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The Pluralistic Horizon: Orthodox Theology in the Age of Human Rights¹



Abstract

In this article I intend to show how Orthodox theology provides the framework and necessary conditions to support and uphold human rights as a necessary and constitutive part of our pluralistic societies. How can the Orthodox Church address the issue of Human Rights, most especially since most humans are beyond the canonical boundaries of the Church? Orthodox Anthropology, Pneumatology and Trinitarian theology provide strong arguments in favor of both the foundation and language of human rights. The creation of humans as

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icons of God, made in the image and likeness along with our personhood, freedom and communion with the Trinity provide a concrete theological justification for addressing human rights today. Additionally, there is an urgent need for the Orthodox Church to address social problems, which threaten the dignity and lives of millions around the world. It is the obligation of the Orthodox Church and its faithful members to renew their understanding of the faith and to ensure that they stand for the morals and ethics professed by the Church and affirmed through centuries of revelation.

Keywords

Human rights, pluralism, anthropology, human dignity, personhood, pneumatology, Holy Spirit

Prologue

Human rights are something you were born with. Human rights are your God-given rights. Human rights are the rights that are recognized by all nations of this earth. And any time anyone violates your human rights, you can take them to the world court.²

There is no doubt whatsoever that the Twentieth Century proved to be the most horrific in all of human history. The loss of life, on the magnitude of tens of millions, is so astronomical, one loses sight of what it really means to be *human*. The Shoah and the years following have haunted secular societies, manifesting in a symbolic castration, our inability to protect, enforce or safeguard “rights.” This inability has created a

² Malcolm X, “The Ballot of the Bullet,” in: S. E. Bronner (ed.), *Twentieth Century Political Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 346.

culture of despair, manifesting itself within movements like that of existentialism in the years following the Shoah. The despair of societies who no longer have any foundation in a metaphysical ontology is manifest in the rise of movements, like human rights, to establish some consensus among peoples and nations about safeguarding rights that are constitutive of the modern human in society. However, difficulty inevitably arises in a pluralistic society, where groups often clash over issues due to their unique epistemological claims and perspectives about truth, reality and morality.

It is the crisis of the commons that is an urgent calling for the Orthodox Church to engage in both developing and affirming the value and necessity of human rights. Additionally, the Orthodox Church must be a force for good and love in society, since it carries the duty to “love your neighbor” and ensure that those poor, oppressed and marginalized are given a voice and a position by which they can fight for their rights and fair treatment. The Church as an institution must be a force for positive, progressive development in ensuring the equality amongst all peoples. It is charged with bringing about the “peace from above” and, in partnership with the Holy Spirit, renewing the whole creation.

The issue over human rights is divisive for the Orthodox Church. The idea of human rights is seen by some as an invention of modernity, owing its existence to the Enlightenment and atheistic humanism. The anthropocentric nature of human rights is centered on individualism, thereby destroying the communal divine-human element which is the core of Orthodox theology. Some Orthodox theologians however, see the developments within human rights as an offshoot of Christianity itself. It is the understanding of the person within the Christian tradition that is the foundation for the modern conception of human rights. Debate remains, dividing many of the Churches and theologians. One thing is for certain, in a pluralistic world, something must provide

everyone equal protection under the law. There is no better system today than human rights.

Orthodox theology provides the foundation for human rights in the legal sense, and thereby can be supported by the Churches to bring about reconciliation and peace. The Orthodox Church can support and contribute to human rights since it is well established already within its theology. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople, New Rome, in an address while receiving an honorary doctorate from Southern Methodist University in 1997 stated; "Orthodox spiritual teaching assures us that Orthodox Christians must always respect the human rights of others. If we do not respect those rights, then we have desecrated the image of God inherent in all human beings."³ There are five main theological justifications that provide credibility to human rights which will be explored in this paper:

1. Orthodox Anthropology provides a theological understanding for the creation of humanity. It is this creation, out of the dynamic love and freedom of God, that humanity was created in God's image and likeness. Thus, humans are an icon of God, with a spiritual and material dimension that makes them the most unique being of the created world, linking both God and nature.
2. The idea of personhood in Orthodox theology provides a theological justification for our own being and individual identity. It is our unique and distinct particularity that adds to the communal experience of God which is enhanced by the diversity and multiple images of human expression. This is ultimately revealed in the Church as the Eucharist.

³ J. Chryssavgis, *Cosmic Grace, Humble Prayer: The Ecological Vision of the Green Patriarch Bartholomew I*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2003), p. 214.

3. The Orthodox understanding of human dignity is rooted in its anthropology and recognizes that since all humans are created in the image and likeness, and thus are icons of the Triune God, they have an obligation to respect life and the freedom of each person. They are called to love one another.
4. Freedom is at the heart of the creation narrative and the foundation for our creation and existence. We are free to choose our relationships and to discover our God given potential. It is through freedom that we can grow to love in an authentic way, bringing about a communal experience that is a reflection of the divine, participating in the divine energies of the Trinity. The Orthodox Church has an obligation to ensure the freedom of all people since it is constitutive of our being and given to us by God.
5. The theology of the Holy Spirit provides a new reality for us to address the particularities which are manifested throughout this world and the cosmos at large. A pneumatologically rooted theology provides the authentic reality of the Trinity's work in creation towards the final restoration of all.

These five topics in Orthodox theology provide the foundation for the Orthodox Church to accept the language of human rights as a starting point in the public sphere.

While human rights is in no way complete and continues to be an ongoing, developing field; the Orthodox Church has an obligation to ensure that all people are free from oppression, exploitation, tyranny and fear. Too often in the West, the Church preaches the gospel of prosperity to those who are fortunate and successful. Yet, it forgets Christ who preached the Gospel of the poor, the marginalized, the downtrodden and the weak. The Orthodox Church has an obligation to those with the least, to ensure they are protected. Thus, the Orthodox Church can promote, support and enhance human rights which are a

step in the right direction towards ensuring and safeguarding basic rights and needs within a pluralistic society.

1 Orthodox Anthropology: Image, Likeness, Icon

The creation of Adam and Eve, the first humans, is the foundation for Christian Anthropology. Concordantly, it provides the foundation for the intersection of Christian Anthropology and Pneumatology. It is in Genesis where God creates both man and woman in His image and likeness. It is important here to note that Adam and Eve are representative of all of humanity, most of which are outside the canonical boundaries of the Church. Thus, amidst the images of particularity, there is a strong universality in the basic fundamental understanding that all human beings are created in the image and likeness of God and thus are *icons of God*. Each human contains something of God within them, regardless of their religious, non-religious or other self-identified particularity.

When God creates and populates the earth, he saves the creation of man and woman for last, they of course being the pinnacle of the created universe. Genesis recounts the events of human creation saying:

Then God said: "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of heaven, over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that moves on the earth. So God made man; in the image of God He made him; male and female He made them" (Gen. 1:26-28).

In this account we must acknowledge two important things. First, that God created both man and woman in His image, thus there is no hierarchy within Christian anthropology but all are equal before God. This is an important affirmation especially when combating gender violence and hetero-patriarchal structures of power. Additionally, all humans are created in the

image and likeness of God. Thus, all humans have God as a constitutive feature of their existence, or their *being*. The story of Genesis continues in Chapter 2 saying: “Then God formed man out of dust from the ground, and breathed in his face the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Genesis 2:7). All human beings are made in the *image* and *likeness* of God and have been given life from the breath of God, the Holy Spirit.⁴ Thus, regardless of origin, religious affiliation or ideological motivations, we as Orthodox Christians must affirm that all human beings are *icons of God*.

Bishop Maximos Aghiorgoussis echoes this affirmation saying: “Man is created in the image of God, with the specific call to become God-Like.”⁵ The created humanity was meant to be a “proxy” of God to creation, stewards to the created world who themselves were able to differentiate themselves from creation by their ability to participate in the divine energies of God, having been created in the image and likeness. “Man is capable of knowing God and being in communion with God. Man belongs to God, for being God’s child and image make him God’s relative.”⁶

Father Stanley Harakas states likewise that God has created a commonly shared human nature in his divine image and likeness.⁷ Additionally, he also recognizes the “natural moral law” which existed for the Church and was, according to the Greek Fathers, “embodied best in the Decalogue.”⁸ Here he

⁴ This pneumatological component is crucial to eventually understanding the economic operation of the Spirit in the later doctrinal elucidation and systematic theology of the Patristic writers and theologians.

⁵ M. Aghiorgoussis, “Orthodox Soteriology”, in: J. Meyendorff, R. Tobias (eds.), *Salvation in Christ: A Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue*, (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), p. 37.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ S. S. Harakas, “Human Rights: An Eastern Orthodox Perspective,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* Vol. 19, no. 3 (Summer 1982), p. 18.

⁸ *Ibid.*

makes the point that “similar embodiments are found in all other religions and cultures.”⁹ The importance of Father Harakas’ statement consists in the *universal* component in which the natural moral law is “found in all other religions and cultures,” and thus, *beyond* the canonical boundaries of the Church. Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos of Albania also has multiple theological expositions regarding the creation narrative. In his summary of creation as it relates to human rights, Yannoulatos states three major principles to understanding Christian anthropology:

1. All of humanity is ultimately descended from the first pair, Adam and Eve, who were created by God, in the divine image and likeness regardless of their differences. Thus, they are endowed from the very beginning with the “dignity of divine origin.”¹⁰
2. God is not simply the creator, but is in fact the Father (sic) of all humankind. As such, all human beings are brothers and sisters and God’s children, without exception.¹¹
3. All human beings share in the same journey of life and likewise in the same guilt in the form of sin.¹² As such, the purpose of human existence is to realize the God-given potential in each individual and to strive towards a higher state of being (theosis).¹³

Orthodox Christians can affirm the following: First, the great importance of the Genesis account of creation in affirming the universality of God’s presence in all of humanity; secondly, that God is the Father of *all humans* who are created in His image and likeness, and thus are *all* His icons; lastly, that Genesis

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ A. Yannoulatos, *Facing the World: Orthodox Christian Essays on Global Concerns* (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003), p. 58.

¹¹ Idem, “Eastern Orthodox and Human Rights”, in: *International Review of Mission* Vol. 73 (1984), p. 455.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Idem, *Facing the World*, p. 59.

reveals the *universality* of the creation story and thus it is extended to every human, every life form and all of the material cosmos. This powerful affirmation shows not only the universality of the faith and witness, but a theological ethos by which we are to create and renew the world, deriving from the Judaic understanding of *Tikkun Olam*, repairing the world. This clearly indicates the foundation of human rights, even though its language is secular and non-metaphysical.

2 The Theology of Personhood

One of the main issues within Orthodox theology pertaining to human rights is the battle over “individualism.” There is a tension between the communal aspects stressed in Orthodox theology with concepts like communion and hypostasis versus the western idea of the individual, who is described as egocentric, thus, separated and alienated from other humans. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I responds to this tension saying, “The individual exists, not separate from the rest of creation and fellow human beings, but in constant relationship to the ontological plenitude. It is this constancy of relationship that informs an individual’s understanding of personal existence as being grounded in the created order. With this grounding, one is able to value oneself in the context of the cosmos.”¹⁴ Thus, there emerges a strong focus on personhood, which while unique to each individual, does not exist outside of communion.

Furthermore, the understanding of “personhood” further illuminates an Orthodox theological position on human rights by providing a foundational concept of our self-realized identity through communion. In his book: *The Mystical as Political*, Aristotle Papanikolaou seeks to show that despite the disparate images and debates among theologians, there is consensus on

¹⁴ J. Chryssavgis, *Cosmic Grace*, p. 213.

two main points, stating: “(1) the doctrine of the Trinity implies an understanding of human personhood in terms of *ecstasis* (freedom) and *hypostasis* (uniqueness) that is constituted in particular relations of loving communion; and (2) such an understanding of personhood emerges from what constitutes the core of the Orthodox tradition – the affirmation of divine-human communion.”¹⁵

The most impressive exposition on personhood comes from Metropolitan Zizioulas’ work: *Being as Communion*, where he provides a framework by which we can understand personhood and being. First, in the introduction, he claims that *being* cannot exist devoid of communion. For Zizioulas “communion is an ontological category,” and thus nothing can exist outside of communion.¹⁶ Second, communion must be realized by a *hypostasis*, which he describes as a “concrete and free person.” This means that communion which is brought about by denying or suppressing a person is “inadmissible.”¹⁷ The crisis of the modern man is that humanism has attempted to disconnect person from theology without realizing that person is “indissolubly bound up with theology.”¹⁸ The modern era’s project is to ensure the rights of a human’s personal identity devoid of theology or metaphysical ontology.

The uniqueness of each individual is also essential for a person. Metropolitan Zizioulas states: “It [The Person] wants something more: to exist as a *concrete, unique and unrepeatable* entity.”¹⁹ Thus, uniqueness for Zizioulas is “absolute” for the person.²⁰ This theological exposition is summed up in one sentence: “The

¹⁵ A. Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political: Democracy and Non-Radical Orthodoxy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), p. 100.

¹⁶ J. D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997), p. 18.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

goal is the person itself; personhood is the total fulfillment of being, the catholic expression of its nature.”²¹ Papanikolaou sums up the main point that Zizioulas is making: “For Zizioulas, only a theological account of personhood can make sense of the human drive for particularity and uniqueness, which Zizioulas identifies with freedom. Specifically, only the Christian conceptualization of God as Trinity can ground a notion of personhood as unique and *ecstatic*.”²²

In his article: “The Human Person as an Icon of the Trinity”, Metropolitan Kallistos Ware explicates the two components of human nature, the *individual* and the *person*. For him, when one speaks about the individual (*atomon*), he speaks of a human being in “isolation, in separateness, of the human being as competitor.”²³ On the other side, when one speaks of the human being as person (*prosopon*), he speaks about the human being in “relationship, in communion, of the human being as co-worker.”²⁴ Thus, the person stands as the image of the Trinity in the world, not the individual. It is the person that is a part of community, while the individual does not participate in this “shared world.”

The theology of personhood clearly indicates the uniqueness of humanity and that our being is only ontologically existent if it is in communion with God. This communion is what provides our lives with a unique identity. The human-divine communion can only occur by way of a free choice and act of love. It is that freedom, a part of our being since we are in the image and likeness, that is the foundation of a loving relationship with God, all of humanity and the entire creation.

²¹ Ibid.

²² A. Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political*, p. 110.

²³ K. Ware, “*The Human Person as an Icon of the Trinity*”, *Sobornost* 8, no. 2 (1986), p. 17.

²⁴ Ibid.

3 The Orthodox Position on Human Dignity

In his article entitled: “Russian Orthodoxy and Human Rights”, Paul Valliere emphasizes: “Like all great faith traditions, Orthodoxy comprises concepts of human dignity which can at least support, if they do not necessarily generate, the idea of human rights.”²⁵ This statement is correct and powerful since the Church, will struggling over the concept of human rights and its ambivalence towards it, and cannot remain silent about human dignity.

According to Emmanuel Clapsis, “human dignity in Christian thought is based on the biblical and patristic tradition that human beings are created in God’s image.”²⁶ Human beings exist in relationship to God, themselves and to the world at large; “a world both of personal and social interaction and as a material cosmos.”²⁷ Thus, our first affirmation is that all human beings are created in the image and likeness of God, and thus are icons of God. It is this basic principle that means Orthodox Christians have an obligation to protect and defend the dignity of all.

The basic foundation is that our humanity is linked with God: “Christian theological anthropology locates the *humanum* not in the relationship of humans to themselves (i.e., capacity for reflection, self-consciousness) or in the relationship to the world, but primarily to God’s relationship to humans.”²⁸

For Archbishop Yannoulatos human dignity is not a “vague civil pride” but in fact arises from the certain fact that each human being is a “sacred person” and a “creation of the personal

²⁵ P. Valliere, “Russian Orthodoxy and Human Rights”, in: I. Bloom, J. P. Martin, W. L. Proudfoot (eds.), *Religious Diversity and Human Rights*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 281.

²⁶ E. Clapsis, “Human Dignity in a Global World” *ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΑ* 81, no. 3 (AΘHNA 2010), p. 245.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

God.”²⁹ The dignity of a person is also rooted in the certainty of the presence of the Holy Spirit in their life.³⁰ Speaking from a pneumatological perspective Fr. Clapsis indicates that the Holy Spirit is the one that is required if all “are to be treated with proper dignity as creatures of God.”³¹ The vision of human dignity being respected by both secular and religious communities still poses a challenge, however, within the Orthodox Church; it provides the foundation by which to treat all people.

Stanley Harakas recognizes the value of the Orthodox position on human dignity formulated by the former Archbishop of North and South America, Iakovos. Archbishop Iakovos affirms that the “dignity of man” is not some outward nicety but rather the “very essence of his being.”³² As such, dignity is the “essence of life itself” and from it alone springs the right of man to call himself “son of God.”³³ Every institution created by humanity is thus bound to the dignity of man and cannot stand alone without it. Ultimately, every institution according to Archbishop Iakovos must help the individual be free and self-respecting with the feeling that s/he is truly the daughter/son of God and sister/brother and equal of all others.³⁴ He concludes by noting that if institutions do not serve this purpose (human dignity and freedom), but rather, are exploitative, discriminatory and unjust, they will inevitably bring the downfall of the rulers of darkness in that time/place.³⁵

Archbishop Iakovos’ position provides a valuable summation of the ideal role the Orthodox Church within society, striving for social justice and the recognition of the dignity of all people, regardless of their background. Dignity is a universal

²⁹ A. Yannoulatos, “Eastern Orthodoxy and Human Rights,” p. 456.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ E. Clapsis, *Human Dignity*, p. 240.

³² S. S. Harakas, “Human Rights: An Eastern Orthodox Perspective”, p. 19.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

affirmation of God's image in all humans: "Human dignity is not some vague kind of civic pride but arises from the certainty that each human being is indeed a sacred person, the creation of a personal God."³⁶ It is the basic principle whose goal is to show institutions and groups of people that there is indeed a basic dignity at the core of simply being human. The Orthodox faithful thus place their dignity in our common origin as children of God, made in His image and likeness.

4 Freedom as Constitutive of our Being

The concept of freedom is central to Christianity.³⁷ The entire narrative of creation and the fall is centered on the concept of freedom, and humanity's free-will to choose a relationship with God or to reject Him. However, at its core, freedom is rooted within the Trinity where it is the personal freedom of God. "We ascribe the being of God to His personal freedom."³⁸ It is through an act of the Father's freedom that he begets the son and brings forth the Holy Spirit. Thus, God does not exist unless the Father exists and freely begets the Son and brings forth the Holy Spirit.³⁹ Concordantly, humans, since we are created in God's image and likeness, have also been given free-will. This is the only way one can have an authentic relationship in communion with God.

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I stresses the importance of freedom in his speech entitled *Spirituality and Human Rights*. It is humanity's free will to choose that is the image of God at work in their lives. Patriarch Bartholomew affirms that Humanity's creation in God's image is proved true by the free will of each and every person to choose between good and evil.

³⁶ A. Yannoulatos, *Facing the World*, p. 60.

³⁷ Idem, "Eastern Orthodoxy and Human Rights", p. 457.

³⁸ J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, p. 41.

³⁹ Ibid.

“The image of God within us is freedom. Since all human beings are created in the image and likeness of God, freedom is an inalienable right of the human being.”⁴⁰

However, Patriarch Bartholomew is quick to clarify that there can be no true freedom apart from God since freedom has no ontological reality apart from/without God. Freedom and personhood are also interconnected for Patriarch Bartholomew. “We see spirituality, the relationship of the individual to God, to be foundational to the realization of freedom.”⁴¹ This, he recognizes, is ultimately a necessary precondition to expressing ones personhood and affirming the personhood of others. Freedom is the key for transforming the world, the key “to guaranteeing human rights as fundamental to humanity’s existence.”⁴² As such, Faith is crucial to safeguarding freedom and recognizing that it is not the governmental polity but rather God, the highest authority, who has granted this freedom to us and who likewise teaches us to “love one another.”⁴³

It is because of freedom that humans are made in God’s image and likeness. Likewise, what exactly does this freedom entail? The Orthodox faithful know that since God made us free, we are responsible for our own actions and held accountable at the end of time. Archbishop Yannoulatos notices that there have been Christians that tried to “restrict that freedom” which held humans together in an effort to maintain social order. It is the duty of every Christian to reject such proposals and focus on building solidarity and relationships that are free and loving.

⁴⁰ J. Chryssavgis, *Cosmic Grace*, p. 214.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

5 Restoring the Holy Spirit in Orthodox Theology

Concordantly, a larger theological issue dominates this discussion. For centuries the Church has operated in a *Christomonistic* way. While claiming to be Trinitarian in faith, Church praxis focused on Jesus Christ, with prayer centered on Jesus Christ and the people of God unable to connect their spiritual lives with the dynamic nature of the Holy Trinity. For Christians, salvation could not be conceived apart from Christ and thus, in order to preserve the faith, salvation and the operation of the Trinity were limited to the confines of Christianity, and in more conservative circles, within the canonical boundaries of Orthodox Christianity. While it is clear that the Christian faith is Christocentric, it cannot be Christomonistic.

Emmanuel Clapsis shows that “the particularity of God’s revelation in Jesus of Nazareth understood from a Trinitarian perspective cannot be disassociated from the universal presence and operation of God in the world through his Spirit.”⁴⁴ The failure to recognize the Trinitarian economy of God is a failure to see the totality of God’s being, his work in creation and his unconditional love for it.

The recent development of pneumatology in the Church allows us to reevaluate the role of the Holy Spirit in the cosmic salvific work of the Trinity. These questions can be answered through a series of systematic expositions that will seek to show unity amidst the multiple, seemingly disparate images presented by both Scriptural and Patristic Traditions. Firstly, it is important to remember that God’s creation in its totality is inherently good, and that all human beings were created in the image and likeness of God.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ E. Clapsis "The Holy Spirit in the World: The Tension of the Particular and Universal" in: *Current Dialogue* 52, July 2012, p. 32.

⁴⁵ This affirmation is found most notably in the story of creation presented in the book of Genesis. In it, God creates man in his image

Secondly, we must answer the question “what is the Church” and likewise “who or what constitutes the church?” These questions are directed at St. Cyprian’s dictum “*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*,” or “there is no salvation outside of the Church.”⁴⁶ When reevaluating the definition of “church,” the aforementioned ecclesial axiom, depending on the definition of “church,” may not be one of exclusion, but rather one of inclusion.

Thirdly, reevaluating the economic operation of the Holy Spirit as not confined to the physical structure of the church or to the larger community of baptized Christians, allows the operation of the Holy Spirit to encompass the entire cosmos; which would fit Scriptural, Patristic and liturgical sources. The exposition here presented seeks to maintain the unity of the Holy Trinity and the authenticity and doctrinal legitimacy of the Orthodox Church while, opening up the theological framework by which we recognize the operation of the Holy Spirit beyond the canonical boundaries of the Church. This leaves room for a broader discussion of the Orthodox Church’s understanding of Human Rights and communities beyond its particularity.

6 The Holy Spirit in the Scripture

It is how God creates humanity that is the most fascinating element of the Genesis story. “Then God formed man out of dust from the ground, and breathed in his face the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Gen 2:7). This breath, or *ruach*, as it

and likeness, giving them life by *ruach* (רוּחַ) or his breath into them. This is seen as the work of the Holy Spirit which sanctifies and brings life to creation. As such, all of creation is thus sanctified by the Holy Spirit. See: Genesis 1:26-28, 2:7.

⁴⁶ This famous phrase is found in St. Cyprian’s Epistle no. 72, section 21 in: A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, *The Anti-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, Vol. V (Buffalo, New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1886), p. 384.

was understood by the Israelites differs from the understanding of the Greek *Πνευμα* or the Latin *Spiritus*. Ruach is not some ethereal, immaterial, supersensory force but a force of nature, a tempest, acting within creation, both in humanity and nature. It was this concept that shaped the Israelites understanding of God's presence amongst them. Moreover, the gift of humanness is a gift of the creator Spirit who animated lifeless clay and thus represents the core of our dynamic and ecstatic existence. This dynamic and ecstatic existence is free and open to particular self-identify in whichever way it finds expression and meaning. This is the foundation of our being.

The Holy Spirit in Orthodox theology provides a phenomenal starting point to show the universality already at work within the created cosmos post-Pentecost. Starting with the Old Testament, the Spirit is seen as a force at work for humanity in its *totality*.

For the Israelites, the work of Yahweh was not exclusively theirs. For the Israelites, the work of Yahweh was not exclusively theirs. The Lord says in Amos 9:7: "Are not you Israelites like Cushites to me? says the Lord. Did I not bring Israel up from Egypt, the Philistines from Caphtor, the Aramaens from Kir?" Thus, in this instance, God's liberating work is beyond the confines of the Israelites. Even in terms of worship, God acknowledges his universal acceptance of worship and offerings in the book of Malachi saying: "My name will be great among the nations, from where the sun rises to where it sets. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to me, because my name will be great among the nations" (Mal 1:11).

Israel attested to God's omnipresence, which includes the Spirit, in many parts of the Hebrew Scriptures. Psalm 33:6 states: "By the Word of the Lord the heavens were made and all their host by the breath of his mouth" and likewise Ps 104:29-30: "When you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust. When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground." This implies that the Spirit is acting at all

times, filling all things and present throughout the cosmos. It is the Spirit that is the spark of life.

The New Testament provides multiple images of the Spirit ranging from the image at Pentecost of the Comforter to the Spirit of Christ. It is important to maintain the Trinitarian understanding of the Spirit especially since disagreement emerged in the early Church over the binitarian doxologies located within certain New Testament passages (1 Cor 8:6, I Tim 2:5-6; 6:13-14). For our purposes, there are fascinating sections that can be attributed to the economy of the Spirit. In Galatians 5:22-23, St. Paul underlines: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." Can we thus be so bold to say that where these things exist, even if they are beyond the canonical boundaries of the Church that it indicates the work of the Spirit? It is my opinion that we most certainly can. The Orthodox Church recognizes the universal presence of the Spirit in the cosmos but many theologians stop short of the Spirit's operation in religious communities or even non-religious communities beyond the community of baptized Orthodox Christians.

St. Paul, while in Athens, affirms the universal presence of the Spirit in Acts 17 saying:

"The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands (...) he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands."

St. Paul celebrates the Holy Spirit and emphasizes the importance of its communication to us both in the life here and after death.⁴⁷ St. Paul asserts the fact that one cannot have the

⁴⁷ G. O'Collins, SJ, *Jesus our Redeemer: A Christian Approach to Salvation*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 225.

Spirit without likewise being “in Christ.”⁴⁸ This fact is reaffirmed by Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos: “The common origin of all persons from the creative breath of God was vividly pointed out by the Apostle Paul at the Areios Pagos of Athens.”⁴⁹

7 Patristic Sources on the Holy Spirit

While the Scriptures provide multiple images of the Spirit and affirm the importance of its economic function, most especially after Pentecost, the elucidations provided by the Fathers of the Church reaffirm the divinity and operation of the Spirit in the Cosmos.

In Book V of *Against Heresies*, St. Irenaeus makes some revealing statements about the Holy Spirit: “The flesh, therefore, when destitute of the Spirit of God, is dead, not having life, and cannot possess the kingdom of God.” He goes on to say: “without the Spirit of God we cannot be saved.”⁵⁰ What this reveals is that ultimately the Spirit plays a crucial role in the salvific work of God and is thus a necessary component for salvation.

For St. Athanasius, the Holy Spirit plays after the Resurrection of Christ a crucial role in our salvation. We have become “temples of the Holy Spirit,” by which our participation with the living God can be achieved.

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⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ A. Yannoulatos, “Eastern Orthodoxy and Human Rights,” p. 455.

⁵⁰ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* Book V: IX in: J. Donaldson, A. Roberts, *The Anti-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, Vol I, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1913), p. 535.

universality of Christ's redemptive work is summarized in his classic statement, "For He [Logos] was made man that we might be made God."⁵¹ This is elucidated by Father Florovsky who acknowledges that this salvation is only possible because Christ has made us "receptive to the Spirit."⁵² It is Christ who through his incarnation allowed the "indwelling and appropriation of the Holy Spirit" in each human.⁵³ Thus, humans have become "Spirit-bearing men" due to God who became flesh.⁵⁴

St. John of Damascus asserts that the "Word have a Spirit."⁵⁵ It is the Spirit that makes the operation of the Word manifest.⁵⁶ What this section illustrates is not only the importance of the Trinitarian understanding of God, but that the Christocentric nature of the faith is not devoid of the Spirit. Where the Spirit is, so also is Christ.

St. Maximos the Confessor affirms in his *Mystagogia* that though humans are born with infinite possible identities and features as biological sex, opinions and habits, all are ultimately born into the Church and recreated in the Spirit.⁵⁷ All members of the Church are constitutive of one community which itself is bound by "one, simple, and indivisible grace and power of faith."⁵⁸ The whole community is thus one body, formed of different members and yet with Christ himself as the true

⁵¹ Ph. Schaff and Henry Wace, *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of The Christian Church* Second Series, Vol. IV (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W. M. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955), p. 65.

⁵² G. Florovsky, *Creation and Redemption, Vol. III, Collected Works*, (Belmont, MA: Nordland Publishing Company, 1976), p. 75.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Saint John of Damascus: Writings (The Fathers Of The Church, a new trans. by F. H. Chase, Catholic University of America, Vol. 37, 1958)*, p. 174.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

⁵⁷ Maximus the Confessor, *The Church's Mystagogy in: Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings*, trans. by G. C. Berthold, (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985), p. 187.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

head.⁵⁹ Maximus' work on what the Church represents is important here in trying to understand St. Cyprian's axiom. The Church comes to represent in one instance the cosmos, with the earth as its nave and the sanctuary as heaven. Likewise, the Church is the Body of Christ, with Christ at its head. Thus all of creation participates in the cosmic liturgy.

Additionally, St. Maximos expands on the importance of understanding man's relationship both to nature and God. For him, the world came into existence as a "divided phenomenon," not as a "unified nature."⁶⁰ Thus, it is this division that leads to death and fragmentation. For St. Maximos, the world has the same relationship with God through man that is represented in our relationship with God through Christ.⁶¹ The relationship comes to fruition not with our independent relationship with nature or our fellow man but ultimately with our "communion" with God. It is in this communion that the eschatological dimension of our relationship with God and the created cosmos is realized and affirmed. Orthodoxy seeks to bring about a relationship whereby nature can be Eucharistic, and thereby repair the relationship and communion between humanity and God.⁶²

8 Spirit, Eucharist and Liturgy

There are powerful affirmations within the liturgical tradition that emphasize the vast workings of the Holy Spirit. Here the

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ I. Midich, *So That God's Creation Might Live: The Orthodox Church Responds to the Ecological Crisis* (Proceedings of the Inter-Orthodox Conference on Environmental Protection: The Orthodox Academy of Crete. November 1991), p. 53: "The Relationship of Humanity with Nature and the Ecological Problem according to St Maximos the Confessor".

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 54.

⁶² Ibid., p. 55.

Prayer of the Holy Spirit is pivotal in the Orthodox understanding of the Spirit within its liturgical life:

“O Heavenly King, Comforter, the Spirit of truth, present in all places and filling all things; treasury of good things and giver of life, come and dwell in us and purify us from every stain, and of your goodness save our souls.”⁶³

The Greek: ὁ Πανταχοῦ Παρῶν καὶ τὰ Πάντα Πληρῶν, present in all places and filling all things, indicates with the root *panta* that this is completely universal. Just like the title of Christ, Pantokrator, or Ruler of All, the Spirit too is omnipresent and filling all things. The emphasis on the Holy Spirit is crucial since the Divine Liturgy brings the community together as the body of Christ and is therefore an Icon of the eschaton.

The Eucharistic event in the liturgy is summarized by Metropolitan John Zizioulas: “In the form of the Eucharist all creatures are brought together and recapitulated in Christ. The Eucharist manifests and substantiates within time the identity of this assembly in the form of the Church.”⁶⁴ However, while the Eucharistic assembly is the community of baptized Christians participating in the liturgy, the mystery of the Eucharist transforms all of creation, far beyond the boundaries of the physical church. To this effect, Metropolitan Zizioulas first emphasizes that any distortion or alteration of the image of the Church becomes a picture of hell.⁶⁵ The distortions which the Church has labeled “heresy” are images which do not come from the eschaton and the kingdom of God but rather, from the kingdom which “loves disorder and hates and opposes the kingdom of God.”⁶⁶ Metropolitan Zizioulas uses a poignant

⁶³ G. Limouris (ed.), *Come, Holy Spirit Renew the Whole Creation – An Orthodox Approach for the Seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches Canberra, Australia 6-21 February 1991* (Brookline, MA.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1990), p. 120.

⁶⁴ J. D. Zizioulas, *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics* (New York: T&T Clark, 2008), pp. 137-138.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 138-139.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

example for this claim in reference to the Eucharistic service. He ponders what the Eucharistic service would entail if it was simply for white people and excluded black people? What about if the Eucharistic service was only for men but not women? How about for the rich and not the poor? These services, he affirms, would “be the very opposite of the Eucharist.”⁶⁷ Segregation of any kind brings about a “foretaste of hell.”⁶⁸ Metropolitan Zizioulas warns that “the Church can very easily be turned into the image of hell without even noticing that this has happened.”⁶⁹

This powerful affirmation about the universality of the Eucharistic experience and the limitless boundaries of the Church are sometime contested. The Eucharistic service is for *all people*, regardless of biology or self-identified particularity. All people are able to take part in the Eucharistic event. This theology provides Orthodoxy with a framework by which to promote and further enhance human rights around the globe.

9 Orthodox Ecclesiology and the Economy of the Spirit: Towards a New Communal Reality

The time has come to reevaluate St. Cyprians’ statement that there is no salvation outside the church. What constitutes “the Church?” Throughout Christian history, there are multiple definitions and presentations of what the Church is. The most extreme exclusive notion is the Church comprised of baptized members within the confines of strict canonical boundaries. Thus, the Church can be represented by the structure itself and the community that worships within.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

The most inclusive notion is that the entire creation itself constitutes the Church and thus nothing is *outside* the Church. This is consistent with the notion that Christ has redeemed all through the Incarnation and Resurrection and thus we are all members of the body of Christ.

For Metropolitan Zizioulas “the Church is a *mystery*. The term ‘mystery’ indicates that the Church is ‘revealed’, and thus no complete definition of it is possible.”⁷⁰ The way in which we conceive the Church has implications in synthesizing the scriptural and patristic notions on the Spirit’s presence in communities beyond the Orthodox Church as well as salvation beyond the canonical boundaries of the Church.

The most important aspect in the discussion about the Church is the *economic* operation of the Holy Spirit. Theologically, the Holy Spirit sanctifies creation and allows for human beings to be united with Christ, and thus participate in the energies of the Trinitarian God. With the gift of the Holy Spirit during Pentecost, the Incarnation and Resurrection of Christ allowed the Holy Spirit to work once again in an intimate way with creation which had been redeemed.

We know that the Spirit does not operate without Christ and its purpose is to sanctify creation, to bring about the grace of God and thus move us to the eschaton and ultimately towards our goal of *theosis*.

Some theologians have taken this to its logical conclusion, like Catholic Theologian Gerald O’Collins. He affirms that the universality of grace is intimately connected with the universal role of Christ as the Savior.⁷¹ First, he seeks to crystallize the fact that there is no grace apart from the grace of Christ and that there is no Holy Spirit apart from the Spirit of Christ. O’Collins takes his argument to the end which he recognizes as drawing the universal conclusion. First, he establishes the fact

⁷⁰ J. D. Zizioulas., *Lectures in Christian Dogmatic*, p. 137.

⁷¹ G. O’Collins, SJ, *Jesus our Redeemer: A Christian Approach to Salvation*, p. 226.

that no one can experience the offer of salvation except from Christ alone. However, the caveat he notes here is with the key word “obscurely.”⁷² What this means is that “any and every acceptance of saving grace and the Holy Spirit, whenever and wherever it takes place, is an acceptance of Christ.”⁷³ Ultimately for him there exists no area outside Christ since there is no area outside of the Holy Spirit. Thus, “all experience of salvation is Christological.”⁷⁴

O’Collins is emphasizing the fact that the Holy Spirit and Christ himself are not separate, thus if we claim the operation of the Holy Spirit outside of the Church proper, than those outside can have some sort of experiential knowledge of Christ: “For those who challenge the presence of the Spirit in all human beings, the short answer could be: the universal presence of the Spirit accompanies and enacts the presence of the risen Christ which is a universal presence.”⁷⁵ Likewise, the *mission* of the Spirit is “to transform everyone and everything in the world.”⁷⁶

Also Emmanuel Clapsis reiterated the importance of the Holy Spirit’s work in the created world. First, it does not operate apart from the Father and the Son and thus the Trinity is active in the salvific work of the entire world. Clapsis shows that any attempt to limit the work and movement of God or to monopolize on one or more persons of the Trinity leads to binitarianism or unitarianism.⁷⁷ Any attempt to limit or

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ G. O’Collins, SJ, *Salvation for All: God’s Other Peoples*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 224.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 225.

⁷⁷ E. Clapsis, “The Holy Spirit in the World: The Tension of the Particular with the Universal” *Current Dialogue* 52 (2012), p. 32. The article bases this theological approach on the work of Karmires most especially in his article: I. Karmires, Η Παγκοσμότητα τῆς Ἐν Χριστῷ Σωτηρίας, *ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΑ* 51, no. 4 (ΑΘΗΝΑ 1980), pp. 645-691; *ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΑ* 52, no. 1 (ΑΘΗΝΑ 1981), pp. 14-45.

constrain the work of the Trinity ultimately fails to account for the “fullness of God’s being, presence and operation in the life of the world.”⁷⁸ This is important in order to see the intimate connection between the Spirits’ operation and the Words Incarnation and ultimate redemption of all creation. The Christian understanding of Christ’s ministry on earth was always intimately connected with the Spirits’ operation and presence within the created cosmos. Christian tradition is somewhat ambiguous as to how to perceive other religions and the operation of the Spirit within those communities.

What we do affirm is that the prayers of the Orthodox Church reaffirm that “the Spirit of God, the Spirit of truth, is everywhere present and fills all things.”⁷⁹ Orthodox theology reasserts the fact that the Spirit is active throughout creation and in all things. However, Orthodox theologians are hesitant to extend the operation of the Spirit beyond the Church and the community for fear of relativizing the Christian gospel.⁸⁰

The importance of the Holy Spirit and Christ’s redemptive work cannot be stressed enough, for herein lies the possibilities of salvation beyond the canonical boundaries of the Church. “The economy of God’s Spirit cannot be perceived apart from the redemptive and deifying work of the Incarnate Logos of God.”⁸¹ Concordantly, the role of the Spirit is to “liberate humanity and creation in general from all forms of self-sufficiency and ‘autonomy’ vis-à-vis God.”⁸²

The operation of the Holy Spirit beyond the canonical boundaries of the Church shows that the Spirit is guiding human efforts towards liberation and movements to end oppression, in conjunction with bringing about the salvific and

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 34.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 35.

⁸² Ibid.

liberating mission of Christ to all.⁸³ The question then becomes how the Spirit would help bring about the salvation of those beyond the canonical boundaries of the Church, i.e. those unbaptized. While Orthodox theologians are hesitant to postulate on whether the risen Christ is actively present in the world today, they do acknowledge the salvific presence of Christ in the Eucharist, which in itself redeems all of creation.⁸⁴ Thus what they can assert is “the incompressibility of God’s active presence in the world beyond the boundaries of the Church (...) [which] is a sign of God’s unconditional freedom and providential love for all his creation.”⁸⁵

The Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Consultation at the 7th Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1991 affirmed the economy of the Trinity within the thematic framework of the Assembly which was entitled “Come, Holy Spirit – Renew the Whole Creation”. In the report to the WCC the Orthodox Churches affirmed that the Spirit constitutes the Church and acts in Church’s life.⁸⁶ Ultimately, however, the Holy Spirit is in no way limited or contained by it. The report acknowledges that “The Holy Spirit is everywhere present since it “blows where it wills, and you have the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or wither it goes” (Jn 3:8).”⁸⁷ It is this mysterious character of the Holy Spirit which for the Orthodox Church is constantly transcending all narrow perspectives with regard to work of the Spirit. For Orthodox theology, the Spirit is at work in the whole of God’s creation, both the visible and invisible creation, though not all are aware

⁸³ Ibid., p. 36.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 37.

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 37-38.

⁸⁶ G. Limouris (ed.), *Come, Holy Spirit Renew the Whole Creation – An Orthodox Approach for the Seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches Canberra, Australia 6-21 February 1991* (Brookline, MA.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1990), pp. 43-44.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

of it. The report shows how the faithful must “recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit wherever the fruits of the Spirit are seen and to call upon the power of the Spirit in all situations when truth is disfigured and freedom misused.”⁸⁸

We can be sure that God continues to work in the world in multiple ways for the purpose of saving the world as it moves towards the Eschaton. While reaffirming the operation of the Spirit throughout the Cosmos, the Orthodox Church can maintain their position to the full revelation of God through Jesus Christ while still acknowledge the work of the Spirit in other religions, and thus the partial revelations that they also have access to by way of the Spirit’s work amongst them. This will prevent the creation of some large, homogeneous religion that leaves no room for particularity while at the same time allowing the Orthodox Church to maintain its truth claim and not resort to relativism.

The Holy Spirit acts, like the wind, beyond the confines of the Church as constrained by the canons and blows where it wills amongst Christian and Non-Christian communities. Here once again St. Irenaeus states: “For where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church, and every kind of Grace; but the Spirit is Truth.”⁸⁹ The aim of the Spirit is to bring about the communion and fellowship of all of humanity with God. Thus the spirit generates the most powerful relationship, that between the human and the divine. The communion of all of humanity is the goal of the Trinity and thus should be the goal of the Orthodox Church, as living witnesses to the Gospel and the Risen Christ.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* Book III: XXIV in: J. Donaldson, A. Roberts, *The Anti-Nicene Fathers*, p. 458.

10 Western Civilization, the Enlightenment and Modernity: The Human Rights Debate

The debate over human rights and the Orthodox Church is an ongoing divisive issue. To some, human rights are a western invention that promotes individualism, egoism, atheism and humanism. To others, human rights is rooted in Christianity and, while not complete, is a step in the right direction towards protecting the world's most vulnerable people.

Paul Valliere writes: "Historically Eastern Orthodox tradition has been less disposed to defending human rights than Roman Catholic or classical Protestant traditions."⁹⁰ Likewise, interesting research has been conducted and analyzed to show how the Orthodox faithful view tolerance and human rights.⁹¹ A careful analysis of the debate will provide the ability to promote dialogue and ensure that human rights remain an important part of the discussion with the hopes of its wide acceptance in the near future.

Summarizing what she sees as the main issues with reconciling Eastern Orthodoxy with Human Rights, Adamantia Pollis concludes that individual human rights cannot be derived from Orthodox theology.⁹² Her analysis focuses on issues with Orthodox theology, most especially the communal v. individual distinction which is only compounded by the role of the Orthodox Church in the social sphere and the Church's relationship to the state.⁹³ Ultimately, Adamantia recognizes that Orthodox theology, with its focus on the *ekklesia*, which she

⁹⁰ P. Valliere, "Russian Orthodoxy and Human Rights," p. 280.

⁹¹ Chr. Marsh, D. Payne, "Religiosity, Tolerance, and Respect for Human Rights in the Orthodox World", in: A. Bruning, E.van der Zweerde (eds.), *Orthodox Christianity and Human Rights*, (Eastern Christian Studies, vol. 13. Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2012), pp. 201-214.

⁹² A. Pollis, "Eastern Orthodoxy and Human Rights", in: *Human Rights Quarterly* Vol. 15, no. 2 (May, 1993), p. 353.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 340.

describes as the “transcendent spiritual unity of all believers;”⁹⁴ mysticism; contemplation; and the absence of individualization, ultimately provides no grounding for the articulation of individual human rights.⁹⁵ She claims that the Orthodox notion of charity could be used as a basis for human rights.⁹⁶ Her analysis is limited and her understanding of Orthodox theology is cursory and she neglects any discussion of Christian anthropology, the Church’s recognition of human dignity and the theology of personhood. She does correctly point to the Orthodox Church’s inability to transform itself, remaining as she describes “frozen,” “rigid,” “resistant to transformative processes,” and ultimately “anti-modern.”⁹⁷ Her concluding hope is that the Orthodox Church can become a “defender of individual human rights and of personal humanity in the temporal world.”⁹⁸

Of those who disagree with human rights, the most prominent is Orthodox philosopher Christos Yannaras. In his article entitled “Human Rights and the Orthodox Church,” he seeks to show that the concept of human rights is a byproduct of modernity.⁹⁹ “The protection of human rights became the symbol of modern Western civilization.”¹⁰⁰ In seeking to show that human rights is a modern invention, Yannaras goes back to Ancient Greece to show that the idea of “rights” and “individualism” were non-existent there.

Alan Dershowitz agrees in his book *Rights from Wrongs* with Yannaras’ take on rights, even going so far as to say that “rights, thus understood, are quintessentially undemocratic, since they

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 343.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 344.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 353.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 356.

⁹⁹ Chr. Yannaras, “Human Rights and the Orthodox Church,” in: E. Clapsis ed. *The Orthodox Churches in a Pluralistic World* (Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2004), p. 83.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

constrain the state from enforcing majoritarian preferences.”¹⁰¹ However, while Yannaras illustrates that all power belonged to the citizens and thus, the democracy, he only glosses over the fact that the vast majority of people in Ancient Greece, especially in Athens, were disenfranchised and had no rights whatsoever.¹⁰² Even Socrates was not protected from the overreach of the city-state. Plato describes democratic governance in *Republic VIII* as “anarchic and motley, assigning a kind of equality to equals and unequals alike!”¹⁰³ Even French Philosopher Jacques Ranciere emphasizes: “The term democracy, then, does not simply mean a bad form of government and political life. It strictly means a style of life that is opposed to any well-ordered government of the community.”¹⁰⁴

Yannaras goes on to speak about the transformation of the Greek political event becoming the *ecclesia* for the early Christians.¹⁰⁵ He also expresses the need to move away from ego-centrism and towards a communion-centered vision of reality.¹⁰⁶

Charles Taylor provides multiple critiques of Yannaras’ analysis by focusing on what rights are and how they protect individuals. Personal rights, according to Taylor, effectively limit the actions of governments and collective decision making processes by offering protection to both individuals and specific groups.¹⁰⁷ Likewise, personal rights offer groups or individuals

¹⁰¹ A. Dershowtitz, *Rights from Wrongs: A Secular Theory of the Origins of Rights* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), p. 16.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 85.

¹⁰³ E. Hamilton, H. Cairns (eds.), *The Collected Dialogues of Plato* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 786.

¹⁰⁴ J. Ranciere, *Hatred of Democracy* (New York: Verso, 2006), p. 36.

¹⁰⁵ Chr. Yannaras, “Human Rights and the Orthodox Church”, p. 86.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

¹⁰⁷ Ch. Taylor, “Human Rights: The Legal Culture”, in: H. J. Steiner, Ph. Alston (eds.), *International Human Rights in Context: Law, Politics, Morals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 174.

harmed by some course of action the opportunity to seek redress and “gives them a margin of liberty in the imposition of these limits.”¹⁰⁸ Thus, the individual is safeguarding their position in society, most especially if they are in the minority. Michael Ignatieff offers a critique of the argument that human rights are a western product of modernity. In his analysis of Lee Kuan Yew and those who promulgate the “Asian Values,” he notes that these are just fronts to continue their authoritarian policies and curb dissent from within.¹⁰⁹ Likewise, Charles Taylor, in his speech: “Conditions of an Unforced Consensus on Human Rights”, urges a new way of coming towards a common consensus on human rights even from multiple, epistemologically independent sources. He recognizes that an unforced consensus on human rights will have agreement on norms. However, there will be a “profound” sense of difference when it comes to “the ideals, the notions of human excellence, the rhetorical tropes and reference points.”¹¹⁰ Ultimately, even with recognition and agreement on norms, consensus, he notes, will “either never come or must be forced.”¹¹¹

Another critic of human rights can be found in Vigen Guroian’s article: “Human Rights and Christian Ethics: An Orthodox Critique,” a polemical piece and a sharp defense of Orthodox theology. Guroian points out his opposition to “ethical relativism” while supporting Christian anthropology and

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ M. Ignatieff, *Human Rights: Politics and Idolatry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 62-63.

¹¹⁰ Ch. Taylor, “Conditions of an Unforced Consensus on Human Rights”, <http://web1.uct.usm.maine.edu/~bcj/issues/three/taylor.html> Ch. Taylor, “Conditions of an Unforced Consensus on Human Rights”, in: J. R. Bauer, D. A. Bell (eds.), *The East Asian Challenge for Human Rights*, (Cambridge: The Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1999) pp. 124-144.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

epistemology.¹¹² In one of the most shocking statements in the article, he states: "I am persuaded that the human rights project has not only become essentially secularist scheme, but that its impetus is atheistic."¹¹³ While he notes that there is some value in human rights, he strongly believes that "if human beings do not worship and pray and repent, then human rights are already deeply in trouble."¹¹⁴ The article's ending focuses on Christian obedience to the Lord which will better prepare us of standing with our fellow humans in support of human rights.¹¹⁵ In response to Guroian, Aristotle Papanikolaou acknowledges that Orthodoxy, while recognizing democracy as the best form of governance to uphold human rights must "allow for practices that would permit expressions, verbal or otherwise, that are contradictory to Orthodox beliefs, such as maximizing the conditions for the possibility of rejection of God and the affirmation of atheism, and even while knowing full well that the language of rights is not neutral and can lead to idolatrous forms of hyper-individualism."¹¹⁶ Here, Papanikolaou takes the same position as St. Paul in affirming the freedom and openness of the community.

Likewise, Sergey Trostyanskiy writes in his article entitled: "The Russian Orthodox Church on Human Rights" that "human rights are denied a status of ultimate authority and are given subordinate status in the social contract of the Russian Church."¹¹⁷ First, he dismisses the claim that human rights are a

¹¹² V. Guroian, "Human Rights and Christian Ethics: An Orthodox Critique", *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics*, Vol. 17 (1997), p. 302.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 305.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 306.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 309.

¹¹⁶ A. Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political*, p. 127.

¹¹⁷ S. Trostyanskiy, "The Russian Orthodox Church on Human Rights," in: M. J. Peira (ed.), *Philanthropy and Social Compassion in Eastern Orthodox Tradition: Papers of the Sophia Institute Academic Conference* (New York: Theotokos Press, 2010), p. 248.

“natural condition” of humanity, thus it is philosophically invalid.¹¹⁸ Human rights grounded themselves in the human being as an image of the divine. In the end, he underlines that human rights are ideals and that these ideals are a regulative principle of social interactions that promote the ideas of “human dignity and freedom.”¹¹⁹

A great deal of support for human rights, most especially in a pluralistic world can be found in David Little’s article: “Human Rights and Responsibilities in a Pluralistic World”. He calls on the Orthodox Churches to “take responsibility for embracing and promoting human rights” once they have discovered why human rights are so important.¹²⁰ Likewise, he calls upon the clergy and laity to become active in the human rights field and work towards understanding these sensitive issues. For him, human rights are a check against arbitrary authority, much like Charles Taylor indicated above. He notes that individuals have the right to protest injustices and even “take things into their own hands.”¹²¹ According to him the rise of nationalism is a great danger in our present time. This is why there is an urgent need for Orthodoxy to get involved in the campaign for human rights.¹²²

The issue of nationalism is at the core of Michael Radu’s critique of the Orthodox Church’s opposition to Western influence as well as individual and minority religious freedom.¹²³ Ultimately, the Orthodox Church, he notes, sees itself as the “historic

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 256.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 259.

¹²⁰ D. Little, “Human Rights and Responsibilities in a Pluralistic World,” in: E. Clapsis (ed.), *The Orthodox Churches in a Pluralistic World* (Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2004), p. 77.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 78.

¹²² Ibid., p. 82.

¹²³ Michael Radu, “The Burden of Eastern Orthodoxy”, in: *Orbis*, Vol. 42, Iss. 2 (Spring 1988), p. 300.

repository of nationhood, national values, and, quite often, as the savior of a nation's very existence."¹²⁴

Adamantia Pollis also describes this issue as the historic unity between *ethnos* (nation) and Orthodoxy.¹²⁵ Ultimately, the Orthodox Church must recognize that separation between Church and State is necessary in pluralistic, democratic and secular societies and that ethnic identity and nationality should no longer be yoked to Orthodox religious identity.

John McGuckin urges us in his article "The Issue of Human Rights in Byzantium" not to dismiss the human rights movement and its language simply because it is "an alien concept from the west."¹²⁶ He summarizes that while it is incomplete, many people may no longer be motivated by "Christian principles and Christian moral foundations" and thus need human rights to help address the issues today.¹²⁷ The best thing to do is to "re-seat human rights language in the nurturing context of social care and communality."¹²⁸

Louis Henkin agrees with this statement saying: "But if human rights many not be sufficient, they are at least necessary. If they do not bring kindness to the familiar, they bring – as religions have often failed to do – respect for the stranger."¹²⁹

In his article "Religion, Politics and Society: An Orthodox Perspective", George Papademetriou seeks to understand the role of the Orthodox Church in American and the need for the Orthodox Church and faithful to engage society so as to fulfill the Gospels charge. Speaking about politics he notes that

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 285.

¹²⁵ A. Pollis, "Eastern Orthodoxy and Human Rights", p. 348.

¹²⁶ J. A. McGuckin, "The Issue of Human Rights in Byzantium and the Orthodox Christian Tradition," in: J. Witte, Jr., F. S. Alexander (eds.), *Christianity and Human Rights: An Introduction* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 188.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

¹²⁹ L. Henkin, "Religion, Religions, and Human Rights" *Journal of Religious Ethics* Vol. 26, no. 2 (1998), p. 239.

politics devoid of the welfare of all people is “demonic.” In fact, his language is one of ensuring that all people are respected and provided their needs since all people are “God’s children created in His image.”¹³⁰ He emphasizes that Christianity is focused primarily on a *social* consciousness, that is, a concern for the welfare of all over the comfort of a few. Additionally, Fr. Papademetriou shows a lineage of social welfare and concern in Orthodox Christianity going back to the Byzantine *Basileias* which was a “welfare center; caring for the old, the traveler and the afflicted.”¹³¹ He finally notes the greatest challenge to American Orthodoxy as “the recognition of human rights and application of Orthodoxy in American life.”¹³² His solutions are: 1.) to bring the salvific message of Christ to all, and 2.) to emphasize the charity and social welfare for all people.¹³³ He outlines his hopes for the Orthodox community in the United States to focus on “social concern” and affirm its commitment to the democratic ideal through a “continuing commitment to freedom, responsibility, justice and equality of rights for all the people.”¹³⁴ The power of the Gospel in society rests in its social message and call for the faithful to be like the Good Samaritan and create egalitarian communities of inclusion and radical love.

While the debates continue in intensity, the human rights movement continues to grow and gain traction around the globe. It is the next frontier of law and rights and a necessary step in protecting many vulnerable peoples and communities

¹³⁰ G. C. Papademetriou, “Religion, Politics and Society: An Orthodox Perspective” *Diakonia: A Quarterly Devoted to Advancing Orthodox-Catholic Dialogue* Vol. 7, no. 3 (1972), p. 2.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3. For a complete and scholarly history of the Byzantine hospital, clinic and *basileias* see: T. S. Miller, *The Birth of the Hospital in the Byzantine Empire* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985).

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

around the world. The Orthodox Church from this exposition has an obligation and sacred duty based on its theology to ensure that all humans are protected and free from tyranny, coercion and oppression in all of its forms.

The theology of the Orthodox Church provides the foundation for human dignity and the more radical position of supporting and affirming human rights. Human rights are radical in that they expose the Orthodox churches to engage in the democratic sphere on the side of the universal, democratic principles even if it does not serve their “national” or “ethnic” interests. It is time that the Orthodox Church in its totality affirms human rights and stand on the right side of history, following in the example of clergy like then Metropolitan Kirill and Stephan of Bulgaria who saved Bulgaria’s Jewish population during the Shoah and have been given the title “Righteous among the nations” by Yad Vashem and Greek Orthodox Archbishop of North and South America Iakovos who marched in support of Civil Rights with Martin Luther King Jr. in Selma, Alabama in 1965.

Epilogue: Towards an Orthodox Position on Human Rights

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, one of the most important contemporary voices of the Orthodox position concerning human rights, states: “Orthodox spiritual teaching assures us that Orthodox Christians must always respect the human rights of others. If we do not respect those rights, then we have desecrated the image of God inherent in all human beings.”¹³⁵ For him “a just society is proof of God’s will at work in humankind.”¹³⁶

¹³⁵ J. Chryssavgis, *Cosmic Grace, Humble Prayer*, p. 214.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

From the aforementioned sections, the following support the human rights position:

1. Orthodox Anthropology asserts the fact that humans are created in the image and likeness of God and thus are the icon of God on earth.
2. Orthodox theology focuses on the idea of personhood which allows for particularity and diversity due to our shared experience and communal relationship with God. The plethora of particularities add to the human experience, much like the Trinity is a communion of three in one.
3. Human dignity is rooted in Christian Anthropology and as such is the cornerstone of Orthodox Christianity's focus on respecting life and the freedom of individuals. This is also a call for radical love.
4. Human Freedom is a core feature of being created in God's image and likeness. Freedom allows us to choose our relationships and, ultimately, to willingly enter into communion with God. Likewise, human freedom is at the core of a free and non-hierarchical society that values individual expression and rejoices in the particularities of all.
5. The pneumatology of the Church provides Orthodox Christians with a clear understanding of the economic function of the Spirit outside of the Church and thus a realization that those outside the "canonical" boundaries of the Church still participate in the Trinity and thus are in an authentic relationship and in communion with God.

According to the analysis presented here, I can affirm that human rights are in fact important and that they provide a framework for protecting those who cannot protect themselves from tyranny and oppression. Likewise, it provides the freedom that the Orthodox moral law may not allow; much like the Mosaic Law didn't for the early Church. "Orthodoxy nurtures a willingness to accept people as they are, with deep respect for

their freedom and without requiring them to adopt Christian views.”¹³⁷ With this in mind, the Orthodox Church must join the dialogue in a constructive way and enhance human rights for a future of peace and solidarity amongst all.

¹³⁷ A. Yannoulatos, *Facing the World*, p. 76.