noticed the fall of Byzantium, the reforms of Peter the Great, or the [Russian] Revolution [...]. This denial of the importance of the historical process does not serve the cause of Orthodoxy. Orthodoxy, instead of understanding the change, so as to deal with it, found itself crushed by it [...]. To proclaim that this Orthodox world is an absolute, eschatological reality is an act of betrayal". Al. Schmemman, *Ἡμερολόγιο*, Greek transl. Io. Roilidis, Akritas Publications, Athens 2002, pp. 57-59.

43. Church leaders' calls to refer to Europe's Christian foundations in the new European Constitution are still fresh; it was an effort that proved futile since the adopted Constitutional Treaty speaks about the United Europe's humanist and not Christian character. Of course, the French political scientist Olivier Roy has pointed out that the link between religion (Christianity) and national identity allows religion to survive temporarily against the impetus of secularization, but does not provide it with a long-term continuity, since, on the one hand, this link strengthens nationalism and, on the other, secularizes religion. For Roy, the national idea cannot function as a guardian of faith. A re-socialization of evangelical values is therefore needed, from a prophetic and not a legislative point of view; Christianity in Europe does not need legislators (who will determine whether Christian symbols should be displayed in public places), but prophets. See O. Roy, *Ἡ Εὐρώπη εἶναι χριστιανική*;, Greek transl. Valia Kaïmaki, Polis

oriented relationship between Christians and the State opens up the prospects for wider synergies, which from the Orthodox point of view would help to bear more convincing witness to the faith and tradition of the Church. This is because the Church does not speak as a dominant power (as political power tends to be), but as a community of a religious character, of loving relationships, acting freely in the space of society without claims to power.

When Christians do not demand the state to recognize their denominational character, they have the moral right to ask non-Christian or neutral states to do the same with the Orthodox living in them as minorities. Many people perceive pluralism as a threat to the Orthodox states; still, it is a blessing for those Orthodox people who live in the West as well as for Christians in other societies.

In the final analysis, this type of Christian-State relationship is beneficial for the Orthodox Christians; it turns their efforts from the affirmation of their particular national and confessional identity to their "conversion" to the common Christian identity, no longer (or not only) activating them for the good of the "nation", but for the protection of every human being, who for Christians is an image of Christ himself.

"Orthodoxy cannot remain alive, either as a defender of the State or as a cultural appendage of 'Russian identity': it will remain alive only in and through the Liturgy"[44]. These were the insightful words having written by a leading contemporary theologian of the Orthodox diaspora forty years ago. We think that the text "For the Life of the World" boldly touches on these issues; it does not seek to restore some "sacred" national or imperial past or some "Christian" political structures but encourages the Orthodox Christians' active participation in the social realities of the world in which they live, to open up spaces where the Gospel's social and humanist impulse –in the light of Orthodoxy's Eucharistic ethos– can find fruitful acceptance by Orthodox Christians, heterodox Christians and all good-willing people.

Publications, Athens 2020.

44. J. Meyendorf, «Ἐπίλογος», in: Schmemann, *Ἡμερολόγιο*, *op.cit.*, p. 541.