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CREATION, HISTORY AND THE CHURCH

Towards an Orthodox Eco-Theology and Social Ethics

*Nikolaos Asproulis*¹¹⁰

11.1 Introduction: A Look to the Present Reality

In recent years, global community experiences unprecedented situations of political, social and financial instability due to the accumulation of acute problems which influence people's lives not only on the individual level but also towards the balance of the interpersonal relations and their reference to natural environment. Following often an extremely rationalist and individualist worldview and being addicted to an unlimited supremacy over nature for many centuries, the human being was trapped in his narcissism and his ardent desire for power. Seeking for the constant increase of the economical profit in combination with the irrational and avaricious consumption of the natural recourses and sources of energy, the especially (post)modern human attempted to give meaning to his existence in terms of radical

¹¹⁰ Dr. Nikolaos Asproulis is Nelsee Coordinator at the Volos Academy for Theological Studies.

immanence, with concerted actions towards a utilitarian model which prioritizes the individual ephemeral enjoyment and wealth accumulation, while neglecting the future of creation or the goods' equalizing and social justice.

In this perspective, the current dominant anthropological model of *homo economicus*,¹¹¹ as it is evidenced by our gloomy economic situation which is an after-effect of the extreme neo-liberal economic theory¹¹² put forth by the audacious capitalism,¹¹³ along with the refugee and migrant crisis¹¹⁴ which afflicts during the last years the whole European continent and especially the Mediterranean basin, as a result of the war and religious fundamentalism in Middle East, thought that he could *ex officio* play the role of the King and the Lord of the World and of History in the place of the very Almighty God the Father.

¹¹¹ For a general overview of the concept of *homo economicus* cf. among others, Persky, Joseph, "The Ethology of Homo Economicus", in: *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 9 (2) 1995, 221-231.

¹¹² For the dominant neoliberal economic theory see: Bresser-Pereira, Luiz C., "Assault on the State and on the Market: Neoliberalism and Economic theory", in: *Estudos Avancados*, 23, (66) 2009, 7-22; Clarke, S., *The Neoliberal theory of Society*, <http://homepages.warwick.ac.uk/~syrbe/pubs/Neoliberalism.pdf>; Howard, M.C./ King, J.E., *The Rise of Neoliberalism in Advanced Capitalist Economies: A Materialist Analysis*, Hampshire: Palgrave, MacMillan, 2008; Bresser-Pereira, Luiz C., "The global financial crisis, neoclassical economics, and the neoliberal years of capitalism", in: *Revue de la régulation* [En ligne], 7, 1er semestre, Spring 2010, <http://regulation.revues.org/7729>; Peters, Michael, "Neoliberalism", in: *Encyclopaedia of Educational Philosophy and Theory*, <http://eepat.net/doku.php?id=neoliberalism>; Larrea Gayarre, José, "The Challenges of Liberation Theology to Neoliberal Economic Policies", in: *Social Justice: a Journal of Crime, Conflict and World Order* 21.4, Winter 1994; Patomaki, Heikki, "Neoliberalism and the Global Financial Crisis", in: *New Political Science*, 31, (4), 2009, 431-442.

¹¹³ Kotz, David, *The Rise and Fall of Neoliberal Capitalism*, Cambridge, MA, London: Harvard University Press, 2015.

¹¹⁴ For detailed information on the current refugee and migrant crisis, see the official website of the European Commission: http://ec.europa.eu/echo/refugee-crisis_en, and the website of Human Rights Watch: <https://www.hrw.org/tag/europes-migration-crisis>.

However, the reality humanity experienced the past few years made prominent in the most tragic way the deficiency and the dead ends of the predominant anthropological model, which in the end threatens creation itself with annihilation.

11.2 The Role of Religion and Christianity

It is true indeed, that religions in general, and Christian churches in particular, including Orthodoxy, consciously or not, served various expressions of spirit of this world, to such a degree that they were identified with unfree, suppressing and totally destructive structures, attitudes and actions. At the same time, many were the voices of eminent representatives of churches at an individual and collective level, who made a decisive contribution with their example and work (academic, pastoral and missionary) to the utterance of another morality, of another alternative way of life concerning the very composition of human being and the adjustment of one's own relations with global humanity and natural environment.¹¹⁵

It is a common place, that both the continuing environment destruction, a fact evidenced once more in the last United Nations

¹¹⁵ See for example: Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I in Chrysavgis, John (ed.): *On Earth as in Heaven: Ecological Vision and Initiatives of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2011; idem in Chrysavgis, John/ Foltz, Bruce (eds.), *Towards an Ecology of Transfiguration: Orthodox Christian Perspectives on Environment Nature and Creation (Orthodox Christianity and Contemporary Thought)*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2013; Tutu, Desmond, *No Future without Forgiveness*, New York: Doubleday, 1999. See also Battle, Michael, *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu*, Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2009; Williams, Rowan, *Where God Happens: Discovering Christ in One Another*, Boston, Massachusetts: New Seeds, 2007 as well as the Pope Francis' Encyclical *Laudatio Si'*: *On care for our common home*, a document of great importance, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html (accessed 21 July 2016).

Climate Summit (Paris, December 2015)¹¹⁶ and the progressive deepening of social and economic inequalities between North and South, which is responsible for the impoverishment of part of the population, are only mere manifestations related to the critical question of the identity of human being. Consequently, as it is noted in many ways among others, but in particular by His Eminence Metropolitan Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia,¹¹⁷ anthropology lies at the core of theological, philosophical and wider concern. It is obvious that the way each tradition defines human's identity, leads to an equivalent anthropological model, a fact which highlights directly or indirectly the important moral responsibilities related to the ecological problem or the domination of extreme capitalistic management models of economical and natural wealth.

11.3 The Role of the Orthodox Church and its Theology in the Present Situation

Throughout the 20th century and even more in the early 21st, Eastern Orthodox Christianity has been confronted with many unprecedented challenges which call for a radical re-evaluation of its identity, and nature of its witness to the world. The various transformations and rapid changes at the political, social and spiritual levels during those years have highlighted the need for a sincere meeting of the Orthodox Church and theology with the quests, the challenges and problems of the postmodern pluralist society, which often seems to move without a

¹¹⁶ See the Paris summit agreement here: http://unfccc.int/files/meetings/paris_nov_2015/application/pdf/paris_agreement_english_.pdf (accessed 20 July 2016) where it is stressed the need to respond "to the urgent threat of climate change on the basis of the best available scientific knowledge".

¹¹⁷ Ware, Kallistos, *Orthodox Theology in the 21st century*, foreword by Pantelis Kalaitzidis, Doxa & Praxis Series, Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012.

compass. The necessity of a meeting and an open and constructive dialogue between Orthodoxy and the surrounding world is not a demand primarily imposed upon the church by the current context; it is mainly the result of its deep theological consciousness and faith.

On one hand, the fundamental belief in a Triune God being in himself and self-revealed in creation and History as a constant *dialogue* in communion of love and freedom, and on the other hand the reality of the divine-human dialogue as it is expressed primarily in the very event of the Incarnation of the Son and Word of God in history, confirm and express the deep roots of the dialogical and relational nature of ecclesiastical Orthodoxy.

Through the experiences of daily practice, the inherent nature of this openness, and the dialogical character with the Other, the church will soon realize that her very being passes through the fruitful and lasting meeting with the contemporary, real world, with its various impasses and possibilities. This world is quite different from the glorious historical or imaginary past that offers to the church only an illusion of security and purity from the alleged un-cleanliness of the contemporary secularized society.

Although for decades this fruitful encounter with the demands of (post)modernity was postponed or caused feelings of fear and hesitation among the Orthodox,¹¹⁸ this meeting is now shown to be not only

¹¹⁸ For an exploration of the difficulties of this still pending discussion between Orthodoxy and modernity see among others: Kalaitzidis, Pantelis, *Orthodoxy and Modernity. Prolegomena*, Athens: Indiktos Publications, 2007, (in Greek); Valliere, Paul, "Russian Orthodoxy and the challenge of modernity: the case of Archimandrite Makary", in: *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 22.1, 1978, 3-15; Stoeckl, Kristina, "Modernity and its Critique in 20th century Russian Orthodox Thought", in: *Studies in East European Thought*, 58, (4), 2006, 243-269; Willert, Trine/ Molokotos-Linerman, Lina: *Innovation in the Orthodox Christian Tradition?: The Question of Change in Greek Orthodox Thought and Practice*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2012; Makrides, Vasilios, "Orthodox Christianity, Modernity and Post-Modernity: Overview, Analysis and Assesement", in:

necessary but also inevitable as long as the church herself and her theology remain receptive before the creative and refreshing breeze of the Spirit. The *Paraclete* calls her in a prophetic way to constantly preach the gospel, to work for the continuing and ever-new incarnation of God's word, by seeking to address soteriologically the problems and the existential needs of humanity, as the predominant environmental problem or economic discrimination make evident.

Orthodoxy, despite the enormous progress in growing and consolidating the principles of democracy, human rights, freedom of speech, dignity and self-worth of the human subject,¹¹⁹ remains constantly hesitant or takes a defensive attitude towards the challenges facing the context of the 'open society'¹²⁰ and a pluralistic world where the encounter and coexistence of various values, traditions and ideologies is neither easy nor always possible without problems. Today, various tensions and difficulties are observed in contemporary European societies, such as the revival of totalitarian ideologies that seek due to the economic crisis to exploit the passions and weaknesses of people, diverse cutting trends and the restriction of civil liberties and democratic values due to the resurgence of religious fundamentalism, which in the name of God and religion is ready to bloody all of humanity, the systematic demoralization and removal of the anthropological constants of dignity, freedom, equality, the current neo-liberal economic model

Religion, State and Society, 40 (3-4), 2012, 248-285, Papanikolaou, Aristotle, "Orthodoxy, Post-Modernism, and Ecumenism: The Difference that Divine-Human Communion Makes", in: *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 42 (4), 2007, 527-546. See also my "Is a dialogue between Orthodox theology and (post) modernity possible? The case of the Russian and Neo-patristic 'Schools'", in: *Communio Viatorum* LIV, (2), 2012, 203-222.

¹¹⁹ See below, for the official synodical document on the 'Mission of the Church in the modern world', which was approved by the Panorthodox Synod held in Crete, Greece in June, 2016.

¹²⁰ For an overview of Karl Popper's political philosophy and his defense of the "open society" see <http://www.iep.utm.edu/popp-pol/> (accessed 21 July 2016).

that seriously afflicts the once balanced relationship between human beings and creation itself, etc. Against these challenges, Orthodoxy is able to offer hope and an alternative way of life, by helping people to look to the future with greater faith and optimism.

Although the Orthodox Church has not always risen to the occasion, it has kept more or less, at least in theory, alive the fundamental truths of its tradition (its own ‘first things’) in many aspects of its life, a fact which is reflected both in the constant liturgical experience and life, and in various actions occasionally taken in order to address in the most expedient way the consequences of the environmental, economical and finally anthropological, spiritual and ethical crisis (e.g. the initiatives of the Ecumenical Patriarchate concerning the environment).¹²¹ Despite, however, the conscientious efforts made by enlightened Hierarchs or prominent theologians,¹²² worldwide, Orthodoxy shows great difficulty in following the developments either on a local or a global level, unable to offer in a persuasive or realistic way responsive solutions to the urgent problems and challenges of our time. Following the traditional (successful or not it does not matter) crisis management models such as its valuable and particularly useful charitable and pastoral work, the Orthodox Church is in most of the cases incapable to show the appropriate flexibility in adopting new methods and means which are available so as to reinforce its overall witness. At the same time, while the problems day to day are distended, many voices come to surface calling in an almost passive attitude against the daily challenges or even in an escape from history, for the sake of soul’s salvation or *theosis* which is considered as an individual achievement.

¹²¹ See above.

¹²² Among others, Metropolitan John D. Zizioulas of Pergamon, Metropolitan Kallistos Ware of Diokleia, Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos of Tirana, Durrës and All Albania et. al.

At the same time, in the area of (Orthodox) theology there are some individual but not at all organised efforts, especially in the past few years (2012),¹²³ for an utterance of a ‘political’ word, taking into account the contemporaneous interplay between secularization and globalization, attempting to converse and be related to the surrounding world by virtue of a topical existential *re*-interpretation of the tradition’s richness. Most of the times, however, this theology, even though it should be the critical voice of the church, continues navel-gazing, restricted to a sterile and unfruitful study of the tradition, neglecting the need that the Word of the Gospel should be constantly re-incarnated according to the patristic ethos in any context, so as to properly address the questions of (post)modern human being. While many challenges and questions are naturally and totally unpredictable by the patristic tradition, Orthodox theology often shows a tendency to follow a ‘theology of repetition,’¹²⁴ that is unable to understand or even receive the surrounding rapidly changed reality, which cannot be addressed by simply quoting the Fathers. What is needed in this regards is a new model of doing theology, a way that will existentially interpret the ecclesial doctrines and tradition, avoiding a sort of ‘patristic fundamentalism,’ making then evident its relevance for the contemporary world.

It seems that Orthodoxy’s often overemphasized liturgical and eschatological character and nature becomes an unexpected obstacle towards its historic and social engagement in the existential and real

¹²³ See for instance: Papanikolaou, Aristotle, *The Mystical as Political. Democracy and non Radical Orthodoxy*, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 2012; Kalaitzidis, Pantelis, *Orthodoxy and Political theology*, Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012.

¹²⁴ A term often used by the eminent Russian theologian Georges Florovsky, [Cf. his “St Gregory Palamas and the Tradition of the Fathers”, in: *Sobornost*, 4, 1961, 165-176] in order to denote an uncritical and sterile use of the tradition (especially liturgical and patristic) without any effort towards interpretation.

problems of humanity itself, presenting a situation where it seems that ‘Orthodoxy itself came to a halt before (post)modernity.’¹²⁵ In this case, any foretaste in this life of the eschatological way of being in the Kingdom of God – where any sort of inequality, divisions or injustice and oppression will be overcome – becomes impossible, if not mere imagination.

11.4 From *Personhood* through *Eucharist* to *Priesthood of Creation*: Towards an Orthodox Eco-Theology and Social Ethics

The very complex and urgent issues that have emerged from the above-described situation, raise in a radical way many theological and *moral* questions. In this context, (Orthodox) Christian theology is necessitated to present its forsaken proposals in order to heal humankind’s wounds. Evidently, the positive role that could be played by theology is frequently ignored in the midst of many political and diplomatic attempts to overcome conflicts. Theology, however, has the means (persuasion, love, freedom, etc.) and the power (*diakonia* and martyrdom) to inspire a dynamic new theological paradigm toward world reconciliation by virtue of a both necessary and creative re-interpretation and contextualization of some fundamental aspects of its doctrinal truths¹²⁶.

¹²⁵ Cf. Kalaitzidis, Pantelis, *Orthodoxy and Modernity*, op. cit.

¹²⁶ For what follows one should consult the following works by Zizioulas, John D., *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985; *Communion & Otherness*, McPartlan, Paul (ed.), London: T&T Clark, 2006; *The One and the Many. Studies on God, Man, the Church, and the World Today*, Edwards, Gregory (ed.), California: Sebastian Press, 2010; *The Eucharistic Communion and the World*, Tallon, Luke B. (ed.), London: T&T Clark, 2011; “Person and Nature in the Theology of St. Maximus the Confessor”, in: Vasiljević, Maxim (ed.),

(a) The gospel of Jesus Christ, as it has been proclaimed by the apostles and further conceptualized and experienced by the church, constitutes the most adequate and at the same time critical model which determines the context of our relations to the other human beings, communities, cultures, as well as to the entire creation. Since Christ was crucified on behalf of humanity, in order to abolish slavery to evil (beginning from ‘the last enemy’, i.e. death and including every kind of evil that threatens the very being of humanity and cosmos), how can we then, claiming to follow in his steps as individual Christians or official churches, continue to commit any kind of atrocities to our ‘neighbour’ and to our ‘Oikos’? Christ gives us the capacity to offer unconditional forgiveness and love to any other, by receiving both the person of the ‘other’ as well as the whole creation and offering them to God the Father, who will eschatologically fulfil by the Spirit their longing towards the divine-human/creation communion. In this context, the Cross of Christ constitutes the ultimate paradigm for one’s social life providing the necessary model for a *kenotic* (self-emptying) way of life, as unconditional *love*, at various levels.

Knowing the Purpose of Creation Through the Resurrection: Proceedings of the Symposium on St. Maximus the Confessor, Alhambra, CA: Sebastian Press and The Faculty of Orthodox Theology of the University of Belgrade, 2013, 85-113; “Trinitarian Freedom: Is God free in Trinitarian life?”, in: Maspero, G./Wozniak, R. (eds.), *Rethinking Trinitarian Theology, Disputed Question and Contemporary issues in Trinitarian theology*, Edinburg: T&T Clark, 2012, 193-207; “Relational Ontology. Insights from the patristic thought”, in: Polkinghorne, John (ed.), *The Trinity and an Entangled World*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Cambridge U.K., 2010, 146-156; “Eschatologie et Société”, in: *Irénikon*, 73 (3-4), 2000, 278-297; “Déplacement de la perspective eschatologique”, in: Alberigo, G. et al. (eds.), *La Chrétienté en débat*, Paris: Les éditions du Cerf, 1984, 89-100; “Eschatology and History”, in: Wieser, Thomas (ed.), *Cultures in Dialogue: Documents from a Symposium in Honor of Philip A. Potter*, Geneva: WCC Publications, 1985, 30-39; “Eschatology and History”, in: Wieser, Thomas (ed.), *Whither Ecumenism?*, Geneva: WCC Publications, 1986, 62-71, 72-73, etc.

(b) Furthermore, it must be stressed that Jesus Christ by his whole life and redemptive work proleptically offers to the contemporary world a real foretaste of the 'trinitarian play' (in Jean Luc Marion's wording)¹²⁷ which will be accomplished in the kingdom of God. In other words, Christ, on the basis of the divine economy, has reintroduced the whole creation into its trinitarian and filial state. In this context the intra-trinitarian relations of mutual communion and otherness can be transferred and realized through the ecclesial body of Christ within the present historical and cosmic reality. *Personhood* is now for humanity a possible and historic way of being, which constitutes the ultimate gift of the absolute 'Other', God the Father in Christ by the Holy Spirit. This way of being, where communion and otherness, freedom and love are narrowly correlated, offers the possibility for a new model of interpersonal relations. In this dimension every kind of conflict could be surpassed and the 'other' would no longer be 'our Hell' (J. P. Sartre). This new *hypostatic* and *ecstatic* way of being, however, namely *personhood*, becomes a reality only insofar as it presupposes an *ascetics* of freedom, considered as freedom for the other, realized in this case as responsibility and moral obligation in view of the entire creation.

(c) But how and where can this new way of being become a reality? How is it possible to abolish all the brutal violence present in our times, which is characterized by so many conflicts? As the churchman Desmond Tutu, who has experienced many difficult situations, once stated 'there is no future without forgiveness'¹²⁸. According to this perspective, churches can play a decisive role concerning the overcoming of the various conflicts. The *eucharistic* and *eschatological*

¹²⁷ Marion, Jean Luc, *Prolegomena to Charity*, Lewis, Stephen (trans.), New York: Fordham University Press, 2002, 142.

¹²⁸ Cf. Desmond, Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*, op. cit.

nature of the church forms a dynamic context within which the preservation or even the transformation of the world can take place. Christian community itself as the body of Christ draws its identity from the Kingdom to come, which means that it does not have the right to be identified with any kind of worldly and always unjust political orders, ideologies or economical systems. The church lives in this world but it does not belong to this world. In the sense of ethical *praxis* or moral action, this means that human *personhood* is not what one is in its present state, but what one will be 'at the last day,' according to the eschatological ontology that defines one's own and creation's being not from the past but from the future. This eschatological reality, although it seems to give a second place to any human efforts towards social justice, food security or protection of the environment, does not, however, prevent the church from entering into a close but always critical cooperation (without, however, adopting any atheistic prerequisites or compromising its own truth) with diverse individual or collective groups or ideologies (e.g. liberalism, liberal democracy, etc.) that share a common and honest concern for the dignity, freedom and the rights of all human beings as well as for the integrity of creation, while at the same time struggle against various modes of evil present in the world.

(d) Moreover, the Eucharist as the communion-event *par excellence* constitutes the appropriate framework, a new mode of communal life, in which every kind of division or exclusion can be overcome (national, religious, or racial, social, and so on; cf. *Gal.* 3:28). In this understanding, the human acquires the capacity to forgive the other, to make peace with the world, because in the face of the Other one recognizes an icon of Christ or rather Christ himself. In the early church, Eucharist was considered as a synaxis of all the people of God and creation itself in order to thank God for the very gift of existence. By entering the world into Liturgy, the church refuses to accept the

corruption and sin of creation, sanctifying the offering to the very Creator: 'We offer to you these gifts from your own gifts in all and for all' (according to the *Epiclesis* found in the Anaphora-Eucharistic Prayer, of the divine liturgy in use in Orthodox Church). The Eucharistic reception of creation, despite its corruption and sin, confirms that creation itself is still the creation of God, away from any Manichean or Gnostic understanding of it. Its offering to God does not intend to negate its very being and status as creation, but mainly brings to the fore its hidden due to sin, truth. Here is where the important role of the human being emerges. As John D. Zizioulas aptly puts it:

"The priest is the one who freely and, as himself an organic part of it, takes the world in his hands to refer it to God, and who, in return, brings God's blessing to what he refers to God. Through this act, creation is brought into communion with God himself. This is the essence of priesthood, and it is only the human being who can do it, namely, unite the world in his hands in order to refer it to God, so that it can be united with God and thus saved and fulfilled. This is so because, as we said earlier, only the human being is united with creation while being able to transcend it through freedom. This role of the human being, as the priest of creation, is absolutely necessary for creation itself, because without this reference of creation to God the whole created universe will die. It will die because it is a finite universe, as most scientists accept today. This is theologically a very fundamental belief, since the world was not always there, but came into being at some point and, for this reason, will 'naturally' have an end and come into non-being one day. Therefore, the only way to protect the world from its finitude

which is inherent in its nature, is to bring it into relation with God."¹²⁹

Despite any, often justified, reservations due to the intense focus on humanity one might have, taking as our starting point the loving-communal-sacrificial *ethos*, as it was manifested in the self-revelation of the Triune God in Christ in history and the entire world, along with the *personal* mode of being that summarizes its whole soteriological proposal, the theology of the Orthodox Church is able to propose a different model of life and social coexistence where the respect of personal freedom and difference, as well as the respect of the creation's integrity, will constitute a fundamental *cultural* condition. The anthropological ideal of *personhood*, as it has emerged and developed through time in the experience and life of the church and is still witnessed throughout the ecclesiastical tradition, without being the only or dominant proposal in the *public* area, constitutes the most valuable gift that Orthodoxy can offer in view of addressing the various closely interlinked anthropological as well as ecological challenges. Without forgetting its *eschatological* identity, the active presence of the church in the public area, apart from obsessions deriving from any favourable or privileged treatment due to its glorious historical role, as well as absolutely respecting the conditions and rules of this area, will be able to offer various guarantees for its seamless process in History, focusing not only on the human's pain relief, but also on the care for the interception of the various problems which threaten the very existence of creation.

¹²⁹ Zizioulas, John D., "Proprietors of Priests of Creation" in: *The Eucharistic Communion and the World*, Tallon, Luke (ed.), London: T&T Clark, 2011, 137.

11.5 Conclusion: Further Challenges to Orthodox Theology

In this perspective, a series of critical questions come to surface referring to the position and role of the Orthodox Church and theology in the contemporary world, their potent to discuss fruitfully not only with the progressive trends of society, but with other religious traditions and cultures as well, in the view of dealing with critical issues related to the environmental, economical, moral and spiritual crisis.

Is the living ecclesiastical consciousness allowed in the context of the present globalised society to keep retreating into its shells, without a reference or at least an honest dialogue towards other Christian traditions, which due to their historical consistency can offer their valuable experience from their successful or not meeting with the various aspects of modernity and particularly post modernity, secularization and post secularization? Is Orthodoxy able to emphatically utter a speech of love and solidarity towards every human, regardless religious, social and cultural origin, following in this respect the paradigm described in the parable of the 'Good Samaritan' (Luke 10: 25-37)? Is the ethos and the way of life Orthodoxy proposes compatible with the liberal values and features of our contemporary world, and which alternative and social solution of management concerning the natural and economical wealth could Orthodoxy propose?¹³⁰ To what extend is the anthropological model of the human being, as a 'priest of creation,' realistic and which are the practical consequences on the

¹³⁰ Towards this direction, see for instance: Bulgakov, Sergei, *Philosophy of Economy. The World as Household*, Catherine Evtukhov (trans.), Yale University Press, 2000. See also Payne, Daniel/ Marsh, Christopher: "Sergei Bulgakov's 'Sophic' Economy: An Eastern Orthodox Perspective on Christian Economics", in: *Faith & Economics* 53, 2009, 35-51; Stanchev, Krassen, "Sergey Bulgakov and the Spirit of Capitalism", in: *Journal of Markets & Morality*, 11, (1), 2008, 149-156.

dealing with the rapid deterioration concerning the terms of ecological crisis, social injustice and inequality? Is orthodox theology able to systematically utter a contemporary ‘political theology,’ which, although founded in a hermeneutic updating of its fundamental faith principles, will pursue to highlight the ethical parameters of ecclesiastical experience, incarnating the truth of the Gospel in any circumstance and always aiming at the foretaste of the divine-human communion in herein History, however, away from fallacious expectations of messianic and revealing type? Can Orthodoxy, respecting its history and tradition, recognizing, however, its possible historical failures or deficiencies, anatomize its tradition from the beginning in a creative way in order to meet the exigencies of time?

Regarding this urgent mission and role of the Orthodox Church in the contemporary world, the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church (June 2016, Crete, Greece), convening after centuries of synodical *aphasia*, clearly stated,¹³¹ that:

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

¹³¹ See the official synodical document “The mission of the Orthodox Church in the today’s world”, https://www.holycouncil.org/official-documents/-/asset_publisher/VA0WE2pZ4Y0I/content/mission-orthodox-church-todays-world?_101_INSTANCE_VA0WE2pZ4Y0I_languageId=en_US (accessed July, 21, 2016).

groans and labors with birth pangs together until now (Rom. 8:20-22).

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

Obviously the continuous discussion of issues related to creation and human survival, constitutes not only a moral duty but a central *existential* concern of the living ecclesiastical experience, which is expressed and culminated in the eschatological transformation of creation into New Creation in the Kingdom of God.

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