

DECLARATION ON
THE RELATION OF THE CHURCH TO NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS
NOSTRA AETATE
PROCLAIMED BY HIS HOLINESS
POPE PAUL VI
ON OCTOBER 28, 1965

1. In our time, when day by day mankind is being drawn closer together, and the ties between different peoples are becoming stronger, the Church examines more closely her relationship to non-Christian religions. In her task of promoting unity and love among men, indeed among nations, she considers above all in this declaration what men have in common and what draws them to fellowship.

One is the community of all peoples, one their origin, for God made the whole human race to live over the face of the earth.(1) One also is their final goal, God. His providence, His manifestations of goodness, His saving design extend to all men,(2) until that time when the elect will be united in the Holy City, the city ablaze with the glory of God, where the nations will walk in His light.(3)

Men expect from the various religions answers to the unsolved riddles of the human condition, which today, even as in former times, deeply stir the hearts of men: What is man? What is the meaning, the aim of our life? What is moral good, what is sin? Whence suffering and what purpose does it serve? Which is the road to true happiness? What are death, judgment and retribution after death? What, finally, is that ultimate inexpressible mystery which encompasses our existence: whence do we come, and where are we going?

2. From ancient times down to the present, there is found among various peoples a certain perception of that hidden power which hovers over the course of things and over the events of human history; at times some indeed have come to the recognition of a Supreme Being, or even of a Father. This perception and recognition penetrates their lives with a profound religious sense.

Religions, however, that are bound up with an advanced culture have struggled to answer the same questions by means of more refined concepts and a more developed language. Thus in Hinduism, men contemplate the divine mystery and express it through an inexhaustible abundance of myths and through searching philosophical inquiry. They seek freedom from the anguish of our human condition either through ascetical practices or profound meditation or a flight to God with love and trust. Again, Buddhism, in its various forms, realizes the radical insufficiency of this changeable world; it teaches a way by which men, in a devout and confident spirit, may be able either to acquire the state of perfect liberation, or attain, by their own efforts or through higher help, supreme illumination. Likewise, other religions found everywhere try to counter the restlessness of the human heart, each in its own manner, by proposing "ways," comprising teachings, rules of life, and sacred rites. The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life,

those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. Indeed, she proclaims, and ever must proclaim Christ "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), in whom men may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself.(4)

The Church, therefore, exhorts her sons, that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men.

3. The Church regards with esteem also the Moslems. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all- powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth,(5) who has spoken to men; they take pains to submit wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself, submitted to God. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet. They also honor Mary, His virgin Mother; at times they even call on her with devotion. In addition, they await the day of judgment when God will render their deserts to all those who have been raised up from the dead. Finally, they value the moral life and worship God especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting.

Since in the course of centuries not a few quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Moslems, this sacred synod urges all to forget the past and to work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve as well as to promote together for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom.

4. As the sacred synod searches into the mystery of the Church, it remembers the bond that spiritually ties the people of the New Covenant to Abraham's stock. Thus the Church of Christ acknowledges that, according to God's saving design, the beginnings of her faith and her election are found already among the Patriarchs, Moses and the prophets. She professes that all who believe in Christ-Abraham's sons according to faith (6)-are included in the same Patriarch's call, and likewise that the salvation of the Church is mysteriously foreshadowed by the chosen people's exodus from the land of bondage. The Church, therefore, cannot forget that she received the revelation of the Old Testament through the people with whom God in His inexpressible mercy concluded the Ancient Covenant. Nor can she forget that she draws sustenance from the root of that well-cultivated olive tree onto which have been grafted the wild shoots, the Gentiles.(7) Indeed, the Church believes that by His cross Christ, Our Peace, reconciled Jews and Gentiles. making both one in Himself.(8)

The Church keeps ever in mind the words of the Apostle about his kinsmen: "theirs is the sonship and the glory and the covenants and the law and the worship and the promises; theirs are the fathers and from them is the Christ according to the flesh" (Rom. 9:4-5), the Son of the Virgin Mary. She also recalls that the Apostles, the Church's main-stay and pillars, as well as most of the early disciples who proclaimed Christ's Gospel to the world, sprang from the Jewish people.

As Holy Scripture testifies, Jerusalem did not recognize the time of her visitation,(9) nor did the Jews in large number, accept the Gospel; indeed not a few opposed its spreading.(10) Nevertheless, God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their Fathers; He does not repent of the gifts He makes or of the calls He issues-such is the witness of the Apostle.(11) In company with the Prophets and the same Apostle, the Church awaits that day, known to God alone, on which all peoples will address the Lord in a single voice and "serve him shoulder to shoulder" (Soph. 3:9).(12)

Since the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews is thus so great, this sacred synod wants to foster and recommend that mutual understanding and respect which is the fruit, above all, of biblical and theological studies as well as of fraternal dialogues.

True, the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ;(13) still, what happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today. Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures. All should see to it, then, that in catechetical work or in the preaching of the word of God they do not teach anything that does not conform to the truth of the Gospel and the spirit of Christ. Furthermore, in her rejection of every persecution against any man, the Church, mindful of the patrimony she shares with the Jews and moved not by political reasons but by the Gospel's spiritual love, decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone.

Besides, as the Church has always held and holds now, Christ underwent His passion and death freely, because of the sins of men and out of infinite love, in order that all may reach salvation. It is, therefore, the burden of the Church's preaching to proclaim the cross of Christ as the sign of God's all-embracing love and as the fountain from which every grace flows.

5. We cannot truly call on God, the Father of all, if we refuse to treat in a brotherly way any man, created as he is in the image of God. Man's relation to God the Father and his relation to men his brothers are so linked together that Scripture says: "He who does not love does not know God" (1 John 4:8).

No foundation therefore remains for any theory or practice that leads to discrimination between man and man or people and people, so far as their human dignity and the rights flowing from it are concerned.

The Church reproves, as foreign to the mind of Christ, any discrimination against men or harassment of them because of their race, color, condition of life, or religion. On the contrary, following in the footsteps of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, this sacred synod ardently implores the Christian faithful to "maintain good fellowship among the nations" (1 Peter 2:12), and, if possible, to live for their part in peace with all men,(14) so that they may truly be sons of the Father who is in heaven.(15)

NOTES

1. Cf. *Acts* 17:26
2. Cf. *Wis.* 8:1; *Acts* 14:17; *Rom.* 2:6-7; 1 *Tim.* 2:4
3. Cf. *Apoc.* 21:23f.
4. Cf 2 *Cor.* 5:18-19
5. Cf St. Gregory VII, *letter XXI to Anzir (Nacir), King of Mauritania* (Pl. 148, col. 450f.)
6. Cf. *Gal.* 3:7
7. Cf. *Rom.* 11:17-24
8. Cf. *Eph.* 2:14-16
9. Cf. *Lk.* 19:44
10. Cf. *Rom.* 11:28
11. Cf. *Rom.* 11:28-29; cf. dogmatic Constitution, *Lumen Gentium* (Light of nations) AAS, 57 (1965) pag. 20
12. Cf. *Is.* 66:23; *Ps.* 65:4; *Rom.* 11:11-32
13. Cf. *John.* 19:6
14. Cf. *Rom.* 12:18
15. Cf. *Matt.* 5:45

THE MISSION OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN TODAY'S WORLD

The contribution of the Orthodox Church in the attainment of peace, justice, freedom, brotherhood and love between peoples and the removal of racial and other discrimination.

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5. The Attitude of the Church Towards Discrimination.

1. The Lord as King of peace (Heb. 7: 2-3) rejects violence and injustice (Ps. 10: 5) and condemns the inhuman treatment of one's neighbour (Mk. 25: 41-46; James 2:15-16). In his Kingdom, which is reflected in and is present on earth in his Church, there is no place for division, enmity or intolerance (Is. 11: 6; Rom. 12: 10).

2. The Orthodox Church takes up a firm position on this issue. She believes that God 'hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation' (Acts 17: 26) and that in Christ 'there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus' (Gal. 3: 28). To the question 'Who is my neighbour?' Christ replies with the parable of the merciful Samaritan woman (Lk. 10: 25-37), thereby teaching us to reject barriers built up by hatred and prejudice. The Orthodox Church confesses that every person, regardless of the colour of his skin, religion, race, gender, nationality and language, is created in the image and likeness of God and is an equal member of the human community. In following this belief, the Orthodox Church rejects discrimination according to the aforementioned reasons which presuppose a difference in dignity between people.

3. The Church, in respecting, the principles of human rights and equal treatment of people, values the application of these principles in the light of her teaching on the sacraments, the family, the position of both genders in the Church and the value of Church tradition as a whole. The Church has the right to bear witness and does bear witness to her teaching in the public sphere.

THE CHALLENGE OF THE OTHER

Inga Leonova for Public Orthodoxy

Orthodox in America are privileged in enjoying complete freedom of worship untethered by allegiance to the state. This is an environment that still, a few hundred years later, is experienced as somewhat of a novelty compared with our much longer history in which we were either joined to the state, or oppressed by it. We have to admit, however, that we have not used this gift to its full potential. Whether it is due to historical forces of the times, or our internal ecclesiological ambiguities, a sad fact remains that in the absence of an external political structure to shape our identity, the Orthodox jurisdictions in America have opted to identify along the lines of ethnic and cultural origins. The scandal that is the jurisdictional disunity in America in spite of the existence of formally unifying conciliar structures only deepens with time. When Father John Meyendorff wrote in 1980 of “nationalism as a divisive force,” he was speaking extensively about the national churches of the Old World, since there seemed to still be a hope for jurisdictional convergence on the American soil. Today, 36 years later, we are more divided here than perhaps ever, in spite of the issues of culture wars reverberating across the jurisdictions and frequently eliciting similarly uncritical and unpastoral responses.

The scandal of our identity being ensnared in ethnicity has come to a head a couple of years ago, when the story emerged of several leaders of the white supremacist movement called Traditional Youth identifying themselves as Orthodox and propagating public statements in which they had claimed “Orthodox witness” in support of their racist and xenophobic agenda. Tragically and inexcusably, the issue did not receive its due vocal and unified condemnation from the body of the Orthodox hierarchs in North America. It had instead been “dealt with” on a local level, albeit ineffectively since the people in question simply claimed a different jurisdictional home. Unlike with the hot-button “culture wars” issues, the scandal of open racism and xenophobia claiming Orthodox foundation has not been acknowledged as a matter of concern and responsibility for our church body, fragmented as it is. Today, several years later, we still see the same group, emboldened by the legitimization of racist and xenophobic speech in public sphere, growing and expanding its hateful activities.

And this brings me to the question of what our Christian witness must entail in the times when the fires of division have been stoked for years from various sides, and when too frequently the Orthodox identity becomes enmeshed and confused with rejection of the “other” and with condemnation instead of compassion.

We are likely to see the forces of hatred and prejudice further emboldened and enabled. Already there is considerable public support for the scapegoating of entire groups perceived as “threats to the American way of life.” Regardless of who those groups are, we as Christians must remember that our responsibility and our place is with the persecuted, with the stigmatized, with the downtrodden. Our neighbor is not only the fellow Greek or Russian or Serbian American in our comfortable and insular middle class enclaves. Our neighbor is also one who makes us, at times, uncomfortable, and one whose life is alien to ours. When our neighbor is lying wounded by the side of the road, it is the Good Samaritan that we must look to, not the (Orthodox) priest or (Orthodox) canonist passing by. Our recent history boasts

as saints Mother Maria of Paris and those with her who gave their lives in service of the “other” under mortal peril, and Archbishop Damaskinos of Athens, Archbishop Joachim of Volos, Bishop Chrysostomos of Zakynthos, and countless named and unnamed Orthodox Christians who had risked their lives and freedom protecting their neighbors under the Nazi occupation. We cannot wait for the people being rounded up to come to their aid. We have to resist evil every day when and where we encounter it, be it at work, at school, on the street, or even in our parishes. We also need to look deep into ourselves for that rejection of the “other” that accompanies our Orthodox tradition as an evil twin of our “orthodoxia.” Over the centuries, the Orthodox have endured horrible persecution at the hands of various “others.” Yet by the same token, once we had gained the upper hand, and especially with the might of the state behind us, we ourselves have time and again turned against the “other”. Whether it is a heterodox “other,” a non-Christian “other,” a heretical group within the Church, etc., we have shown hatred and rejection, which at times had even been enshrined in our liturgical tradition. Lately, the “other” has become a gay “other,” and a poor “other” – the “gospel of prosperity” has taken hold in the American Orthodox mind and led to the rejection of those who are not seen as “deserving.” This is what the culture of hate breeds on, and if we don’t face it in our own midst, we run the danger of allowing it to consume us. For the Church to be countercultural, it has to be with Christ, and to be with Christ is to be with, not against, the “other,” to be vulnerable to the “other,” even at the ultimate cost.

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Inga Leonova for Public Orthodoxy



Three years ago, a scandal broke out. An outspoken white supremacist by the name of Matthew Heimbach was received into the Orthodox Church on Lazarus Saturday. A few days later, on Bright Monday, Heimbach and his cohorts from the Traditionalist Youth Network (a white supremacist group affiliating itself with Orthodoxy) beat up a protester at a hate rally with an Orthodox wooden cross.

The story went viral. There were multiple demands on the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America (ACOUSIA) to speak out against the white supremacy and the racists' claim that it is "ontological" to Orthodoxy. Quoting Heimbach,

"As an Orthodox Christian I believe in the separation of races into ethnically based Church's. That is why even in Orthodoxy there is for instance a Greek, Russian, Romanian, Serbian, etc. Orthodox Church. Regional and racial identity is a fundamental principle of Christianity, must to the dismay of Leftists. I believe black Christians should be in their black Church's, with black priests, having black kids, going to black Christian schools, etc."

Instead, the Antiochian Archdiocese quietly dealt with the matter by excommunicating Heimbach and his mentor Matt Parrott (another chrismated Orthodox and leader of the "parent" Traditionalist Workers white supremacist group) and posting a notice on the parish website. No public statement was ever made by the bishops of either the Archdiocese or the Assembly. Within a year, Heimbach found a spiritual home with some Romanian Orthodox group, and today his network is going strong and happy in the United States.

On August 11, 2017, a crowd bearing torches and shouting racist slogans marched on the campus of University of Virginia in Charlottesville ahead of the largest white

supremacist gathering in the US history in decades. The next day, August 12, the rally led to clashes with counter-protesters and ultimately an act of domestic terrorism, when a car driven by a white supremacist James Fields mowed down a group of counter-protesters, killing one woman and injuring nineteen people.

Matthew Heimbach has marched in Charlottesville with the TradWorkers group, **waving the "Orthodoxy or Death" banners**. On August 14, he stood in front of the courthouse in Charlottesville where Fields had just been denied bail, and promised that Charlottesville was "just the beginning," and that the **neo-Nazis will be "more active than before."** White supremacists marched in Seattle on the same weekend, and there are rallies being announced in Boston, on the National Mall in Washington, DC, and in other places.

For weeks leading to the "Unite the Right" rally, far-right Orthodox – most of them affiliated with various canonical parishes in the South – have been organizing on social media in support or for participation in the rally. Monitoring groups have been in contact with clergy and bishops, reporting the growth of racist and anti-Semitic rhetoric in "conservative" Orthodox social media, and the relations between members of those groups and the Heimbach/Parrott organization.

Not a single public statement has been made by any of the American Orthodox jurisdictions on either these alarming public events or the growth of nationalist, racist, islamophobic, and anti-Semitic element in American Orthodoxy.

We know that American Orthodox episcopacy is fully capable of speaking in a unified voice when so moved. Our bishops have no issues with pronouncing upon the matters of secular law and civil rights, as they have done more than once in the recent years. To this day, however, they have completely failed to speak out against racism and xenophobia expanding in our midst, in our own parishes, and spilling out into the public square. The only historical record of an American Orthodox bishop joining the fight against racism is the march of Archbishop Iakovos with Martin Luther King, Jr. – which happened in 1965, and for which the Archbishop has been much reviled. Is this all the witness that our Church can offer to America? We are the Church which in America is largely composed of immigrants who have experienced xenophobia and ethnic discrimination in many forms. Yet we refuse to even acknowledge the growth of this cancer in our midst, the cancer that claims our ecclesiastical legacy as its fuel, to the deafening silence of those whose duty, as we are reminded at every Liturgy, is to pronounce the words of Christ's truth...

Cyril Hovorun, draft excerpt from a book “Political Orthodoxies”

On antisemitism, racism, and nationalism as Christological heresies. And why Orthodox Christology shows a way out of them.

Because the churches refuse to acknowledge their role in Holocaust, anti-Semitism still frames the worldview of many Orthodox. They do not realize that anti-Semitism is not just a crime against humanity, but also a heresy—similar to the ancient heretical doctrines. It is a distortion of the Orthodox teaching about incarnation.

In classical Christological doctrine, God received the fullness of humanity to save all human beings. The humanity of the incarnated Logos remained unalienated and unseparated from the rest of humanity regardless of their race, gender, and social status.

All major Christological heresies of the past effectively built a wall between God and humankind, thus impeding the salvation of the latter. Arianism, for instance, made the godhead of Jesus created, and in this way separated him from the uncreated Father. Nestorianism made the humanity of Jesus a subject coexistent with the subject of the Logos under the same appearance of Jesus' face (prosopon). As a result, Jesus' humanity became separate from the rest of humankind. It was only the individual being of Jesus who was saved through the incarnation—not the rest of humanity. In monophysitism, the humanity of Jesus was alienated and turned into something different from the rest of humanity. The alienation of Christ's humanity, thus, became a wall between God and men.

In anti-Semitism, the Jewishness of Jesus became a similar wall between God and men. For anti-Semitic theologians, universal salvation cannot spring from a Jew; that would be a “heresy.” The anti-Semitic “Orthodoxy” holds that to be able to save humankind, Jesus has to be stripped from his Jewishness. This “Orthodoxy,” however is a heresy from the perspective of the classical patristic theology: it alienates the humanity of Jesus from what it actually was, in a way similar to the original monophysitism. Besides this, anti-Semitic Christology interprets salvation not as deliverance from sins and corruption common to every human being, but from Jewishness. It identifies being a Jew with being sinful.

Anti-Semitism is based on an ontological rendering of the human condition. A capacity of a group of people (being Jewish, for instance) is given a distinct ontological status of having a different nature than the rest of people. The same idea underpins racism. According to the racist perception of humanity, color of skin makes groups of people ontologically different from each other. Nationalists sometimes also see differences between nations as ontological—pertinent to the human nature.

A way out of anti-Semitism, racism, and nationalism would be by regarding the entire human nature as common for every human being. Classical Orthodox Christology suggests such a way out: because the incarnation of the Son of God in the person of Jesus Christ was a universal ontological happening, which embraced all human beings regardless of their race and ethnicity, racial and national differences between men and women are not ontological. They can be cultural or simply imagined, but have no meaning from the perspective of the incarnation of God.