

Just After the «Holy and Great Council»

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Translated into English, original text (in Greek):

Λίγο META τήν «Άγία καὶ Μεγάλη Σύνοδο»

A few days before the convocation of the ‘Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church’, as it has been characterised in recent years, I wrote an article in which I presented my views on this Council. In the same way, now that the Council has met, I shall record my first comments, which are the result, not of speculations, but of my own observation, without exhausting this major topic.

1. Evaluating the work of Councils

The ‘Holy and Great Council’ has completed its proceedings and has been referred to the life of the Church and its history, where it will also be judged. History will also give it its real name, because we know that some Councils, although they were characterised as Ecumenical, were rejected by other later Councils; just as other Councils again, although they were convened as Local Councils, acquired an Ecumenical character. This depends on the decisions that they made and on whether or not they were accepted by the members of the Church.

Generally, Councils are judged by those who have an illumined nous and experience of divine vision, because such people constitute the vigilant conscience of the Church, as they have “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16).

Some may be sarcastic about illumination and deification, but in fact this is the basis of Orthodox life, as Saint Dionysius the Areopagite analyses with divine inspiration in his treatise On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy, and as all the Fathers of the Church

emphasise.

The whole of the Orthodox biblical and patristic tradition confirms that the genuine preconditions for a Council are the hesychastic and neptic tradition of its members and their genuine empirical life. In the First Apostolic Council in Jerusalem, the Apostles had the confidence to say: “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us” (Acts. 15:28). They recognised the energy of the Holy Spirit, not in their rational faculty but in their heart, as the Apostle Peter expresses this experience when he writes of “the hidden man of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. (1 Pet. 3:4).

The Apostle Paul writes in his Epistles about those people who are led by the Holy Spirit and sense in their heart the cry of adoption as sons, as well as psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, the witness of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:15-16, Gal. 4:6, Eph. 3, 16-19, Eph. 5, 18-19, Col. 3:16).

This apostolic experience of the Holy Spirit was the experience of at least the majority of the Fathers who participated in the Ecumenical Councils, as Canon 1 of the Quinisext Ecumenical Council records.

This Canon, after referring to “the holy and blessed Fathers” of previous Ecumenical Councils, goes on to say: “[We decree] that the faith of all those eminent men in the Church of God, who were luminaries in the world because they held the word of life, shall be kept firm.” When it is written that the Holy Fathers were “luminaries in the world” who had “the word of life”, it means that they had experience of illumination and the divine vision, and this is the firm faith which we must safeguard and implement.

Father John Romanides had this in mind when he wrote: “The basic precondition, not only for Ecumenical Councils but for Local Councils as well, is that those who attend a Local or

Ecumenical Council should be at least in the state of illumination. But the state of illumination does not begin when they say the prayer at the start of an Ecumenical Council. That is not when illumination begins. Certain fundamentalist Orthodox – I don't know how to describe it – imagine that the historical bishops were like bishops today, who have no idea about dogmas, but have dogmatic experts at their side, advisers who advise them about dogmas.”

In this sense no Council is above the Church, but each Council expresses the life and mind of the Church, that is to say, the experience and theology of the saints, and it is judged by them. In any case, the Apostle Paul's words are well known: “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?” (1 Cor. 6:2).

Reading the Acts of the Ecumenical Councils we observe that the phrase “following the Holy Fathers” is used everywhere. The Patriarchs of the East in 1848 stressed that “the defender of religion is this body of the Church, that is to say, the people themselves.” And, of course, the word “people” does not mean everyone who tries to judge things with his reason and from his own ideological perspective, but those who have the mind of Christ, because, according to St Dionysios Areopagite, the Orthodox people are “the class involved in theoria” within the Church, in other words, the deified, the saints.

Therefore, as the Synodikon of Orthodoxy writes, we proceed “in accordance with the divinely-inspired theologies of the saints and the devout mind of the Church.” The divinely inspired teachings of the saints are closely linked with the mind of the Church.

2. Present and absent Churches

The ‘Holy and Great Council’ was attended by bishops, clergy, monks and laypeople from almost all the Orthodox people who live in the world. One saw clergy and laity who work in the mission field and in the life of the Church under all sorts of

different conditions (in America, Europe, Africa, Korea, the Far East, etc.), who set out their experiences of their ecclesiastical ministry. This Council was a window revealing how the Orthodox Church operates in the world.

We are able to see the conciliar way of life of the Church at the Metropolitan level with meetings between clergy and laity, and at a broader ecclesiastical level, as in the Hierarchy of the Church of Greece. But for the first time we had the opportunity to see the conciliar way of life of the Orthodox Church at the highest possible level, in the meeting of local Orthodox Churches, with their Primate and part of their Hierarchies.

Of course, four living Churches were missing, the Patriarchates of Antioch, Russia, Georgia and Bulgaria. I had a great desire to see representatives at this Council from the martyric Patriarchate of Antioch, which is soaked in the holy blood of martyrdom, so that they could share their own martyric experience. I was therefore distressed every time there was a negative reference to this Patriarchate, prompted by ecclesiastical jurisdictions (Qatar). I also wanted to have before me representatives from the Patriarchate of Russia, who have emerged from great persecution lasting about seventy years, so that they could bear witness to their faith. It is a very large Church, which no one can easily overlook, despite the problems that exist. I also wished I could see representatives from the Patriarchates of Georgia and Bulgaria expressing the experience of their lively flock.

Because my books have also been translated into these languages, I have visited these four Patriarchates, among others. I have seen their lively Church life, which I wanted to be vividly expressed at the Council, so that we could gain a more universal view of the Orthodox Church.

I still do not know whether, and to what extent, these lively Patriarchates will react to the decisions of 'Holy and Great Council'. It would really be a difficult development if these

Churches were to meet in another Council to judge the results of the 'Holy and Great Council', thus causing further ecclesiastical problems.

In articles that I wrote unsuspectingly earlier on, I identified the fact that in the Western world, especially in America, the Orthodox Church is expressed mainly by Greek-speaking, Russian-speaking and Arabic-speaking Christians, although there are other linguistic groups as well.

This seems very timely because it is possible that after the 'Holy and Great Council' a split and division may appear in the Orthodox Church along linguistic and national lines. Major efforts must be made to keep the Orthodox Church united, so that it can offer people the great treasure of its patristic and liturgical tradition.

3. Subjects discussed at the 'Holy and Great Council'

Those who followed the work of this Council, either from inside the Council or through the media (who performed their task selectively), realised that six texts were discussed, which had been drawn up in the 1970s and 80s, and had been updated by a Pan-Orthodox Commission following the meeting of Primates held in Constantinople in March 2014. These six issues referred to the basic levels of modern ecclesiastical life.

Summarising these six topics, I could refer to the four levels of the agenda of the Council.

The first level referred to the inner unity of the Orthodox Church and its administrative organisation, such as the issue of granting 'autonomy by Autocephalous Churches and the Orthodox 'Diaspora' with its Episcopal Assemblies. The second level referred to the pastoral care of Orthodox Christians, and included the issues of fasting and marriage. The third level referred to relations between the Orthodox Church and the rest of the Christian world located in the West and the East. And the fourth level referred to broader social, anthropological,

ecological problems faced by people today. Basically, these subjects were treated according to the principle of economy and charity.

The same also applied to the speeches of the Ecumenical Patriarch at the opening ceremony, the closing ceremony, and at both the Patriarchal Liturgies, and to the addresses given by the Primate of the Orthodox Churches. It also applied to both the basic texts of the 'Holy and Great Council', namely, the Encyclical, which will be sent to all the Orthodox Churches, and the Message that was read during the Divine Liturgy on the Sunday of All Saints in the Cathedral of SS Peter and Paul in Chania.

4. Historical ecclesiastical continuity

In my opinion one of the greatest and most important points about the 'Holy and Great Council' is that it literally destroyed the myth that had been circulating for so long before the convocation of the Council, that this Council was being convened after an interval of between 1,000 and 1,200 years, thus making it appear that the Orthodox Church was in a state of hibernation for a millennium and was not concerned with pastoral and theological issues.

Repeatedly before the Council I emphasised this state of affairs and I publicly begged the Ecumenical Patriarch and the other Primate to rid us of this myth, which had probably been constructed for media purposes. During the work of the Council someone well-informed told me: "We said that to stimulate journalistic interest!" Thus, a media ploy was used at the expense of the theology of the Church.

However, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew made clear repeatedly in his speeches that the Church is a continuous council, just as the Divine Liturgy is also a council; it is a living organism that produces soteriological fruits. Due emphasis was also given to the great value of the Council of St Photios the

Great and the Councils of St Gregory Palamas, which, in the consciousness of the Church, as we find in the writings of various saints, Patriarchs and scholars, constitute the Eighth and Ninth Ecumenical Councils.

The Encyclical of the 'Holy and Great Council', which was sent to the Churches after the end of the Council, mentions the following points: "The Orthodox Church, in its unity and universality, is the Church of the Councils, from the Apostolic Council in Jerusalem (Acts. 15:5-29) until today. This Church is in itself a Council set up by Christ and guided the Holy Spirit, according to the apostolic words, 'For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us' (Acts. 15: 28). Through the Ecumenical and Local Councils, the Church proclaims, and continues to proclaim, the good news of the mystery of the Holy Trinity, which was manifested by the incarnation of the Son and Word of God. This conciliar work continues in history without interruption through the later Councils, which have universal authority, such as, for example the Great Council in the time of St Photios the Great, Patriarch of Constantinople (879-880), and the Great Councils convened in the time of St Gregory Palamas (1341, 1351, 1368), by which the same truth of the faith was confirmed, especially concerning the procession of the Holy Spirit and human participation in the uncreated divine energies. It also continues through the Holy and Great Councils in Constantinople in 1484, which rejected the unifying Council of Florence (1438-1439), in 1638, 1642, 1672 and 1691, which rejected Protestant beliefs, and also in 1872, which condemned racialism and nationalism as ecclesiological heresy."

These Councils are clearly designated as Councils with "universal authority", universal validity. They were recognised by the whole Orthodox Church, and they condemned the heresies fostered by Western Christianity. I consider that this confirmation is the greatest positive work of the 'Holy and Great Council'.

5. Ecclesiological considerations

The Ecumenical Patriarch himself, at the closing ceremony of 'Holy and Great Council', spoke of the difficulties that arose in the Council. As he said characteristically, "Not everything has been easy. Things have not always been rosy." He talked about moments of "acrimony, tension, difficulty, pessimism about the outcome," and he was also mentioned the prayer of the delegates and of many others.

I have already recorded some positive points that I noticed at this Council. Now, however, I should note some ecclesiological considerations that I find problematic, which arose not only from the texts put forward for discussion, but also from the interventions of the delegates and the views expressed by the Bishops who were members of the Council.

a) The Primates

In a text that I wrote before the Council met I noted that this Council could be described as a Council of Primates. This is a more recent institution which follows on from the meetings of the Patriarchs of the East that took place during the period of Turkish domination.

In the Council I found that this impression prevailed, although it was in fact an expanded Council of Primates. That is to say, the Primates attended with a number of Synodical Bishops from their Churches. The Primates spoke first, and they could develop their opinions with greater freedom and at greater length, but subsequently the Bishops also had the opportunity to speak. Occasionally they differed from their Primates and sometimes they were indirectly critical of them. So it was not the case, as some people had alleged, that the Bishops in this Council did not have the chance to speak or express their points of view.

Because each of the Primates set out his views in a particular way, they were judged by the delegates who were present. So I had the opportunity to judge and compare the overall presence

of the Primates. Without setting out to do so, I evaluated the Primates' words, silence, behaviour, views and many other things. It was not a Council of people with no voice.

For the sake of objectivity, the name of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew must be mentioned. He had an important role, firstly in convening the 'Holy and Great Council', and secondly in its operation.

On the first point, it was the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in particular who speeded up the final convocation of the 'Holy and Great Council'. It is well known that the decision to convene it was made at the First Pan-Orthodox Conference in Rhodes in 1961, and the agenda of the Council was established by the First Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference in Chambesy, Geneva in 1976. Since then there have been continuous Pre-Conciliar conferences, gatherings of the Primates, and many discussions. Because various problems came to light and because various objections arose, the convening of this Council was continuously postponed.

The Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, from the first moment he became Patriarch, made it his aim to convene this Council. He speeded up the procedures, expending great efforts and making many journeys. Of course, the Ecumenical Patriarchate participated in all this preparation with its financial costs.

On the second point, Patriarch Bartholomew presided over the proceedings of the Council very well and directed the proceedings with his expertise, experience and special gifts. He let anyone who was interested speak, whereas until then it had been rumoured that the delegates would not speak. On some points he cleverly overruled the stifling Organisation and Working Procedures, and he commented on every intervention of the speakers.

As I have taken part in many academic and ecclesiastical conferences, I was able to appreciate the skill with which the

Patriarch conducted the proceedings of this Council, saying a good word to everyone. He was tireless, gracious and courteous to everyone, even to those who commented negatively on some aspects of the texts. We need to be objective and recognise other people's natural qualities and gifts.

b) The Orthodox Church and the rest of the Christian world.

The text 'Relations of the Orthodox Church with the rest of the Christian world', which produced the longest discussion and aroused the greatest concerns, was not ready and needed further work.

Those who closely monitored the preparation of the 'Holy and Great Council' are well aware that there were two subjects on its agenda, one entitled 'Relations of the Orthodox Church to the rest of the Christian world' and the other entitled 'The Orthodox Church and the ecumenical movement'. These two issues were eventually combined into one text, and for that reason there were various contradictions in the final text. Thus it was a text that was subject to additions and changes, literally until the last moment before it was signed. This means that, on the one hand, it was not ready, and, on the other, that it will create various problems in the future.

This was the reason why some Churches officially raised the issue that the discussion should not be finalised and that this text should not be signed, but that it should be worked on further and put to the vote at a subsequent Great Council. This was not accepted.

I want to point out that the whole text has inadequacies and contradictions with regard to its ecclesiology, because it does not identify who is part of the Church and who is not; who has been cut off from the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church; and where the boundaries lie between the Orthodox Church and heresy. This is one main reason, among others, that I did not sign the final document. I did it deliberately.

The problem that arose during the debate was the exact identity of non-Orthodox Christians and the groups to which they belong. At the Ecumenical Councils the non-Orthodox and heretics, who had a different belief and faith from that revealed by God to the prophets, apostles and saints, were condemned, whereas at the Council of Crete for the first time an effort was made with regard to how to establish communication with the non-Orthodox.

The question that arises is: Can we classify the non-Orthodox as being in schism or in excommunication? Is the group to which they belong, or their "Church", in a state of schism or of excommunication?

To make this understandable we should realise what is meant by the so-called "rest of the Christian world", to which the title of this text referred.

First of all there are the Christians of the East, that is to say, the Nestorians, the Monophysites, and the Monothelites, who are described by various names, such as Anti-Chalcedonians, Pre-Chalcedonians, Copts, Armenians, Maronites, etc.

The Nestorians were condemned by the Third Ecumenical Council (431); the Monophysites, Pre-Chalcedonians and Anti-Chalcedonians were condemned by the Fourth (451) and Fifth (553) Ecumenical Councils; and the Monothelites were condemned by the Sixth Ecumenical Council (680). Therefore these Christian groups were cut off from the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

Then there are those Christians who belong to Old Rome, who were cut off from the Church due to the introduction of the heresy about the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Son, firstly by the Franks and afterwards in Old Rome (1009). They were also condemned by the Council of 1351 for teaching about *actus purus* and for asserting that there are created energies in God through which He communicates with the world.

From within Western Christianity, which had been cut off from the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, a large group, calling themselves Reformers, Dissenters and Protestants, broke away in the 16th century. This category includes the Lutherans, Calvinists, the followers of Zwingli, the Anglicans, and so on. These Christians, too, were condemned by the Orthodox Church, since they introduced many heresies.

The question therefore arises: Are all these Christians in a state of schism or of excommunication? I do not think that we can use the word schism for them, firstly because, according to our faith, the Church is One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. It cannot be split and its unity is a given fact. Secondly, because they have already been condemned as heretics by Great Councils with “universal authority.”

Nor can they all be considered as being in a state of excommunication as regards the Orthodox Church, because the term excommunication has a special weight. This term designates those Orthodox Churches that are temporarily not in communion with other Orthodox Churches, as is the case between the Patriarchates of Antioch and Jerusalem on account of ecclesiastical jurisdiction in Qatar.

Therefore, for Christians who have introduced heresies into their faith, we cannot use either the term schism or the term excommunication. It is better to say that these Christians broke away or distanced themselves from the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, which maintains its unity.

In this sense the Local and Ecumenical Councils spoke of heretics, because they have a teaching which is different from the teaching of the Church. The Councils actually used very severe expressions in their Canons against them. Anyone who reads Canon 1 of the Quinisext Council will see exactly how the Fathers spoke in the Ecumenical Councils about those who corrupted the revealed faith.

The Fathers of Quinisext Council call Arius “impious”, because he taught the doctrine of “a diversity of gods or many gods”. Macedonius is called “profane” and they expelled him, together with previous “enemies of truth”, as a slave who dared presumptuously to express an unsubstantiated opinion about his Lord. Apollinarius is called “an initiate into evil”, Nestorius is called “raving”. Eutyches is characterised as “empty-minded”, and so on. In these cases they use the words “driving out”, “fallen away”, “let him be cast out”, “let him be excluded”, etc. At the end it is written that, if someone does not preserve the faith delivered to us and does not adhere to the dogmas of piety, if he does not believe or preach in this way, but attempts to act contrary to these things, “let him be anathema, according to the decree already promulgated by the previously mentioned holy and blessed Fathers, and let him be cast out and excluded as an alien from the number of Christians.” This means that it is the Fathers of the Ecumenical Councils who are commemorated, and not simply the Councils. The Fathers did not accept reconciliation or coexistence with heresy, and did not face these situations with a relativistic attitude. In matters of faith there is no room of diplomacy.

For all these old and new heretical groups we cannot use the words schism or excommunication. Rather we should describe them as distanced from the faith and life of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. The name for this is not conservatism, as some claim, but precision in matters of faith.

The words of Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov of blessed memory are characteristic: “There are three things that I cannot understand: 1) faith without dogma, 2) Christianity outside the Church, 3) Christianity without asceticism.” This means that there is no real faith in God outside the dogma established by the Holy Fathers. There is no Christianity outside the Church, which is the Body of Christ. And there is no Christianity without asceticism, without hesychasm.

In spite of this, I can say in all honesty that I very clearly saw a

relativistic approach in the views expressed in the Council. From what was said and discussed, the branch theory was definitely going around, without being named as such. That is to say, the idea was apparent that there had been a split in Christianity and that Christianity had been torn apart, in the same way as “a priest’s gown had been torn” (!) and that everyone is seeking unity. The theory of inclusiveness, that all Christians have something in common, namely, valid baptism, in other words, baptismal theology; and the theory of non-theological moralism and non-theological pastoral care for people today were also in evidence.

The participation of the Orthodox Church in the World Council of Churches, as a member and not as an observer, is a cause for concern. Because I cannot imagine St Athanasius the Great and St Basil the Great taking part in a council of the Arians, Eunomians or Macedonians of their time. Nor can I imagine St Gregory Palamas joining a council with Barlaam, Akindynos, Gregoras and their supporters to deal with various social problems of their time.

The view expressed by a Primate of one Church, which unfortunately was applauded by some delegates, that theological issues ought not to be discussed in the Council was, in my opinion, one of the most negative aspects of the Council. If such a ‘Holy and Great Council’ is not based on the theology of the Church, and if, when serious theological issues are mentioned, the delegates do not pay attention and even protest, then this Council is very problematic from the point of view of Orthodox theology and ecclesiology.

Indeed one Bishop in the Council expressed the view that we should officially condemn pietism, without of course there being any discussion about the distinction between piety and pietism. There was also talk against Orthodox ‘fundamentalism’.

Apart from this unfortunately superficial viewpoint, which neither defines nor clarifies what is meant by these terms, ultimately no

text was published against pietism and zealotry. The Ecumenical Patriarch cleverly bypassed this unfortunate proposal. It is characteristic that Archbishop Savas of Warsaw and All Poland argued that in Poland and other northern and eastern countries these so-called zealots were those who kept the faith during the Communist era, and were imprisoned and martyred.

c) *“The Church: Body of Christ, image of the Holy Trinity”*

In the Encyclical sent by the ‘Holy and Great Council’ to the Churches, a serious theological problem is evident, because in it, apart from the fact that the Church is characterised as the “Body of Christ”, at the same time it is also characterised as an “icon of the Holy Trinity.” The Encyclical also writes that “the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church is a theanthropic communion in the image of the Holy Trinity.”

The Church, according to the teaching of the Apostle Paul, is the Body of Christ. The foundation of the Church centres on Christ, not on the Trinity, since Christ “one of the Trinity” became incarnate. He assumed human nature and deified it. When the Church is characterised as the “image” or “according to the image of the Holy Trinity,” then, from a strict theological point of view, there is confusion between theology and the Divine Economy, and confusion between uncreated and created. Moreover, when it is stated that the Church is the image of the Holy Trinity, many problematic issues arise regarding the interrelationship between the Churches and the hypostatic properties of the Persons of the Holy Trinity!!!

St Gregory Palamas writes that the inner workings of the Triune God “completely transcend knowledge and speech”, in other words, “what pertains to the essential union” “and what pertains to the hypostatic distinction”, but also “what pertains to the utterly unmixed and unconfused union of essence”. For human beings and creation, therefore, “it is completely impossible to share” in any of these things. This means that no example of the

relationship between the Persons of the Trinity can be found in creation. “That is why no model of these things is to be found in the creation.” The Church is the “Body of Christ” and the “communion of deification”, and not an image of the Holy Trinity.

By way of explanation, I want to point out that the wording in the Encyclical of the Council, “The Church: Body of Christ, image of the Holy Trinity” has a different meaning from the statement in the same Encyclical that the Church is “a theanthropic communion in the image of the Holy Trinity.”

The first wording is also to be found in St Maximus the Confessor and refers to the Church as the Body of Christ and as a “type and image of God”, in the sense that the Church is a figure and image of God “as it has, by imitation and type, the same energy as He.” This means that the Church is not the image of the inner relationship between the Persons of the Holy Trinity, but that God Himself with His uncreated energy brought beings into existence and then “contains, gathers and limits them, and in His Providence binds both intelligible and sensible beings to Himself and to one another.”

God keeps everything united, without confusion. He takes care of created things and in fact, as St Maximus says, the Church leads all human beings to Christ for the purpose of their deification. This is interpreted admirably by St Maximus later in his text about how the Church holds and keeps everything in unity. St Maximus does not speak about human relationships as an image of the relations between the Persons of the Holy Trinity. The relations within the Holy Trinity are completely inaccessible.

The second version (“a theanthropic communion in the image of the Holy Trinity”), incorrectly according to some current interpretations, refers to relations between human beings as an image of relations within the Holy Trinity. Moreover, this interpretation was deleted as false by the ‘Holy and Great Council’ itself, in accordance with the proposal of the Church of

Greece and with the agreement of the Ecumenical Patriarch in the text 'The mission of the Orthodox Church in today's world'.

The Epistles of St Paul, especially the Epistles to the Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians, and the writings of the Church Fathers make reference to the Church as the Body of Christ and the communion of deification, and they do not refer to relations within the Holy Trinity. God in His infinite love "has shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4, 6). He unites us with His Church and in Christ we partake of the uncreated grace of the Triune God and share in the uncreated energies of God. The Apostle Paul writes in his Epistle to Colossians: "Giving thanks to God the Father, Who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col. 1:12).

The Church, therefore, is interpreted Christologically. Christ is the head of the Church. The Church is the Body of Christ. We are members of the Body of Christ and through Christ we share in the uncreated energies of the Triune God.

d) Canonical ecclesiological problems

It caused me deep concern when discussions took place about the 'Orthodox Diaspora', 'autonomy', 'the mystery of marriage and impediments to it', and the 'importance of fasting and its observance today'. These are canonical issues, which constitute important points for the whole of Church life.

The decisions taken seem, at first glance, to resolve some issues. But if you examine things in more depth, you find that they provide preconditions for the fragmentation of the unity of Church life. I will quote a few examples.

The term 'Orthodox Diaspora' is very strange, because, as was also noted within the Council, the diaspora is mainly associated with nations and religions and not with the Church, which is created in each place by the grace of God and the zeal of the missionaries. Ecclesiastical jurisdictions, which were assigned

by the Ecumenical Councils, especially by the Fourth Ecumenical Council in Chalcedon, to the ancient, senior Patriarchates and to the Church of Cyprus (Third Ecumenical Council), do not justify giving ecclesiastical status to the cultural and nationalistic concept of the so-called diaspora. It is not possible, on the one hand, for racialism and nationalism to be condemned as heresy (1872) and, on the other, for a form of ecclesiastical racialism and nationalism to be created, especially by the decision of the 'Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church'. And, although the Episcopal Assemblies may solve a problem which exists in the so-called 'Orthodox Diaspora', basically they are uncanonical and break up ecclesiastical unity, because they introduce the principle of racialism and nationalism

Then, the text about 'autonomy', that is to say, the possibility of every autocephalous Church granting autonomy to a region, will, in my opinion, as I argued in my speech, open up many ecclesiological problems. I mean this in the sense that it will give the opportunity to every new autocephalous Church to create autonomous ecclesiastical regions, following pressure from external factors and the actions of clergy who like to have the first place, despite the Canons that give this right to the ancient Patriarchates.

Also, the granting of autonomy by Autocephalous Churches to regions that belong to other ecclesiastical jurisdictions, and the ease with which autonomy can develop into autocephalous status, poses a danger to the unity of the Church, because it is an excuse for many splits. It is a great ecclesiological problem when autocephalous status is interpreted and understood as 'complete self-rule', especially in the context of national and cultural developments. The Professor of Canon Law at the Theological School of Athens, Archimandrite Fr. Gregory Papathomas, has written significant texts on the issue of the diaspora and autonomy with all the parameters set by such a Council, and particularly as a relativisation of the validity of the content of the Canon 28 of the Fourth Ecumenical Council.

In addition, the possibility given to local Churches to exercise economy in the matter of fasting and the issue of impediments to marriage opens the way for a breakdown in the identity of ceremonies and asceticism in different Churches. This means that economy, which operates for a certain period as a temporary suspension of strict application of the rules, will be changed into canonical strictness and will split the ecclesiastical Orthodox ethos into different ecclesiastical regions.

Finally, listening to all the opinions of the delegates during the discussions on these issues, and carefully reading the texts, I am intensely concerned, and I cannot be carried away by the superficial enthusiasm of some elements in the Church, who speak emotionally and journalistically.

6. My Interventions

During the discussions on the six texts I asked to speak, and I set out my views with discretion and honesty. I spoke within the limited time available about the human person, the Orthodox Diaspora, autonomy, fasting, the ecclesiological consequences of mixed marriages, and about the Church.

With the first opportunity these brief and comprehensive interventions will be published. In this section I will set out what I said about the Orthodox Church in relation to the non-Orthodox, because I think that this was the central issue of this Council.

When we began the discussion on the text 'Relations of the Orthodox Church with the rest of the Christian world', after the text had been read out and before we entered into discussion about the articles, I was given the opportunity to make a brief intervention. I had heard some previous speakers and I felt uncomfortable about what was being said, because unfortunately they reached the point of using St Mark of Ephesus to support their views.

In my intervention I stressed two specific points.

The first was that at the First Pan-Orthodox Conference held in Rhodes in 1961 about a hundred issues were raised to be dealt with by this Great Council, which was at that time regarded as Ecumenical. However, at the First Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference, held in November 1976 in Chambesy, Geneva, ten subjects were decided upon. Six of these, together with a seventh that was merged with one of these six issues, were discussed at the Council.

The same Pre-Conciliar Conference adopted as second priority four important issues to be discussed later on, following inter-Orthodox investigation. These issues are the sources of divine revelation; the codification of the sacred Canons and canonical provisions; the concept of the Church; and economy and strictness with respect to the way in which we receive non-Orthodox. Specifically on these points, the text records: "These issues are referred for particular consideration by the individual Churches, in order that they may possibly be included in future inter-Orthodox investigation."

Thus the issues 'concerning the Church' and 'concerning economy and strictness' were omitted from the agenda of this Council. However, there remains an important book written by the then President of the First Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference, the late Metropolitan Chrysostom of Myra and later of Ephesus, on The Recognition of the mysteries of the non-Orthodox in the continuing relations between Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism.

The second point is that the Third Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference held in October and November 1976 in Chambesy, Geneva approved the text 'Relations of the Orthodox Church with the rest of the Christian world'. In one particular paragraph it writes that the Orthodox Church is the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church and it recognises the actual existence of all the Christian Churches and Confessions. Subsequently, however, there is a phrase which not many people noticed: The Orthodox Church "believes that its relations with them should

be based on their (the Christian Churches and Confessions') clarification, to be made as quickly and objectively as possible, of the whole ecclesiological issue, and particularly of their overall teaching on the sacraments, grace, priesthood and the apostolic succession."

This means that non-Orthodox Christians must clarify their teaching on the sacraments, on grace, on the priesthood and on the apostolic succession.

I concluded that issues concerning the Church are not matters for this present 'Holy and Great Council'. They are irrelevant and not included in the Organisation and Working Procedures.

What is said about Karmiris, Trembelas, and especially about St Mark of Ephesus is unfair on them. It may be that in their writings, and in those of other people, the word 'Church' is used as a technical term, but this Council cannot stop at technical terms. The term 'Church' is used both according to economy and according to strictness. Here strictness should be applied. The time available for each speaker was very limited, so, as I said in my speech, I submitted a text for inclusion in the Proceedings of the 'Holy and Great Council' on this subject.

Because in this Council there were continuous references to St Mark of Ephesus, saying that he spoke about the Western Church, I will refer to an excerpt from an analysis by Professor Ioannis Karmiris, whose name was repeatedly mentioned in the Council. The late professor, commenting on the letter of St Mark of Ephesus entitled To Orthodox Christians throughout the world and on the islands, he writes about his attitude to the Council of Ferrara-Florence:

"On account of the above doctrinal differences and deviations of the Latins from 'the right faith ... and these issues about the theology of the Holy Spirit,' Mark of Ephesus characterises them as heretics, confirming that the Orthodox Church at that time and possibly from the time of the Crusades actually considered

the Latins not only as schismatics, but also as heretics, receiving those of them entering Orthodoxy by means of Chrismation with holy chrism, thus classing them with Arians, Macedonians, Sabbatians, Novatianists and other heretics of the fourth century, according to Canon 7 of the Second Ecumenical Council, to which he appeals, together with the Sixteenth Question and Answer of Theodore Balsamon. Thus in the Encyclical it is declared, that the Orthodox 'excised them (the Latins) and cut them off from the common body of Church..., as having improper and impious ideas, and unreasonably making the addition. Thus as heretics we have turned away from them, and therefore we have separated from them ... they are heretics, hence as heretics we have cut them off ...' And in Florence Mark of Ephesus said to the Orthodoxy delegation, 'that the Latins are not only schismatics but heretics as well. Our Church kept silent about this because their people are many and much stronger than ours' (J. Harduin, *Acta Consiliorum, Parisiis 1715 ff.*), and '(those before us) did not wish to reveal the Latins as heretics, as they were waiting for them to return and they were trying to gain their friendship' (S. Syropuli, *Vera historia unionis non verae*, 9,5. p. 256)."

St Mark of Ephesus, according to the Proceedings and memoirs of the Council of Ferrara-Florence always considered the Latins heretics and he said this to the Orthodox delegation. The delegation of the Orthodox Church, however, did not want to state it publicly on account of the difficult conditions of that time and as an expression of friendship, because they hoped they would return.

Also, St Mark of Ephesus, in a letter that he sent to the Orthodox after the Council of Ferrara Florence, as well as characterising the Latins as heretics and writing that they were cut off from the Church, at the same time writes about the "Greco-Latins", that is to say, the Orthodox who accept Latin customs and doctrines: "We must flee from them as one flees from a snake or from them [the Latins] themselves; surely they are much worse than they are, being Christ-traders and Christ-

profiteers”!

I have referred to what St Mark of Ephesus said and wrote, as he was unfairly treated and ‘abused’ by some delegates at the ‘Holy and Great Council’.

Before I finish my first brief comments on the recent Council of Crete, I would like to stress two general points. The first is related to the self-awareness of the Council. During the debates the view was put forward that this Council was not a Pan-Orthodox Theological Conference, but a ‘Holy and Great Council’. This means that the issues are not being discussed in an academic context, but that it is a ‘Holy and Great Council’, and is above every local Church, so its decisions must be enforced in all the local Churches.

Precisely this created an intense problem for me. First of all, discussions took place in a general, informative, conciliatory and balanced context, and not in the atmosphere in which the Local and Ecumenical Councils acted. Then, I do not know how some of the Council’s decisions will be enforced, either in the Churches that were present or in those that were absent, especially when the consequences of non-compliance with such decisions is not specified. As is well known, the Ecumenical Councils specified excommunication, deposition and exclusion from the Church for those who did not accept the decisions.

The second point to emphasise relates to the way in which those outside the Council were given information. Personally, I noticed that the briefing was selective, the giving of information was ‘manipulated’. Finally, it is dramatically illustrated that the Church is a divine-human organisation, the theanthropic Body of Christ, and the life of this mystery cannot be channelled into the suffocatingly narrow limits of the art and science of communication. Anyone who seeks to manage the whole of ecclesiastical life and theology in a journalistic and media-

orientated way insults the mystery of the Church.

All the above notes have been written in brief, and they do not exhaust the subject.

July 2016