

The necessity of Incarnation:

The Contribution of Orthodox Theology to the Ecumenical Process towards a Just and Sustainable Society

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1. The New Challenges

Humanity today has reached to a point where every physical relationship is in danger of being dissolved; by necessity, man's contact with reality becomes indirect and mediated. This indirection is the main characteristic of the iconic society. Living in a virtual society tending towards the disembodiment of goods (e.g. power, wealth, money, monetary order, information) and relationships (interpersonal, economic and political)¹, man is transformed by technology into an "indirect man"², alienated from his body, which is linked to his alienation and detachment from the others' body and nature, to which his body is connected. As communication becomes less corporeal, it loses the deepest aspect of its existence, the sense of touch – the sense which is distinguished by the

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1. For the notion of the "virtual society", see Th. Tasis, *Ψηφιακός ανθρωπισμός. Εικονιστικό υποκείμενο και τεχνητή νοημοσύνη*, Harmos Publications, Athens 2019, p. 11.

2. For the "indirect man", who is not interested in the relationship but in the use, see Sp. Kyriazopoulos: *Η καταγωγή του τεχνικού πνεύματος*, Athens 1965 and *Ενώπιον της Τεχνικής*, Grigoris Publications, Athens 1971. S Gounelas explains with specific references to Kyriazopoulos' work what "direct" and "indirect man" means in his book: *Η κρίση του πολιτισμού: κρίση του ανθρώπου – απώλεια του νοήματος*, Harmos Publications, Athens 1977, pp. 158-171.

greatest interiority³. Several years ago, the blessed Metropolitan John Zizioulas of Pergamos, in a prophetic speech, pointed out:

Another problem that arises due to civilization's course [...] is rescuing the body. Yes, the body is under threat. If we think more deeply about what information technology, the Internet and all these means by which people now communicate with each other imply, we will understand that the greatest victim of all this civilization is the human body [...]. It is no accident that this situation is directly linked to another very important danger, the one to which nature is exposed [...]. Man's alienation from his own body, with which he is connected to the rest of the world, the separation of the human person from his body, is connected to his separation from nature, with which his body is intimately connected⁴.

If now, as D. Bekridakis aptly notes, in the context of the industrial era and capitalism's prevalence, the exploitative suppression of the natural environment took place, the modern post-industrial ("high") technology has advanced even further. In its digital version, it creates the conditions for man's total detachment from the natural environment, replacing it with a variety of Artificial Environments⁵.

3. See Th. Tasis, *Ψηφιακός άνθρωπισμός*, *op.cit.*, pp. 38, 206 and Anna Lydaki, «Ἐνσυναίσθηση στην ψηφιακή κοινωνία», <https://bookpress.gr/kritikes/idees/11084-tasis-theo-fanis-armos-psifiakos-anthropismos-lidaki> [19.5.2024]. Al. Katsiaras, explaining why the "de-spiritualization" of matter and the body is the most serious challenge, or contemporary threat, to which the Orthodox Church is now called upon to respond, points out, among other things, the following: "Nature and the body seem to have less and less importance in a world where everything is becoming more and more 'incorporeal' and 'intangible': communications, human relations, work, means of exchange (e.g. 'intangible bonds/assets'), even the system itself, capitalism itself. Human communication has become so invisible through technology and the body redundant" (see Al. Katsiaras, «Ἐπιλεγόμενα. Ἡ ἀποπνευμάτωση τῆς ὕλης καὶ τοῦ σώματος: ἡ πρόκληση τοῦ παρόντος καὶ τοῦ μέλλοντος», *Θεολογία/Theologia* 90, 1 (2019), pp. 277-286, (the particular extract in p. 284).

4. See Metr. of Pergamon John (Zizioulas), «Περὶ Ὁρθοδοξίας καὶ Πολιτισμοῦ», *Διάλογοι Καταλλαγῆς/Dialogoi Katallagis*, period III, iss. 30 (July-September 2022), pp. 1-4, here p. 4.

5. See D. Io. Bekridakis, «Ἀπόπειρα Διερεύνησης τῶν Θεολογικῶν ὅρων ἄρθρωσης τοῦ Τεχνικοῦ Φαινομένου», *Ἀντίφωνο/Antifono* (November 10, 2010), <https://antifono.gr/%ce%b1%cf%80%cf%8c%cf%80%ce%b5%ce%b9%cf%81%ce%b1-%ce%b4%ce%b9%ce%b5%cf%81%ce%b5%cf%8d%ce%bd%ce%b7%cf%83%ce%b7%cf%82-%cf%84%cf%89%ce%bd-%ce%b8%ce%b5%ce%bf%ce%bb%ce%bf%ce%b3%ce%b9%ce%ba%cf%8e%ce%bd/> [30.9.2023] and D. Io. Bekridakis, «*Machina ex deo*: στοχασμοὶ

Along with it, this structural change has allowed to a small class of protagonists to use the information obtained through the new technologies, to set up virtual companies that undermine the existing ones and to speculate in total opacity, amassing enormous wealth at the expense of most of the world's populations, even of whole states, without passing through the production process⁶. This is what we call “profit over people”⁷ and, we would add, over the environment.

We are referring to a form of the global market/growth economy, totally opposed to Christian principles, the dominant philosophy of which is individualism, brutal materialism and greed. The type of technology found within it reflects the swelling of the calculating mind, leading to unnatural attitudes and alienation⁸. At the heart of this economic model lies the continuous growth and unlimited consumption, causing the destruction of the natural environment and depletion of natural resources, and increasing the extent and speed of global warming and climate change, with dire consequences for human populations, especially the most vulnerable ones.

At this point, the following should be clarified: technology should not be seen as independent of the established socio-economic ideology; it is closely intertwined with matters related to economic interests, political correlations, ideology and power. It has never been “neutral” as far as the logic and dynamics of the market economy are concerned⁹. Pope

γύρω από τὸν θεολογικὸ πυρῆνα τῆς σύγχρονης τεχνολογίας», in: D. Geroukalis (ed.), *Μετάνθρωπος: Ζώντας σὲ ἕναν ψηφιακὸ κόσμο*, Harmos Publications, Athens 2018, pp. 110-182, here p. 123.

6. See the interesting points highlighted in a lecture delivered at the Academy of Athens on 11.12.2012 by N. Aliprantis, titled: «Κοινωνιολογία τοῦ χρήματος καὶ ἡ σύγχρονη ἐξέλιξη τοῦ Καπιταλισμοῦ», *Θεολογία/Theologia* 83, 4 (2012), pp. 123-145, espec. p. 132.

7. N. Chomsky, *Profit over People. Neoliberalism and global order*, New York 1998.

8. See Chr. Terezis, «Κοσμολογικὰ ζητήματα στὴ Νεοπλατωνικὴ Φιλοσοφία καὶ στὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Θεολογία», in: *Ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία ὡς κληρονομιά: Φιλοσοφία καὶ Θεολογία στὴν ἐποχὴ τῶν Πατέρων*, vol. III, Hellenic Open University, Patras 2008, pp. 121-185, here pp. 161-162.

9. See the line of thought developed by D. Bekridakis, «Ἀπόπειρα Διερεύνησης τῶν Θεολογικῶν ὅρων ἁρθρώσεως τοῦ Τεχνικοῦ Φαινομένου» and D. Bekridakis, «Machina ex deo...», op.cit., espec. pp. 115, 173, 180.

Francis, in his ecological Encyclical *Laudato si'*¹⁰, expressing Christian enlightened, forward-looking thought, explains: “The alliance between technology and the economy ends up neglecting everything that does not contribute to their direct interests” [§ 54]. Further down, he points out: “We have to recognize that the technological products are not neutral, because they create a framework that ends up determining the way of life and shaping social possibilities in the direction of the interests of certain powerful groups. Some choices, which may appear to be purely instrumental, are in fact choices related to the kind of society they intend to build” [§ 107].

2. The Necessity of the Incarnation

Against the techno-economic paradigm which is based on individualism and institutionalized greed, crushing man and life, annihilating goods and relationships, and disrupting the communion between people and their bond with nature, the Orthodox Church is called upon to formulate a different model of life, based on its theology and life. According to what has been mentioned above, the necessity of the Incarnation is nowadays more than obvious; it is the basic axis of a theological statement that wants to inspire the purest and deepest positive evaluation of man's and nature's materiality, as well as a life attitude that will be the mark and foundation of a “society of love, sharing and solidarity”. Salvation is founded on the Incarnation and at the same time the “realization” of God's Word¹¹. The Incarnation constitutes the central event of the Christian faith and is revealed as the great mystery of the Church, from which all the

10. Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'* of the Holy Father Francis on Care of our common home (2015), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html [6.9.2023]. See the Encyclical Letter in Greek: Πάπας Φραγκίσκος, *Δοξασμένος νά'σαι: Πάνω στη φροντίδα της κοινής μας οίκιας*, The Hierarchy of the Catholic Church of Greece Publications, n.p. 2015.

11. *John* 1, 14. See –among many others– f. Georgios D. Metallinos, «Ἑλική κτίση, ἀγιαζόμενη καὶ ἀγιαζούσα», <https://www.pemptousia.gr/2014/05/iliki-ktisi-agiazome-ni-ke-agiazousa/> [30.9.2023]. See also Chr. Yannaras, *Τὸ πραγματικό καὶ τὸ φαντασιώδες στὴν Πολιτικὴ Οἰκονομία*, Domos Publications, Athens 1989, especially pp. 258-261.

other mysteries derive their existence. The Orthodox Church's theological discourse has so much highlighted the value of the matter and the body through the Incarnation that we can speak of "Orthodox materialism", "theology of touch" and "the Incarnation Church"¹².

The theology of the Incarnation is necessary today for yet another reason; there are many Christians who preach that the purpose of the Christ's Church is nothing else but the salvation of souls. All material things are considered secondary to them, since the material world is temporary and destined to be replaced in the Kingdom of God by an immaterial or spiritual world. Others argue that Church and theology have nothing to do with political, scientific, or technocratic issues. These belong to the competence of politicians and scientists.

Such tendencies prevent the Church from giving some sort of vision to its existence, its way of being in time and history as the Incarnated Church. The Word seems to flesh itself in words¹³. The blessed Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon, guided by a self-critical spirit, admitted that the Church has not accomplished what it should have done about the great challenges of our time – e.g., the environment. A typical example, he said,

12. One of the contemporary theologians who has promoted and developed the theology of the incarnation, linking it to the challenges of our times is Professor Chr. Stamoulis. For Stamoulis, the theology of the Incarnation it is a theology of philanthropy, a theology of acceptance, reception or hospitality. The culture of the Incarnation that he projects through his work is understood unconventionally, not idealistically, beyond moralism and psychological explosions of purity, with an interest in material existence in its double meaning - of body and communion. His discourse offers the theological basis for a discourse of protest against social and institutional evil. See, for example, his following works: *Κάλλος τὸ Ἅγιον*, Akritas Publications, Athens 2004, especially pp. 197-199 for the "theology of touch"; *Ὡσπερ ξένος καὶ ἀλήτης ἡ Σάρκωσις: ἡ μετανάστευση τῆς ἀγάπης*, Akritas Publications, Athens 2010; *Ἡ γυναῖκα τοῦ Λὼτ καὶ ἡ σύγχρονη θεολογία*, Harmos Publications, Athens 2014; *Ἐρως καὶ θάνατος. Δοκιμὴ γιὰ ἓναν πολιτισμὸ τῆς σάρκωσης*, Harmos Publications, Athens 2019.

13. Chr. Stamoulis is right when he says: "In practice, the life of the Church moves as a rule [...] on bordering an Old Testament way, i.e. on the borders of an unfathomable reality that cannot be fulfilled". Man within the Church "denies the need for the incarnated liturgy after the Liturgy, i.e. the need for the act of exercising Eucharistic love in a particular place and time..." (See Chr. Stamoulis, *Ὡσπερ ξένος καὶ ἀλήτης ἡ Σάρκωσις...*, *op.cit.*, p. 16 and 19 seq. cf. *passim* in his work: *Φάγαμε Ἦττα. Κείμενα γιὰ τὸν αὐτοεγκλωβισμό τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας*, Harmos Publications, Athens 2021).

is that the concept of sin against nature¹⁴, is absent, but also, we would add, the consideration of sin as being collective and structural.

Despite the fact that such tendencies and deviations weaken the Orthodoxy's voice and its witness to the world, this does not mean that it has become theologically and spiritually impoverished. Orthodoxy carries within itself, in its essence, dynamic-prophetic antibodies. Its sacramental and soteriological character is preserved intact. Its Eucharistic vision, which is the Eucharistic reference of the world and life to the life of God, is preserved.

Man's relationship with the material creation and its positive impact is solemnly confessed in the Orthodox Worship, within the boundaries of which matter is taken up as the Christ's "flesh" for its sanctification. "Thus, the event of the Incarnation, the enthronement of 'the clay to the throne of God' (John of Sinai) is prolonged"¹⁵. The Church, in its Divine Worship, embraces all of nature, respects man's toil, affirms the life and material needs, does not reject them, but "elevates them to the essentials". Thus, "harmony is restored to the unity crushed by sin"¹⁶.

After all, the ecclesiastical event is a way of life, of real material relationships and a daily working relationship with material reality. The very event that constitutes the Church is a supper: eating and drinking material food – bread and wine¹⁷. This most essential act of sharing the Eucharist is furthermore understood as an ecological – "social" principle. It is shared to all from what exists, given as a gift. It is precisely this faith that is indicated by the reference of all to God with thanksgiving and the Church's confession at the central moment of her Divine Liturgy: "Your own of Your own we offer to You, in all and for all" (*«τὰ σὰ ἐκ τῶν σῶν, σοὶ προσφέρομεν κατὰ πάντα καὶ διὰ πάντα»*); that is, everything,

14. He was wandering: "What priest imposed a penance on someone who polluted the environment? And what believer ever believed that he sinned because he destroyed the environment?" [Metropolitan of Pergamon John (Zizioulas), *«Περὶ Ὁρθοδοξίας καὶ Πολιτισμοῦ...»*, op.cit., p. 4].

15. Georgios D. Metallinos, *«Υλική κτίση, ἀγιαζόμενη καὶ ἀγιάζουσα»*, op.cit.

16. See Kaiti Chiotelli, *«Ἡ Ἐκκλησία καὶ τὰ βιοτικά»*, *Σύνορο/Synoro* 31 (1964), pp. 162-171, pp. 162 seq. and 171.

17. See Chr. Yannaras, *Τὸ πραγματικὸ καὶ τὸ φαντασιώδες στὴν Πολιτικὴ Οἰκονομία*, op.cit., p. 259.

both the earthly goods and the economic means, belong to God. Man does not own and possess them. God gives them to all men as a gift, for the purpose that all may use them to meet their needs for a true and full life. In this sense, the Eucharist can find its continuity in the “simple meal as an ecological symbolic act” and in a renewed asceticism for the creation’s sake¹⁸. As it should have become clear, this concern does not only deal with preserving the environment¹⁹, but also with social and economic justice, as well as peace; in other words, it is related with protecting the history of all living organisms against the effects of a human history of violence.

The Orthodox Church has grafted ecumenical thinking with this ecologically and socially sensitive theology and has contributed to a common agreement in the way the Christian community reads the “signs of the times”.

3. The Ecumenical Movement towards a Just and Sustainable Society

Since the early 1970s, the Christian community has been turning its attention to the agonizing question of whether a reversal of the admittedly and objectively destructive world order is possible. Along with the debate on development, social justice and the autonomy of peoples, other challenges have been added²⁰. The problems arising

18. For further details, see St. Tsompanidis, *Μετα-λειτουργία. Ἡ ὀρθόδοξη συμμετοχή στην κοινή χριστιανική μαρτυρία για δικαιοσύνη, εἰρήνη καὶ ἀκεραιότητα τῆς δημιουργίας*, P. Pournaras Publications, Thessaloniki 2009, chapt. 2.1.1 and 2.2.1.3. as well as our article: «Ἡ συμβολὴ τῆς ὀρθόδοξης θεολογίας στὴ διαμόρφωση μιᾶς οἰκουμενικῆς περιεκτικῆς οἰκολογίας». *Ἐκκλησία τῆς Ἐξόδου. Οἰκουμένη – Κοινωνία – Ἄνθρωπος*, Ostracon Publications, Thessaloniki 2018, pp. 147-162.

19. It has been rightly underlined that “the responsibility for the integrity of the environment must not be treated piecemeal as ‘ecological consciousness’, nor can it be limited to isolated actions of ‘environmental protection’. Instead, it must reflect a broader existential attitude and behavior, embracing all human activity –including technical one– in a gesture of offering it to the Triune God” (D. Bekridakis, «*Machina ex deo...*», op.cit., espec. p. 175).

20. For more details on this topic and those that follow, see St. Tsompanidis, *Μετα-λειτουργία*, op.cit., espec. pp. 60 ff. and 351-366.

from technology and the environment are attracting the attention of the ecumenical debate. Even before the Club of Rome report on the “Limits to Development” was widely discussed, the positions of the report had already been taken up by the World Council of Churches (WCC). Seeking some basic elements of a new “paradigm”, which would encompass future multifarious economic, political, ecological and technological perspectives, the WCC envisioned a “Just, Participatory, Sustainable Society” (JPSS). The central concept of “sustainability society” will play an important role in the subsequent development of ecumenical social thinking. Via this concept, the attention is focused on the search for the consequences of scientific and technological development for the future of humanity, linking it to the broader context of the creation’s future.

When in the early 1980s at the Sixth General Assembly in Vancouver (1983) this vision was succeeded by “the synodic march for justice, peace and the preservation of creation”, the integrity of the whole of God’s created world will become the central goal of the ecumenical call to this day. In addition to the call for the development of a life-serving economy, the WCC’s call to all member churches and ecumenical partners to urgently give to the issue of the threat of climate change the priority and attention that the global and unprecedented climate crisis deserves, from which the poor and future generations are most threatened²¹.

What is completely new today, and it needs to be emphasized, is the astonishing agreement that one finds in the analysis and theological positioning of different Christian Churches, at a time when the enslavement of people to the market and the techno-economic model has acquired religious, totalitarian characteristics and in the face of “the interests of the deified market” and its “sacralized mechanisms”, any corrective effort is rejected; everything that is fragile –people, societies, countries, environment – remains undefended. In particular, there are many similarities between the positions of Pope Francis, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and the texts drawn up by the WCC since 2012.

21. See the Declaration of the First General Assembly of the WCC in Karlsruhe/Germany (2022) “The Living Planet: Seeking a Just and Sustainable Global Community”, <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/the-living-planet-seeking-a-just-and-sustainable-global-community> [19.5.2023].

The agreement is expressed in the following key statements²²:

1. Growing inequality and injustice, rooted in the current economic system, combined with rampant consumerism and the universal indifference for the poor and the environment. Pope Francis has incomparably expressed with the famous phrase: “this economy is killing”²³ both people and land.

2. It is therefore the duty of Christians listening to the sighs and groans of both the poor and the earth. To this end, a global and integral approach is needed, which takes into account the environment, society and the economy, and will be keen on giving concrete responses to it and to the radical change in the way of life it produces.

3. Every act of exploitation, pollution and abuse of God’s creation must be recognized as a “sin” (a position taken by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew²⁴, the first religious leader to express such a view).

4. The ecological problems affect all human beings, but it is the lower social classes, the poor and the excluded, who mostly suffer the consequences. Thus, the ecological problems are linked to justice.

5. Instead of a “bodiless spirituality”, what is proposed is a “transformative spirituality”. “Transformative spirituality” links practice, prayer and the sacraments inextricably with the struggle for justice and with social and environmental concerns. It is rooted in the Holy Eucharist, which must continue to be present in the world as a “a liturgy after the Liturgy”.

Making a general observation here, one could argue that the Ecumenical Movement has many times in its course played an important role in changing the way of awareness of the contemporary problems²⁵, to which other parts of the international community have only reluctantly opened up.

22. On this subject and on what follows see the studies included in our book: *Εκκλησία τῆς Ἐξόδου*, *op.cit.*, espec. pp. 120 ff., 136-140, 147 ff.

23. See Holy Father Francis, *Ἡ χαρὰ τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου: Ἀποστολική Παραίνεση «Ἡ χαρὰ τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου» γιὰ τὴν ἀναγγελία τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου στὸν σημερινὸ κόσμο*, The Hierarchy of the Catholic Church of Greece Publications, n.p. 2014, p. 44, § 53.

24. See Rev. Ioannis Chrysavgis, *Βαρθολομαῖος – Ἀποστολὴ καὶ Ὁραμα*, prologue Holy Father Francis and Pr. Pavlopoulos, transl. (Greek) and ed. V. Argyriadis, En plo Publications, Athens 2018, pp. 240-241.

25. See Chr. Tsironis, *Θρησκεία καὶ Κοινωνία στὴ Δεύτερη Νεωτερικότητα: Λόγοι, διάλογοι καὶ ἀντίλογοι στὸ ἔργο τοῦ Ul. Beck*, Barbounakis Publications, Thessaloniki 2018, espec. pp. 241-246 and 247-260.

4. Contributions of the Orthodox Theology to the Ecumenical Process towards a Just and Sustainable Society

The aforementioned ecumenical convergence and the vision of the world's unified conception and interdependence represents largely the fruit of the Orthodox Churches' participation in the debates and activities in the Ecumenical Movement and the positions of contemporary Orthodox theology. Due to time constraints, our reports will be limited to the most important representative milestones.

One of the first orthodox steps, which gave an impetus for a shift in emphasis from the individual salvation to a universal one on an ecumenical level, was N. Nisiotis's contribution at the Third General Assembly of the WCC in New Delhi (1961). Starting from a secular-Christological interpretation of *Colossians* 1:15-20 and *Ephesians* 1:22, Nisiotis referred to God's plan "to lead the whole world, already potentially saved in Christ, through the charismatic Church, to salvation and thus to call it into its unbroken unity"²⁶.

During the early '70s, when "The importance of science and technology for the development of humanity" was a matter under consideration, emphasis had been put, based on the thought of the Fathers, to the indissoluble unity of God-man-nature and it is pointed out that what is needed is a "reverent" and receptive attitude" towards creation, that is already present in prayer and in the sacrament of the Divine Worship.

When in the late 1970s a new kind of abuse of the economic, military and scientific power was identified and the awareness of the "limits of development" became disturbing, the Orthodox Churches explained that the Eucharistic dynamic "leads to a 'liturgy after the Liturgy' - a liturgical use of the material world-, a transformation of human sociability into communion, of consumerism into an ascetic attitude towards creation and a restoration of human dignity"²⁷. This connection between the

26. See N. Nisiotis, „Zeugnis und Dienst der orthodoxen Christenheit für die eine ungeteilte Kirche“, in: F. Lüpsen, *Neu Delhi Dokumente. Berichte und Reden auf der Weltkirchenkonferenz in Neu-Delhi 1961*, Witten 1962, pp. 407 ff., here pp. 409 and 417.

27. See «“Η οἰκουμενικὴ φύσις τῆς ὀρθοδόξου μαρτυρίας”: πορίσματα τοῦ εἰς Valamo Φιλλανδίας Ὁρθοδόξου Συμποσίου», *Ἐπίσκεψις/Episkepsis* 8, no. 176 (15.10.1977), pp.

sacramental and the social-secular dimension of the Holy Eucharist became even more convincing at the Fifth General Assembly of the WCC in Vancouver. Since then, the orthodox motivations for the importance of the Holy Eucharist in the secular, wholistic approach to salvation will become an integral part of the theological systematic thinking of the WCC²⁸.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew's unceasing efforts and initiatives for reconciliation, solidarity, ecological and social justice will have immediate repercussions not only in the ecclesiastical and religious sphere, but also in global political affairs. He will establish the Conferences of the Primates of the Orthodox Churches, that have initiated a decisive phase regarding the understanding of Orthodoxy's social and ecological responsibility and its prophetic mission in the modern world.

Particular reference should be made to the declaration of the Heads of the Orthodox Churches in the autumn of 2008, in which it was characteristically stated²⁹:

The Christian teaching related to the ontological unity of the human race and the divine creation, as expressed through the whole mystery of Christ's redemptive work, constitutes the foundation for the interpretation of man's relationship to God and the world [...]. A sustainable economy is one that combines efficiency with justice and social solidarity [...]. The Orthodox Church is of the opinion that the technological and economic progress must not lead to the destruction of the environment and the depletion of natural resources. Greed for satisfying our material desires leads to the bankruptcy of the human soul and the environment. It should not be forgotten that the Earth's natural wealth is not only the property of man but, first and foremost, a creation of God: "*The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it*" (Ps 24:1). We must remember that not only the present but also future generations have a right to the natural goods given to us by the Creator.

These positions, which include Orthodox formulations on various ecumenical initiatives, were incorporated verbatim and most formally

9-15, here pp. 13-14.

28. This is the central theme of our book *Μετα-λειτουργία*, *op.cit.*

29. Message of the Orthodox Churches' Primates, Constantinople 12.10.2008, [See *Εκκλησία/Ekklesia* 85, 10 (2008), pp. 756-759 § 6, 8, 10].

expressed in the texts decisions of the Holy and Great Synod of Crete (2016)³⁰. Starting from, and centered on, the sacramental –especially the Eucharistic– life of the Church, it was pointed out that the Christian response to ecological problems requires a radical change of lifestyle, repentance for the depletion of natural resources –an action considered as a “sin”– an ascetic ethos and, at the same time, the cultivation in man of the awareness that he is a “steward” and a priest, not the Creation’s owner³¹.

As it had happened in the pre-conciliar and ecumenical process, so the texts of the Synod rejected the assumption that relentless competition, greed and avarice are the absolute law governing human life, society and the natural environment; they emphasized the necessity of a life-serving economy that combines the proper management of the “common home” with justice and social solidarity. An essential characteristic of solidarity, which is directly linked to justice, is that it cares both for future generations and the future of the world³². Thus, the traditional understanding of fundamental rights, the “right to life”, is broadened to include “rights of nature” and “rights of future generations”.

These positions of the Holy and Great Synod are of fundamental importance, condensing long processed and toiled experiences and visions. They constitute a solid basis for new outreaches of the Orthodox together with other Christians and with other people of other faiths (or no faith), who are interested in and strive for a just and sustainable society.

30. See the official texts of the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church on the website: https://www.holycouncil.org/official-documents_el [14.05.2023].

31. See the “Encyclical of the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church”, § 14: “...In the sacraments of the Church, creation is affirmed and asserted and man is empowered to function as its steward, guardian and ‘priest’, offering it as a praise to the Creator – ‘Your own of Your own we offer to You, in all and for all’– and cultivating a Eucharistic relationship with the reation. This orthodox evangelical and patristic approach also draws our attention to the social dimensions and tragic consequences of the destruction of the natural environment”.

32. See «Ἐγκύκλιο τῆς Ἀγίας καὶ Μεγάλης Συνόδου τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας», § 14. Also the text-decision: «Ἡ ἀποστολὴ τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας εἰς τὸν σύγχρονον κόσμον», Section ΣΤ’, § 4 and especially § 10.