

• Historical Information on the Document

There is perhaps no other document of the 2016 Council of Crete in which the influence of the post-war era, but also of certain political systems, is so strongly felt.

The basis of this document is rooted in the list of topics produced by the **First Pan-Orthodox Conference in Rhodes in 1961**. In the list adopted by the First Pan-Orthodox Conference mentioned above, in point 8 we find a set of themes under the general title of **Social Problems**. The enlarged list of themes included in the Social Problems was as follows:

- A. The Orthodox Church and the Youth
- B. Marriage and Family
 - a. Problems related to marriage
 - b. Child birth
 - c. Bringing up children
 - d. Birth control and overpopulation
 - e. Divorces
 - f. Artificial insemination
- C. The social Establishments, Homes and the Social Assistance in the Orthodox Church
- D. Orthodoxy and ethno-racial Discrimination
- E. Orthodoxy and the Problems of the Regions in fast social Transformation

These were the themes of the current document, to which several changes were made during the synodal preparation. The initial title was chosen in 1976 during the First Pan-Orthodox Pre-Conciliar Conference, which made a new list of themes. The tenth point was entitled: *The contribution of the Local **Orthodox Churches** to the realisation of the Christian ideals of peace, freedom, fraternity and love among peoples and the abolition of racial discrimination.*

This title was perfectible, because it presented several problems. One of them is the use of the plural with regard to the Orthodox Church, making so reference not to the contribution of the Orthodox Church, but to the contribution of the local Orthodox Churches. This was a great disadvantage, in our opinion, because it weakened the ecclesiological path of unity with regard to mission - characteristic of the One Church. That preparatory time was a time of rediscovery of the One Church: the plural used with regard to mission emphasizes too much the idea of national churches. Another imperfection of this title is that especially the use of the word **ideals**, , which was in a way a reminiscent of Soviet speeches.

The Third Pan-Orthodox Pre-Conciliar Conference of 1986 produced the first version of this document and also changed the title. The new title was: *The*

contribution of the Orthodox Church to the realization of peace, justice, freedom, fraternity and love among peoples and the elimination of racial and other forms of discrimination. The version of the document approved in 1986 was divided into a rather weak introduction and eight subdivisions. In the introduction we could find again the expression *ideals of peace, freedom, fraternity and peace among peoples*, although the expression including the word *ideals* had been removed from the title. The introduction in the form of that time did not contain theological questions, the approach being more social, from a fairly general human point of view. Subsequent subdivisions included Christian values to be followed by Christian society and the mission of the Orthodox Church. Most of them repeat the same themes, although certain nuances or expressions will be adjusted in later versions, up to the final version approved in 2016 during the Holy and Great Council. In the 1986 draft, the document was subdivided as follows:

- A. The value of the human person. A foundation for peace;
- B. The value of human freedom;
- C. The mission of Orthodoxy in the contemporary world; D. On peace and justice;
- E. Peace as a method of eliminating war;
- F. Racial and other types of discrimination;
- G. Fraternity and solidarity among peoples;
- H. The prophetic mission of Orthodoxy: a witness of love in the service of our neighbour.

Starting from theological aspects such as the human person - image of God, the document, in that version, always underlined (as can be seen also from the title of the subdivisions) to the need for peace.

At the recommendation of the 2014 Synaxis of the Primate of the Orthodox Churches, the Special Inter-Orthodox Commission for the Preparation of the Holy and Great Council revised the text of this document at two of its meetings in 2015. It was observed that a truly theological and suitable introduction to the document was missing. According to the information offered by the historian of the Pan-Orthodox Council - Viorel Ioniță, Ioannis Zizioulas was the one who personally wrote the introduction, with minor changes made by other delegates.

The Romanian Church proposed that the notion of human freedom should be theologically linked to that of responsibility. A great difficulty was encountered around the question of discrimination, because, by insisting too much on the idea of suppressing it, some feared that it might be understood that the Orthodox Church would accept the moral principles of certain minorities that are in total contradiction with the morals of the Church.

Another very important fact to mention is the change of the word *Orthodoxy*, which was used several times in the 1986 version, with the alternative use of the expressions *The Orthodox Church* or *The Church of Christ*. We consider this to be very positive, because the formulation *The Orthodox Church* expresses much more clearly the ecclesiological weight of what the Church is. *Orthodoxy* gives the impression of an ideological movement, or of a confederation of Churches, whereas the new formulation emphasises the unity of the Church dispersed throughout the world (Church in the singular). The *Church of Christ*, in addition to the aspects of ecclesiology and unity, also highlights the Christological aspect of the Church. This fact makes the personal aspect of the Church even more evident. The Church is one and belongs to Someone. The Church is not personal, but exists in a very concrete and personal environment because it is the Church of Christ.

In 2015, one year before the Council, it was decided to shorten the title. The proposal of the Russian Church was accepted and the new title became the current one: *The Mission of the Orthodox Church in the Contemporary World*. The old title became a subtitle. The delegation of the Russian Church also proposed the adding of a list of dangers that threaten the spiritual life of the Orthodox faithful today. This addition, however, was rejected as being too anti-Western.

This fact points to a very important aspect of the preparation of the Holy and Great Council, that of trying to avoid, especially in the approach to the contemporary world, a gnostic vision that could have endangered, in the long run, the theology of the Council. Unfortunately, this document was not signed in 2015 by the Church of Russia and the Church of Georgia.

At the Synaxis of the Primates of the Orthodox Churches in January 2016, the last event before the Synod itself in June 2016, discussions on this document were once again held. The agreement of the Church of Moscow and the Church of Georgia was also achieved in the end, after a Select Committee had revised the document, according to the recommendations of the Russian Church. The current version contains the form in which the document would be adopted by the Council itself six months later.

The Great Council discussed the document *The Mission of the Orthodox Church in the Contemporary World* on its first day of work, this being the first document discussed. Unfortunately, we do not have access to the debate, but we do know that the document received two amendments out of the three proposed by the Church of Greece.

- **Analysis of the content**

The introduction, composed by Ioannis Zizioulas, is rich in theology, the influence of the ideas of Metropolitan Zizioulas being easily detectable throughout the text. The first essential theological aspect that comes out right at

the beginning is the **aspect of the unity of humanity in the Person of Christ**, in Whom, in spite of the differences and identities, all humanity becomes one body (one Person). This happens through the Eucharist. In the Eucharist, all human differences are overcome. Around the Person of Christ all persons are integrated, through the Eucharist, into the communion of the body of Christ. This aspect, in which we are all united in the deepest *koinonia*, although each one remains what he or she is, is a pre-experience of the Eschaton.

The first chapter deals with the Value of the Human Person. It derives from Creation, according to the Image of God. In addition to this likeness to God, the first paragraph sets out another reason for the value of the human person: the fact that he or she was accepted by Jesus in salvation. Jesus and Adam are the two concrete personalities in history, who have influenced man. Human dignity and worth come, on the one hand, from the fact that, having a common ancestor, there is a very strong bond between all human beings, all being part of the same human nature, found undivided in Adam; and on the other hand, because all are recapitulated in Jesus - the new Adam, who saves the old Adam (in the sense of all human nature).

Further on, the document recommends that the Church should work together in all directions in an inter-Christian sense "for the protection of human dignity and likewise for the sake of peace, so that the peaceful efforts of all Christians, without exception, acquire greater weight and strength" 441. 441 This mention leads to an underlying idea, which can be found in the document from the very beginning. The idea of this dignity of the human person, for which Christ came to recapitulate mankind, leads us towards a reconsideration of humanity and its value. On the basis of this value of the great treasure of humanity, possessed by the person, we must work together, despite many schisms or mutual accusations, in matters of faith. This means that beyond a religious unity, there is still a very strong unity in humanity, which does not only come from the unity in Adam. "On this basis, collective initiatives can be developed to promote peace among all Christians and, without falling into syncretism, with non-Christians and all people of good will."

The second chapter deals with **freedom and responsibility**. Freedom is called the greatest gift of God, but we note that, prior to the synod sessions, this part of the document included Trinitarian references to the freedom of man as a person, or of local or universal society. The Trinitarian mention was present from the very beginning of the document, in the 1986 version of the text approved by the Third Pre-Synodal Conference. This is how the phrase regarding the freedom of the human person and the Trinity was narrowed down and modified.

Testo proposto dalla Terza Conferenza Pre-Sinodale del 1986	Testo adottato dalla Sinassi dei Primate del 2016, dopo la revisione del 2015	Versione finale approvata dal Concilio di Creta, a giugno 2016
<p>B. The Value of the Human Freedom</p> <p>1. The perfection of human person, both as an isolated possessor of the image of the personal God, as well as a community of persons, that reflects – through the unity of human kind – the life in the Holy Trinity and the communion of the Divine Persons, is realized due to the divine grace of freedom which man, by acquiring his self-awareness, acquires at the same time the possibility to discern between good and evil (Gen. 2 16-17). Therefore, freedom is for the human person a divine gift, which makes it capable to progress permanently in ascending manner towards his spiritual perfection⁴⁴³.</p>	<p>B. Freedom and Responsibility.</p> <p>1. Freedom is one of God's greatest gifts to the human being as a specific bearer of the image of a personal God and member of a community of persons, which, through the unity of the human race, reflects by grace the life and communion of the Divine Persons of the Holy Trinity. <i>He who created man in the beginning made him free and autonomous, limiting him solely by the laws of the commandment</i> (Gregory the Theologian, <i>Homily 14, On Love for the Poor, 25</i>. PG 35, 892A). Freedom renders the human being capable of progressing toward spiritual perfection; yet, it also includes the risk of disobedience as independence from God and consequently the fall, which tragically gives rise to evil in the world⁴⁴⁴.</p>	<p>B. Freedom and Responsibility</p> <p>1. Freedom is one of God's greatest gifts to the human being. <i>He who created man in the beginning made him free and self-determined, limiting him solely by the laws of the commandment</i> (Gregory the Theologian, <i>Homily 14, On Love for the Poor, 25</i>. PG 35, 892A). Freedom renders the human being capable of progressing toward spiritual perfection; yet, it also includes the risk of disobedience as independence from God and consequently the fall, which tragically gives rise to evil in the world⁴⁴⁵.</p>

A few aspects can be easily observed. First of all, there are two sentences from the original version which have been mixed up in the 2016 version: the expression at the beginning of the second sentence replaced the beginning of the first sentence ("...freedom is for the **human person** a divine gift"). Already in the second version of 2015-2016, a mention that is very important for our study disappears: **human person** becomes **human being**, which in our opinion weakens the theological-philosophical aspect of the text, although from a certain point of view it enriches the social and missionary aspect. In both versions we find a very strong Trinitarian reference: God is Person and his communion is the source of human communion, where the persons of human nature have freedom, because they reflect the freedom of the Persons of the Holy Trinity in the Trinitarian communion. So, although in the second version there is no longer the human personalist mention, the mention of God the Personal Trinity still remains. In the third version, the one approved by the Holy See, we see that the phrase obtained by combining the two phrases of the previous version is maintained, human being is maintained, and the personalist and Trinitarian mentions of God

disappear. Freedom based on the personalism of man, in connection with Trinitarian personalism, could have been a very strong point in the theology of this document.

Why Human Person -> Human Being

According to the Fathers of the Church, the term *person* was attributed to the Triune God, while throughout patristic literature the biblical term *human being* (*anthropos*) is used for humans in the theological meaning of human beings created in the image and likeness of God. When sometimes the Fathers use the term *hypostasis* for human beings, they use it based on the Bible and not on philosophy. However, in modern philosophy existential *personalism* has developed, which deviates from patristic tradition by identifying nature with need and sin, and desire-volition with the person. For this reason the expression 'human person' (*anthropinoprosopo*) must be replaced with the biblical term *human being* (*anthropos*), which is understood in all languages

(H. Vlachos, «The Decisions of the Hierarchy»)

«Prior to the Council, in May 2016 the Church of Greece, at the urging of Metropolitan Hierotheos and others, accepted that all references in Council documents to 'human person' should be changed to 'human being'. Vlachos advances two reasons for rejecting references to humans as persons. First, the ancient Fathers attributed the term *person* (*prosopon*) to the Persons of the Holy Trinity, and used the biblical term *human being* (*anthropos*) (LXX) for humans. He dismisses the significance of the occasional patristic use of the more abstract term *hypostasis* for human beings, also employed for the Persons of the Trinity. For Vlachos, it is unacceptable to identify and name humans as persons, since this appears to put them on the same level as the divine Persons. So humans must be thought of simply as *anthropoi* (human beings); they do not, in Christos Yannaras' terminology, have a personal 'mode of existence' analogous to the Persons of the Holy Trinity».

(P. Laudecer, «Human Beings or Human Persons»)

In the afternoon of the first day, after reading the text *The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World*, a discussion arose concerning the significance of the term *person*. The Hellenic Church proposed (which the Metropolitan of Nafpaktos, Hierotheos Vlachos expounded on later) that instead of *person* the word *man* be entered (*anthropos, human being*). The intention of this suggestion was to contest the status that the term *person* has received in contemporary theology, thanks mostly to Fr. Georges Florovsky and the Metropolitan of Pergamon John Zizioulas. Metropolitan Kallistos of Diocleia explained that the

term *man* in English covers only one dimension of the human being and is usually identified with the male sex, which is problematic. The Metropolitan of Pergamon, in response to the critical remarks of Hierotheos Vlachos, expressed his disagreement and considered Vlachos' positions to be contradictory. He then pointed out that, apart from the extensive theological use of the term *person* (Fr. G. Florovsky said it is the most precious term we inherited from the patristic thought), the expression *person* is very significant in dialogue with contemporary science, whereas the notion of *man* is used in general and does not bear any more weight than *animal* (living being). Only with the help of the term *person* we can have any dialogue with modern science and through it demonstrate the dignity, uniqueness and unrepeatability of man.

(M. VASILJEVIC, *Diary of the Council*, 28-29)

Hierotheos Vlachos found two reasons to condemn personalist theology, which coincide with those of the communiqué of the Greek Church prior to the Pan-Orthodox Council: the expression human person is not used by the Fathers and it may be that this expression was lent to theology by philosophy. Both of these reasons are very weak, because the Fathers themselves used words from theological or biblical usage and introduced them into theology from the philosophy of the time. In this way they brought theology into dialogue with the philosophy of their time. This kind of fidelity to the Fathers goes beyond their spirit of operation and is "rather a betrayal of the anthropology of the Fathers than fidelity" 452.

The expression of a limited language for reasons of fidelity may lead one to believe that Orthodox theology "stopped long ago in history, at St Gregory Palamas in the fourteenth century, or not after the fall of Constantinople. (...) Orthodox theology then seems static, stuck in time and not dynamic and alive" 453.

In today's world, refusing to accord the quality of personhood to the human being degrades it, and the dialogue between theology and philosophy of our time becomes more complicated. Paul Ladouceur analyses the danger for present-day orthodox theology of this anti-personalist and reductionist tendency. If the title of person is not acceptable for man, even the title of individual (atom) cannot be accepted, because it leads towards individualism. Perhaps there is no other field where the consequences of theological anti-personalism can be as concrete as in bioethics. Ladouceur is quite critical of this:

The refusal to consider that humans are persons also has consequences in legal philosophy. In most legal systems, *persons* have rights and responsibilities, a notion extended to various types of associations, considered legal persons. This becomes critical, for example, for the unborn. Following anti-personalist

reasoning, if human adults are not persons, then they cannot claim the civic rights attached to persons. And much less so the unborn. A fetus may indeed be human (*anthrōpos*) – everyone will admit this – but since it is not a person, it cannot have any rights – including the right to be born. By denying that humans are persons, anti-personalists undermine a key argument against abortion, that the unborn fetus is indeed a person and has the rights of a person.

After the interventions of Zizioulas and Ware (and others as well), the Church of Greece gave up asking for the replacement of all mentions of the human person; some mentions remained, but unfortunately, in this passage where human freedom was found alongside the notions of Trinitarian Persons and personal God, the **human person** became **human being**. In all the documents of the Council only seven times remained the terminology **human person** mentioned.

In fact, at the recommendation of Hierotheos Vlachos, the Greek delegation ignored a long history of theology in which the notion of the human person has been at the centre of the theological discourse of many representative theologians of the last century and even earlier. Roots of Orthodox personalism can be found in the Russian scholars of the nineteenth century, in their successors of the Russian renaissance of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially Vladimir Soloviev, Nicolas Berdyaev and Seryozha Bulgakov. From them, personalist thought passed on to Vladimir Lossky and through him to contemporary Greek theologians, especially Christos Yannaras and Ioannis Zizioulas, but also to other theologians of the twentieth century, such as Olivier Clément, Dumitru Stăniloae and Kallistos Ware.

Highly recommended bibliography:

<https://publicorthodoxy.org/2017/06/06/human-beings-or-persons/>