

THE PATRIARCH OF THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH, IRINEJ (†)

Statement

The Crisis of Modernity and the Climate Crisis

Modernity confronts us with many dilemmas. Man must answer challenges, and not only those for which his teachers in his educational-upbringing process prepared him, but also totally new and different problems that life places before us. And it has always been so. Still, sociologists, pedagogues and culturologists generally agree that today's world is changing at a significantly faster pace than before. The technological progress and social innovations of the 20th century have transformed the world much faster than, for instance, the entire process of technological development during medieval times. This process is characterized by a loss of values. Today's world functions as a marketplace, meaning that the market economy principle is seeking to impose itself as the general norm.

The person is the central axiological notion of Christianity: the person is the measure of all values because it expresses the very designation of the human being, its possibility and its goal to be in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1,26). To be sure, the concept of person is not only a Christian category: more precisely, it is possible to also find it in other philosophical and theological conceptions. Nevertheless, only Christianity has produced an integral ontology of personality and established a corresponding personal pedagogy on its basis. It would be wrong to see this personal pedagogy as a theoretical principle; it should be, rather, seen as the living experience of the Church, founded before all in Christ's Theandric personality. In that way – through an Christological steadfastness of being and faith – as partakers in the new soteriological existence of Redemption and Integration we can meet the challenges of modernity.

But, egotism encourages us to view the world as an opportunity for acquisition and enjoyment: at every Divine Liturgy, St. John Chrysostom reminds us to “commend ourselves and each other, and all our life, unto Christ our God.” A Man who is a captive to egotism is not able to build the right relationship either

with God or with other people: “when there is a feeling of higher worth, it does not only damage relations between people, it also clouds the relationship with God. Egotism undermines all life, which is why it is worth applying oneself towards its eradication.” That is why the entire Liturgy is one great reminder to firstly overcome our own “I” in order to achieve communion in the life of the New Creation, in the future Kingdom.

Where we have to live in the contemporary world? Only in the place where truth resides – in Christ’s Church, in its dogmas and its worldview that is, before all – liturgical. Truly, as a cosmic event, Liturgy cannot “fail” to witness to the world its true designation in communion with God.

In facing the “crisis” of each epoch, as well as the modern era, which is, in fact, just a manifestation of the perpetual eschatological “crisis” of this world, the eschatological judgment over this world that has, in the words of Christ, already begun with His Incarnation: “And this is the condemnation: that Light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil” (John 3,19). The Church’s basic method is the witnessing of the God-Man Christ, God the Logos Incarnate, the Son of God and the Son of Man.

The Church has never avoided facing the crisis of the world that it was supposed to change, due to its experiential knowledge that crisis – is the ontological state of the world until Christ’s Second Coming. There is no other world than the “world in crisis”; it is a world that the Church loves, that it does not anathematize for its sinfulness but, rather, lavishes it with “works of love in Truth.”

Respected theologians of the Serbian Orthodox Church began to raise serious concerns about the environmental crisis and the urgent problems of global warming, floods, risk of forest fires, sea pollution from plastics, climate changes, etc. Pastors and theologians of the Church before all, as well as Christians in general, have always erred, missed and betrayed their ecclesial task whenever they argued and matched wits with “this world” and their epoch using methods and arguments of “religious reason,” straining to prove the world’s sinfulness and condemning it, from the heights of their supposed “salvation,” to eternal perdition while, in fact, completely and irresponsibly abandoning it to the power of anthropolatric ideologies and manipulations. And, on the other hand, Church pastors and theologians have

always triumphed over the world and won it over for Christ's "easy yoke" (Matthew 11,30) whenever they have witnessed to it Christ's Love for the life of the world, liturgical love and sacrifice "in all and for all."

What is expected of contemporary Christians, as responsible members of Christ's Church, is neither aloof diagnosing of spiritual "illness" nor pronouncements of the "ruination of the world," nor panicked anathematizing of "this world" and its apostatic modernity, but a responsible witnessing of the Truth of God-Man Christ, and an unmasking of all the anthropolatric ideologies, falsities, mis-conceptions and injustices through the love of Christ. The basis of Christian witnessing in the modern world must be a liturgical love for that world, a love prepared to sacrifice for the life of the world, instead of a dualistic puritanism that, from the heights of its righteous self-satisfaction, abhors the "world (that) lieth in wickedness" (1 John 5,19) and anathematizes it, hating, along with sin, the sinners themselves, contrary to the example of Christ, Who came into the world for the sake of the sinners, to call them to repentance (cf. Matthew 9,12-13).

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The loss of the Christian experience of life, worldview, criterion of everything and value system is the mark of the modern fall of the "Christian historical world." After twenty centuries of her baptismal-resurrectional history, the Church finds herself once again in a situation of existing in a world that is no longer "hers," that is no longer a Christian world, that defines itself as a "post-Christian" world, a "world after Christianity," a world that no longer bases itself on Christian foundations and assumptions, that is either indifferent or openly rejects the Christian theory and practice of life, thought and action, i.e., Christianity as a whole, together with its theology and anthropology, ontology, ethics and esthetics, cosmology and ecology. We have a crucial role as the Orthodox Church in encouraging the world's response to the climate and ecological crisis through Church as Body of Christ. We give a clear message for Orthodox climate leadership, focusing primarily on the Balkan Peninsula

and Mediterranean, which is facing mounting challenges caused or exacerbated by climate change and the broader environmental crisis.

The experience of the entire creation (the World) as Home (of all of us), is possible exclusively and solely from that which is the Wholeness of Heaven and earth, history and the Eschaton – from the Body of Christ and in the Body of Christ, Christ’s Church, which is larger and higher and more encompassing than the world, “which surpasses Heaven itself,” which contains within herself not only the entire cosmos, not only the visible but also the invisible world, “all worlds” “life, immortality and eternity, and theandricity.” That is because graceful-ascetic knowledge of God is the source of all other human knowledge – self-knowledge (anthropology) as well as knowledge of the world (cosmology, ecology).

The ascetic experience of the Fathers, i.e., the “renunciation of the (fallen) world,” commanded to us by God-Man Christ Himself (“If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me...” – Matthew 16:24), “lies in the very nature of the Christian philosophy of life and means a radical change of relationship with the world and with oneself, and a change of the way of life, behind which lies a demand for freedom that only the Holy Spirit can grant.”

Let us all recall the commands of God regarding our use of the earth as Our Home. Let us respond to the divine commandments so that the blessings of God may be abundantly upon us in Liturgy and prayers. And let us responsibly discern the right, holy and proper way to live in this time of change and challenge, as a life in Church as a Body of Christ.

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