

HUMAN FREEDOM IN THE ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN SPACE

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ABSTRACT: Human Freedom in the Orthodox Christian Space.

The Orthodox Church and its theology have always been clear in affirming human freedom. The clarifications of this brief study on human freedom do nothing but better communicate the Orthodoxy's vision of human freedom to the postmodern audience of the 21st century. It is the Church's way of reminding people that we are all pilgrims. So human freedom is, in fact, a creative enrichment of the mysteries of God and humanity.

Keywords: *liberty, Church, orthodox, dignity.*

Introduction

The main teaching of the Orthodox Church on human dignity and rights highlights two types of freedom according to this tradition. These correspond to the distinction between God's image and likeness. The first type, referring to the image of God, refers to man's ability to choose freely, because it values freedom as an ontological right that all people possess by their common nature.¹ This type of common freedom also includes the freedom to choose between good and evil, with the specification that: „freedom of choice is not an absolute or ultimate value”.² However, although it is considered of great importance, this kind of natural freedom necessarily involves personal responsibility. This is why Vladimir Lossky specifies: „To

1 Ioan-Gheorghe Rotaru, “Religious liberty – a natural human right”, în *Jurnalul Libertății de Conștiință*, Ganoune Diop, Mihnea Costoiu, Liviu-Bogdan Ciucă, Nelu Burcea (coord.), Les Arsc, France, Editions IARSIC, 2015, pp. 595-608.

2 *Basic Teaching on Dignity, Freedom, and Rights*, disponibil la: <https://mospat.ru/en/documents/dignity-freedom-rights/ii/>, (accesat 23.10.2023.)

be in the image of God, the affirmation of the Father, in the last analysis is to be a personal being, that is, a free responsible being.”³

The second type of interpretation and approach to freedom, that of likeness to God, comes from the Greek term *eleutheria*, which refers to a presupposition of freedom in the sense of man’s liberation from sins and, as such, from sin. This kind of freedom begins with man’s encounter with divine grace and his ascetic effort to gain the state of deification. It is a matter of human perfection through the exercise and deepening of the work of likening the human person to the person of God. Perfection, however, varies according to the degree of spiritual development and is valid only for those who have acquired it and cultivate it as they pass „from glory to glory” (2 Corinthians 3:18). It is the freedom of which Saint Paul speaks when he exhorts the Galatians: „Stand firm therefore in the liberty with which Christ has set us free, and do not be entangled again in the yoke of bondage” (Galatians 5:1).

In Orthodox Christian thought, therefore, the notion of *eleutheria* refers to freedom and order. In the Orthodox view, therefore, these two types of freedom are not only essential elements necessary for the acquisition of salvation, but true spiritual processes without which human existence cannot attain full flourishing and fruitfulness now and in eternity. The fullness of God’s grace is found in the Church, where the One who by his grace „makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matthew 5:45). And because God’s grace is thus to some extent available to all, Orthodoxy views God’s creation as a whole, without dividing it into sacred and secular. It is precisely in this sense that St. Justin the Martyr stated that, „We have been taught that God did not create the world in vain, but only for the sake of mankind; and, we have said before that He delights in those who seek to imitate His qualities and that He detests those who embrace evil, whether in word or deed.”⁴ In fact, all creation is saturated, created by and sustained by divine ener-

3 Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction*, St. Vladimirs Seminary, New York, 2001, p. 73.

4 Sf. Iustin, *Apologia II*, în ***, *Apologeți de limbă greacă*, în col. PSB 2, traducere, introducere, note și indice de Pr. Prof. T. Bodogae, Pr. Prof. Olimp Căciulă, Pr. Prof. D. Fecioru, Ed. Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1980, p. 73.

gies. Thus we also understand why asceticism, „is a positive, life-affirming attitude and set of practices that seeks human freedom by overcoming passions - the sinful and disordered habits and attitudes that poison our relationships, first of all with God, but also with ourselves, our neighbor and the world.”⁵ As such, a certain level of asceticism is fundamental to the health of human society in general, since freedom means the removal and overcoming of human passions and passions.

This harmony, or freedom-generating symphony, is not a Caesar-papalism where the monarch rules both the state and the Church, as Max Weber has sociologically characterized it, but is rather a relationship between „the two powers [imperial and ecclesiastical] that would seem to have been a complex process of give-and-take of authority and influence at different levels - a kind of interdependence. In actual practice, the relationship may have been a mixture of the emperor’s dominance over the church in some areas and perhaps an absence of imperial authority in other spheres.”⁶

Aristotle Papanikolaou shows that this type of divine freedom represents divine-human communion, that theosis of Orthodox teaching, which describes man’s communion with God in the horizon of his free, ascetic cooperation with divine grace. In affirming the belief that man was created to be free, in the image of God’s freedom, we affirm that freedom is given to man so that he may naturally become free. It is like the freedom which the Church has in celebrating the Holy Sacraments and preaching Christ so that the world may receive God’s grace to be perfected in communion with God. As the Epistle to Diognetus says, God sent His Son „to save, to convince, not to compel; for God does not compel.”⁷

5 Fr. Michael Butler and Andrew P. Morriss, *Creation and the Heart of Man: An Orthodox Christian Perspective on Environmentalism*, Acton Institute, Grand Rapids, MI, 2013, p. 56.

6 Deno J. Geanakoplos, *Church and State in the Byzantine Empire: A Reconsideration of The Problem of Caesaropapism*, in *Church History: Studies in Christianity and Culture*, 34, December 1965, (381-403), p. 386.

7 *Epsitola către Diognet*, în ****, Apologeți de limbă greacă*, în col. PSB 2, traducere, introducere, note și indice de Pr. Prof. T. Bodogae, Pr. Prof. Olimp Căciulă, Pr. Prof. D. Fecioru, Ed. Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1980, p. 101.

1. The Church's teaching on creatio ex nihilo and human freedom

There is an indisputable correlation between creatio ex nihilo and the traditional Orthodox Christian understanding of human freedom. As the Latin name suggests, this teaching of faith affirms that „God created the world out of nothing - out of no pre-existing matter, space or time”.⁸ This simple but fundamental statement has been valid since the time of the Cappadocian fathers in both East and West, and is „a fundamental teaching of Christian thought”.⁹

What creatio ex nihilo affirms is that in the beginning, before the creation of the universe, there was nothing but God and, as such, whatever was created later was necessarily caused by Him. In this way, creatio ex nihilo teaches about the fragility and contingency of all beings, because „their existence as beings is not self-sufficient. There is another dimension (God) beyond or behind the particular beings of this world, in terms of which their being can be explained”.¹⁰

God is absolutely free because there is no restrictive condition (e.g. matter, space, time) in His sphere of existence that could either enslave, determine or limit God. In this way, „Christianity (...) introduced into human history the very idea of (...) God's absolute ontological freedom”, i.e. „freedom as the transcendence of all limits”.¹¹ Consequently, creatio ex nihilo lays the foundations of God's absolute freedom, which is why, through the Incarnation of Christ, freedom also enters the created world, even if it is finite because of sin, which is why man can only experience ‚relative autonomy’.¹² Zizioulas pointed out in this sense that „authentic freedom is impossible to experience in the created order and can only be found in

8 Carlo Cogliati, *Introduction*, in David B. Burrell, Carlo Cogliati, Janet M. Soskice, William R. Stoeger (eds.), *Creation and the God of Abraham*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2010, p. 1.

9 Janet M. Soskice, *Why Creatio Ex Nihilo for Theology Today?*, in Gary A. Anderson, Markus Bockmuehl (eds.), *Creation Ex Nihilo: Origins, Development, Contemporary Challenges*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 2017, p. 38.

10 Lewis S. Ford, *An Alternative to Creatio Ex Nihilo*, in *Religious Studies* 19/2 (1983), (205-213), pp. 207.

11 Elizabeth T. Groppe, *Creation Ex Nihilo and Ex Amore: Ontological Freedom in the Theologies of John Zizioulas and Catherine Mowry LaCugna*, in *Modern Theology* 21/3 (2005), (463-496), pp. 478, 471-472.

12 S. Japhets, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

the ecclesial realm through baptism in Christ who transplants us into a true ontology".¹³ It is a Church-centred understanding of freedom. Thus, if absolute freedom is found only in the infinite and unbounded realm of God, man who is wounded by sin and lives in a finite and transient world is deprived of authentic and absolute freedom. Therefore, the Orthodox Church as the Body of Christ, according to Colossians 1:18 where the Apostle Paul points out that „He is the head of the body, the Church; He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that He might be first in all things”, is the source of true human freedom. Therefore man must follow its teachings and teachings. As such human freedom means membership in the Church of Christ.

The Church plays a key role in achieving freedom. Showing that man alone is not capable of choosing the good independently from a variety of options, it is therefore necessary that freedom be the expression of the extent to which man embraces the Church in the hope of ultimately acquiring God's absolute freedom at the second coming of the Savior Jesus Christ.

2. A vision of human freedom for the 21st century

Nikolai Berdiaev, who generally „considered himself a loyal son of the Russian Orthodox Church”¹⁴, deepened the Orthodox teaching on freedom. In his view: „Freedom is not created by God: it is rooted in Nothingness”¹⁵, and is therefore „ontologically independent of God”.¹⁶ As such, freedom is not „a gift given by God” and also „God cannot direct or revoke man's freedom”¹⁷. The reason why Berdiaev perceives freedom as an uncreated and independent category is that: „to the extent that freedom is dependent on something (...) there can be no true freedom.”¹⁸

13 E. T. Groppe, *op. cit.*, p. 477.

14 Richard A. Hughes, *Nikolai Berdyaev's Personalism*, in *International Journal of Orthodox Theology* 6/3 (2015), (63-80), pp. 64.

15 Nicolas Berdyaev, *The Destiny of Man*, Geoffrey Bles, London, 1935, p. 25.

16 Thomas A. Idinopulos, *Nicolas Berdyaev's Ontology of Spirit*, in *The Journal of Religion* 49/1 (1969), (84-93), p. 89.

17 James McLachlan, *Mythology and Freedom: Nicholas Berdyaev's Uses of Jacob Boehme's Ungrund Myth*, in *Philosophy Today* 40/4 (1996), (474-485), p. 480.

18 Tim Noble, *Theosis and Pleroma in East and West: Integral Freedom*, in; John Arblaster, Rob Faesen (eds.), *Deification: Christian Doctrines of Divinization East and West*, Peeters Publishers, Leuven, 2018, p. 132

However, if freedom is absolute indeterminacy, as Berdiaev argues, then it should also be an „indeterminate Nothingness”¹⁹, because everything is, to a greater or lesser extent, determined by the very conditions of its existence. For Berdiaev, however, the nothingness of freedom is not to be understood literally as absolute nothingness, but rather as nothingness that contains within itself limitless potentiality and, as such, „is a nothingness that is a whole, a potentiality without substance and form.”²⁰

In Berdiaev’s thinking, then, there is a *creatio ex nihilo*, as traditional Christianity teaches us, the only difference being that for the Russian thinker the nihil of creation is not a literal nothing, but a potential nothing that is essentially „potential being.”²¹ So: „There was (...) before creation, a potentiality”²², by which God out of His „infinite love”²³ made all Being into existence. Moreover, when the time of creation came, God „used the things (...)”, which potentially contained uncreated freedom. Uncreated freedom, which bore the seeds of man’s freedom of self-determination, thus entered into the formation of man”²⁴.

In this light, the foundation of man’s freedom is no longer literally the nothing out of which God created everything, but rather the uncreated freedom/new. Therefore, if freedom is found here and now within people, being their very foundation, as Berdiaev’s understanding implies, then belonging to the Church is arhisufficient to experience freedom.

Thus, freedom is not something that will (or will not) be given to people in the afterlife, depending on the faith they professed during their earthly existence, but rather, freedom is the mysterious and absolute poten-

19 Fuad Nucho, *Berdyaev’s Philosophy: The Existential Paradox of Freedom and Necessity: A Critical Study*, Victor Gollancz Ltd, London, 1967, p. 155.

20 J. McLachlan, *The Desire to Be God: Freedom and the Other in Sartre and Berdyaev: Studies in Phenomenological Theology*, International Academic Publishers, Peter Lang Inc., 1992, p. 126.

21 Georg Nicolaus, C.G. Jung and Nikolai Berdyaev: *Individuation and the Person: A Critical Comparison*, Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group London, 2011, pp. 122-123.

22 Matthew Spinka, *Berdyaev and Origen: A Comparison*, in *Church History* 16/1 (1947), (3-21), p. 9.

23 N. Berdyaev, *Salvation and Creativity: Two Understandings of Christianity*, disponibil la: http://www.berdyaev.com/berdiaev/berd_lib/1926_308.html (accesat 23.10.2023).

24 F. Nucho, *Berdyaev’s Philosophy: The Existential Paradox of Freedom and Necessity: A Critical Study*, p. 155.

tial that underlies all that exists, including humans²⁵, and thus is found in the innermost dimensions of humanity created by God.

Man, then, is already in this life a totally free being, in the same way that the poet is free when he is confronted with the infinite potentialities of his art. Just as the poet „confronted as he is with his blank sheet of paper, sees it as the place of infinite poetic possibilities”²⁶, man confronted with the restrictive conditions of existence, does not lose the infinite freedom of potentiality that resides in his being. Thus, as far as the outer side of human life is concerned, people are restricted by the conditions of matter, space, time, etc., but in the depths of their being, in the inner side of their life, man can come into contact with an infinite potentiality that makes him free.

Therefore, there is no single answer to define human freedom²⁷, but an infinity of answers that endow the human being with an infinity of choices. This is the solution to the Orthodox understanding of human freedom in Christian theology today, which, as always, proposes freedom in Christ to the world. In this way, Orthodox Christian theology and postmodernity meet in a common and contemporary vision of Orthodox meanings of human freedom.

3. Human freedom as an expression of the relationship with the „other”

In order to develop the Orthodox understanding of human freedom it is also necessary to talk about two Orthodox theologians who have made a special contribution to an understanding of the human person: Metropolitan John Zizioulas and Professor Christos Yannaras, because they see human freedom as an expression of the relationship with the „other”.

In Zizioulas' view, the Trinity serves as the unique model of communion with the other for the Church and for human beings²⁸. He affirms

25 Ioan-Gheorghe Rotaru, „Libertatea religioasă – temelie a demnității umane”, in Daniela Ioana Bordeianu, Erika Androne, Nelu Burcea, *Manual pentru liderul Departamentului de Libertate religioasă*, Casa de editură „Viața și Sănătate”, București, 2013, pp. 210-215.

26 Etienne Gilson, *Painting and Reality*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1957, p. 114.

27 Ioan-Gheorghe Rotaru, *Om-Demnitare-Libertate (Man-Dignity-Freedom)*, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Risoprint, Cluj-Napoca, 2019, pp. 208-215.

28 John Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness. Further Studies in Personhood and the Church*, T&T Clark, New York, 2007, pp. 4-5.

that „otherness is constitutive of unity”, as the Orthodox understanding of the Holy Trinity is presented. In the Holy Trinity, there is „an inseparable koinonia that exists between the three persons, which means that otherness is not a threat to unity, but a sine qua non of it.”²⁹ Moreover, for Zizioulas, „otherness is inconceivable apart from relationship,” and the names of the persons of the Holy Trinity: Father, Son and Spirit refer to the existence of relationships between them. The very distinction between them is also specified by a relationship. Therefore, the communion of persons does not threaten otherness, but generates it.³⁰

Zizioulas’ and Yannaras’ understanding of the human person is rooted in the teaching established at the Ecumenical Synods of the 4th century when the Church established its teaching on the Holy Trinity.³¹ In their attempts to arrive at a common expression of belief in God as three persons, the Cappadocian fathers succeeded in redefining the Greek philosophical term, *ipostas*, which in Aristotelian thought was equated with the substance of a thing, with the definition of the person in itself. This change in terminology is particularly significant because it allows the concept of person to be equated with being-in-itself, rather than being as a category for understanding a particular being. The person thus constitutes being.³² This shift to personhood allowed for the defense of the complete uniqueness and freedom of persons, as well as their ultimate otherness, in the Godhead.³³ God is not bound by any necessity of divine nature, but rather His person exists in a mode of complete ontological freedom, allowing Him to determine His nature. Yannaras specifies, „Precisely as personal existence, as distinction and freedom from any predetermination by essence or nature, God constitutes being and is the hypostasis of being.”³⁴

The Orthodox understanding of personhood has its roots in the first chapter of Genesis, which states that God creates man and woman in

29 *Ibidem*, p. 5.

30 *Ibidem*.

31 J. Zizioulas, *op. cit.*, 155-77; Christos Yannaras, *The NeoHellenic Identity*, 3rd ed., Gregory, Athens, 1989, pp. 98-100.

32 John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY, 1985, p. 39.

33 *Ibidem*, 35.

34 Christos Yannaras, *The Freedom of Morality*, St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY, 1984, p. 17.

His image and likeness. Since God exists in a community of persons as the Trinity, each with his or her own personal particularity, humanity is also created in its own particularity within the community of the human being. Thus it is not substance or nature or a particular aspect of nature that constitutes the image of God in man, but rather the mode of existence that is the *imago Dei*. This mode of existence constitutes the unique hypostasis of man in community where he expresses his freedom.

The person exists in relation to the other in the community. Yannaras writes: „Man is an existential fact of relationship and communion. He is a person, *prosopon*, which signifies, both etymologically and in practice, that he faces (*ops*) to (*pros*) someone or something; that he is opposed to (in relation to or in connection with) someone or something.”³⁵ This fact of personhood explains its differentiation from the other. „Self-consciousness” and „otherness” differentiate one person from another. By comparing myself to another self, I become aware of my own uniqueness. This self-consciousness refers to the awareness of my own identity, which is „an absolute otherness, a unique, distinct and unrepeatable character that defines my existence.”³⁶ Yannaras comments, „We thirst for life, but the possibility of life seems viable only through a relationship with the Other. In the person of the Other we seek the reciprocity of relationship. The Other becomes the ‚signifier’ of life, corresponding to the deepest desires of our nature.”³⁷

In and through relationship one’s identity or ego develops. „Thus personhood represents a way of being,” according to Yannaras, „which presupposes natural individuality but is at the same time distinct from it. Each person is a sum of features common to the whole of human nature, to humanity as a whole, and at the same time transcends it insofar as it is an existential distinction, a fact of existence that cannot be objectively defined.”³⁸ Beings have objective characteristics, reflected in the tripartite mode of existence of rationality, freedom, and mastery, but each person uses his or her own will in a distinct, unique way in the juxtaposition of those objective characteristics.

35 *Ibidem*, 20.

36 Christos Yannaras, *Elements of Faith: An Introduction to Orthodox Theology*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1991, p. 29.

37 Christos Yannaras, *Variations on the Song of Songs*, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, Brookline, MA, 2005, p. 4.

38 C. Yannaras, *Freedom of Morality*, p. 21.

However, this differentiation of the person does not make them an autonomous individual. Through the freedom expressed in self-expression through relationship, the person is able to manifest the whole of humanity in himself.³⁹ Zizioulas asserts that personhood implies „openness of being” and even more than that, an ek-stasis of being, i.e. a movement towards communion that leads to an overcoming of the boundaries of the „self” and thus to freedom. At the same time, and unlike the partiality of the individual who is subject to communion and communication, the person in his ecstatic character reveals his being in a universal, i.e. integral and undivided way, and thus becomes hypostatically ecstatic, i.e. bearer of his nature in its totality.⁴⁰ The uniqueness of the person is revealed only in and through relationship, and as such, „defines man’s personal existence, his way of being.”⁴¹ „Thus communion,” as Zizioulas remarks, „does not threaten personal particularity; it is constitutive of it.”⁴²

Distinct from the concept of the person is the notion of the individual, which suppresses human freedom. Yannaras states, „The individual is the denial or neglect of the distinctiveness of the person, the attempt to define human existence using the objective properties of the common nature of man and quantitative comparisons and analogies.”⁴³ By approaching man through what is common as a nature, it destroys what particularly defines the person’s identity: his relationships.⁴⁴ The results can be disastrous. By considering man only as an individual, i.e. by equating man’s being with his nature, personal distinction is erased by destroying human freedom. The person is determined by the characteristics of human nature and, in fact, becomes imprisoned by them. He becomes subject to his objective nature.

As a human person, man remains capable of exercising his freedom in the context of community. In Western thought, freedom is usually understood as the ability to exercise choice. Yannaras, however, understands

39 *Ibidem*.

40 John D. Zizioulas, *Human Capacity and Human Incapacity: A Theological Exploration of Personhood*, in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 28, (1975), (401-447), p. 408.

41 C. Yannaras, *Freedom of Morality*, p. 22.

42 J. Zizioulas, *Human Capacity and Human Incapacity*, p. 409.

43 C. Yannaras, *Freedom of Morality*, p. 22.

44 Pentru o abordare asemănătoare vezi: Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1989.

freedom as the ability to escape natural constraints. Freedom therefore means the ability to escape the limits of our own nature. True human freedom is therefore „the capacity to live our existence as a realization of love, so as to reach the truth of the person.”⁴⁵

Equating human identity with nature leaves humanity at the tragic level of ontological necessity, unable to free itself from what nature dictates. But, as Yannaras has shown, the ontological understanding of the person is reflected in communion. Through ecstatic expression, that is, going beyond the self to the other, the person acquires personhood. Freedom enables this ecstatic expression of the self in relation to the other. If the person is defined only by his nature, then he is incapable of expressing his freedom ecstatically because he is determined or limited by his own nature. In understanding humanity by its nature, there is no differentiation of the self that allows for reaching out to the other and achieving communion and personal relationships. Instead, there is no relationship in an ontology of homogeneous beings. This is why God creates for relationship with what He is not. Human beings created in the image of God are capable of communion relations because of their distinctiveness in their modes of being in the way they are hypostatically actualized.

Essentially, this ecstatic expression of coming out to the other is in love or self-emptying. According to Yannaras, „Life is about stepping back from the demands of your own life for the sake of the life of the other. It means living selflessly in order to receive the self-sacrifice of the other.”⁴⁶ Through the ecstatic experience of love, the other is confirmed as subject.

Therefore, eros, or desire for the other, is achieved through kenosis or self-emptying, modeled after the self-emptying love of the Persons of the Holy Trinity.⁴⁷ Zizioulas remarks: „Unless we sacrifice our own will and submit it to the will of the other, repeating in ourselves what our Lord did in Gethsemane in relation to his Father’s will, we cannot adequately reflect in history the communion and otherness we see in the triune God.”

⁴⁸ He continues, „the,kenotic’ way is the only way that fits the Christian in

45 Christos Yannaras, *Towards a New Ecumenism*, disponibil la: <http://www.incommunion.org/Yannaris.htm>. (accesat 21.10.2023.)

46 C. Yannaras, *Variations on the Song of Songs*, p. 5.

47 *Ibidem*, p. 46.

48 J. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, p. 5.

his communion with the other - whether God or one's, a promene."⁴⁹ This kenosis must occur in the context of love of God and love of neighbor. Yannaras states, „[Love] is the mode of, authentic life' expressed in human existence. A reflection of the creation of humanity in the, image of God'. Implanted in human nature in the human body and soul. The power of love determines nature's mode of existence."⁵⁰ Only by modeling itself after the revealed life of the Holy Trinity can humanity freely experience the „triadic fullness of life."⁵¹

Conclusions

The Orthodox Church and its theology have always been clear in affirming human freedom. The precis of this brief study on human freedom only serves to better communicate the Orthodox vision of human freedom to the postmodern audience of the 21st century. It is the Church's way of reminding people that we are all pilgrims. So human freedom is, in fact, a creative enrichment of the mysteries of God and humanity.

This means that in today's society Orthodox Christians must respect the religious or non-religious convictions of others out of love for their neighbour. In building the common good of human society and in supporting the freedom of others to believe as they wish, the Church recognizes the other, not as a right, but as a service of love. As Archbishop Anastasios comments, the Church must work⁵² towards a koinonia of love modelled on the model of peri-historical love that exists in the life of the Holy Trinity. Rooted in the very ontology of the person as revealed in the Trinity, one's otherness recognized by another includes recognition of one's freedom, including the freedom to believe or not to believe. The Church, through her love of neighbor, upholds such freedom to believe or not to believe as a reflection of the person's being. Through such an approach to the other, to people of different religious or non-religious faiths, out of love for the other in a kenotic self-emptying, Orthodoxy promotes religious freedom for the whole world.

49 *Ibidem*, p. 6.

50 C. Yannaras, *Variations on the Song of Songs*, p. 58.

51 *Ibidem*, p. 136.

52 Ioan-Gheorghe Rotaru, "Biserica lui Dumnezeu, sursa unui Râu al Vieții și al Vindecării", *Argeșul orthodox*, 2012, XI, nr.564, p.5.

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