§68 Ours is an age of ever more rapid technological development; humanity’s power today to transform physical reality, for both good and ill, is quite unprecedented in human history, and constitutes both a peril and a responsibility for which humanity seems largely unprepared. The Orthodox Church must, therefore, before all else, remind Christians that the world we inhabit is God’s good creation (however marred by sin and death it may be), and a gracious gift to all his creatures. With St. Maximus the Confessor, it affirms that the human presence in the physical cosmos is also a spiritual office, a kind of cosmic priesthood. Humanity occupies the place of a methorios, the boundary where the spiritual and material realms meet and are united; and, through that priestly mediation, the light of spirit pervades all of created nature, while the whole of cosmic existence is raised up into spiritual life. This is, at least, creation as God intends it, and as it will exist in the restoration of all things, when he brings about a renewed heaven and earth where all the creatures of land, sea, and air will rejoice in his light. Christians must always recall that, according to the teachings of their faith, the bondage of creation to death is the consequence of humanity’s apostasy from its priestly role; that in Christ this priesthood has been restored; and that the ultimate salvation promised in scripture encompasses the whole of cosmic reality, and so will be made perfect only in a renewed creation (one that scripture repeatedly portrays as abounding in animal and plant life, no less than human). The responsibility of Christians in this world, therefore, in seeking to transfigure fallen nature in service to the Kingdom, involves a real responsibility to the whole of creation and a ceaseless concern for its integrity and flourishing. How to accomplish this in an age of such rapid technological change and of such immense technological power is a question that Christians must ceaselessly pose for themselves, and that the Church must approach with prayerful discernment. This is the foundation and context of the pioneering initiatives of the Ecumenical Patriarchate for the preservation of the natural environment. It is also the reason and reasoning behind the establishment of September 1—as early as in 1989, by Ecumenical Patriarch Demetrios, of blessed memory, and subsequently adopted by all Orthodox Churches, by the World Council of Churches and many Protestant Confessions, by the Anglican Communion, as well as by Pope Francis for the Roman Catholic Church—as the annual day of prayer for and protection of God’s creation.

§69 The Christian’s mission to transfigure the world in the light of God’s Kingdom is one that reaches out to all of creation, to all of life, to every dimension of cosmic existence. Wherever there is suffering, Christians are called to bring healing as relief and reconciliation. This is why the Church early in its history began founding hospitals open to all persons, and employing such therapies and medicines as were known in their day. St. Basil’s extraordinary Basiliad was a place of welfare for the poor even as it was a place of wholeness for the sick. As St. Basil wrote, “Medicine is a gift from God even if some people do not make the right use of it. Granted, it would be stupid to put all hope of a cure in the hands of doctors, yet there are people who stubbornly refuse their help altogether.”[57] The ministry of healing has been recognized by the Church from her earliest days as a holy endeavor and as a genuine cooperation in God’s workings. And in no area of human activity is technological development more readily to be sought and welcomed than in the medical sciences. The invention of medicines, antibiotics,
vaccines, therapies for even the gravest of illnesses, and so forth, are especially glorious achievements of human creativity, and are thus also particularly precious gifts from God. Even so, the speed with which the medical sciences today develop, test, and use new technologies and therapies often far outpaces moral reflection and spiritual discernment. More and more, the Church must be willing to consider and evaluate every medical innovation separately, as it appears, and sometimes to consider the uses of these innovations on a case-by-case basis. This will often prove necessary, for instance, in the Church’s approach to the forms of care given the elderly and the terminally ill. There can be no simple general rule, for example, as to when to continue medical treatment to prolong life and when instead to refrain from doing so. The welfare of the patient, the spiritual and material welfare of his or her family, the sensible distinction between ordinary and extraordinary efforts to preserve and prolong life—all of these issues, as well as many others, must be taken into consideration in each individual case. Often the judgment that the Church will render on current medical technologies depends on the practical and moral concomitants of those technologies, which is to say the methods they require and the ethical consequences those methods might entail. For instance, some practices of *in vitro* fertilization or stem-cell treatments for spinal injuries may involve the destruction of very young human embryos, and this the Church cannot support. Again, each individual case of treatment may need to be adjudicated separately. The Church might, for example, give its full blessing to a particular stem-cell therapy to alleviate symptoms of a particular spinal injury so long as the stem-cells used have not been extracted from aborted babies.

§70 New technologies evolve even more rapidly outside the realm of medical science, it might be argued. Certainly, they do so with greater diversity and cultural pervasiveness. In only the past few years, for instance—scarcely more than a decade or two—we have seen radical new developments in technologies of communication, data-gathering and sorting, mass-messaging, instant global proliferation of information (or misinformation, as the case may be), and so forth. Each such development brings with it numerous beneficial possibilities, such as extremely rapid humane interventions in situations of natural catastrophe or human aggression, or such as new avenues of communication and reciprocal understanding between persons or peoples. Yet these same technologies create new opportunities for malicious abuse or inadvertently harmful misuse. Today, the distinctions between reality and fantasy, between facts and opinions, between news and ideologically motivated propaganda, and between truth and lies have become ever more obscure and fluid, precisely as a result of the enormous power of the internet. We have seen numerous cases in recent years of the systematic corruption of public discourse on the internet by agents of confusion, for the purpose of sowing discord or influencing political trends, principally through deceit and misdirection. Just as pernicious, perhaps, are the unplanned but still quite ubiquitous corruptions induced by the precipitous decline of civility on the internet. The casual and customary use of the rhetoric of blame, provocation, and insult, cruelty, harassment, and humiliation—all of these spiritually devastating practices are all too common to the atmosphere of internet culture. It may well be that the very nature of modern instantaneous communication makes such evils all but inevitable. The disembodied, curiously impersonal, and abstracted quality of virtual communication seems to prompt the kind of amoral and self-absorbed behavior that the real, immediate presence of another person would discourage. Here communication can all too often become an alternative to true communion, and in fact destructive of such communion. We know also that the internet can (for many of the same reasons) become a remarkably powerful vehicle for any number of obsessions and addictive fixations, such as
pornography or violent fantasy. As yet, it is impossible to predict the extent either of the good or of the harm that the new age of instantaneous global interconnection may bring about. But the magnitude of the latter will almost certainly be no smaller than that of the former, and will in many unforeseen ways be greater. Here the Church must be vigilant regarding the effects of these new technologies and wise in combating their more deleterious effects. It must also remain constantly aware of even more consequential developments in other or related spheres of research, such as new algorithms for artificial intelligence or new techniques of gene-editing. How well it will be able to marshal her pastoral powers and resources in the face of this ever-accelerating process of scientific advancement will surely determine how well it will be able to offer true spiritual refuge to those who seek God and his love in the modern world.

§71 Perhaps the Church’s first concern, in seeking to understand the rapid technological developments of late modernity, and in attempting to secure her role as a place of spiritual stability amid the incessant flux of scientific and social change, should be to strive to overcome any apparent antagonism between the world of faith and that of the sciences. One of the more insidious aspects of modern Western cultural history has been the emergence of religious fundamentalism, including fideistic forms of Christianity that refuse to accept discoveries in such fields as geology, paleontology, evolutionary biology, genetics, and the environmental sciences. No less fideistic, moreover, are forms of ideological “scientism” and metaphysical “materialism” that insist that all of reality is reducible to purely material forces and causes, and that the entire realm of the spiritual is an illusion. Neither scientific evidence nor logic supports such a view of reality; indeed, it is philosophically incoherent. But, even so, the popular intellectual culture of late modernity has been marked to a remarkable degree by these opposed fundamentalisms. The Orthodox Church has no interest in hostilities between simpleminded philosophies, much less in historically illiterate fables regarding some kind of perennial conflict between faith and scientific reason. Christians should rejoice in the advances of all the sciences, gladly learn from them, and promote scientific education, as well as public and private funding for legitimate and necessary scientific research. In our age of ecological crisis especially, we must draw on all the resources of scientific research and theory to seek out an ever deeper knowledge of our world, and ever more effective solutions to our shared dangers. In the eyes of the Church, all that contributes to the welfare of humanity and of creation as a whole is to be praised, and it offers her ceaseless encouragement to researchers in the relevant fields to devote their best efforts to the alleviation of suffering everywhere, including the development of new technologies for providing clean water to deprived regions, preventing soil depletion and crop disease, increasing crop yields and crop durability, and so forth. And the Church encourages the faithful to be grateful for—and to accept—the findings of the sciences, even those that might occasionally oblige them to revise their understandings of the history and frame of cosmic reality. The desire for scientific knowledge flows from the same wellspring as faith’s longing to enter ever more deeply into the mystery of God.

§72 Neither should the Church fail to take advantage of the resources of the sciences for her own pastoral ministry, as well as the technological advances of the internet and social media for her pastoral mission. At the very least, her pastoral practices should be informed by what has been learned in recent centuries regarding the complexity of human motivations and desires, and regarding the hidden physical and psychological causes—including genetic, neurobiological, biochemical, and psychologically traumatic causes—that often contribute to human behavior. In
no way need this awareness detract from the Church’s understanding of the real power of sin in
the world or of the necessity in every life for repentance and forgiveness; nor need it encourage
the Church to dismiss spiritual maladies as purely psychological disorders, requiring therapies
but not genuine penitence and regeneration by God’s Spirit. But a keen sense of the larger
predicament of embodied spirits in a world tormented by death and spiritual disorder can only
aid Orthodox pastors in understanding, persuading, and healing the souls in their charge. And it
is entirely in keeping with true charity and true Christian humility for such pastors to recognize
that certain problems are as much the result of purely contingent physical or psychological forces
as of moral failings on anyone’s part. Those who devote themselves to the care of souls should
be willing and even eager to learn from those who study the natural dynamisms of minds and
bodies, and to be grateful to God for the grace he supplies through the insights these latter can
provide.

§73 In the Church’s central symbol and declaration of faith, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan
Creed, Orthodox Christians confess “one God, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things
visible and invisible.” Scripture affirms that “God saw everything that was made and, indeed, it
was very good” (Genesis 1:31). The word for “good” (kalos) in the canonical Greek text
connotes more than just the value of a thing, and more even than its mere moral acceptability; it
indicates that the world was also created as, and was called to be, “beautiful.” The Liturgy of St.
James affirms this too: “For the one God is Trinity, whose glory the heavens declare, while earth
proclaims his dominion, the sea his might and every physical and immaterial creature his
greatness.” This profound belief in the goodness and beauty of all creation is the source and
substance of the Church’s whole cosmic vision. As Orthodox Christians sing at the Feast of the
Theophany: “The nature of waters is sanctified, the earth is blessed, and the heavens are
enlightened” . . . “so that by the elements of creation, and by the angels, and by human beings,
by things both visible and invisible, God’s most holy name may be glorified” (From the Great
Blessing of the Waters). St. Maximus the Confessor tells us that human beings are not isolated
from the rest of creation; they are bound, by their very nature, to the whole of creation.[58] And
when humankind and creation are thus rightly related, humanity is fulfilling its vocation to bless,
elevate, and transfigure the cosmos, so that its intrinsic goodness might be revealed even amidst
its fallenness. In this, God’s most holy name is glorified. Nevertheless, human beings all too
often imagine themselves to be something separate and apart from the rest of creation, involved
in the material world only insofar as they can or must exploit it for their own ends; they ignore,
neglect, and even at times willfully reject their bond to the rest of creation. Again and again,
humankind has denied its vocation to transfigure the cosmos, and has instead disfigured our
world. And ever since the birth of the industrial age, humanity’s capacity for harm has been
relentlessly magnified. As a result, we today find ourselves faced with such previously
unimaginable catastrophes as the increased melting of ice-caps and glaciers, rain and rivers
running sour from pollution, pharmaceuticals tainting our drinking-water, and the tragic
reduction or even extinction of many species. Over against all the forces—political, social, and
economic, corporate and civic, spiritual and material—that contribute to the degradation of our
ecosystems, the Church seeks to cultivate a truly liturgical and sacramental path to communion
with God in and through his creation, one that necessarily demands compassion for all others and
care for all of creation.
The work of cosmic transfiguration requires great effort, a ceaseless striving against the fallen aspects of humanity and of the world; and the embrace of this labor requires an ascetic ethos, one that can reorient the human will in such a way as to restore its bond with all of creation. Such an ethos reminds Christians that creation, as a divine gift from the loving creator, exists not simply as ours to consume at whim or will, but rather as a realm of communion and delight, in whose goodness all persons and all creatures are meant to share, and whose beauty all persons are called to cherish and protect. Among other things, this entails working to eliminate wasteful and destructive uses of natural resources, working to preserve the natural world for the present generation and for all generations to come, and practicing restraint and wise frugality in all things. None of this, however, is likely possible without a deep training in gratitude. Without thanksgiving, we are not truly human. This, in fact, is the very foundation of the Church’s Eucharistic understanding of itself and of its mission in the world. When humanity is in harmony with all of creation, this thanksgiving comes effortlessly and naturally. When that harmony is ruptured or replaced by discord, as it so often is, thanksgiving becomes instead an obligation to be discharged, sometimes with difficulty; but only such thanksgiving can truly heal the division that alienates humanity from the rest of the created order. When human beings learn to appreciate the earth’s resources in a truly Eucharistic spirit, they can no longer treat creation as something separate from themselves, as mere utility or property. Then they become able truly to offer the world back up to its creator in genuine thanksgiving—“Your own of your own we offer to you, in all and for all” (From the Anaphora in the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom)—and in that act of worship creation is restored to itself: everything assumes again its purpose, as intended by God from the beginning, and is to some degree arrayed again in its primordial beauty.

The Church understands that this world, as God’s creation, is a sacred mystery whose depths reach down into the eternal counsels of its maker; and this in and of itself precludes any of the arrogance of mastery on the part of human beings. Indeed, exploitation of the world’s resources should always be recognized as an expression of Adam’s “original sin” rather than as a proper way of receiving God’s wonderful gift in creation. Such exploitation is the result of selfishness and greed, which arise from humanity’s alienation from God, and from humanity’s consequent loss of a rightly ordered relationship with the rest of nature. Thus, as we have repeatedly stressed, every act of exploitation, pollution, and misuse of God’s creation must be recognized as sin. The Apostle Paul describes creation as “groaning in pain along with us from the beginning till now” (Romans 8:22), while “awaiting with eager longing” (Romans 8:19) “the glorious liberation by the children of God” (Romans 8:21). The effects of sin and of our alienation from God are not only personal and social, but also ecological and even cosmic. Hence, our ecological crisis must be seen not merely as an ethical dilemma; it is an ontological and theological issue that demands a radical change of mind and a new way of being. And this must entail altering our habits not only as individuals, but as a species. For instance, our often heedless consumption of natural resources and our wanton use of fossil fuels have induced increasingly catastrophic processes of climate change and global warming. Therefore, our pursuit of alternative sources of energy and our efforts to reduce our impact on the planet as much as possible are now necessary expressions of our vocation to transfigure the world.

None of us exists in isolation from the whole of humanity, or from the totality of creation. We are dependent creatures, creatures ever in communion, and hence we are also morally
responsible not only for ourselves or for those whom we immediately influence or affect, but for the whole of the created order—the whole city of the cosmos, so to speak. In our own time, especially, we must understand that serving our neighbor and preserving the natural environment are intimately and inseparably connected. There is a close and indissoluble bond between our care of creation and our service to the body of Christ, just as there is between the economic conditions of the poor and the ecological conditions of the planet. Scientists tell us that those most egregiously harmed by the current ecological crisis will continue to be those who have the least. This means that the issue of climate change is also an issue of social welfare and social justice. The Church calls, therefore, upon the governments of the world to seek ways of advancing the environmental sciences, through education and state subventions for research, and to be willing to fund technologies that might serve to reverse the dire effects of carbon emissions, pollution, and all forms of environmental degradation.

§77 We must also recall, moreover, that human beings are part of the intricate and delicate web of creation, and that their welfare cannot be isolated from the welfare of the whole natural world. As St. Maximus the Confessor argued, in Christ all the dimensions of humanity’s alienation from its proper nature are overcome, including its alienation from the rest of the physical cosmos; and Christ came in part to restore to material creation its original nature as God’s earthly paradise. Our reconciliation with God, therefore, must necessarily express itself also in our reconciliation with nature, including our reconciliation with animals. It is no coincidence that the creation narrative of Genesis describes the making of animal life and the making of humanity as occurring on the same day (Genesis 1:24–31). Nor should it be forgotten that, according to the story of the Great Flood, Noah’s covenant with God encompasses the animals in the ark and all their descendants, in perpetuity (Genesis 9:9–11). The unique grandeur of humanity in this world, the image of God within each person, is also a unique responsibility and ministry, a priesthood in service to the whole of creation in its anxious longing for God’s glory. Humanity shares the earth with all other living things, but singularly among living creatures possesses the ability and authority to care for it (or, sadly, to destroy it). The animals that fill the world are testament to the bounty of God’s creative love, its variety and richness; and all the beasts of the natural order are enfolded in God’s love; not even a single sparrow falls without God seeing (Matthew 10:29). Moreover, animals by their very innocence remind us of the paradise that human sin has squandered, and their capacity for blameless suffering reminds us of the cosmic cataclysm induced by humanity’s alienation from God. We must recall also that all the promises of scripture regarding the age that is to come concern not merely the spiritual destiny of humanity, but the future of a redeemed cosmos, in which plant and animal life are plentifully present, renewed in a condition of cosmic harmony.

§78 Thus, in the lives of the saints, there are numerous stories about wild beasts, of the kind that would normally be horrifying or hostile to human beings, drawn to the kindness of holy men and women. In the seventh century, Abba Isaac of Nineveh defined a merciful heart as “a heart burning for the sake of the entire creation, for people, for birds, for animals . . . and for every created thing.” This is a consistent theme in the witness of the saints. St. Gerasimos healed a wounded lion near the Jordan River; St. Hubertus, having received a vision of Christ while hunting deer, proclaimed an ethic of conservation for hunters; St. Columbanus befriended wolves, bears, birds, and rabbits; St. Sergius tamed a wild bear; St. Seraphim of Sarov fed the wild animals; St. Mary of Egypt may well have befriended the lion that guarded her remains; St.
Innocent healed a wounded eagle; St. Melangell was known for her protection of wild rabbits and the taming of their predators; in the modern period, St. Paisios lived in harmony with snakes. And not only animals, but plants as well, must be objects of our love. St. Kosmas the Aetolian preached that “people will remain poor, because they have no love for trees”[61] and St. Amphilochnios of Patmos asked, “Do you know that God gave us one more commandment that is not recorded in scripture? It is the commandment to love the trees.” The ascetic ethos and the Eucharistic spirit of the Orthodox Church perfectly coincide in this great sacramental vision of creation, which discerns the traces of God’s presence “everywhere present and filling all things” (Prayer to the Holy Spirit) even in a world still as yet languishing in bondage to sin and death. It is a vision, moreover, that perceives human beings as bound to all of creation, as well as one that encourages them to rejoice in the goodness and beauty of the whole world. This ethos and this spirit together remind us that gratitude and wonder, hope and joy, are our only appropriate—indeed, our truly creative and fruitful—attitude in the face of the ecological crisis now confronting the planet, because they alone can give us the willingness and the resolve to serve the good of creation as unremittingly as we must, out of love for it and its creator.
IX. Conclusion

Let us the faithful rejoice, having this anchor of hope[62]

§79 Needless to say, a document of this sort can address only so many issues and its authors can foresee only so many of the additional concerns that might occur to those who receive it. It is offered, therefore, with the caution and the humble acknowledgment that it is in many respects quite inadequate as a comprehensive statement of the social ethos of the Church. In that sense, it is at most an invitation to further and deeper reflection on the parts of the faithful. More to the point, the social ethos of the Church is fulfilled not simply through the implementation of ethical prescriptions, but also and most fully in the liturgical expectation of the divine Kingdom. Nothing written here can bear much fruit if taken in abstraction from the full sacramental life of those who are called to be immersed in the fire of the Holy Spirit, joined thereby to Christ and, through Christ, to the Father. For the Church Fathers, and especially in the teaching of Dionysius the Areopagite, the heavenly doxology of the angelic powers and righteous orders surrounding the royal throne of Christ (cf. Revelation 7:11) at once perfects and communicates the archetypal and consummate worship to which all creation is summoned from everlasting, and it is this heavenly liturgy that inspires and informs the earthly, Eucharistic sacrament.[63] This indissoluble and inalienable relationship between the heavenly polity of the angelic powers and saints and the earthly life of the Church in the world provides the essential rationale underlying the ethical principles of the Gospel and the Church; for those principles are nothing less than a way of participation in the eternal ecstasy of worship that is alone able to fulfill created natures and elevate them to their divine destiny. For Orthodox Christians to conform themselves to Christ’s moral commandments, however, each must also take up his or her personal cross daily, and this must in some measure involve the ascetical discipline of “joyful mourning”—not as some sort of cathartic discharge of emotion, but rather as an act of repentance for one’s alienation from the grace of God. This is why, in the Beatitudes, those who mourn are blessed by Christ, who pledges the certainty of divine consolation. “Blessed are those who mourn; for they shall be comforted” (Matthew 5:4).

§80 The Church exists in the world, but is not of the world (John 17:11, 14–15). It inhabits this life on the threshold between earth and heaven, and bears witness from age to age of things as yet not seen. It dwells among the nations as a sign and image of the permanent and perpetual peace of God’s Kingdom, and as a promise of the complete healing of humanity and the restoration of a created order shattered by sin and death. Those who are “in Christ” are already “a new creation: the old has passed away, behold, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17). This is the glory of the Kingdom of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, which even now can be glimpsed in the radiant and transfigured faces of the saints. Yet the Church is not only the living icon of the Kingdom, but is also a ceaseless prophetic witness of hope and joy in a world wounded by its rejection of God. This prophetic vocation demands a refusal to remain silent in the face of injustices, falsehoods, cruelties, and spiritual disorders; and this is not always easy, even in modern free societies. Characteristic of many of our contemporary societies, and curiously common to their otherwise often incompatible political systems in both East and West, is the novel teaching that there is such a thing as a purely public sphere that, in order to be at once both neutral and universal, must exclude religious expression. Religion, moreover, is understood in such societies as essentially a private pursuit, which must not intrude upon public discussions of the common good. But this is false in principle and, almost invariably, oppressive in practice.
For one thing, secularism itself is a form of modern ideology, invested with its own implicit concept of the good and the just; and, if it is imposed too imperiously upon a truly diverse society, it becomes just another authoritarian creed. In some contemporary societies, religious voices in public spaces have been legally and forcibly silenced, whether by the prohibition of religious symbols or even certain religious styles of dress, or by the denial that religious persons can act according to their consciences on matters of ethical import without violating the inalienable rights of others. In truth, human beings cannot erect impermeable partitions between their moral convictions and their deepest beliefs about the nature of reality, and to ask or force them to do so is an invitation to resentment, deepening factionalism, fundamentalism, and strife. It is undeniably the case that modern societies are increasingly culturally diverse; and, far from lamenting this fact, the Orthodox Church celebrates every opportunity for encounter and reciprocal understanding between persons and peoples. But such understanding becomes impossible if certain voices are proleptically silenced by coercive law; and, in the absence of that understanding, and perhaps partly as a result of that coercion, problems far worse and far more destructive than mere civil disagreement can incubate and grow beyond the margins of the sanitized public arena. The Orthodox Church, therefore, cannot accept the relegation of religious conscience and conviction to some purely private sphere, if for no other reason than that her faith in God’s Kingdom necessarily shapes every aspect of life for the faithful, including their views on political, social, and civil issues. Neither can the Church simply grant the obvious congeniality, disinterestedness, and impartiality of secularism in the abstract; every ideology can become oppressive when it is given unchallenged power to dictate the terms of public life. While a modest secular order that does not impose a religion on its citizens is a perfectly good and honorable ideal, a government that restricts even ordinary expressions of religious identity and belief all too easily becomes a soft tyranny that will, in the end, create more division than unity.

§81 That said, the Church respects and even reveres the essential freedom of every person, implanted in him or her from the beginning by virtue of the indwelling divine image. This freedom must include both the liberty to accept and love God as revealed in Jesus Christ as well as the liberty to reject the Christian Gospel and embrace other beliefs. Hence, the Church is called at all times and in all places to witness, at one and the same time, both to a vision of the human person as transfigured by fidelity to the will of the Father, as revealed in Jesus Christ, and also to the inviolability of the real freedom of every human person, including the freedom to reject that fidelity. Once again, the Church affirms the goodness of social and political diversity, and asks only that it be a genuine diversity, one that allows for true freedom of conscience and the free expression of belief. Her own mission is to proclaim Christ and him crucified to all peoples and at all times, and to summon everyone into the life of God’s Kingdom. And this mission necessarily includes a sustained dialogue with contemporary culture, and the clear enunciation of a truly Christian vision of social justice and political equity in the midst of the modern world.

§82 “God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that, through him, the world might be saved” (John 3:17). The Orthodox Church sees it as her calling to condemn cruelty and injustice, the economic and political structures that abet and preserve poverty and inequality, the ideological forces that encourage hatred and bigotry; but it is not her calling to condemn the world, or nations, or souls. Her mission is to manifest the saving love of God given in Jesus Christ to all creation: a love broken and seemingly defeated upon the cross, but shining out in
triumph from the empty tomb at Pascha; a love that imparts eternal life to a world darkened and disfigured by sin and death; a love often rejected, and yet longed for unceasingly, in every heart. It speaks to all persons and every society, calling them to the sacred work of transfiguring the world in the light of God’s Kingdom of love and eternal peace. All this being so, this commission humbly offers this document to all who are disposed to listen to its counsels, and especially encourages all the Orthodox faithful—clergy and laity, women and men—to engage in prayerful discussion of this statement, to promote the peace and justice it proclaims, and to seek ways in which to contribute in their own local parishes and communities to the work of the Kingdom. To this end, the revitalization of the order of the diaconate, male and female, may serve as an instructive way of assimilating and applying the principles and guidelines proposed in this statement. The commission also asks Orthodox seminaries, universities, monasteries, parishes, and associated organizations to foster reflection upon this document, to excuse its deficiencies, to attempt to dilate upon its virtues, and to facilitate its reception by the faithful. It is the earnest prayer of all who have been associated with this document that what is written here will help to advance the work inaugurated in 2016 by the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, and will further aid in fulfilling the will of God in his Church and in the world.