

TRUTH AND TOLERANCE IN ORTHODOXY

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May I thank the honorable President and my distinguished colleagues of the Athens Academy, the highest spiritual institution in this country, not only for this extraordinary session, but also for having agreed to this subject in a period so critical for the relationship between religion and society. The presence of distinguished figures from political, ecclesiastical and intellectual circles in our country greatly honors the speaker and increases his responsibility to find the best possible approach both from the theoretical point of view and from that of its practical consequences for the lives of peoples. I thank you cordially for this honor.

The Terms of the Theme

The theme "Truth and Tolerance in Orthodoxy" comprises two concepts that have to be evaluated not only as they relate to each other, but also in their relation to Orthodoxy. This theme is always pertinent, but the rapid socio-political changes in Europe have made it extremely crucial for the peaceful coexistence of the various peoples. It is significant that the U.N. General Assembly, in its session of December 18, 1992, declared 1995 to be a year for the protection of the idea of religious tolerance in the face of manifestations of intransigence and religious fanaticism.

An evaluation of the two key concepts of our theme presupposes a few points of theoretical convergence. The term "truth" refers to a

knowledge of the essence of beings, either in the sense of Aristotelian correspondence (*adaequatio intellectus rei*) or else from other points of view (those of cohesion, consensus, sociological semantics, etc.). The term “tolerance” implies a certain relationship of religious faith with truth in every concrete manifestation in the world, whether national, political or sociological.

Christian Orthodoxy is also a concrete manifestation in world history, embodied in a great family of peoples in Eastern Europe. It functions as a body bearing witness in the world to the revealed truth of the faith and “the hope that is within us.” Thus it is self-evident that the various theoretical considerations concerning the terms of our theme all lead toward the final question of man’s relationship with God, his neighbor and the world.

Truth in the Sphere of Religion

A critical and comparative approach to the term “truth” is particularly appropriate in the sphere of religion. This is not only because the members of each religion have been instructed in accordance with the image of God provided by their faith, but also because they interpret their lives in this world and the next according to its criteria.

The redeeming experience of this spiritual relationship also determines the meaning of “holy” in the lives of peoples, as it is embodied in their progress through history and expressed in the most characteristic features of their cultural identity. The “holiness” of religious faith is continually attested by the existential concern not to stray from the proper path, determined by the redeeming relationship of the faithful with the authentic content of religious faith.

At the same time, such holiness creates the obligation of a conscious or unconscious religious introversion. This introversion does not always stop at a passive or even active spiritual reflection, but can often extend to manifestations of fanaticism or intransigence, especially when the framework of religious liberty is threatened. Religious aggressivity and religious isolationism are two different expressions of the deep consciousness of the members of nearly all religions of enjoying a total inner independence guaranteed by the redeeming truth of their faith.

Christianity, more especially, has based its exclusive relationship with the truth of the faith on the totality of the plan of the “divine economy” in Christ. According to its teachings, this plan constitutes, for every true member of the Christian Church, God’s authentic revelation of the truth concerning the relationship of God, man and the world.

While the absolute truth of religions is linked to the holy and the divine, for the Christian it is concentrated in the person of Christ. For it was Christ who declared, “I am the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6), and who said, “For this cause I came into the world, that I should

bear witness to the truth" (John 18:37). His life and teachings are regarded by Christians as "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14, 8:40), and his Gospel as the "word of truth" (Gal. 2:5,14) and the "way of truth" (2 Pet. 1:12, 2:2).

This is the regard in which, after Christ's Ascension, the Holy Spirit was sent. It is the "spirit of truth" that guides the faithful "into all truth" (John 16:13) and enlightens them so that they can discern the spirit of truth and distinguish it from the spirit of falsehood and error.

The "hypostatic truth" of Christianity becomes a model of life and not merely of the theoretical research of human intelligence. It is not the person who simply reflects on the truth, but "he that does truth" that "comes to the light" (John 3:21). One is called upon to "know the truth," since "the truth makes you free," implying, of course, a recognition that Christ is "the way, the truth and the life" (John 8:32-36) and an experience of this truth in one's personal life.

Christians are urged not to be content with a mere acknowledgment of or acquaintance with the truth (1 Tim. 2:4, 4:3, 2 Tim. 2:25), but to "walk in the truth" (2 John 1:4), and to "practice the truth" (1 John 1:6). In other words, in Christianity truth is not a systematic body of theoretical concepts but a hypostatic reality that directs human life. For, as our Lord said, only "he who does and teaches shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:19).

The entry, consequently, of the Word (*Logos*) of God into time and history through the Incarnation of Christ has always been interpreted as a perfect revelation of the truth. The Church's experience of the "mystery of Christ" as the mystery of truth and life *par excellence* has signified — as it still does — Christianity's claim to put before the world its authentic and, in a certain way, exclusive relationship with the truth.

All that is outside the body of Christianity can undoubtedly participate to some degree in the truth of revelation, since the true God upholds, preserves and directs the world. Yet this participation acquires a more particular value only through a relationship with the mystery of Christ, which is spread out in time and history through the workings of its historical body, the Church.

Hellenism claimed to offer a dialectical ecumenicity complementary to Christianity. Christianity's connection with Hellenism reinforced Christianity's historical claim not only concerning the ecumenicity of its message of salvation, but also concerning the universality of its capacity of adaptation. This was demonstrated in a particularly dynamic way and with an especial serenity in the difficult period of the persecutions of the first centuries. The Incarnation of Christ revealed both the true God within the world and the empirical path of man toward God. Hellenism, on the other hand, gave Christianity man's most genuine in-

tellectual reinforcement in the quest for a divine transcendent reality.

The patristic tradition of the Church preserved the fundamental principles of this dual spiritual mystagogy of the Christian theocentric revelation and the anthropocentric sensibility of Greek thought. The spiritual marriage between Christianity and Hellenism was thus the ripe fruit of a long and sometimes painful historical process. As is recognized, this process forged the identity of both the European and the universal spiritual heritage.

Tolerance in the State Context

Tolerance is better understood within the context of Christianity's march through history. This is not only because tolerance was Christianity's requirement *par excellence* during the first three centuries of its existence — the period of persecutions. It is also because Christianity provided all the spiritual characteristics that can give this term its content.

Properly speaking, "tolerance" means that a political — or any other — authority avoids any discrimination against a particular religion, and thus imposes tolerance toward all religions that exist and function within the framework of a given political or ethnic reality. It was in this way that the representatives of the political government of the Roman empire, Constantine and Licinius, linked the religious freedom of Christianity to the principle of tolerance in the Decree of Milan (313).

The obvious connection of different religions with particular nations or peoples makes religion not only an individual affair but also a concern of the State. The recognition of a religion as the official religion of the State endows it with aspects of the national unity and the social cohesion of a people no less than the liberty of conscience of the individual. Thus the individual's right to exercise his freedom of religious conscience is principally determined by the specific role played by the official religion within the State, so that to question it or to insult its principles or profane its holy sites is regarded as tantamount to insulting the patriotic sentiments of the particular people concerned.

For example, in ancient Athens Socrates' freedom of religious conscience came into conflict with the official religion. The accusation that he questioned the validity of the city's gods brought upon him the city's inexorable reaction, demanding submission to its gods with a corresponding restriction of liberty of conscience. Similarly Rome, while exercising a discreet tolerance within the limits of the Roman empire, required each Roman citizen to demonstrate a formal recognition of the official Roman religion parallel to his other religious convictions.

In Byzantium, the recognition of Christianity first as a privileged religion, and then as the official religion of the Empire, did not affect the basic principle of tolerance toward the members of other religions. But it restricted the rights they were permitted in public life. Christianity

and, after the East–West schism (1054), Orthodoxy were closely linked to the identity of the Byzantine State and thus determined its religious policies. A respect for the right to freedom of religious conscience did not imply a right to question the official religion of the Empire or to treat it with disrespect.

The contemporary understanding of tolerance, on the other hand, chiefly signifies the citizen's right freely to perform his religious duties, yet without implying that the political authorities have a self-evident duty to protect that right. Tolerance is thus interpreted in contemporary jurisdiction as a form of controlled or restricted liberty, relating above all to the liberty to perform one's duties, to participate in the forms of worship of the religious communities.

Toward those communities, however, the State maintains an attitude of discreet neutrality. It recognizes this religious reality as a fact, which it usually regards with concealed or undisguised indifference, while demonstrating a marked inclination to control or restrain the religious freedoms of the citizen within the limits of the principle of tolerance. This attitude of the "Enlightenment" toward religious faith was made absolute as a result of the atheist tendencies of the modern ideology, which contested the right to religious freedom or even the citizen's liberty of conscience in the expression of his religious convictions.

Recently a "Law on the Liberty of Conscience" was voted after a long debate in the former Soviet Union (November, 1990). It is very significant that in that law of the Soviet State, any assurance or guarantee of religious liberty was deliberately avoided. Despite international pressures, this law guaranteed only the rights of the individual or of organizations or of local religious bodies; it completely ignored or avoided any reference to the religions existing in the former Soviet Union.

All this confirmed the limitations of the theoretical constitutional principle of tolerance. On the one hand, that principle is unable to guarantee the citizen's exercise of liberty of conscience. On the other, it limits the right of religious liberty to a simple tolerance of people's freedom to participate in religious services, although not without harming their position in public life.

Of course, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the lacuna in the law was corrected and the Patriarchate of Moscow was recognized as a legal entity enjoying individual rights, like other public organizations. Today, then, in Russia, the Ukraine and Belarus, as well as in the other independent republics of the Commonwealth of Independent States where the "Law on the Liberty of Conscience" applies, the Orthodox Churches also have the right to be regarded as legal entities with individual rights. Yet, once again, their religious liberties derive from the rights of their members guaranteed by the law. I insist on the judicial

framework of the liberty of conscience in Russia and the republics connected with it because it has had a practical influence on all the other states in Eastern Europe and thus on the life of the Orthodox peoples of that region.

Thus although the Orthodox peoples of Eastern Europe have regained their individual rights of liberty of conscience within the context of the principle of tolerance, they have not yet regained their former religious liberties as organized local churches. In Eastern Europe, the State has recognized the liberty of conscience of most of them within their local framework, and thus of the Orthodox Church as a collection of parishes. But Orthodoxy as such has not yet evolved from existence in a still-imperfect state of tolerance to that full religious liberty which is more than a mere passive "tolerance" on the part of the State.

The principle of tolerance, then, has developed mainly within the context of the relationship of State and religion. It is obvious, however, that the principle does not exclude cases of excessive zeal deriving from the spirit of the members of a particular religion. For if a religion declares one of its constitutive elements to be the violent imposition of its truth on the members of other religions, then that religion may not only increase the antagonism between religions, but also religious intolerance. On the other hand, if a religion expresses in its teaching, according to its own particular scale of values, the aspirations or the spiritual quest of all human beings, it can interrogate the spiritual searchings of the members of other religions in a way comprehensible to them, while at the same time different from them.

The monotheistic faiths (Christianity, Judaism, Islam) are commonly classified under the first kind of religions, while the Far Eastern religions are placed in the second category. In the first case, the claim of exclusivity has led to historical aberrations with which we are familiar and whose repetition should not be ruled out, particularly in Eastern Europe where memories of the past are always alive.

Formal and Essential Tolerance

In the course of the history of religions, two different forms of tolerance and two corresponding forms of intolerance have been practiced. There may be formal tolerance or essential tolerance, and there may be formal intolerance or essential intolerance.

By "formal" tolerance I mean the mere fact of tolerating the existence of another religion within the framework of a dominant national or state religion. The refusal of that religion to allow or tolerate even the mere freedom to exist of any other religion can be regarded as a case of religious intolerance, compelling the members of other religions to submit to a theocratic — political or religious — authority on the pretext that otherwise the religious unity of the people or state in question

would be undermined.

On the other hand, by “essential” tolerance I mean going beyond the narrow framework of a simple (or indifferent) tolerance of the existence of another religion and giving it positive recognition as a legitimate expression of man’s relationship with the divine. The refusal of a dominant ethnic or state religion to countenance any form of recognition beyond a mere tolerance of the existence of other religions amounts to the practice of an essential intolerance that limits the expression of any tolerated religion.

“Tolerance,” wrote Goethe, “must be a temporary situation of the human spirit and must lead to total recognition of the other.” Whereas simple tolerance is a form of insult, a mutual recognition presupposes a certain depth of mutual knowledge. Certainly, this mutual knowledge will not lead to any form of syncretism or of alienation with regard to the specific character of the various religious traditions, or to the search for a type of religion acceptable to all. It rather leads to a mutual respect for the specific character of the religious identity of the other.

Only when we know the others will we be able to advance from a mere formal tolerance of the existence of the other to an essential recognition of the liberty of the members of other religions. For a long period, our points of view with regard to the others as individuals or as communities were influenced by a lack of communication or by ignorance, by the heritage of the past or by simple disinformation. Meanwhile, the world has grown smaller and human beings have had need of one another. Nothing is more important than for us to gain a mutual knowledge of one another and to advance, through mutual comprehension and tolerance, toward a dialogue in a spirit of friendship and collaboration.

There thus exists a very broad area of development of the principle of tolerance in the domain of religions as well. It goes from a simple tolerance of the right of the members of other religions to exist to an essential recognition of all their rights — religious, political and social. Where there is a dominant religion of the State, however, it may be disturbed by such a redefinition of its relationship to other religions or Christian confessions. Yet the principle of religious tolerance, like the right to religious freedom, is a fundamental human right that cannot and should not be confined within the limits of the dialectic of a local balance of religious forces.

Tolerance, therefore, should be lived out in a more widespread recognition of the right of the members of society to be what they are, or what they want to be, without this choice adversely affecting their political or social equality with the other members of society. Liberty of conscience is in fact the core of human dignity; it should not be

violated by the arrogance of power or by an improper interpretation of man's relationship with the truth of his religious faith.

The Divergence of East and West

More particularly, Christianity's mission of passing beyond the stage of formal tolerance and establishing religious peace is in large part determined by the magnitude of its historical responsibilities. The long and deep spiritual crisis of Christianity in its second millennium has been confirmed by the spiritual void of the last two hundred years. The many theological disputes and fragmentations of the Church, the extreme manifestations in favor of the supremacy of the Church or of the State (*civitas Dei* and *civitas Diaboli*), the dialectic between secularization and rejection of the world, and the opposition between the present age and the age to come — all these have progressively undermined the credibility of the Christian message concerning God, man and the world.

The separation between the theological word (*logos*) and the incarnate Word (*Logos*) of the mystical experience of the Church has weakened their functional relationship with the mystery of Christ; it has led man, without any preparation, to face the crucial question of the very meaning of his faith. Belief and atheism have become two different forms — both unhealthy — of the same function of the human word. As Montesquieu observed, the believer and the atheist both speak of the same thing: the first of what he loves, and the second of what he fears.

Orthodoxy, too, has not been exempt from the manifestation of historical pathology represented by the temptations of the various distinctions made by Western theology. Nevertheless, Orthodoxy has been obliged by historical circumstances to adhere to the patristic tradition of the first millennium of the Church's history — a tradition that had achieved a harmonious synthesis of the Christian faith with the anthropology and cosmology of Greek thought. While Western scholasticism emancipated itself from the accepted relationship between Hellenism and Christianity, Orthodoxy remained true to the patristic synthesis.

Thus, after the East–West schism (1054), two different theories of knowledge and two ways of affirming the truth-faith relationship came into being. Eastern Orthodox theology relied above all on Neoplatonic philosophy as interpreted by the Church Fathers. Western scholastic theology distanced itself from this tradition and turned to the works of Aristotle, especially as interpreted by the Neoplatonist Porphyry and by Arab Averroism.

This difference of philosophical premises led to two different hermeneutical approaches. The relationship between revelation and faith was strengthened in the Orthodox East. In the West, on the other hand, scholastic theology placed this relationship under the control of the hu-

man word. It thus eliminated the distinction between the “created” and the “increate” and declared the human word to be capable of penetrating the sphere of the increate and of transcendent divine reality.

Thus the intellectualist movement of scholastic theology with regard to the truth of the faith was based on the subjective philosophical assumptions of the theologian. It led to the confrontation of the “realists” and the “nominalists” and finally to the abandonment of scholasticism in the fifteenth century. The dilemma of a “double truth” resulted in a vertical distinction between theological and philosophical truths. It gave rise to purely formal dilemmas, such as the unity versus the trinity of God and the concomitant question of which of the two definitions was the more important. Thus antitheses abounded: the relationship of God and the world, of the work of Christ and that of the Holy Spirit, of the clergy and the people, of the work of Christ and that of the Church, of the visible and the invisible Church, and so on.

The Orthodox Church did not experience these vertical oppositions with the same intensity, but had been able to avoid them in principle by basing itself on the criteria of the patristic tradition, on whose dogmatic teachings they had already set their seal. For sure, there were undoubtedly periods when the tendency to independence of classical Greek thought with regard to the Christian faith was more in evidence and provoked traditionalist reactions in the Eastern Church. Yet the balance between Orthodoxy and Hellenism was never seriously questioned. A follower of Orthodoxy always partook of the treasure of the spiritual heritage of ancient Greece, which led him on harmoniously to theological thought. He regarded it as unacceptable to separate the two.

Christianity’s reception of Hellenism was a natural consequence of the “Church–world” relationship; it proved to be beneficial not only to the formulation of its teachings, but also to the mystagogical process of the reception of the world into its mystical body. The ecumenical dimension of the mission of the Church of Christ and the ecumenical function of Greek thought projected the universality of the Christian message onto both the question of God and the question of man and the world. The support given to the truth of the Gospel by a recourse to Greek philosophy neutralized the older presentation of the faith — going back to apostolic times — in the extreme terms of a “foolishness” for Greeks and a “stumbling block” for Jews (1 Cor. 1:23).

The inseparable connection of Orthodoxy with Hellenism gave a more solid foundation to the relationship of the truth of faith with the ecumenical mission of the Church, and, on the other hand, to the ecumenicity of its message with regard to other religions. To be sure, the Orthodox consciousness of the ecumenicity of the truth of the faith undoubtedly rejected heretical opinions as an ever-present implicit threat

to the truth. At the same time, however, the ecumenicity of the message took the form of a continual dialogue with other religions for the purpose of putting the truth of the faith before them.

Thus the Orthodox East, in its missionary work as a whole, functioned as a melting pot of national, religious and linguistic traditions. It did not experience within itself the Western dialectic of the three languages (Hebrew, Greek and Latin), or the "crusade" syndrome of the Western Christian peoples, or the operations of an Inquisition for the extermination of heretics or the members of other religions. When, for instance, the Emperor Nikephor Phokas (969–983) asked the Ecumenical Patriarch Polyeuctos to declare those who had died on the battlefield against the Muslim "infidels" saints of the faith, the Patriarch refused, saying that not only did the Church not sanctify war, but it imposed spiritual chastisement (*epitimia*) on the belligerents.

In the East, the anthropocentric antagonism of different religions always ended in a continuous dialogue on behalf of the truth of the faith. This spirit imbued the grand spiritual undertaking of the Ecumenical Patriarchate carried out by Cyril and Methodius, the missionaries to the Slavs, as described in the first Russian chronicle of the conversion of the Russians to Christianity.

The Present Crisis

Orthodoxy's self-awareness of having a privileged relationship with the truth of the faith did not produce unhealthy or extreme manifestations of religious fanaticism. On the contrary, it obliged Orthodoxy to follow a path of peaceful dialogue in order to bear witness to it. This meant that Orthodoxy experienced its self-awareness in regard to the truth-faith relationship as a permanent commitment to bear witness to its faith, yet at the same time it ruled out any institutional lapse into an illicit or violent imposition of that faith. Orthodoxy consistently avoided the common confusion between mission and proselytism, which it excluded from its concept of its mission in the world.

Nevertheless, one cannot overlook two concrete factors: a) the thousand year-old historical relationship of Orthodoxy with the Orthodox peoples; and b) the continual provocations of confessional or religious antagonisms against the members of the Orthodox Church. Especially in unfavorable historical circumstances, these factors stimulated a few isolated reactions of fanaticism or religious intolerance in defense of the traditional faith or the historic rights of the Orthodox peoples.

For although the Orthodox Church is not limited to the historical destiny of any particular people, it has embodied itself historically in each nation. Thus it integrates all the problems of its peoples in its spiritual mission, as understood in the broadest sense. This mission of Orthodoxy is indissolubly linked to its people, and its pastoral care rejects

any sacerdotal monophysitism and any separatist Nestorianism coming between the people and the Church.

As for the second factor mentioned, Orthodoxy was constantly the target of the illicit proselytism of Roman Catholic uniatism and Protestant missionary activity in the course of the second millennium. This historical observation is confirmed by the fact that it was Orthodoxy alone that suffered the consequences of confessional antagonism. The Orthodox East was always considered an "area of mission" (*terra missionis*) by Western Christianity.

The sudden and unforeseeable political, religious and social changes taking place at the present day among the Orthodox peoples of Eastern Europe have brought to the surface repressed confessional and religious conflicts from other historical periods. These conflicts prevent Orthodoxy from devoting itself to its own renewal because of a renewed struggle against Roman Catholic uniatism and Protestant missionary activity. Furthermore, this confessional or religious antagonism spills over into an area of confusion and ethnic conflict where there is not only an opposition to the principle of tolerance, but also to the necessity for peaceful coexistence of the members of the different Christian confessions and of other religions.

Orthodoxy links its witness to a peaceful dialogue on behalf of the truth. The spiritual heritage of the European peoples also requires the overcoming, by means of a constructive dialogue, of the spiritual oppositions and religious conflicts of the past in which the role of confessional antagonism was decisive. It is a historical fact, however, that this confessional antagonism was intermixed with very strong nationalist confrontations between peoples. Nor is it impossible that the Orthodox peoples will be drawn into the vortex of religious fanaticism. The sickness is contagious and dangerous, since provocation evokes a reaction and violence begets violence.

The insistence of Orthodoxy on witnessing with the support of the Word, and on emphasizing dialogue as a means of calming conflicts, has its source in the rejection of the irrational (*para-logon*) from which confessional or religious antagonism draws its strength. Moreover, the religious map of Europe and the world has already taken shape through the tragic contradictions of the past; it will not disappear owing to the stillborn or remote-controlled confessional or religious antagonisms of our period. When the crisis has passed, the need for dialogue will reappear. The world no longer desires and can no longer tolerate new religious wars, and the religions, for their part, are no longer able to cause them on their own.

Despite those antagonisms, it is also true that religions can help to soothe nationalist or other tensions and to strengthen the conditions

for a peaceful coexistence among peoples. Religions, for sure, cannot impose peace on a shattered world in which conflicting political and economic interests combine with an appeal to nationalism and thus give rise to more extensive conflicts. Yet religions can refrain from supporting unscrupulous international policies; they can also proclaim the common respect for the sacred character of the human person and the world implied by their various faiths. This, however, presupposes a conscious and sincere peace between religions, which is possible only where there is a reciprocal tolerance and a recognition of their right to a peaceful coexistence based on an essential and not merely formal mutual tolerance.

In the present crisis, truth is necessary, while tolerance is the inescapable condition for a sincere dialogue, a dialogue of truth concerning God, man and the world. In this dialogue, Orthodoxy has, and possesses the right to have, an important role to play. Truth and dialogue are interdependent and exclude religious or confessional introversion, since truth is lived as an experience and a witness. The experience of the truth presupposes a permanent quest and is not exhausted by a phenomenological self-sufficiency regarding the truth that has already been established. Dialogue is as necessary for the renewal of other religions or Christian confessions as it is for our own examination of the truth of our faith.

The Orthodox “Whatever”

The great theoretician and philosopher of religions, Rudolph Otto, in his celebrated work, *Das Heilige*, more than seventy years ago described with prophetic intuition the following fearful vision:

A gigantic confrontation is preparing itself.... It will be the most solemn moment in the history of humanity when it will no longer be political systems or economic groups or social interests that rise up against each other, but the religions of humanity, and when ... the struggle finally acquires an elevated style, in which at last spirit meets with spirit, ideal with ideal, experience of life with experience of life, in which everyone must say without concealment whatever he has that is most profound, that is genuine, and whether he has anything.

The advent of this moment, this *kairos*, seems to be taking place at the present time. We are called upon to communicate whatever we have that is most profound and genuine so as not to miss the historic opportunity and compromise our credibility even more. Before coming to our “whatever,” I wish to emphasize one point: in the extreme situation in which we find ourselves, we have the responsibility of answering the question of whether the third millennium will or will not be penetrated by the encounter of the soul with the Holy, by what Otto terms the *mysterium tremendum* and the *mysterium fascinans*.

The Orthodox “whatever” is not something theoretical and devoid of substance. It is essential, a responsible attitude of moderation inspired by fidelity to our roots and by our common commitment in the face of the new and dangerous conditions that threaten peaceful coexistence. It will be our decisive contribution to a justice based on the sacred character of the human person, and on our common truth — namely, that we are all children of the same God, the bearers of His image, and members of the same human family.

In short, we aspire to formulate together an expression of principles, if only a minimal one, which could serve as an official declaration of the need for mutual respect — and for interreligious collaboration — on a basis of equality in the face of the common problems of the faithful in this present period so critical for man and the world. This aspiration of Orthodoxy was proclaimed at the Third Preconciliar Panorthodox Conference, which took place at the Orthodox Center of the Ecumenical Patriarchate at Chambésy in 1986. There that conference enunciated the main principles of its contribution to the endeavor to promote the spirit of peace, justice, liberty, fraternity and love among peoples and to suppress racial and other discrimination.

An authentic and viable overcoming of conflicts and intractable problems could be based on that declaration of the Third Panorthodox Conference concerning the necessity of maintaining a position of independence within the framework of a peaceful coexistence of religions, while respecting the specific character of ethnic and religious minorities. The declaration was as follows:

A minority, whether religious, linguistic or ethnic, has to be respected for what it is. Man's liberty is connected with the liberty of the community to which he belongs. Each community must evolve and develop in accordance with its own characteristics. In this respect, pluralism should govern the life of all countries. The unity of a nation, country or state should be understood as comprising the right of human communities to differ. Orthodoxy unequivocally condemns the inhuman system of racial discrimination and the sacrilegious affirmation that this system can be in accordance with Christian ideals. To the question “Who is my neighbor?” Christ answered with the parable of the Good Samaritan. He thus taught us to remove all barriers of hostility and prejudice. Orthodoxy acknowledges that every human being, whatever his color, religion, race, nationality or language, bears the image of God, and that he is our brother or sister, a full member of the human family.

The declaration thus expresses respect for the specificity of each religion, alongside a recognition of the need for the religions to collaborate as equals in order to deal with the many fractures in the world. These are the chief characteristics of the contemporary witness of Or-

thodoxy with regard to the relationship of truth and tolerance.

“In this situation,” writes His Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomaios, “the responsibility and permanent mission of the religions is to be a living reminder of the fact that atheism in practice and the replacement of the notion of divine assistance by the power of man in fact destroy man himself and lead him into individual and social impasses. Religions, because of their position and influence, can contribute effectively, by drawing on the reserves of goodness which still exist in the world, to finding solutions to the difficult problems of our epoch.”

In accordance with the Panorthodox declaration and the guidelines laid down by our Patriarch, I have undertaken to organize, in my capacity as Director of the Orthodox Center, academic interreligious dialogues of Orthodoxy with Judaism on the one hand and with Islam on the other. Several official encounters have already taken place with the participation of eminent spiritual figures on both sides. They have shown that the religions feel concerned by the unhealthy outbursts of religious fanaticism and are aware of their specific responsibility to contribute to the peaceful coexistence of peoples and to the alleviation of current and local crises. Moreover, there is an increasing consciousness of the fact that fanaticism and intransigence on the part of the members of a religion harm the spiritual character of that religion far more than does the missionizing of other religions.

Consequently, while Orthodoxy proclaims its conviction of the authenticity of its teaching on the truth of the faith, it regards the concepts of truth and tolerance as contrasted, for it places its historical mission within the eschatological perspective of the salvation of man and the world. Its teaching on the unity of the human race and the world is based both on the unity of the divine creation and on the universality of Christ's work of salvation. This salvation embraces all human beings of all periods and determines the spiritual relationship of the Church with every human being in the history of salvation.

The truth of the faith is lived — or at least ought to be lived — in Orthodoxy and in Christianity as a whole. It is lived not as a condition of being wrapped up in an arrogant syndrome of superiority with regard to other religions, but rather as a responsible service of dialogue and witness toward contemporary man with regard to the mystery of God, man and the world.

A respect for the principle of tolerance serves the purposes of the dialogue of truth. For it is not only the sole way in which to achieve a constructive interreligious dialogue, but also the most appropriate context in which to witness truly to “the hope that is within us.” Religious intransigence, on the other hand, not merely prevents a dialogue of truth

from taking place. It also creates a deeper spiritual confusion in an already over-fragmented world which is anxiously searching for the elements that unite rather than divide it.

Other religions know this too. Orthodoxy, however, on account of its historical experience and spiritual identity, has special reasons to strive for the triumph of the principle of essential tolerance.

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