15/12/2018

CROCEU on the link between religion and fundamental human rights



On the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Committee of the Representatives of the Orthodox Churches to the European Union issued a public statement, congratulating the UN for this remarkable achievement. The signatories emphasise the religious environment in which this declaration was baked and the need to recuperate the pre-eminence of the societal dimension of fundamental human rights.

Read full statement bellow:

On December 10, 2018, we commemorate the 70th anniversary since that memorable day of December 10, 1948, when the United Nations' General Assembly voted and adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights after the end of the most frightening and destructive war in the history of humankind – World War II – which caused millions of lost lives and tremendous damage. Mankind and civilisation subsequently had to face another historical crossroad on how to

progress after what had happened. It was clear to every nation in our world that peace could only be obtained and preserved by means of common endeavour. In the years after World War II the main concern was to secure peace and the rights of all human beings regardless of their sex, ethnicity, religion, or social status. In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we find the incorporation of hope for a peaceful co-existence and the protection of human rights and freedom.

The Declaration has indeed a Christian spirit. Furthermore, it shares common values with the Bible. Thus, article 1 says: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.” True brotherhood among people is only possible if there is mutual understanding, solidarity and love. Reason and conscience are given to human beings by their Creator. As a gift of God the observance of Human Rights is a responsibility regarding both the human law and the Law of God. In fact, fundamental Human Rights constitute a political answer to the question “how may I live in harmony with others” – the Other who is God and the others who are our brothers and sisters.

However, because of the dominant individualistic narrative of the 20th century and also because of political “neutrality/correctness” that has been often the alibi for political inertia, fundamental rights progressively lost their appeal to the wider public. What is worse, they were progressively understood as having a defensive character, not to the avail of the community at large, but rather serving the interests of individuals, or minorities in confrontation with majorities. This did not help the advancement of peace, because the community turned somehow to an arena of rival interests.

In this way, fundamental Human Rights, cut off from the religious environment where they were born and the societal goal for a harmonic common life, are only a “dead letter”. This is why nowadays we need to underpin their social dimension and to enhance our efforts to clarify for all the organic interdependence between the fundamental Human Rights, social rights and the religious-cultural environment in which all of them were born.

This is why States are meant to protect the fundamental human need to practice religion. They are also obliged to both support people who feel the need to practice religion for the benefit of the spiritual health of themselves and of society as a whole, and ensure that people practice religion in a respectful way, which means that their religious practice leaves them open to their neighbour in a peaceful and not at all a menacing way.

As Representatives of our Orthodox Churches to the European Union, we congratulate the United Nations Organisation for this remarkable anniversary. Furthermore, we express our conviction that the rights of all human beings could be guaranteed as far as they do not contradict the eternal Law of God and the perfection for which all human beings were created: “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mathew 5:48).

The Committee of the Representatives of the Orthodox Churches to the European Unionwas established in 2010 and consists of: the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Patriarchate of Moscow, the Patriarchate of Romania, the Patriarchate of Bulgaria, the Church of Cyprus and the Church of Greece.