Hellenic College
Holy Cross
Greek Orthodox School of Theology

A Statement on Diversity, Equality, Equity, and Inclusion
by the Faculties of Hellenic College and Holy Cross

Hellenic College and Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology together constitute a unique and important entity within the diverse world of American higher education. Not only are we the only accredited higher educational institution within the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, but we also constitute a leading seminary of the largest eparchy of the First Throne of Orthodoxy, the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Moreover, being located as we are within the millennia-old tradition of Hellenic thought and culture, we aim at upholding the values and traditions of critical inquiry and democratic participation which undergird both the academy and contemporary civil society.

As an Orthodox Christian seminary and college, we seek to come ever closer to the values of our ancient faith, with their at once radical and traditional implications for human dignity; radical, because so clearly rooted in the revelation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and traditional, because of their timeless implications for the cherishing of the human person. Our commitment to Diversity, Equality, Equity, and Inclusion arises from the tradition we uphold and from the divine commands for individual and collective conduct which we are bound to obey. This sense of obedience to tradition and to God obligates us to provide our students with the educational, moral, and spiritual environment best governing their formation in Christ by the Holy Spirit.

Diversity
Diversity can never be an absolute value for us. Rather, both the life in Christ and civilized order requires a healthy tension between diversity and unity, a tension exemplified within the Orthodox concept of the Trinity. The Biblical witness, the worship of the Church, and our age-old mystical experience are all anchored in the life of the Holy Trinity, three persons and yet still one God. It is God who shows us how diversity and unity must mutually condition each other in the service of life.

The ancient Greek intellectual inheritance was itself born in a period of great multicultural encounter, when the search for a common humanity and universal principles of natural order drove the poets, philosophers, and lawgivers of Hellas, from Homer to Plotinus, to express the unity within diversity in the human experience. Thus, today, we welcome cultural distinctiveness through the promotion of the liberal arts and our study of the broadest traditions of Christian Orthodoxy.

Indeed, our community is at the same time called to pursue and even augment its own uniqueness within the wider academic world, and yet to be ever open to possibilities for diversity within our own Hellenic and Orthodox identity. We see this tension as a life-giving challenge, as a Cross which we are called to bear for the life of the world, and as a wonderful intellectual puzzle which we enjoy attempting to solve.

Equality and Equity: The Grace of a Liturgy offered for the Life of the World
We affirm that every human being is created in the image of God and is therefore equal in dignity. Regardless of race, gender, nationality, country of origin, ethnicity, religious tradition, socioeconomic status, immigration status, disability, or anything else, we affirm the dignity and equality of human persons. We further affirm that human persons are made in God's image from the moment of their conception through their death, and into the longed-for afterlife. We believe not only in the intrinsic equality of human beings, but indeed that God loves each person equally; in fact, even when God is not equally well-pleased with the conduct of each, His mercy abides and He desires the salvation of all (I Timothy 2:4). Pentecost confirms this vision of unity in diversity, as the Holy Spirit reveals the function of human cultural difference in the celebration of the inexhaustible revelation of Christ's divinity and authority, which operate both in and beyond the natural order of the world.

In the Year of the Lord 2024, considerations of equality are rooted deeply in debates about the extent and limitations of human agency. Whereas the Enlightenment vision of human equality took human agency as a given, over the last century knowledge of the human condition has been clarified by deeper understandings of the role of factors such as traumatic experience, family of origin, addiction, and past oppression in the generation of and limitations to human agency. Consequently, our contemporary civilization has moved from the platonic assumption that "no one could willingly choose to do that which is not in his or her best interests," to the Pauline insight that, "the good that I would, that I do not" (Romans 7:19).

Orthodox Christianity offers its own unique and valuable contribution to the challenges of human agency. Believing as we do that the image of God is never completely obscured within the human person, we summon every person to a more complete exercise of their agency and freedom from circumstance. At the same time, we understand the very real obstacles to human agency that arise in the course of the human story, at both the individual and social level. The tension between these two poles of human experience - between freedom on the one hand, and the reality that we are tied to our social setting, on the other - is intrinsic to the Christian story. As Orthodox Christians, we are called to overcome obstacles to our moral agency precisely through taking up the cross of self-offering love for others and for their freedom.

Orthodox Christians and Hellenes alike also approach the issue of equity from within our long tradition of philanthropy. Although we honor those whose courage and sacrifice have brought them success, we still acknowledge that every single one of us also lives by unmerited gifts of love from God and others and that we, in turn, are called to share. While we know from personal and collective experience that in Christ the repentant sinner enjoys an augmentation of human agency resulting ultimately in *theosis*, we also know that even the most miracle-working saint can testify that his or her freedom and ethical choices are, like our common human nature, never held in isolation.

Thus, the successful and the powerful, the rich and the wise, are called to share their prosperity with those for whom circumstances have represented an obstacle to human agency. This is exemplified in the notion of hierarchy, a term which the Church invented, whereby the higher are called to serve the lower, while the lower are called to receive these

gifts in gratitude and in prayer for the salvation of their benefactors rather than in bitterness or resentment - and to find others, still less fortunate, to serve in turn. Our Lord and Savior came not to be served, but to serve (Matthew 20:28) and the sign of a vibrant Christian spirit is that "while we are yet poor," we begin to experience ourselves as rich, and long to serve others, "so as to fulfill the apostolic directive to 'bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ' (Galatians 6:2)."

Truly, we affirm that each person has a vast potential to develop the image of God into the likeness of God through their actions during their tenure on this earth.

Inclusion

Inclusion is an issue of great concern for Orthodox life, as it was for both the classical and the Hellenistic age, and thus is of central importance for the Faculty of Hellenic College. The teaching of our Savior is that to exclude a fellow human being for any but the most implacable of reasons is itself a serious offense, which in turn would threaten us with an exclusion that would be terrible, eternal, and unbearable. Inclusion, therefore, is not optional for us. Rather, we are called to invite all human beings into an experience of mutual life and conciliarity, regardless of differences of race, gender, ability, and class.

We therefore offer our Divine Liturgy as often as we are able and always "for the life of the world." In this worship, we believe that we unite all human existence in an orientation toward Ultimate Love. We include all of humanity within our own stance of petition to God for mercy for our weakness and our sinfulness. Thus, inclusion is for us first a mystical and sacramental reality, which we then make haste to bring to reality in our social relations through attentive listening, warm hospitality, cooperative effort, and patient attention to the lived experience of each.

Summation

Hellenism and Orthodoxy, and particularly the Greek Orthodoxy of the First Throne of the Church in New Rome, have for two millennia been forces promoting an ecumenical and even Trinitarian diversity-in-unity among human persons, a robust human equality, an equity based in the balance between justice and mercy, and the inclusion of all mankind. As the sole institution of higher education in the United States affiliated with the Ecumenical Patriarchate, we celebrate our heritage even as we cherish our American values, seeing in the latter a contemporary expression of the life and duty which we have carried for two thousand years.

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