

**INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC COMPETITION OF THE  
INTERPARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY ON ORTHODOXY**



**SCIENTIFIC ESSAY**

**“The social values of Christianity in politics and the contribution of  
the IAO in bringing them to the forefront”**

## **PREAMBLE**

The present essay has been composed for the purpose of participating in the Contest organized by the Inter-parliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy (henceforth IAO) on the occasion of the celebration of its twenty years of action since its foundation. The gravitas of the occasion combined with the international prestige enjoyed by the IAO made this endeavor particularly demanding. Further, the abundant literature in relation to the proceedings of the institution, increased the degree of difficulty involved in the writing of the essay which was required to depict the dialectic relationship between the IAO and the current reality imprinted in the various historical social and financial redeployments over the last twenty years. The intention of the present essay is to reconstruct IAO's twenty year course by probing those political acts which bring forth its political particularity and give tongue to its identity imbued with the orthodox Christian values.

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## INTRODUCTION

The essay shall explore the contribution of the IAO to the consolidation of the orthodox social values universally. It aspires to outline the IAO's mediatory role in the putting forth of the orthodox proposition as the right spiritual perspective in the European and international scene. The present essay, therefore, shall attempt to shed light on the ways in which the IAO is bringing "a proposition of an existential message"<sup>1</sup> in the modern globalised and secular historical framework. Specifically, the essay is attempting to depict the testimony of Orthodoxy, as expressed by the IAO, in the multifaceted expressions of social life that govern issues of ethics and bioethics, of cultural and national identity, of religious and interreligious dialogue, social problems and the deep crisis which hit the modern financial, democratic system and its values.

The essay was based on the study of the abundant literature on the subject and is focusing on texts such as the manifesto, the founding act, the resolutions, the conclusions, the general principles of the IAO, as well as its bulletins produced at the end of the twenty-year period. Therefore, the method used ensued from the armamentarium of "contextual theology", in accordance with which each and every text is produced in a given historical and cultural context and is, thus, surrounded by a certain historical and cultural cohesion<sup>2</sup>.

The term «social values» comprised in the title of the essay brings to mind the final text of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference (October 28 – November 6 1986), where there is mention of "the prevalence of the Christian ideals of peace, freedom, brotherhood and

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<sup>1</sup> Minutes of the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Assembly, Athens, pp. 57-58

<sup>2</sup> Petros B. Vassiliadis, *Contextual Theology and the role of Orthodoxy* in: [www.amen.gr/article11607](http://www.amen.gr/article11607) (accessed on 06/08/2013)

love among the peoples and the lifting of racial discriminations”<sup>3</sup>. The present essay delves precisely in these values, in an attempt to depict their guiding role in the twenty-year course of action followed by the IAO.

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<sup>3</sup> [www.apostoliki-diakonia.gr/gr\\_main/dialogos/dialogos.asp?content=content&main=C\\_pros\\_4.1.htm](http://www.apostoliki-diakonia.gr/gr_main/dialogos/dialogos.asp?content=content&main=C_pros_4.1.htm)  
(accessed on 06/08/2013)

## SECTION 1 IAO's HISTORICAL COURSE

### 1.1. IAO's European origins

The IAO emerged at a point in time when the European geopolitical map was changing radically. The Eastern European countries were transitioning fast from real socialism to liberal democracy, while Central and Western Europe were gradually transforming into a single monetary and political Union. In this climate of redeployments, harking to the challenges generated by international developments, a group of Greek members of Parliament<sup>4</sup> headed by Dr. Kostas Mygdalis and under the paternal blessing and encouragement of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, addressed to other Orthodox Europeans an invitation to an inter-orthodox dialogue in order to reflect on the orthodox self consciousness in the new European reality, then in the making. The Russian State Duma has been a partner and a supporter to this endeavor from the very beginning. The outcome was the first pan-orthodox conference, jointly organized in Ormilias of the Chalkidiki peninsula in June 1993, with the participation of 15 European parliaments. The conference bore fruit which became the statutory texts of the IAO, the Manifesto of the Participants (1993), its Founding Act (1994) and its Regulation of Function that was definitively approved in 1998. Since then and to date, the IAO has increased the number of its parliamentary members to 24 with the participation, in parallel, of groups of members of parliament from Australia, Asia, Africa and the USA and has organized twenty yearly General Assemblies,

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<sup>4</sup> Namely the Chairman of the Committee on Religions and Orthodoxy, m. Vassilis Korachais and the Vice-Chairman m. Stelios Papatthemelis, see Kostas Migdalis "Politics and Inter-religious dialogue: the paradigm of the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy" in [blogs.auth.gr/moschosg/?s=%CE%9C%CE%A5%CE%93%CE%94%CE%91%CE%9B%CE%97%CE%A3](https://blogs.auth.gr/moschosg/?s=%CE%9C%CE%A5%CE%93%CE%94%CE%91%CE%9B%CE%97%CE%A3) (accessed on 09/08/2013), while his article titled "Greece faced with the new Orthodox ecumenical reality" in the *Kath' Odon* issue 1 (January – April 1992) pp 81-89 could be said to be "prophetic" in the theologian sense of the term.

dozens of seminars and conferences as well as hundreds of Meetings of its International Secretariat and Committees the world over.

Studying the juvenilia of IAO, one can easily discern in the scattered thoughts therein a diffuse anxiety about the future of Orthodoxy in the fluid political landscape formed in the Balkans in the period 1990 – 2000. This was the time during which some of the participating Members of Parliament started the idea of an “orthodox axis” in answer to the looming shadow of “Muslim arcs” and the threat of “Roman Catholic fronts” in a disintegrating Yugoslavia<sup>5</sup>. This latent polemic tendency however, very soon wore out and gave its place to an intercultural and interreligious dialogue recognizing the need for an interactive coexistence of cultures and religions enabled by their mutual perichoresis<sup>6</sup>.

As it is expressly stated in the Manifesto, the IAO addressed the proposal to the European Union to “use Orthodoxy as the another cultural expression”<sup>7</sup>, which depicts the unique identity of the 150,000,000 Orthodox people mainly in the eastern part of the Old Continent, a number corresponding to almost half the population of Europe. This proposal is totally in line with the position of the Ecumenical Patriarchate “that political unity separated from civilization, that is, without a fundamental understanding of human relationships, cannot lead to the achievement of a united Europe”<sup>8</sup> and it delineates IAO’s position on the construction of an “pan-Europe” the geopolitical map of which extends “from the Atlantic Ocean to the Urals” and contains all religious and cultural traditions of the nation states which compose it.

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<sup>5</sup> Minutes of the 4<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, Athens, p. 9

<sup>6</sup> Ibid p. 10

<sup>7</sup> Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy, *Manifesto of the participants– Founding Act – Regulation of Function*, Athens, 2013<sup>2</sup>, p. 12

<sup>8</sup> The Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew “Address to the Plenary of the European Parliament (Strasbourg April 19, 1994” in *Kath’ Odon*, sixth issue (September – December 1993) p. 9

In the beginning of the 1990's, the perspective of the European Union enlargement by the accession of the post-communist states created the expectation of an equal recognition of the cultural identity of the orthodox peoples. Therefore, IAO's principal aspiration was to have the leading role of Orthodoxy recognized -on equal footing with that of Catholicism and Protestantism- in the joint forging of the European identity and to project its diachronic presence in the European developments. IAO's European orientation is obvious both in the Eurocentric agendas of its General Assemblies and in its very title as European Inter-parliamentary Assembly up until 2001. The accession to the European Union of Cyprus and eight countries of the former Eastern European block (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Hungary) in 2004 and that of Romania and Bulgaria in 2007 undoubtedly gave the IAO movement a boost, as it reinforced the presence of the Eastern Christian world in the bosom of the European family. Reality, however, especially after the deep economic recession, did not respond to IAO's expectations, as it became apparent in one of its resolutions in 2010, where it is stated that "the accession of a group of traditionally orthodox countries to the European Institutions has not contributed to making the voice of Orthodoxy be heard more in the contemporary world"<sup>9</sup>. This assessment made it obvious that an alternative plan was required which would put forth as a solution the rallying of the orthodox word<sup>10</sup> in order to show its partners in a more dynamic way the mode of life it embraces.

## **1.2. IAO'S ecumenical mission**

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<sup>9</sup> Minutes of the 17<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, Athens, p.116

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 116



IAO's change of name and its transformation into an International Organization<sup>11</sup> signaled its opening to the world. In 2000, for the first time on the occasion of the two-thousand-year anniversary of Christ's presence on earth, the General Assembly convened outside European territory, in Sion, mother of all churches. Since then, the Delegation has started on a series of visits and the International Secretariat has been holding its meetings in all those countries where there is parliamentary representation of Orthodoxy. The first visits to Brussels, to the seat of the European Parliament and the European Commission and to Geneva, to the premises of the ecumenical bodies (World Council of Churches, the Conference of European Churches, the Orthodox Centre of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Official Delegation of the Moscow Patriarchate etc) have certainly been a milestone for the organization, as it was formally recognized and accepted by the international community on a symbolic level<sup>12</sup>.

Events that occurred in the dawn of the third millennium, such as the culmination of the anti-globalization movement in the Genoa march and the 9/11 attack triggered changes in the current political situation and led the IAO to seek ways to enhance its influence and prestige. By means of its participation in international organizations, in its observer's status (CIS, PABSEC, SEECF) and by signing cooperation agreements with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Russia-Belarus Union and the Interparliamentary Assembly of the Eurasian Economic Community (IPAECC), it enhanced its relations with its member-states in Eastern Europe. Further, it became more prominent in Western Europe thanks to resolution 126/ 14 June 2005 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Western European Union (PAWEU) which recognized the IAO as an

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.eiao.org/Istoria.aspx> (accessed on 12/08/2013)

<sup>12</sup> Minutes of the 12<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, Athens, 2006, p. 108

international organization. It signed a cooperation agreement with the Parliamentary Union of the Organization of Islamic Conference member states (PU-OIC) and with the Pan-African Parliament (PAP) and attended as an observer the works of International Organizations (OSCE, IPU), as well as the 9<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the WCC in Porto Alegre, Brazil. Finally, apart from the cooperation it established with the senior and new Patriarchates, the Autocephalous Churches and the Council of European Churches, last year the IAO made two visits of an outstanding significance for its future, to America and to the Vatican, in the course of which subjects of vital importance were dealt with, such as the safety of the Christians of the Middle East and cooperation to be developed in matters of common interest.

Acting in the globalised framework of our post-modern cultural paradigm, the IAO moves flexibly bringing the orthodox message of ecumenicity. In the light of globalization seen as a process based on the ideology of an unbridled neo-liberalism and an unprincipled use of technology, the secularized ethics of individualism and religious discoloration, the annihilation of the nation state with all it entails for the cultural identity of persons and peoples, reality appears very grim for humanity at large. The IAO, however, took up the challenge of globalization and saw it as an invitation to a dialogue, thereby seizing the opportunity to communicate its own position on ecumenicity, in which globalization is replaced by universality, ideology by theology and economy by divine economy, and which promulgates unity of peoples and strives to consolidate itself through the defense of individual rights, religious freedom and international law.

### 1.3 IAO's poetic action

In the words of the Russian advisor V. Alexeev, the IAO is “a secular political organization which bases its action on the shared ideas for the defense of the spiritual foundations of Orthodoxy and is enriched by them”<sup>13</sup>. The IAO is a political supra-partisan organisation which, based on democratic concertation and interparliamentary cooperation endeavors to produce a strong political discourse emanating from the gospels, transubstantiate the orthodox experience into political action, transfigure Christian ethics into moral laws and upgrade the role of politics from a servant to utilitarian needs to a minister of “morality”.

As a collective body, the IAO is exclusively founded on the principle of majority, proportionate to the orthodox synodic system of local Churches, which is, in turn, based not on individual opinion but rather on collective opinion<sup>14</sup> where “the vote of the majority should prevail”. The principle of synodicity, the “ecclesiasm of democracy”<sup>15</sup> as per the favorite expression of Pr. M. Begzos, in its secular form governs the whole of the IAO's poetic action, which, to use a paraphrase, “democratizes the Church” by transfusing the values of Orthodoxy into the body of politics.

The IAO members, in the course of their mandate, shoulder the responsibility of the prophetic gift. In the language of theology, prophesy does not refer to the divinatory ability but rather to an “insightful understanding of what will happen, when life deviates from truth”<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Minutes of the 4<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, Athens, p.87

<sup>14</sup> His Eminence Metropolitan of Nafpactos and St. Vlassios Hierotheos Vlachos “The synodic and hierarchic polity of Church as a gift”, *Theology* 2/2009. (Dedication to the Synodic Institution), p. 67.

<sup>15</sup> Marios Begzos, “Democracy in the Church”, *Kath' Odon*, issue 10 (January –April 1995), pp 55-60

<sup>16</sup> Adamantios Avgoustidis “*Christianity and Politics in tomorrow's world*” In [www.romfea.gr/arhtra-apopseis/17711-2013-06-28-10-36-18](http://www.romfea.gr/arhtra-apopseis/17711-2013-06-28-10-36-18) (accessed on 10/08/2013)

Guided by the anthropocentric values of Orthodoxy and its ecumenical peace-making vision, the IAO follows the developments of military operations and political ministrations. To this effect, article 3a of its Founding Act establishes as an objective the “recording and evaluation of the changes taking place in Europe”. Its members, therefore, militate in the orthodox congregation and endeavor to transmit the principles of Orthodoxy to the parliaments and International Organizations in the form of resolutions and general principles. The political praxis of the IAO members finds its ultimate expression in their missionary action, which, by means of agreements with parliamentary representatives and exchanges of visits with church representatives, attempts to comply with our Lord’s last command “and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”

## SECTION 2 IAO's ORTHODOX IDENTITY

### 2.1. The principles of Christian anthropology

In the words of its first President V.Zorkaltsev, the IAO endeavors to implement the “Christian interpretation of the concept of anthropocentrism”<sup>17</sup>. Following the orthodox Christian anthropology, the IAO perceives man as the image of God, as “person” who is in a position to substantiate his life in God’s existential manner, freely and not by compulsion<sup>18</sup>. The interpersonal and especially family relationships constitute a reflexion of God’s coexistence in the holy trinity as a communion of love. In reproducing the aforementioned Christian thesis by virtue of a decision of its General Assembly (1999), the IAO expressed its belief that the “traditional God-given family relations, blessed on the levels of man-wife, parents-children... remain the fundamental element of the modern world”<sup>19</sup>. This position promulgated by the IAO could not be deemed as coincidental when, at the same point in time, the Amsterdam Treaty introduced, by virtue of article 13, sexual orientation as one among other criteria of discrimination<sup>20</sup>.

On the other hand, the Christian approach of man as a psychosomatic entity and the respect for the particularity and uniqueness of the human person, as these are depicted in the passed Declaration of the basic principles of Bioethics (2002), constitute IAO’s proposition to the promising decoding of the human genome which was triumphantly

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<sup>17</sup> Minutes of the 7<sup>th</sup> Assembly, Athens, p.22

<sup>18</sup>Christos Giannaras, *The Alphabet of Faith*, Domos publ., Athens, p.93 (*Το αλφαβητάρι της πίστης*)

<sup>19</sup>Minutes of the 6<sup>th</sup> Assembly, Athens, p.83

<sup>20</sup> [http://europa.eu/legislation\\_summaries/institutional\\_affairs/treaties/amsterdam\\_treaty/a10000\\_el.htm](http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/institutional_affairs/treaties/amsterdam_treaty/a10000_el.htm) (accessed on 16/08/2013)

proclaimed for the first time by the US President Bill Clinton in 2000<sup>21</sup>. The IAO declaration, having been reviewed by the Bioethics Committee of the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece<sup>22</sup>, was notified to the parliaments of its member states and was internationally commended<sup>23</sup>. Its special contribution lies in the fact that it fosters the orthodox “social perception” of human life, according to which each and every human being exists in relation to his fellow human beings and not as a slave to his individual rights, as stipulated by western philosophy<sup>24</sup>. Indicative of the above is, indeed, the concept of “consent” given by the relatives, who decide jointly in case of patient euthanasia<sup>25</sup>. Finally, the understanding of life as a gift from God and its protection in order to prevent it from being reduced to a mere financial magnitude, is in line with the proposal made by the IAO in the course of a debate in the Council of Europe in 2003 before the vote on a recommendation in relation to euthanasia and goes against the adoption of active euthanasia, as it had been voted in the Netherlands and Belgium in 2001 and 2002 respectively<sup>26</sup>.

## **2.2. The orthodox perception of the national and cultural identity**

The IAO has consistently maintained that “Orthodoxy has been a constitutive element of the national self-awareness and the very statehood

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<sup>21</sup> Francis S. Collins, *The Language of God*, Papazisis Publishers, Athens, 2009, p. 18)

<sup>22</sup> [http://www.bioethics.org.gr/03\\_c.html#7](http://www.bioethics.org.gr/03_c.html#7) (accessed on 16/08/2013)

<sup>23</sup> Minutes of the 12th General Assembly, Athens, 2006, pp. 54-55

<sup>24</sup> Minutes of the 8th General Assembly, Athens, 2002, p. 42

<sup>25</sup> *Euthanasia, Motions on the General Principles*, as voted during the 10<sup>th</sup> IAO Annual General Assembly in Vilnius, Lithuania, June 2003, p.24.

<sup>26</sup> Minutes of the 10th General Assembly, Athens, 2004, p. 50.

of our countries”<sup>27</sup>. Orthodoxy, by its ascetic life, religious experience and parish life incubated the value system of traditional societies and nurtured their national sense of belonging to such a degree that the State and the Church are perceived as expressing the public sphere in tandem. This thesis is certainly in opposition to the “other view”, which bans the Church and the ensuing Christian values to the sphere of private life, thus depriving the state from all spirituality and converting it into an exclusively administrative agent. The IAO definitely endorses the two distinct roles for the State and the Church, recognizing however the complementary role the Church plays as the main vector of the expression of the spiritual and moral values of a large part of society. In this spirit, the IAO issued a resolution (2003) against the fact that there was no mention in the preamble of the European Constitution of the contribution by Christianity to the shaping of the European conscience<sup>28</sup>.

Further, Orthodoxy is not a reality outside history. On the contrary, it unfolds within history. Christian ethics materialize in the century-long tradition of Orthodoxy, which, in turn, leaves the traces of its uninterrupted course in history on the treasures of cultural heritage that the IAO has been trying to safeguard by means of its numerous resolutions to this effect. Specifically, having condemned the conversion of the Armenian monastery of Saint Macarius in Cyprus into a hotel<sup>29</sup>, it launches an appeal for the salvaging, restoration and repatriation of the Cypriot treasures<sup>30</sup>. It also condemns the destruction of holy monuments in Kosovo and Metohi as a blow against European and global heritage<sup>31</sup>,

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<sup>27</sup> Minutes of the 17<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, Athens, p.115

<sup>28</sup> IAO Bulletin, 6<sup>th</sup> issue (2004), p. 8

<sup>29</sup> Minutes of the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual General Assembly, Athens, p. 61

<sup>30</sup> Minutes of the 14<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, Athens, pp. 177-178

<sup>31</sup> Minutes of the 16<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, Athens, pp 169-171

while expressing its concern over the systematic destruction sustained by the Christian Armenian monuments in Nagorno-Karabakh, drawing the authorities' attention to the consequences for non-compliance with the 1972 UNESCO provisions on the Protection of Cultural Heritage<sup>32</sup>.

In order to safeguard the continuity of the orthodox tradition, the IAO in one of its resolutions (2005) advocated the need for the lesson on religion to be taught as a subject of identity in primary and secondary education<sup>33</sup>. A Conference among the Education Ministers of the IAO member states had been previously organised (1999) on the subject of religious instruction and it was repeated three years later (2002). Acknowledging the mediating role of education in the cognitive ammunition and spiritual armoring of the youth, the Ministers recommended in their Declaration the necessity to pass on the Christian principles of ecumenicity and sacredness of the person as the most appropriate antidotes to the contemporary new order<sup>34</sup>. For this reason they suggested the establishment of an Inter-Orthodox Education Centre<sup>35</sup>. The seminar organised in the Volos Academy for Theological Studies in 2004 was the continuation of the original thought and raised again the contemporary demand that religious instruction at school respond to the pluralist and multicultural world in such a way as to promote dialogue and collective reflexion and to keep fanaticism and dogmatism at bay<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> Minutes of the 17<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, Athens, p. 118

<sup>33</sup> Minutes of the 12<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, Athens 2006, p.159

<sup>34</sup> IAO Bulletin, 4<sup>th</sup> issue (2002), p. 5

<sup>35</sup> Minutes of the 10<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, Athens 2004, p. 92

<sup>36</sup> "Introductory Note by Professor of the Faculty of Theology of the Athens University, m. K. Delikonstantis" in *The lesson on religion as a subject of identity and culture* (Volos 15 – 17 May 2004), publications of the Hellenic Parliament, Athens 2005, pp 25-26



### **2.3. The right to religious freedom and the interreligious dialogue**

The IAO, in line with the provisions of articles of international organisations and the decisions of European institutions, recognises the right to religious freedom and establishes as a priority the legal safeguarding of this right against potential violations. By the promulgation of its General Principles<sup>37</sup>, in 1999, it defends Christianity in countries which are self-determined as Orthodox, recommending to its member states to reinforce “traditional religions”, as the vectors of their prevailing cultural paradigm and system of values. This reinforcement, takes on the form of a special institutional arrangement entailing tax cuts and legal protection on the level of structures such as administration and education, and it is totally in line with the basic principles of the European Parliament resolution (29/02/1996) on sects<sup>38</sup>, which are deemed dangerous on account of their proselytizing activity which is incompatible with the human rights.

On the other hand, by its resolutions on the suffering orthodox peoples in Cyprus, Kosovo and Metohi, in Israel and Palestine, in Africa and lately in the countries of the Middle East, the IAO castigates the discriminations suffered by the Christian communities for religious reasons and it defends their right to practice freely their religious rights, supporting the important role of the state in the consolidation of religious tolerance. For this reason, it hails and welcomes the first ever systematic effort of a European Union institution, the European Parliament’s initiative in 2011 to condemn terrorist attacks, religious discriminations

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<sup>37</sup> Minutes of the 6<sup>th</sup> Assembly, Athens, pp 87-88

<sup>38</sup> Minutes of the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual General Assembly, Athens, p.53

and the religious prosecutions suffered by the Christian minorities the world over at the end of 2010 and the beginning of 2011. The same line of thought is also followed in the resolution on the reopening of the Theological School of Halki, uttered for the first time in 2000 and reiterated as a request during the two-day conference very recently in Constantinople (2013).

The IAO, remaining faithful to its founding manifesto per which it is a political and not a religious organization and therefore not competent to intervene in internal issues of the church or theological contentions, embraced from its inception the ancient eastern orthodox Churches, including Armenia among its founding members. This principle is in line with the ecumenical spirit of Orthodoxy which may transcend confessional oppositions and unite the Churches in the person of the Holy Trinity. The ecumenicity, however, of Christ's deplorative message is not restricted to the patrimonial hearth of its "home", but wandering around the world, it focuses on each person, familiar and stranger alike, inviting them to a dialectic conversation. The initialing of the draft cooperation agreement between the IAO and the Parliamentary Union of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (PUOIC), may be interpreted as such an invitation to dialogue, a gesture which is in harmony with the imperative of the Ecumenical Charter of the European Union Churches (2001) for Christians to cooperate with Muslims living in Europe on issues of common interest<sup>39</sup>. Furthermore, the proposal of the Geneva Spiritual Appeal, signed by the IAO in 2005, for the spiritual foundation of religion to be released from its abusive idealization by forces aspiring to legalise every effort to prevail at the expense of others, was complemented in the 2007 IAO resolution for the establishment of the

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<sup>39</sup> Council of European Churches, *Ecumenical Charter, Guidelines for the Growing Cooperation among the Churches in Europe*, translation by Ioanna Sachinidou in: <http://www.academia.edu/1892907/> (accessed on 20/07/2013), p. 7

interreligious dialogue as the answer to violence and fanaticism and as the sole guaranty of the consolidation of peace the world over<sup>40</sup>.

## 2.4. The vision of conciliation

The Second Ecumenical European Assembly which took place in Assisi in 1997 on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary from World War II bequeathed as a mission to the churches the ministry of conciliation<sup>41</sup>. Conciliation should not be interpreted as a solution of compromise or as a social contract of mutual concessions, but as a “dynamic gesture by man to man, which for the Christians follows the deep and existential change of relationship to God”<sup>42</sup>. The apocalyptic act of conciliation blasts social relations opening new perspectives to the will for self offer, solidarity, non violence and respect for the Maker and Creation<sup>43</sup>. In its quest of Christ in the person of every helpless individual, the IAO proceeds to a series of actions. It has been strongly defending for numerous years the right of repatriation for the refugees of Cyprus, Kosovo, Palestine and the 300.000 uprooted Abkhazians in Georgia, while, making the many South African issues its own, it invited –by its 2005 resolution- the international organizations to provide the necessary humanitarian assistance in order to solve the problems of hunger, disease, financial hardship and civil strife which are present in Africa<sup>44</sup>.

<sup>40</sup> Minutes of the 14<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, Athens, pp. 175-176

<sup>41</sup> «Assisi Conference: Conciliation: A Gift of God and source of a new life”, *Kath’ Odon*, 12<sup>th</sup> issue, February 1997, p.10

<sup>42</sup> Christos Tsironis “The lesson on Religion as a subject of conciliation and reconciliation” in *The lesson on Religion as a subject of identity and culture* (Volos, 15-17 of May 2004), Athens 2005, p.79

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, p. 81

<sup>44</sup> IAO Bulletin, issue 8 (2006), pp. 47- 49

Following the incitation of Apostle Paul in his epistle to the Galatians (3,28) that “there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ”, the IAO takes a clear position against racial discrimination, racist exacerbations and nationalistic trends. In a special resolution (2005), it denounces racism as the culprit for “some of the greatest tragedies in human history”<sup>45</sup>. For this reason, in one of its subsequent resolutions (2011) and, of course, in an effort to put pressure on Turkey –in view of its accession to the EU- the IAO denounces the Genocide against the Armenians, the Greeks and the Assyrians, i.e. the indigenous Christian peoples residing in the Ottoman Empire territories, in order to restore historical justice<sup>46</sup>. Furthermore, in its effort to materialize Christ’s incitation in the Sermon on the Mount “Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God” (Mathew 5,9) it takes position against a number of wars raging in Kosovo, Abkhazia, Iraq and Palestine, while after the 9/11 attack it denounced international terrorism, persisting on the necessity to upgrade the legislative system, interparliamentary dialogue and interstate relations on the basis of the unifying force of Orthodoxy<sup>47</sup>. The actions mentioned above are in line with the IAO’s founding objective for the consolidation and promotion of peace in the world. It needs, however, to be pointed out that IAO’s peace-making vision is not realized without internal resistance and controversies. The war in Yugoslavia almost destroyed the unity of the organization itself. The fact that the IAO reached a unanimous decision is largely due to the contribution of Greece which, although a member of the military NATO

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<sup>45</sup> Minutes of the 12<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, Athens, p. 157

<sup>46</sup> Minutes of the 18<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, Athens, p. 158

<sup>47</sup> IAO Bulletin, issue 7 (2005), pp. 10- 11

alliance, backed Yugoslavia of the same faith<sup>48</sup>. On the other hand, while its resolutions emanate from unanimous plenary decisions, this was not the case with the resolution on the Israeli-Palestinian issue (2005); that resolution had not been approved by the USA and Australia delegates<sup>49</sup>. These events, indicative of the difficulties experienced by the IAO, corroborate its “martyr” disposition and put to evidence the slowness with which the Gospel is revealed within humanity, on account of man’s fallen nature manifested in all sorts of dissensions, divisions and disagreements.

Finally, the deep financial recession, “deprived of any anthropological dimension and sensitivity”<sup>50</sup> which has been ravaging the humanity over the last five years has not escaped IAO’s attention. Following the rule of the interest of the many, it condemns the rationale of super-profit accumulated in the hands of the few and counter proposes the solution of voluntary offers for the suffering and the financially deprived, as a tangible manifestation of the ecclesiastical solidarity and the attachment of politics to the service of public interest<sup>51</sup>. Expressing the conviction that the financial crisis is first and foremost a moral crisis manifest in the fall of guaranties of the creditworthiness of banks and state institutions, it calls for a new prioritization of the value system, in order for the capital of universal human values, solidarity and corporate responsibility to be transferred to the economy of the world capital market<sup>52</sup>. During a conference organised in Helsinki in 2011, it stressed the necessity to orient ourselves towards voting a declaration of human

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<sup>48</sup> Minutes of the 6<sup>th</sup> Assembly, Athens, p. 79

<sup>49</sup> Minutes of the 12<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, Athens, p. 156

<sup>50</sup> «Message by the Heads of the Orthodox Churches in: [www.ec-patr.org/docdisplay.php?lang=gr&id=995&tla=gr](http://www.ec-patr.org/docdisplay.php?lang=gr&id=995&tla=gr) (accessed on 25/08/2013)

<sup>51</sup> Minutes of the 16<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, Athens, p.. 167

<sup>52</sup> Minutes of the 18<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, Athens, p.162

responsibilities to benefit the weaker<sup>53</sup>. The ultimate measure to overcome the crisis is, in its view, to ensure the function of Democracy, by restoring the relationship between the citizens and the state, the autonomy of political authorities and the strengthening of civil society<sup>54</sup>. The initiative for the establishment and operation of a “Foundation for Democracy, Parliamentarism and Religious Tolerance” in cooperation with the PAP, seated in Athens and Mozambique<sup>55</sup> should be understood in this light, in order for the vision of conciliation to find its legal and political expression in tormented Africa. These actions by the IAO, in tandem with the goals set by the movement of Diakonia in Europe through the Bratislava Declaration (1994)<sup>56</sup>, make it an observatory for the violation of human rights and turn it into a bridge-builder over financial gaps and social inequalities.

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<sup>53</sup> <http://www.eiao.org/default.aspx?pageid=872>

<sup>54</sup> Minutes of the 19<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, Athens, p. 141

<sup>55</sup> IAO Bulletin, issue 14 (2012), p. 41

<sup>56</sup> “The Bratislava Declaration: On the road of a vision of Diakonia in Europe”, transl. Ath. Vletsis, *Kath’ Odon*, issue 12 (February 1997), pp. 12-19

## CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS

Recognizing politics as the space where history unfolds, par excellence, the IAO translates through its actions the Christian message into its political dimension. The juxtaposition, therefore, between its political deeds and the objectives set out in article 3 of its Founding Act leads to the conclusion that the IAO, at the end of the twenty-year period, moved towards the achievement of all its goals. We could even be as bold as to claim that like another Liberation Theology it seeks the “realization of utopia”<sup>57</sup>. For utopia to become reality, however, there is still a lot to be done. The IAO needs to fortify its presence in the international community and to increase the intensity and the scope of pressure it can exercise, approaching more parliamentary representatives. It shall make closer contact with people of spirit and institutions of the academia, in order to further enrich its theoretical background. To this end, it would be useful to establish the Inter-Orthodox Center of Education, which, above and beyond its statutory objectives, could also inaugurate a series of seminars on the links between politics and theology and the theological interpretation of political actuality. But mainly, the IAO needs to make its existence more visible to the civil society. Its basic concern should be its dissemination towards the congregation of the faithful, in order to be able to consolidate its orthodox message. For the achievement of this goal, the use of the internet and social networking would be equally important as the mobilization of its committees and the cooperation with NGOs and local Churches. Finally, the enlargement of the subject matter of its General Assemblies with themes relative to issues such as the ecological environment, the proper function of the Mass Media, the Christian

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<sup>57</sup> Nikos Nikolopoulos, “Political Theology: Reality and Utopia” in: *Church – Ecumene – Politics: Dedicated to Metropolitan of Adrianopolis, Damaskinos*, Athens, 2007, p.509

understanding of biopolitics, mental illnesses, the orthodox ethos in work and fair trade, to mention just a few, is still open and waiting to happen in the near future.



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