

The effect of Orthodoxy on the establishment of social values of Christianity in politics: a glance in light of the activities of the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy

The idea of establishing the social values of Christianity in the political life of the society appears since the very years of Christian faith. After having gone through numerous adversities, persecutions and hard times, the Church obtained the grace of God and instead of being persecuted it prevailed. Tertullian, one of the fathers of the Church, said boldly to the gentiles: «We are but of yesterday and yet we have filled all places that belong to you: cities, islands, fortresses, town councils, the very camps, the palace, the senate, the market place ...». The Church gained the right to speak before kings and peoples and affect the course of historical developments.

The Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy has been successfully active for over 20 years under difficult political, socioeconomic and cultural conditions. Today the Organization brings together representatives from Europe, Asia, Africa and America reaffirming once again that the values and ideals declared by the IAO are important for all mankind as de facto Christian values. The Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy differs from other similar organizations due to the fact that before its establishment there were no similar transnational organizations defending the interests of Orthodoxy on a political and legislative basis. In the Manifesto of the Assembly's members (June 1993), adopted at Ormylia of Halkidiki (Greece), the important role of Orthodoxy in modern Europe far from any denominational, racial or ethnic conflicts is highlighted. A proposal has been made to broaden the contribution of Orthodoxy to finding solutions to the problems of modern man: ecological, social, health protection, tolerance. These are the areas that usually turn into an object of political manipulation and speculation and as a result they are in need of Christian social values more than others. In June 1994 in Athens representatives of 20 European parliaments signed the act establishing the «European Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy», the main objectives and targets of which shape and coordinate the influence of Orthodoxy on international and domestic politics. Parliamentarians, politicians, philosophers, lawyers, clergymen and representatives of other important areas of society's activities participate in the activities of the IAO. Another important element of IAO's activities related to the establishment of Christian values in politics is the fact that the idea of establishing an orthodox organization of parliamentarians belonged to Greece which is the birthplace of parliamentarianism and democracy and the place where the first Christian churches were established, the traditions of the Orthodox faith were founded and the Gospel was preached! Let us examine the effect of Orthodoxy on the establishment of social values of Christianity in politics in light of IAO's activities.

The Declaration of the representatives of parliaments who participated in the 20th anniversary annual General Assembly (June 2013) of IAO emphasizes the need for Orthodoxy to contribute to the establishment of social Christian values in politics, such as human rights, equality, the right to work and education, the protection of life and environment. By analyzing the documents of the IAO we single out the following social Christian values: freedom of the individual, human rights, mutual aid and social solidarity.

Social diakonia of the Church. The problem of upgrading the social activities of the orthodox community, raised for the first time during the conference in Minsk, was soon set by the Secretariat of the IAO as main topic at the 3rd IAO Assembly in Sofia. Already back in January 1996, six months before the conference, the topic was finally approved under the following wording: «Social work of the Orthodox community». For the first time the concept of “orthodox community” was discussed, which includes not only the representatives of the administrative structure of the church but also every man who considers himself orthodox, who

is asked to bring to the world the divine light, to contribute using his own forces to the dissemination of social ideals of Christianity in all aspects of life of the society.

Parishes play a huge role in the implementation of ideas adopted during the IAO's conferences on the social diakonia of the Church. Especially the religious communities that help the clergy in matters related to financial management, religious education, education and charitable work, constitute the bridge between the upper clergy and people who need comfort care and assistance. In certain countries there are state institutions that work together with the Church. Today as a result of these activities, social and socio-religious associations directly affiliated to the Orthodox Church have been established, the objective of which is to cooperate with the Church in the revival of orthodox traditions and culture. Thus, the youth movement of the Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate, "Resurrection", is active in the province of Cherson and is asked to unite orthodox young persons, implement projects in the field of social diakonia targeted to the poor, the orphans and lonely elderly people.

The Christian ideal of the politician. The apostle Paul asks us to pray for those in governing authorities for there is no authority except from God (Romans, 13:1-6). The canonical books of the New Testament reflect the social circumstances in which Christian values should be established and they often reveal the contrast between what is habitual, what is established and what is proper to do. The established laws and rules of political life very often are different than the rules in legal documents and do not reflect the teachings of Christ. The theology of authority according to the New Testament presents the Christian as a "social" person. Such a Christian has the ability to make his own independent decisions taking into account the divine spiritual laws of church sociability which then determine his lifestyle, behavior and actions towards the moral rules, prohibitions, laws and obligations as a citizen.

Supporting secular authority and influencing the political life of society is one of the pillars of Orthodoxy. Orthodox faith has always fostered respect and trust towards those in authorities, since according to the Testament, "for he is God's servant for your good". (Romans, 13:4). Since the time of the New Testament peoples expectations have not changed: they want to lead a peaceful life, without wars, riots, revolutions, corruption and non-accountability of authorities.

Ukraine belongs to the territory of canonical Orthodoxy and this is the reason why orthodox faith in this country has always had a significant influence on politics and politicians. The years of persecutions and hardships for the faith of God, the years when politicians were not allowed to express openly their religious beliefs now belong to the past. Today spirituality prevails throughout the country. For eastern Christian countries it is highly important that this spirituality might not become a routine and a mask behind which there is a completely different life and principles where there is no place for Christ. The Orthodox community that promotes the image of the Church to the world should become a major element in shaping culture with the contribution of which the charitable, humanitarian, missionary, catechetical, peacemaking work will be accomplished, i.e. the social diakonia of the Church.

Politicians are people of high social status the mistakes of whom often turn into sins against whole peoples and sometimes against the whole world, for which they cannot atone. In the past Germany's evangelical churches blessed Hitler and today we recall with grief the horrors of war. Orthodoxy should become the guardian of peace – constantly make appeal for peace to the politicians and this is the reason why it should not be militant. It is unacceptable to have conflicts over land, churches and parishes and bless sinful decisions made by people in authority in exchange for material goods.

Orthodox prelates who use their prestige and influence over the international cycles and the political elite of the society are asked by God Himself to contribute to the establishment of Christian values among the political forces, the authorities and the peoples by introducing them the commandments of Christ, so that the Christian morals of politicians might not be limited to showy prayers in churches, or their presence at the celebrations of the Epiphany or in churches followed by hundreds of television cameras or at social events accompanied by prelates of the

Church. Their activities should embody the social values proclaimed by Christ – honesty, justice, charity, mercy, helping their fellow man, caring for the others more than for themselves. A ruler is a deacon of God! No religion has ever proclaimed that the authorities are deacons of people! However in the New Testament the Lord Himself comes to the world to minister and save. To minister and not to rule, to reap benefits. Paul the apostle describes the result of the introduction of social values of Christianity into the political life of ancient society as «submissive and obedient... be ready to every good work» (Titus, Chapter III, 1-3).

The social values of Christianity in politics are irreplaceable especially **during the economic crisis**. The golden idol is openly ruling the world. Shakespeare once wrote: «Thus much of this will make black white, foul fair, wrong right, base noble». Today avarice topples the thrones of the powerful bringing despicable people in power, causes external complications and wars, and sows internal discord that leads to bloodiest revolutions. Current economic crises and disasters are mainly attributable to the decline in human morality. The voice of the Church, the voice of Orthodoxy is not heard loud enough in this struggle. Bishop Nikolai of Ohrid notes: «God used a modern means and hit modern people – banks, the banks of Forex, the stock market overturning the tables of money changers tables throughout the world just like He once did at the Temple of Salmon». I wonder if the Church that has also drifted into this money hunting, has changed its views, if this «feast in time of plague» has stopped. When the senior prelates of the Church instead of helping their fellowmen choose expensive cars and luxury goods? Is this the image of Christ and of His Church and the gates of Hades will not overcome it?

The 17th General Assembly of the IAO pointed out that the economic crisis and environmental disasters in the whole world have weakened the social values and revealed the numerous problems of society. Orthodoxy is called to offer people faith, support and hope for the future. Priests and Orthodox politicians should come close to the people and be ready to help them instead of remaining secure in churches protected by their personal security staff and locks. At the 19th General Assembly of the IAO (Prague, 2012) parliamentarians particularly underlined that the financial crisis is a challenge for the democratic values. In the course of the Assembly the way was proposed through which Orthodoxy can influence politics in times of crisis in order to find the balance between the political and financial fields and fight for the preservation of spiritual and moral values in the society.

«Love your neighbor» in politics. Two commands constitute the foundation of life in the New Testament – the religious one «love the Lord your God» and the social one – «love your neighbor» (Mark, 12:30, Matthew, 22:39, Luke, 10:27). The establishment of these values in politics leads to the achievement of harmony between the spiritual and material components of man and society. The preservation of Christian values was the main issue of the 15th session of the General Assembly of IAO (Rhodes, 2008) dedicated to solving the crisis of the global value system as a challenge before Christian Orthodoxy. Politicians, theologians and social actors adopted a single resolution, pointing out that mutual understanding among orthodox peoples is fundamental for a stable global political system.

Orthodoxy is required to bring the **respect of human rights and freedoms** into politics without privileges and discrimination. Through the unifying spirit of Orthodoxy, one of the objectives of the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy is to help overcome the extreme ethnic, denominational and religious contrasts, and find effective ways of protecting ethnic and religious minorities. The members of the IAO continuously discuss about problems related to the expression of orthodox values in the modern world. The work of the IAO starts from the struggle for the human rights of both Christians and believers of other religions. Orthodoxy should become an example to this respect. When the clergy enjoys privileges, when there are lies and sins intensely discussed by the mass media and among the parishioners, no one can expect that such priests can influence politics by introducing the Spark of God. Church cannot be the source of sins!

Orthodoxy is asked to introduce **moral dignity of man** into politics instead of power, wealth and position in society. The Bible tells us that «The serpent was craftier than any other

beast of the field that the Lord God has made» (Genesis, 3:1). The serpent tempted Christ by offering power and wealth in exchange for the fall and the worship of evil!

Education is an underlying element in shaping morality. In this context in June the 13th 1995 the Resolution on «Development of orthodox culture and of intellectual-moral enlightenment and education» was adopted. The Resolution presented the goals and objectives of the IAO in the field of intellectual enlightenment: 1) revealing the role of Orthodoxy as an important and necessary factor for the development and expression of culture and traditions in shaping the new European reality, 2) cooperating with international organizations in the setting up and implementation of cultural, enlightening, educational and scientific programs aimed at the study and dissemination of the cultural heritage of Orthodoxy, 3) preparing curricula and textbooks for students of pedagogical institutes that will help them learn the foundations of orthodox culture as component of pan-Christian and pan-European cultural heritage, 4) contributing to the development of general education courses, religious studies and programs as part of optional education, 5) contributing to the organization of tenders for special programs, 6) granting awards and scholarships, inter alia, also to the mass media, 7) preparing optional and special courses targeted at students of all ages. Today the fruit of this Resolution is clearly seen in the modern educational process. A new course on “The foundations of Christian morality” has been introduced in general education schools of Ukraine while priests of the Orthodox Church are involved in the teaching of the said course. A special pilot course on “The foundations of Orthodoxy” has been introduced in higher educational institutions allowing not only the orthodox but also the representatives of other denominations as well as the atheists to get to know the roots of faith and the basic doctrinal rules.

The need for moral regeneration of man was the key issue of the 15th General Assembly of the IAO on «The crisis of the global value system as a challenge before Christian Orthodoxy» (Rhodes, 25-28 June 2008). It is particularly important the fact that His Holiness Alexei II Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia in his greeting message to the members of the Assembly stressed that the crisis of moral principles of society and the persistent efforts to deny the Christian content of European culture further increase the over-consuming attitude of man in life. The Patriarch called the representatives to consider the importance of the contemporary challenge facing Orthodoxy in creating a system of actions in support of traditional values with a view to establishing the fundamental importance of Christian spirituality for the further development of humanity within the framework of creating equitable social and law principles relating to the state and international organizations.

Such meaningful and responsible duties require a de facto Christian unity between Orthodox peoples and their representatives in order to strengthen their influence in the world. The Church should not be subordinate to power and wealth, its mission is to bring Christian social values in politics instead of doing compromises in order to gain earthly goods.

Orthodoxy is asked to influence politics in order to **solve poverty issues**. Diligence is a social value of Christianity that should influence the process of solving the problem of poverty legislatively. At the annual meetings and conferences of the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy the current legislative and religious efforts to solve the problem of poverty are discussed. At the conference on «The social dimension of monotheistic religions» (Istanbul, March 2013) held under the auspices of the IAO, the issue of combining efforts in order to solve the problem of poverty was discussed. Following the Apostolic Constitutions, Apostle Peter used the following words: «Be ashamed of yourselves for holding on to what belongs to someone else. Resolve to imitate God’s justice and no one will be poor». These words are timely as far as modern politics is concerned – do not hold on to what belongs to others! Who else if not the Church should appeal to politicians and reveal sins?!

Another social value of Christianity is **peacemaking**. In order to justify or explain a historical event, especially when society feels that bears part of the guilt, we say: «It’s the inevitable course of history». There is nothing inevitable, in history there is always cooperation of two powers – the Divine and human will. Orthodoxy should direct human will towards

peacemaking actions in accordance with the social principles of Christianity. At the conference of the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy (June 1993) the special role of Orthodoxy as a bridge between the cultures of Europe and Asia was emphasized so that through the dialogue the organization might be in favour of preserving peace and mutual understanding on the planet.

At the conference in Minsk (March 1996) it has been pointed out that under conditions of spread regional crisis and conflicts with a destructive effect throughout the global system, the peoples of post Byzantine spiritual tradition do not intend to build a closed community or link isolated from other countries and peoples. Orthodox peoples are in favour of integration processes in the continent, in favour of a single Europe and of their presence in it. At the same time, the peoples of the orthodox region would like to be present in Europe, which is being unified, without losing their unique image, faith, spirituality, language and culture. At the conference the problems related to the social diakonia of the Orthodox community, its peacemaking and charity actions were raised. This year was a turning year for the establishment of Christian social values in politics. The Assembly became known to the world and had the opportunity to enter into mutual relations with parliamentarians of Australia and USA. An important step in the context of its peacemaking action was the adoption of the communiqué and the declaration towards the authorities of Estonia, European Union, Council of Europe and the Patriarchate of Constantinople so that they might make all possible efforts to put an end to discrimination and violation of orthodox believers' rights in Estonia with a view to safeguarding ecclesiastical peace in this country.

IAO's action during the period of national intolerance against the orthodox population in Kosovo and Metohija is particularly important. At the conference in Moldova (May 1998), the participants discussed the history of this complex ongoing conflict in the center of Europe and expressed their concerns about possible outbreaks of new armed conflicts because of transnational disagreement. In order to avoid bloodshed, the members of this forum called the international community not to interfere in the internal affairs of Yugoslavia. They also called the government of this country not to yield to Albanian nationalist challenges and to try to resolve the conflict peacefully. According to the participants' views, the main cause of this dangerous situation is the continued division of Europe, the persistent adherence by a series of pan European institutions to questionable and obsolete dogmas created and formulated without a discussion with broad representation, the main points of which are related to the predominance of the use of violent methods in international relations. The problem of divided peoples, of refugees who are victims of religious and ethnic cleansing makes the situation in Europe particularly difficult.

Today the world is repeatedly reeling from religious hostilities and conflicts. The situation in Egypt was the catalyst to uniting the representatives of Christian denominations and defending their believers. Orthodox and Catholics both pray together for peace, protection and assistance to all those who suffer for God's faith and call the international community to take effective measures to resolve the conflicts in Africa.

In this spirit, we would like to point out that peace does not start from somewhere far in Africa where Muslims kill Christians. Peace should start from our countries, which, being orthodox, are still hostile to each other. This year Ukraine celebrated the 1025th anniversary of the Christianization of Russia (Rus), when the Rus converted from paganism to Christianity. This celebration did not become the symbol of unity and peace between denominations in accordance with the supplication of Christ, «that they may all be one». Without referring to the mutual relations between Catholics and Orthodox, I would like to point out that even the Orthodox Church has not managed to forget its differences, discords and problems – the Patriarchates of Kiev and Moscow celebrate separately, the mass media are full of mutual accusations, parishioners insult each other! Christ said that no one can remove the speck from his brother's eye without first taking the plank out of his own eye! We will not be able to bring peace as long as we ourselves are not the source of peace, do not forget our complaints and do not unite in order to defend our Earth!

Prospects. Today the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy is active in establishing the social values of Christianity in politics. The ways we work are different: the delegations sent and their participation in meetings, General Assemblies of the IAO and conferences, the exchange of information within the framework of various programs. The Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy not only managed to maintain under difficult political and economic conditions, but it is growing rapidly demonstrating, thus, the pressing social need for such an organization, especially considering the lack of financial support from most member states, while IAO's work resonates in people's souls and minds. However, in order to ensure its further effective development, more attention should be paid to its active role so that after the meetings the participants in their own countries might embody in life the declared ideas and goals.

In order to continue the establishment of Christian social values in politics, a reasonable definition of the term "Christian values" should be given. Today Christianity has become an ideology, culture and heritage; it is not the individual choice of the man to follow the commands of Christ in his everyday life. We believe that it is unacceptable for a man to see the «Christian values» in the Christian heritage. Today we talk about the Christian roots of Europe, yet, there is also Christian Africa, Asia and America. We forget the Ecumenical Church, its mission throughout the world and it is in this spirit that Orthodoxy, through IAO's action, can reach out to the people.

Today the political world and the society have their eyes turned to Orthodoxy awaiting drastic steps! However, much to our regret, we have to acknowledge that in post-Soviet countries the Church no longer enjoys the status and trust of the society it once did. Under these conditions, IAO's effective action as an international organization establishing the social values of Christianity in politics through Orthodoxy is particularly important. In our opinion in order to find the way out we first have to recall what is Christianity, Christianity preached by Christ! He did not preach on «high-level» issues, on categories and philosophical systems, He spoke in simple understandable words to people. The establishment of Christian social values in politics is not possible without the introduction of real Christian values in the life of every man. The real values, not imitations, not formal ceremonies and pagan beliefs, external religiousness and doctrines! Orthodoxy must raise its voice and start talking about Christ, His love, forgiveness of sins, His sacrifice on the cross. Most people perceive Christianity simply as a well known and well marketed brand and some people have even had enough of it.

It is said that the ideas rule the world; yet, ideas can overthrow the world only when they are put into practice. Orthodoxy should implement social values preached by Christ, should bring the eternal and imperishable in politics and society through the clergy! When orthodox parliamentarians, priests and believers raise their voices, start resonating in hearts and souls, guiding these souls, caring for them and not using them in order to enjoy a carefree existence, then we will be able to see all these ideas come true, the implementation of which has been ministered by the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy for more than 20 years.