

THE CANONICAL TRADITION OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH AND THE HOLY AND GREAT COUNCIL BETWEEN RECEPTION AND REJECTION

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ABSTRACT. With this paper the author tries to answer questions raised by some of the detractors of the Holy and Great Council. He is analysing from the point of view of Orthodox Canon Law if the delegation of bishops and the principle of representativeness are canonical realities in accordance with the Orthodox tradition of the Church and valid manifestations of synodality, if the number of bishops participating in a Council is a true criterion of ecumenicity and if monastics and laymen were totally bypassed in the preconiliar preparatory process and in the sessions of the Holy and Great Council.

Keywords: Holy and Great Council, number of bishops, laymen participation, Canon Law, ecumenical and general council, reception

Motto: "When we had sailed slowly many days, and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus, the wind not permitting us to proceed, we sailed under the shelter of Crete. We moved along the coast with difficulty and came to a place called Fair Havens".

(Acts 27:7-8)

"Since those who for any reason, whether of an ecclesiastical or of corporeal nature, are absent from the holy Council and have remained in their own town or district, ought not to be left in ignorance of the Councils regulations regarding them, we make known to your holiness and love..."¹.

(First Canon of the Third Ecumenical Council)

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¹ D. Cummings, trans., *The Rudder (Pedalion) of the Metaphorical Ship of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of Orthodox Christians = or, All the sacred and divine canons as embodied in the original Greek text for the sake of authenticity and explained in the vernacular by way of rendering them more intelligible to the less educated.*, (Chicago: Orthodox Christian Educational Society, 1957), 226; "ἔχρην καὶ τοὺς ἀπολειφθέντας τῆς ἁγίας συνόδου, καὶ μείναντας κατὰ χώραν, ἢ πόλιν, διὰ τινὰ αἰτίαν, ἢ ἐκκλησιαστικὴν, ἢ σωματικὴν, μὴ ἀγνοῆσαι τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ τετυπωμένα, γνωρίζομεν τῇ ὑμετέρᾳ ἀγιότητι καὶ ἀγάπῃ". For the Greek text see: Giuseppe Alberigo, *Conciliorum oecumenicorum*

The importance of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, that took place on the island of Crete from June 16th to 26th, 2016², is given by its positive and simultaneously negative reactions and by the greatness of this historical event for our modern Orthodox Church and theology. In spite of this, the positive and negative approaches, both before and after the Council, have not yet received a detailed theological analysis, the comments on the Holy and Great Council being, almost all the time, an unjustified condemnation³ of the Council with arguments and slogans of Church propaganda, lacking in academic consistency, or just an immediate approbation of all its aspects, leaving aside certain deficiencies of the pre-conciliar and final decisions. A careful analysis of these reactions can show that the actual orthodox theological debate is based, in most of the cases, exclusively on interviews, online commentaries, blogs and newspaper articles, even on Facebook commentaries, such as Cyril Hovorun's "book", entitled: "Curiosities of the Great and Awful Council"⁴, a book with more than 5000 views⁵. At the same time, the official page of the Holy and Great Council (<http://holycouncil.org>) was visited in the last five months, from January to May 2017, just twenty thousand times, with average visit duration of 04:16 minutes⁶. The reactions against the Council have more popularity than the final decisions of the Council. The texts are often rejected without being read in the framework of the whole canonical and doctrinal Tradition of

generaliumque decreta: editio critica, Corpus Christianorum 1, Istituto per le scienze religiose (Bologna) (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 83; Périclès-Pierre Joannou, *Discipline générale antique (Ile-Ixe s.)*, 1.1: *Les canons des conciles oecuméniques (Ile-Ixe s.)*, Codification canonique orientale, Fonti, Série 1 (Roma: Grottaferrata, 1962), 57-65. Georgios A. Rhalles, Michael Potles, eds., *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱερῶν κανόνων* vol. 2 (Athena, 1852), 192-215.

² The Council of Crete began on June 16, 2016, with the official welcome of each Church delegation and ended on Sunday June 26, 2016. All the texts were discussed during these ten days.

³ The Holy and Great Council was already condemned by some of the Orthodox Theologians and bishops even before the Council took place. An example for this is the Conference: "Αγία και Μεγάλη Σύνοδος. Μεγάλη προετοιμασία, χωρίς προσδοκίες" Αίθουσα «Μελίνα Μερκούρη» του Σταδίου Ειρήνης και Φιλίας, Πειραιώς. The papers of the Conference were translated from Greek into Romanian, and were used after the Council against the Romanian Bishops that signed the documents: Tatiana Petrache and Marius Pop, eds., "*Sfântul și Marele Sinod*" (Creta, 2016). *Între providență și eșec* (Oradea: Editura Astradrom, 2016).

⁴ Cyril Hovorun, *Кунсткамера Великого и Ужасного (Curiosities of the Great and Awful Council)* (Москва: Христианский книжный клуб, 2016). Cyril Hovorun is Professor at Yale University. His book is a compendium of Facebook commentaries on the Holy and Great Council, considered as "Great and Awful Council", illustrated by caricatured images of the Council and bishops, transforming this "book" into an awful pamphlet of the Holy and Great Council. The book is lacking in any real academic consistency. I believe that this "book" does not honour our Orthodox Theology and the theological debate, or the remarkable theologian Cyril Hovorun.

⁵ https://www.academia.edu/26715123/Кирилл_Говорун_Кунсткамера_Великого_и_Ужасного_Curiosities_of_the_Great_and_Awful_Council_Москва_Христианский_книжный_клуб_2016

⁶ <https://www.similarweb.com/website/holycouncil.org#overview>

the Orthodox Church⁷. This shows, on the one side, the seriousness with which this Council is or is not treated, and, on the other side, the level of development of our current Orthodox theological debates on the final decisions of the Holy and Great Council. We even can find more academic studies and articles about the Council in Crete in the journals and books published by catholic and protestant theologians⁸ than by the Orthodox.

⁷ A good example of an unjustified condemnation of the Council is the paper of Fr. Peter Heers (The "Council" of Crete and the New Emerging Ecclesiology: An Orthodox Examination: <https://orthodoxethos.com/post/the-council-of-crete-and-the-new-emerging-ecclesiology-an-orthodox-examination>) who compares the Council of Crete with the Second Vatican Council: "Another point which unfortunately forges kinship between the two gatherings is the absence of any demonology. It is indicative as to the mindset and priorities of the drafters of the conciliar texts that nowhere, in any of the texts, does one find the following terms: Devil, demon, diabolical, or evil one; Heresy, heretic, schism or schismatic". It is quite interesting how the author considers demonology as a fundamental character of ecumenicity and orthodoxy, a text is truly orthodox when it contains demonological terminology. Unfortunately the author contradicts himself by writing in the footnotes: "[5] In the texts of the Second Vatican Council matters are slightly better. In *Lumen Gentium* the devil is referred to four times, although in *Unitatis Redintegratio* he is not mentioned. [6] The only exception to this latter case, is when the ecclesiological heresy of phyletism is mentioned in the Encyclical of the Primates, which is also quite indicative of the priorities of the meeting." If we analyse the Canonical Tradition of the Orthodox Church we can see the following: the word "διάβολος" is used in the Canonical Tradition just 8 times (canon 2 Nicaea, 66 Carthage, 1, 2, 9, 11 Peter of Alexandria, 1 Athanasius, two times); the word "δαίμων" is used 6 times (canon 79 apostolic, 60 Trullo, 5 Peter, 87 Basil the Great, 3 Gregory of Nyssa, used two times), the word "πονηρός" is used just 4 times (canon 4 Protodeutera, 9 Peter, 1 Athanasius, 85 Basil the Great). For a comparison between Second Vatican Council and the Council of Crete, see: Alexey Yudin, "Тематика II Ватиканского собора и повестка Всеправославного собора в подготовительный период: параллели и различия (The Agenda of Vatican II Council and of Pan-Orthodox Council in the Preparatory Period: Parallels and Differences)", *Государство, религия, церковь в России и за рубежом* 1 (2016): 165–81.

⁸ See for example: Eva Maria Synek, *Das 'Heilige und Grosse Konzil' von Kreta* (Freistadt, Verlag Plöchl Freistadt, 2017); Reinhard Thöle, 'Ein hohes Ideal zahlt einen hohen Preis. Zur Heiligen und Großen Synode der Orthodoxen Kirche auf Kreta', *Ökumenische Rundschau* 1 (2017): 6–11; Martin Illert, 'Die Bulgarische Orthodoxe Kirche und die Heilige und Große Synode', *Ökumenische Rundschau* 1 (2017): 42–47; Johannes Oeldemann, 'Die Heilige und Große Synode der Orthodoxen Kirche auf Kreta. Eine erste Einordnung aus katholischer Sicht', *Ökumenische Rundschau*, 2017, 48–58; Dagmar Heller, 'Das (Heilige und Große) Konzil der Orthodoxen Kirchen 2016 auf Kreta in ökumenischer Perspektive', *Ökumenische Rundschau* 1 (2017): 59–72; Alberto Melloni, 'Le Saint et Grand Concile de Crète, juin 2016', *Contacts* 255, no. 68 (September 2016): 323–37; Frère Richard, 'L'espérance d'une dynamique conciliaire', *Contacts* 255, no. 68 (2016): 338–41; Michelina Tenace, 'Le Concile - page d'histoire d'un livre ouvert sur le mystère de la Sainte Trinité', *Contacts* 255, no. 68 (September 2016): 342–47; Ivana Noble, 'Quelques remarques issues du "reste du monde chrétien"', *Contacts* 255, no. 68 (2016): 348–51; Gisa 1970- Bauer, 'Die heilige und große Synode 2016: Geschichte, Verlauf, Beschlüsse', 2016; Johannes 1964- Oeldemann, 'Konzil auf Kreta: die lang erwartete Panorthodoxe Synode tritt im Juni 2016 zusammen', 2016; Johannes Oeldemann, 'Konzil auf Kreta', *Herder Korrespondenz* 70, no. 3 (March 2016): 25–28; Norbert Zonker, 'Fragile Einheit: nach dem Konzil von Kreta bleibt die Orthodoxie zerstritten', *Herder Korrespondenz* 70, no. 8 (August 2016): 9–10; Joseph Famerée, 'Autocephaly: Questions from a Roman Catholic', *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 60, no. 1–2 (2016): 133–47; Anne Marie Reijnen, 'Fasting--Some

The lack of a consistent theological evaluation from the Orthodox academic community of the final documents of the Holy and Great Council⁹ led to the radicalization of those who wanted to “protect” Orthodoxy against itself. Even the final decisions of the Council of Crete are not yet published as official texts and translations of the Local Orthodox Churches, despite the fact that they can be found on the official website of the Holy and Great Council and on the websites of some Autocephalous Churches, being translated into several languages. At least we can find some translations and studies, but they are just few exceptions to this rule¹⁰.

Protestant Remarks: “Not by Bread Alone”: An Argument for the Contemporary Value of Christian Fasting’, *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 60, no. 1–2 (2016): 269–78; Ivana Noble, ‘The Future of the Orthodox “Diaspora”--an Observer’s Point of View’, *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 60, no. 1–2 (2016): 171–88; Barbara Hallensleben, ‘Sister Churches: Hermeneutical Principle within the Relationship among Christian Churches Ad Intra and Ad Extra’, *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 60, no. 1–2 (2016): 219–33; Barbara Hallensleben, ‘Ein Panorthodoxes Konzil--ohne die Orthodoxen?: Bericht über ein Internationales Kolloquium in Paris’, *Catholica* 67, no. 2 (2013): 97–100; Peter de Mey, ‘The Role of the Observers during the Second Vatican Council’, *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 60, no. 1–2 (2016): 33–51. Even the German translation of the final documents of the Council in Crete is made by a Catholic theologian: Barbara Hallensleben, ed., *Einheit in Synodalität: die offiziellen Dokumente der Orthodoxen Synode auf Kreta 18. bis 26. Juni 2016*, Epiphania (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2016).

⁹ Although some articles were published on the pre-conciliar and post-conciliar decisions, very few academic studies have considered the analysis of the proposed texts, most of the time summing up just the general content of the documents, not trying to evaluate and comment on the texts. Some exceptions for the pre-conciliar documents can be mentioned: John Chryssavgis, *Toward the Holy and Great Council. Retrieving a Culture of Conciliarity and Communion*, Faith Matters Series (New York: Department of Inter-Orthodox Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations, 2016); published first as: John Chryssavgis, ‘Toward the Great and Holy Council: Retrieving a Culture of Conciliarity and Communion’, *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (2016): 317–32; Nathanael Symeonides, ed., *Toward the Holy and Great Council. Theological Reflections*, Faith Matters Series (New York: Department of Inter-Orthodox Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations, 2016).

¹⁰ French translation “Textes Officiels Adoptés Par Le Concile”, *Contacts* 255, no. 68 (2016): 255–322; English Translation: Alberto Melloni, ed., *The Great Councils of the Orthodox Churches. Crete 2016*, Corpus Christianorum Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Generaliumque Decreta 4.3 (Brespol, 2017) (forthcoming). Ukrainian Translation: *Документи Святого і Великого Собору Православної Церкви. Крит, 2016*, trans. Юрій Вестель, Дмитро Каратеев, Відкритий Православний Університет Святої Софії Премудрості, ДУХ І ЛІТЕРА, 2016, 112 pages. Parts of the documents were published in different Journals: ‘Message of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church’, *The Canadian Journal of Orthodox Christianity* 11, no. 3 (September 2016): 57–70; ‘Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church: Crete 2016’, *The Ecumenical Review* 68, no. 2–3 (December 2016): 291–304; ‘Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church’, *The Canadian Journal of Orthodox Christianity* 11, no. 3 (September 2016): 71–94; ‘Autonomy and the Means by Which It Is Proclaimed’, *The Canadian Journal of Orthodox Christianity* 11, no. 3 (September 2016): 95–105. For orthodox academic evaluation of the document see the first issue on 2017 of the journal *Catholica*. *Vierteljahresschrift für ökumenische Theologie* dedicated to the Holy and Great Council: Vasilios N. Makrides, “Zwischen Tradition und Erneuerung. Das Panorthodoxe Konzil 2016 angesichts der modernen Welt”, *Catholica* 71, no. 1 (2017): 18–32; Sergii Bortnyk, “Zwischen Tradition und Erneuerung. Die Sendung der Orthodoxen Kirche in der heutigen Welt”, *Catholica* 71, no. 1 (2017): 33–37; Vladimir Khulap, “Die Orthodoxe Kirche

What can be observed from this lack of official reaction¹¹ is the rapid polarization of the opinions of some theologians or non-theologians, few in number but very vocal, especially on the internet and among Orthodox laymen without a solid theological education, but with an eagerness to defend Orthodoxy against the “ecumenist” bishops that signed the documents of “betrayal”. If the opinions against the documents issued after the Council are partly justified, the authors references to the final texts, the condemnation of the Council of Crete before its convocation shows nothing else than an eschatological anxiety, a hypothetical fear of the events that are “already, but not yet”, a fundamental rejection of the synodal structure of the Church on the ground that this Council could become the eighth ecumenical council, an eschatological or antichrist council, due to its symbolic number eight¹².

zwischen Universalität und Ethnizität Autokephalie, Diaspora und die Beziehungen zwischen Konstantinopel und Moskau”, *Catholica* 71, no. 1 (2017): 38-43, Athanasios Vletsis, “Fragmentierung oder ökumenische Öffnung der Orthodoxie? Plädoyer für eine neue Beziehung zwischen Universalität und Lokalität der Kirche”, *Catholica* 71, no. 1 (2017): 44-51, Rade Kistic, “Die Fundamente stärken. Ein Kommentar zum Dokument des Konzils von Kreta über die “Beziehungen der Orthodoxen Kirche zu der übrigen christlichen Welt”, *Catholica* 71, no. 1 (2017): 52-59, Evgeny Pilipenko, “Zum Ökumene-Dokument der Orthodoxen Synode auf Kreta. Einige Überlegungen in Reaktion auf das Referat von Rade Kistic”, *Catholica* 71, no. 1 (2017): 60-63, Viorel Ioniță, “Der lange Weg zur Heiligen und Großen Synode der Orthodoxen Kirche und seine Perspektiven”, *Catholica* 71, no. 1 (2017): 64-71; Anna Briskina-Müller, “Das Konzil von Kreta als Anfang - oder: was zu tun bleibt”, *Catholica* 71, no. 1 (2017): 72-85.

¹¹ We can mention for the pre-conciliar documents and for the debates before the *Synaxis of the Primates* held in Chambesy, January 2016, the following academic papers: George E. Matsoukas, ed., *Orthodox Christianity at the Crossroad: A Great Council of the Church – When and Why* (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2009). For the evaluation of the final decisions of the Council, we can mention the following papers: Dimitrios Bathrellos, ‘Le Saint et Grand Concile: présentation et appréciation’, *Contacts* 255, no. 68 (2016): 352–58; Raymond Rizk, ‘Saint et Grand Concile ou Concile source de tension?’, *Contacts* 255, no. 68 (2016): 359–68; Serge Chapnin, ‘Le Concile de Crète a eu lieu, les problèmes restent’, *Contacts* 255, no. 68 (2016): 369–75; André Shishkov, ‘Sur le Concile de Crète’, *Contacts* 68, no. 255 (2016): 376–79; Dimitar Arnaudov, ‘Apport et réception du Saint et Grand Concile’, *Contacts* 255, no. 68 (2016): 380–84; Ioan Tulcan, ‘L’importance du Saint et Grand Concile orthodoxe de Crète’, *Contacts* 255, no. 68 (2016): 385–90; Noël Ruffieux, ‘Un concile inachevé’, *Contacts* 255, no. 68 (2016): 391–97; Kartachev Antoine, ‘Annexe 1 : Les Conciles œcuméniques et La Conciliarité’, *Contacts* 255, no. 68 (2016): 398–418; Peter Bouteneff, ‘Annexe 2 : Les Implications de La Méthode Du Consensus’, *Contacts* 255, no. 68 (2016): 419–22.

¹² A good example of this is represented by the statements of Professor Dimitrios Tselengidis at the Conference of Piraeus, March 23, 2016: “We will pray daily, with pain of heart, that the Triune God will not allow this Council to take place, because it is clear from its composition and subject matter that it will create more problems than it aspires to resolve.” For the Romanian translation see: Dimitrios Tselenghídis, ‘Poate un Sinod al ortodocșilor să acorde caracter de Biserică eterodocșilor și să definească diferit identitatea de până acum a Bisericii?’, in *“Sfântul și Marele Sinod” (Creta, 2016). Între providență și eșec*, ed. Tatiana Petrache (Oradea: Editura Astradrom, 2016), 107. For the Greek paper see: K. Δημήτριος Τσελεγγίδης, “Μπορεί μία Σύνοδος Ὁρθοδόξων νά προσδώσει ἐκκλησιαστικότητα στους ἑτεροδόξους καί νά ὀριοθετηθεῖ διαφορετικά τήν ἔως τώρα ταυτότητα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας;” <http://www.impantokratoros.gr/dat/storage/dat/E9DAC65B/tselengidis.pdf>

As far as the event and meeting on the island of Crete are taken into consideration, it should be emphasized that in Crete, synodality at the universal level, was reinforced in the pan-orthodox practice after a considerable absence. Even though the history of the second Christian millennium records some general councils¹³, however, the manifestation of synodality at the highest level – the universal one – appeared in the last decades more often in the voluminous handbooks of Orthodox ecclesiology, as a principle of the ideal structure of the Church, than in the real life of the Orthodox Church¹⁴. Synodality at the universal level is and remains a topic much debated in current Orthodox theology, creating various misunderstandings and disagreements, especially after the Ravenna document¹⁵. It is certain that the resumption of this synodal practice in the life of the Church and the dialog at the universal level were a considerable effort for the Orthodox Church¹⁶, being more than just an occasional sending of letters from the primate of an autocephalous Church to the others on the occasion of some Orthodox feasts that, apart from Easter, are not celebrated on the same day in the Orthodox Church¹⁷. This is one of the reasons that this

¹³ For a list of General Councils of the Orthodox Church, see: Chrysavgis, *Toward the Holy and Great Council. Retrieving a Culture of Conciliarity and Communion*, 13, note 18.

¹⁴ Johannes Oeldemann, 'Die Synodalität in der Orthodoxen Kirche', *Catholica* 70, no. 2 (April 2016): 133–48.

¹⁵ For the debate on Ravenna Document, see: Cristian Vasile Petcu, 'The Theological Premises and Canonical Consequences of Church Synodality as Reflected in the Ravenna Document', *International Journal of Orthodox Theology* 5, no. 2 (2014); Joseph Famerée, "'Communion Ecclésiale, Conciliarité et Autorité': Le Document de Ravenne", *Revue Théologique de Louvain* 40, no. 2 (2009): 236–47; 'A Common Response to the Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church Regarding the Ravenna Document "Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacramental Nature of the Church: Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity, and Authority" by the North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation', *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 54, no. 1–4 (Spring-Winter 2009): 302–10. For the relation between primacy and synodality and the Holy and Great Council see: Athanasios Vletsis, "Ein orthodoxer Primat? Die Neu-Gestaltung von Primatsvorstellungen unterwegs zur Einberufung des Panorthodoxen Konzils", *Una Sancta*, 2 (2015): 93–118; Andrey Shishkov, 'Спорные экклезиологические вопросы повестки Всеправославного собора и проблема верховной власти в Православной церкви (Controversial Ecclesiological Issues of the Pan-Orthodox Council Agenda and the Question of Sovereign Power in the Orthodox Church)', *Государство, религия, церковь в России и за рубежом* 1 (2016): 210–54.

¹⁶ Cyril Hovorun highlights the importance of the very process of preparation of the Council that has benefitted the Church by the aim of revealing the internal problems of the Church: Cyril Hovorun, 'Critique of the Church through the Prism of the Panorthodox Council', *Θεολογία* 87, no. 1 (2016): 65–66.

¹⁷ Unfortunately, the problem of the common calendar, although it was one of the most important themes, had not reached a consensus and it was pulled out from the agenda of the Holy and Great Council. Franz Mali, "Julianische Berechnung des Osterdatums und Gregorianischer Kalender?", *Ostkirchliche Studien* 53 (2004): 309–327; Alkiviadis C. Calivas, "The Date of Pascha, the Need to Continue the Debate", *The Greek orthodox theological review*, 35 (1990): 333–343. D. P. Ogitsky, "Canonical norms of the Orthodox Easter computation and the problem of the dating of Pascha in our time", *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, 17 no 4 (1973): 274–284. Anastasios Kallis, *Auf dem*

effort has not been completely without difficulties and deficiencies. From the long period of pre-conciliar preparations¹⁸ to the refusal of participation of certain autocephalous Churches in the Holy and Great Synod¹⁹, the Council of

Weg zu einem heiligen und großen Konzil Titelzusatz: ein Quellen- und Arbeitsbuch zur orthodoxen Ekklesiologie (Münster: Theophano-Verlag, 2013), 105 -108. B. Gheorghiu, "Die Kalendarfrage", in: Hamilkas S Alivizatos, *Procès-verbaux du premier Congrès de Théologie Orthodoxe à Athènes, 29 Novembre - 6 Décembre 1936* (Athènes: Pyrsos, 1939), 300-308. For a pre-conciliar analyse of this theme see: Vladimir Khulap, 'Pastoral Problems of a Reform of the Liturgical Calendar in Russia', *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 60, no. 1-2 (2016): 65-77; Thomas Pott, 'The Problem of a Common Calendar: Do We Need to Reform Our Liturgical Calendar or Our Understanding of the Time of Salvation?', *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 60, no. 1-2 (2016): 79-89; Pierre Sollogoub, 'Why a Reform of the Established Liturgical Calendar and of the Eastern Date Is Necessary', *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 60, no. 1-2 (2016): 53-64.

¹⁸ For the pre-conciliar documents, see: Anastasios Kallis, *Auf dem Weg zu einem Heiligen und Großen Konzil: ein Quellen- und Arbeitsbuch zur orthodoxen Ekklesiologie* (Münster: Theophano-Verlag, 2013); Viorel Ionita, ed., *Towards the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church: The Decisions of the Pan-Orthodox Meetings since 1923 until 2009* (Freiburg: Basel: Reinhardt, Friedrich, 2014); Viorel Ionita, ed., *Hotărârile întrunirilor Panortodoxe Din 1923 Până în 2009: Spre Sfântul și Marele Sinod Al Bisericii Ortodoxe* (București: Basilica, 2013); Patrick Viscuso, *A Quest For Reform of the Orthodox Church: The 1923 Pan-Orthodox Congress, An Analysis and Translation of Its Acts and Decisions* (Berkeley, Calif: InterOrthodox Press, 2006); *Actes de la Conférence des chefs et des représentants des églises orthodoxes autocéphales: réunis à Moscou à l'occasion de la célébration solennelle des fêtes du 500ème anniversaire de l'autocéphalie de l'Église orthodoxe russe, 8-18 juillet 1948*, vol. I- II (Moscou: Éd. du patriarcat de Moscou, 1950) and the collection *Synodika* edited by the Centre orthodoxe du Patriarcat Œcuménique, Chambésy-Genève, vol. I-XIV, available online on the official webpage of the Center: <https://sites.google.com/site/centreorthodoxegr/ekdoseis/synodika>. A good overview of the preconciliar process is made by: Viorel Ioniță, "Auf dem Weg zum heiligen und Großen Konzil der orthodoxen Kirche", *Una Sancta*, 2 (2015): 82-92; Andrey Gusev, 'История подготовки Всеправославного собора (History of the Preparation of the Pan-Orthodox Council)', *Государство, религия, церковь в России и за рубежом* 1 (2016): 127-64; Viorel Ioniță, 'On the Way to the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church', in *Orthodoxie Im Dialog: Historische Und Aktuelle Perspektiven*, ed. Reinhard Flogaus and Jennifer Wasmuth, *Arbeiten Zur Kirchengeschichte* 130 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, n.d.), 413-434; Noël Ruffieux, 'The Preparation and Reception of the Council', *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 60, no. 1-2 (2016): 11-32.

¹⁹ Four of the fourteen orthodox Autocephalous Churches decided not to participate in the Holy and Great Council two weeks before the Council. The Orthodox Church Bulgaria was the first Church refusing to participate in the Council (decision of June 1, 2016), then the Orthodox Church of Antioch (decision of June 6, 2016), the Orthodox Church of Georgia (decision of June 10), and the Russian Orthodox Church (decision of June 13). On June 1, 2016, two weeks before the Council of Crete, the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church decided, by an unexpected and surprising attitude, not to participate in the Holy and Great Council of Crete, although the approval and signatures of the Bulgarian Church delegations can be found on all Pre-conciliar Documents. The document "The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World" was signed at the Synaxis of the Primates of the Orthodox Churches in Chambésy, January 21-28, 2016, by the Patriarch Neophyte of Bulgaria; The document "Autonomy and the means by which it is proclaimed" was signed on October 15, 2015 in Chambésy by Metropolitan John of Varna and Veliki Preslav; The document "The Orthodox Diaspora" was signed at the 4th Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference in Chambésy, June 6-13, 2009, by Metropolitan Neophytos of Roussis; the document "The Importance of Fasting and its observance today" was signed at the 5th Pan-Orthodox Pre-Conciliar Conference in Chambésy,

Crete was a great challenge for the Orthodox Church. However, given the relatively long-term atrophy of synodal practice at the universal level of the Church, the simple organizational problems are pardonable.

Nevertheless, the Holy and Great Council of Crete led us to the need for a fundamental debate on several theological themes of Church organisation and practice, that obviously involve doctrinal and theological consolidation and clarification²⁰. The themes on the agenda of the Council – from organizational and canonical structure of the Church to its mission in society, or its social²¹ and bioethical engagement, as we can see in the Encyclical of the Council, – are of a relatively great importance for the Orthodox Church and its witness in the world. In this context, both during the preparation of the texts for the Holy and Great Council and after the publication of the final documents, there were

October 10-17, 2015, by Metropolitan John of Varna and Veliki Preslav; The document "Relations of the Orthodox Church with the rest of the Christian world" was signed at the 5th Pan-Orthodox Pre-conciliar Conference in Chambésy, October 10-17, 2015, by the same Metropolitan John of Varna and Veliki Preslav; The document "The Sacrament of Marriage and its Impediments" was signed at the Synaxis of the Primates of the Orthodox Churches in Chambésy, January 21-28, 2016, by the Patriarch Neophyte of Bulgaria; The "Organization and Working Procedure of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church" was signed at the Synaxis of the Primates of the Orthodox Churches in Chambésy, January 21-28, 2016, by the Patriarch Neophyte of Bulgaria. The reasons for the withdrawal of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church from the Holy and Great Council were: "1) The lack of an agenda for the Great Council is of particular importance for Holy Orthodoxy, to detail topics that have contemporary relevance and require timely resolution by a Great and Holy Council; 2) To date there have been declarations by the Autocephalous Orthodox Churches disagreeing on some of the texts already approved for the Great and Holy Council; 3) According to the already adopted regulations for the conduct of the Great and Holy Council of the Orthodox Church, there will be no ability to edit texts in the course of work of the council; 4) The proposed location of the Primate of the Orthodox churches in the room provided for meetings of the council violates the principle of equality for the Primate of the Autocephalous Orthodox Churches; 5) The location of observers and guests of the Council is inappropriate; 6) The structure of the Council imposes upon the Bulgarian Orthodox Church – Bulgarian Patriarchate the need to undertake large and unjustified financial expenses to participate in the council." <http://bulgariandiocese.org/decision.html>.

²⁰ Some Churches, such as the Orthodox Church of Bulgaria, argued that it will not participate in the Council because "The lack of an agenda for the Great Council is of particular importance for Holy Orthodoxy, to detail topics that have contemporary relevance and require timely resolution by a Great and Holy Council". For the decision of the Orthodox Church of Bulgaria see: <http://www.bg-patriarshia.bg/news.php?id=205494>. For the English translation see <http://bulgariandiocese.org/decision.html>. For an overview of the problem see: Illert, 'Die Bulgarische Orthodoxe Kirche und die Heilige und Große Synode'. Dr. Smilen Markov, "Decision of the Bulgarian Church: A policy of self-imposed marginalization, June 4, 2016" <http://sobor2016.churchby.info/en/comments/decision-of-the-bulgarian-church-a-policy-of-self-imposed-marginalization/>

²¹ For the social teachings of the Holy and Great Council see: Natallia Vasilevich, 'Die Soziallehre des Heiligen und Großen Konzils: Auf dem Weg, eine Kirche für die Welt zu werden', *Ökumenische Rundschau* 1 (2017): 12–28; Radu Preda, 'Orthodoxy Confronted with Ethical Questions: A Social-Theological Perspective', *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 60, no. 1–2 (2016): 235–47.

some reactions to support or reject certain theological assertions found in the documents. The existing reactions, both for and against the Council, are necessary in the current theological debate, being the condition for the exercise of the faith and for a real theological dialogue between those who have different opinions, but just when they are taking place inside the Church and not through schismatic attitudes, by ceasing commemoration and communion with the bishops and with the whole Church. Therefore, even attitudes that reject certain parts of the documents or some theological assertions from them should be integrated into the process of synodality, as they lead to a fundamental debate not just of the documents, but of the Orthodox ecclesiology and theology of the 20th and 21st centuries. However, some approaches instead of being fundamental, that is, returning to the foundations of Orthodoxy, are on the verge of fundamentalism and extremism, diminishing the true importance of the Church's manifestation in its unity, and accusing the Council and its participants of dogmatic innovations and betrayal of the faith of our Holy Fathers²².

Despite the fact that the attitudes against the Holy and Great Council have been considered by some theologians, perhaps too impulsive and harshly, as fundamentalist – which has led to their radicalization by threatening the cessation of communion under the pressure of this rejection of dialogue²³, subjecting the others to anathema and heresy – they have tried to bring into question, often in an impercipient manner, fundamental questions about the identity of Orthodoxy. Their approaches do not reside in the fact that they are expressions of fundamentalism and cannot be categorized under this appellation. First of all, they cannot be considered a part of the conservative Protestant movement of the 19th century that developed the concept of fundamentalism by opposing the secularizing, liberal and modernist trends in academic theology. Furthermore, they cannot be accused of a conservative vision that tries to preserve the purity of the faith by any means. The Church itself follows this purpose of living the

²² Georgios Vlantis, 'Die Angst vor dem Geist. Das Heilige und Große Konzil und die orthodoxen Anti-Ökumeniker', *Ökumenische Rundschau* 1 (2017): 32–41.

²³ In the Romanian Orthodox Church as in the Greek Orthodox Church some priests ceased communion with the bishops who signed the document by bringing as a theological and canonical argument an abusive interpretation of the 15th canon of the Protodeutera Council (861). For an overview of this problem in the Romanian Orthodox Church see: Fr. Emilian-Iustinian Roman, "Debating the Documents of the Holy and Great Synod of Crete - A Canonical and Disciplinary Approach. Case Study: the Archbishopric of Iași", published in this Journal. One of the most shocking instances, Cessation of commemoration of Bishop on account of the "teaching of Heresy" was that of Professor Theodoros Zisis, on March 3, 2017, the Sunday of Orthodoxy. For the "Letter of Protopresbyter Theodore Zisis to Metropolitan Anthimos of Thessaloniki (March 3, 2017)", entitled: "Defense and Declaration of Cessation of Commemoration of Bishop on Account of the Teaching of Heresy", see: <https://orthodoxethos.com/post/defense-and-declaration-of-cessation-of-commemoration-of-bishop-on-account-of-the-teaching-of-heresy>.

faith in an unaltered form by keeping the Holy Tradition. In Orthodox theology we cannot speak of novelties as in natural science, but if we believe that Orthodoxy expresses the truth, then there are no new dogmas, just ways of expressing the eternal unchangeable truth, no new canons, because the canons are practical applications of the dogmas in the life of the Church²⁴. Which is the error of the attitudes against the Council of Crete and of those who condemn it? Although their attempts to analyse the documents were honest, they did not take into account the entire canonical and dogmatic tradition of the Orthodox Church, accusing the synodal documents of serious innovations.

If we take into consideration the entire canonical and theological Tradition of the Orthodox Church we will see that the Holy and Great Council of Crete was extremely conservative, remaining in complete fidelity with the canonical and dogmatic tradition of the Orthodox Church. One of the problems of this Council, as we will see, is the expression of theological realities in a too conservative manner. Those who were expecting too much from the Holy and Great Council and those who did not expect anything at all would be surprised that it did not bring and could not bring anything new in terms of dogma and canon. Every novelty is equated with innovation and ultimately with heresy (canons 1 and 2 Trullo)²⁵. However, this does not mean that the Synod of Crete has no importance, but on the contrary, it represents the canonical expression of the fidelity of the entire dogmatic and canonical tradition in a completely different historical context.

1. The Number of Participants in the Holy and Great Council. A Problem of Orthodox Synodality?

Regarding the number of participants in the Holy and Great Council, even before June 2016 and after the Council, there were several voices contesting the representative character of the delegations, arguing that it was against orthodox synodality²⁶, that it was uncanonical²⁷, the lack of participation of all bishops

²⁴ Nikolai Afanas'ev, 'Canons of the Church Changeable or Unchangeable', *St Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly* 11, no. 2 (1967): 54–68.

²⁵ Metropolitan Hierotheos (Vlachos), "Intervention and Text in the Hierarchy of the Church of Greece" (November 2016 Regarding the Holy and Great Council of Crete: <https://orthodoxethos.com/post/intervention-and-text-in-the-hierarchy-of-the-church-of-greece-november-2016-regarding-the-cretan-council>).

²⁶ See for example the paper of Fr. Peter Heers, "The "Council" of Crete and the New Emerging Ecclesiology: An Orthodox Examination", Lecture delivered at the Clergy Retreat of the Eastern American Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia. <https://orthodoxethos.com/post/the-council-of-crete-and-the-new-emerging-ecclesiology-an-orthodox-examination>. The author, having in mind a quantitative synodality, thinks that synodality can be expressed only when all the bishops of the Orthodox Church are gathered in one place. According to this

from around the Orthodox world transformed, according to their opinion, the Holy and Great Council of Crete into a simple “conference of representatives”²⁸ or “a council of primates with their entourages”²⁹ and not a Council with ecumenical perspective. Some of our Orthodox theologians considered the limitation of the number of bishops as a conspiracy against the principle of synodality because the organizers of the Council were afraid of giving to the bishops that were against the Council the right to vote and to condemn the documents³⁰. According to this opinion the Orthodox principle of synodality, which claims that all bishops are equal, was altered and in the end destroyed by the wilful selection of some “ecumenist” bishops. Let us analyse this accusation. After the withdrawal of the four Autocephalous Churches, in the Holy and Great Council of Crete, 163 bishops³¹

kind of perspective, synodality is equal to statistics: “Participating Churches: 10 of the 14 Local Churches (71%); Representation of Orthodox Christians: close to 30%; Participating Orthodox Bishops: 162 participated of the 350 invited (46%); Representation of Orthodox Bishops: 162 of a total of 850 (19%); Total number of Voting Bishops: 10 of the 162 bishops present (6%), or 10 of the 850 bishops in the Orthodox Church (1.1%).”

²⁷ Serafim Metropolitan Kythirelor și Antikythirelor, “Probleme eclesiale și pastorale care decurg din neparticiparea tuturor episcopilor ortodocși la Sfântul și Marele Sinod”, in *“Sfântul și Marele Sinod” (Creta, 2016). Între providență și eșec* (Oradea: Editura Astradrom, 2016), 41–51.

²⁸ Hovorun, ‘Critique of the Church through the Prism of the Panorthodox Council’, 64–65.

²⁹ Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos, “Intervention and Text in the Hierarchy of the Church of Greece (November 2016 Regarding the Cretan Council”: <https://orthodoxethos.com/post/intervention-and-text-in-the-hierarchy-of-the-church-of-greece-november-2016-regarding-the-cretan-council>.

³⁰ “With this anti-traditional measure the possibility that some bishops may oppose the decisions that are contrary to Tradition was avoided, or that any local Church has greater power in taking decisions because of the larger number of bishops”. Serafim Metropolitan Pireului Serafim, ‘Salutul Înaltpreasfințitului Serafim, Mitropolitul Pireului’, in *“Sfântul și Marele Sinod” (Creta, 2016). Între providență și eșec*, ed. Tatiana Petrache (Oradea: Editura Astradrom, 2016), 15. Μητροπολίτης Πειραιώς κ. Σεραφεΐμ: Χαίρετισμός στην Ημερίδα “ΑΓΙΑ ΚΑΙ ΜΕΓΑΛΗ ΣΥΝΟΔΟΣ: Μεγάλη προετοιμασία, χωρίς προσδοκίες”: „Μέ τόν αντιπαραδοσιακό αυτό τρόπο άποφεύγεται ή πιθανότητα κάποιου έπίσκοποι να αντιδράσουν σε άποφάσεις τής Συνόδου, πού θά είναι άνατρεπτικές τής Παραδόσεως, ή κάποια Τοπική Έκκλησία να έχει μεγαλύτερη δύναμη στην λήψη τών άποφάσεων, λόγω του μεγαλύτερου αριθμού έπίσκοπων”. <http://www.impantokratoros.gr/BACF6AA1.el.aspx>

³¹ The 10 Primates of the Orthodox Autocephalous Churches: 1. † Bartholomew of Constantinople, Chairman; 2. † Theodoros of Alexandria; 3. † Theophilos of Jerusalem; 4. † Irinej of Serbia; 5. † Daniel of Romania; 6. † Chrysostomos of Cyprus; 7. † Ieronymos of Athens and All Greece; 8. † Sawa of Warsaw and All Poland; 9. † Anastasios of Tirana, Durres and All Albania; 10. † Rastislav of Presov, the Czech Lands and Slovakia; *Delegation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate*: 11. † Leo of Karelia and All Finland; 12. † Stephanos of Tallinn and All Estonia; 13. † Elder Metropolitan John of Pergamon; 14. † Elder Archbishop Demetrios of America; 15. † Augustinos of Germany; 16. † Irenaios of Crete; 17. † Isaiah of Denver; 18. † Alexios of Atlanta; 19. † Iakovos of the Princes’ Islands; 20. † Joseph of Prokonnisos; 21. † Meliton of Philadelphia; 22. † Emmanuel of France; 23. † Nikitas of the Dardanelles; 24. † Nicholas of Detroit; 25. † Gerasimos of San Francisco; 26. † Amphilochios of Kisamos and Selinos; 27. † Amvrosios of Korea; 28. † Maximos of Selyvria; 29. † Amphilochios of Adrianopolis; 30. † Kallistos of Diokleia; 31. † Antony of Hierapolis, Head of the Ukrainian Orthodox in the USA; 32. † Job of Telmessos; 33. † Jean of Charioupolis, Head of the Patriarchal Exarchate for Orthodox Parishes of the Russian Tradition in Western Europe; 34. † Gregory of Nyssa, Head of the

participated plus 2 bishops as consultants. If we add 25 bishops for each of the

Carpatho-Russian Orthodox in the USA (Bishop Makarios of Christopolis (Estonia) as special Consultant); *Delegation of the Patriarchate of Alexandria*: 35. † Gabriel of Leontopolis; 36. † Makarios of Nairobi; 37. † Jonah of Kampala; 38. † Seraphim of Zimbabwe and Angola; 39. † Alexandros of Nigeria; 40. † Theophylaktos of Tripoli; 41. † Sergios of Good Hope; 42. † Athanasios of Cyrene; 43. † Alexios of Carthage; 44. † Ieronymos of Mwanza; 45. † George of Guinea; 46. † Nicholas of Hermopolis; 47. † Dimitrios of Irinopolis; 48. † Damaskinos of Johannesburg and Pretoria; 49. † Narkissos of Accra; 50. † Emmanouel of Ptolemaidos; 51. † Gregorios of Cameroon; 52. † Nicodemos of Memphis; 53. † Meletios of Katanga; 54. † Panteleimon of Brazzaville and Gabon; 55. † Innokentios of Burudi and Rwanda; 56. † Crysostomos of Mozambique; 57. † Neofytos of Nyeri and Mount Kenya; *Delegation of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem*: 58. † Benedict of Philadelphia; 59. † Aristarchos of Constantine; 60. † Theophylaktos of Jordan; 61. † Nektarios of Anthidon; 62. † Philoumenos of Pella; *Delegation of the Church of Serbia*: 63. † Jovan of Ohrid and Skopje; 64. † Amfilohije of Montenegro and the Littoral; 65. † Porfirije of Zagreb and Ljubljana; 66. † Vasilije of Sirmium; 67. † Lukijan of Budim; 68. † Longin of Nova Gracanica; 69. † Irinej of Backa; 70. † Hrizostom of Zvornik and Tuzla; 71. † Justin of Zica; 72. † Pahomije of Vranje; 73. † Jovan of Sumadija; 74. † Ignatije of Branicevo; 75. † Fotije of Dalmatia; 76. † Athanasios of Bihac and Petrovac; 77. † Joanikije of Niksic and Budimlje; 78. † Grigorije of Zahumlje and Hercegovina; 79. † Milutin of Valjevo; 80. † Maksim in Western America; 81. † Irinej in Australia and New Zealand; 82. † David of Krusevac; 83. † Jovan of Slavonija; 84. † Andrej in Austria and Switzerland; 85. † Sergije of Frankfurt and in Germany; 86. † Ilarion of Timok (Bishop Jerome (Močević) of Jegar as Special Consultant); *Delegation of the Church of Romania*: 87. † Teofan of Iasi, Moldova and Bucovina; 88. † Laurentiu of Sibiu and Transylvania; 89. † Andrei of Vad, Feleac, Cluj, Alba, Crisana and Maramures; 90. † Irineu of Craiova and Oltenia; 91. † Ioan of Timisoara and Banat; 92. † Iosif in Western and Southern Europe; 93. † Serafim in Germany and Central Europe; 94. † Nifon of Targoviste; 95. † Irineu of Alba Iulia; 96. † Ioachim of Roman and Bacau; 97. † Casian of Lower Danube; 98. † Timotei of Arad; 99. † Nicolae in America; 100. † Sofronie of Oradea; 101. † Nicodim of Strehaiia and Severin; 102. † Visarion of Tulcea; 103. † Petroniu of Salaj; 104. † Siluan in Hungary; 105. † Siluan in Italy; 106. † Timotei in Spain and Portugal; 107. † Macarie in Northern Europe; 108. † Varlaam Ploiesteanul, Assistant Bishop to the Patriarch; 109. † Emilian Lovisteanul, Assistant Bishop to the Archdiocese of Ramnic; 110. † Ioan Casian of Vicina, Assistant Bishop to the Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese of the Americas; 111. † Georgios of Paphos; 112. † Chrysostomos of Kition; 113. † Chrysostomos of Kyrenia; 114. † Athanasios of Limassol; 115. † Neophytos of Morphou; 116. † Vasileios of Constantia and Ammochostos; 117. † Nikiphoros of Kykkos and Tillyria; 118. † Isaiaos of Tamassos and Oreini; 119. † Barnabas of Tremithousa and Lefkara; 120. † Christophoros of Karpasion; 121. † Nektarios of Arsinoe; 122. † Nikolaos of Amathus; 123. † Epiphanius of Ledra; 124. † Leontios of Chytron; 125. † Porphyrios of Neapolis; 126. † Gregory of Mesaoria; 127. † Prokopios of Philippi, Neapolis and Thassos; 128. † Chrysostomos of Peristerion; 129. † Germanos of Eleia; 130. † Alexandros of Mantinea and Kynouria; 131. † Ignatios of Arta; 132. † Damaskinos of Didymoteixon, Orestias and Soufli; 133. † Alexios of Nikaia; 134. † Hierotheos of Nafpaktos and Aghios Vlasios; 135. † Eusebios of Samos and Ikaria; 136. † Seraphim of Kastoria; 137. † Ignatios of Demetrias and Almyros; 138. † Nicodemos of Kassandrea; 139. † Ephraim of Hydra, Spetses and Aegina; 140. † Theologos of Serres and Nigrita; 141. † Makarios of Sidirokastron; 142. † Anthimos of Alexandroupolis; 143. † Barnabas of Neapolis and Stavroupolis; 144. † Chrysostomos of Messenia; 145. † Athenagoras of Ilion, Acharnon and Petroupoli; 146. † Ioannis of Lagkada, Litis and Rentinis; 147. † Gabriel of New Ionia and Philadelphia; 148. † Chrysostomos of Nikopolis and Preveza; 149. † Theoklitos of Ierissos, Mount Athos and Ardameri (Bishop Clement (Kotsomytis) of Methoni, Chief Secretary of the Holy Council); 150. † Simon of Lodz and Poznan; 151. † Abel of Lublin and Chelm; 152. † Jacob of Bialystok and Gdansk; 153. † George of Siemiatycze; 154. † Paisios of Gorlice; 155. † Joan of Koritsa; 156. † Demetrios of Argyrokastron; 157. † Nikolla of Apollonia and Fier; 158. † Andon of Elbasan; 159. † Nathaniel of Amantia; 160. † Asti of Bylis; 161. † Michal of Prague; 162. † Isaiah of Sumperk; 163. † Jeremy of Switzerland, Chief of the Panorthodox Secretariat of the Holy and Great Council. <https://www.holycouncil.org/delegations>

four missing Autocephalous Churches, the total number of bishops would have been 263³². The main accusation of those who condemned the Council for the lack of participation of all Orthodox bishops was precisely the delegation of a maximum number of 24 bishops from each Autocephalous Church with their Primate, totalling 25 bishops for each Orthodox Local Church. For some Autocephalous Churches, such as the Church of Albania, of Poland or for the Church of the Czech Republic and Slovakia, whose Holy Synods do not count more than 10 bishops, the number of 24 bishops was too large. But for the Russian Orthodox Church or for the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the number of 25 bishops represented a small percentage of the total number of their bishops. However, it is rather curious that since the adoption of this decision on the fixed number of bishops for each delegation at the *Synaxis* of the Primates of the Autocephalous Orthodox Churches, from Constantinople, on March 9th 2014 until January 2016 the delegation of bishops and their number was not a real subject of debate in Orthodox theology. This decision of the *Synaxis* in 2014 was taken over in the *Organization and Working Procedure of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church*, a document signed at the *Synaxis of Primate*, in Chambésy, on January 27, 2016³³, by all the Primates of the autocephalous Churches, with the exception of the Patriarchate of Antioch. Noteworthy is the fact that the Patriarch of Antioch did not participate in the *Synaxis of the Primates* in Constantinople in March 2014. The Antiochian delegation refused to be part of this *Synaxis* because of Antioch's dispute with Jerusalem over Qatar. If this issue is carefully analysed, it can be seen that the *Synaxis of the Primates* (March 2014)³⁴

³² The lists of participating bishops raises a delicate canonical problem that betrays the canonical claims of the Ecumenical Patriarchate over Diaspora. All the titles of the bishops from Diaspora, that are not under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate were modified. For example, all the bishops of the Ecumenical Patriarchate from Diaspora, are bishops *of* that country (Augustinos *of* Germany, Emmanuel *of* France, Elder Archbishop Demetrios of America, Amvrosios *of* Korea), but the other bishops from the same territory are bishops *in* that country (Serafim in Germany and Central Europe, Nicolae in America, Maksim in Western America, Irinej in Australia and New Zealand, Andrej in Austria and Switzerland, Timotei in Spain and Portugal). This modification of titles can be found in all four official languages, see, for example: Ecumenical Patriarchate: “ὁ Γερμανίας Αὐγουστίνος, Augustin d’Allemagne, Митрополит Германский Августин”, and Romanian Orthodox Church: ὁ ἐν Γερμανίᾳ καὶ Κεντρικῇ Εὐρώπῃ Σεραφεῖμ, Séraphin en Allemagne et Europe centrale, Митрополит в Германии и Центральной Европе Серафим, or Serbian Orthodox Church: ὁ Φραγκφούρτης καὶ ἐν Γερμανίᾳ Σέργιος, Serge à Frankfort et en Allemagne, Епископ Франкфуртский и в Германии Сергей. In the official documents of the Holy and Great council it can be seen how the Romanian Orthodox Bishops corrected their titles with a pen.

³³ In the 3rd article of the *Organization and Working Procedure of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church* is written: “Members of the Council shall be those hierarchs designated by each autocephalous Orthodox Church as its representatives: The number of members has been determined by the *Synaxis* of the Primates of all the local autocephalous Orthodox Churches (Phanar, March 2014).”

³⁴ https://www.patriarchate.org/messages/-/asset_publisher/9mdbt2FJgbY0/content/id/957805 and <https://mospat.ru/en/2014/03/09/news99338/>

established the principle of representativeness, according to which at the Holy and Great Council every delegation will be composed of 24 bishops and the Primate of the Autocephalous Church³⁵ and the decisions both during the Council and in the pre-conciliar preparation of the Council will be taken by consensus³⁶, a principle promoted in particular by the Orthodox Church of Russia³⁷ and by the Romanian Orthodox Church, in opposition to the Ecumenical Patriarchate, a promoter of the majority decision-taking principle. The Synaxis of Primates (2014) issued two documents: *Decisions of the Synaxis of the Primates* and *the Message of the Synaxis*. Unfortunately, only *the Message of the Synaxis* has been made public, its decisions remaining foreign to the *pleroma* of the Church, being an internal procedure for the Primates. In the *Message of the Synaxis*³⁸ only one small chapter is dedicated to the future Holy and Great Council without specifying the number of the delegated bishops, the number of the participating bishops being mentioned in the *Decisions of the Synaxis*.

Those who were against the delegation of some bishops and the principle of representativeness brought as an argument the definition of the ecumenical councils and the summoning of all bishops to these Councils. Therefore, the title "Holy and Great Council" used for the ecumenical councils and the ecumenical claim of the Council in Crete implied, in their opinion, the convocation and the participation of all the bishops of the Orthodox Church³⁹. The final conclusion of this thesis is that the Council of Crete cannot, for this reason, be considered or called an ecumenical one. Let us analyse these statements and see if they are according to the canonical tradition of the Orthodox Church.

³⁵ Ioan Moga, 'Erwartungen Und Anfragen an Die Heilige and Große Synode Der Orthodoxen Kirche', *Catholica* 69, no. 3 (2015): 198.

³⁶ Peter Bouteneff, 'The Great and Holy Council and The Implications of the Consensus Method', in *Toward the Holy and Great Council. Theological Reflections*, ed. Nathanael Symeonides, Faith Matters Series 3 (New York: Department of Inter-Orthodox Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations, 2016), 125–28.

³⁷ Bouteneff, 'Annexe 2 : Les Implications de La Méthode Du Consensus'. For the English translation see: Bouteneff, 'The Great and Holy Council and The Implications of the Consensus Method', in *Toward the Holy and Great Council. Theological Reflections*, ed. Nathanael Symeonides, 125–128.

³⁸ Paragraph 6: "The Synaxis agreed that the preparatory work to the Synod should be intensified. A special Inter-Orthodox Committee will work from September 2014 until Holy Easter of 2015, followed by a Pre-Synodal Pan-Orthodox Conference to be convened in the first half of 2015. All decisions at the Synod and in the preparatory stages are made by consensus. The Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church will be convened by the Ecumenical Patriarch in Constantinople in 2016, unless something unexpected occurs. The Synod will be presided by the Ecumenical Patriarch. His brother Primates of the other Orthodox Autocephalous Churches will be seated at his right and at his left". For the English translation of the Message see: https://www.patriarchate.org/messages/-/asset_publisher/9mdbt2FjgbY0/content/id/957805

³⁹ Hovorun, 'Critique of the Church through the Prism of the Panorthodox Council', 64; Serafim, 'Probleme eclesiale și pastorale care decurg din neparticiparea tuturor episcopilor ortodocși la Sfântul și Marele Sinod', 43–44.

From the beginning it can be said that in no ecumenical or general council did all the bishops of the Orthodox Church participate, not only because they could not travel or they were sick, as some may say⁴⁰. A good example is the difference between the number of participants in the Third Ecumenical Council of Ephesus (431), which was around 200 bishops⁴¹, and in the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon. The number of bishops participating in the Fourth Ecumenical Council varies between 450 and 630, the epistle of the Ecumenical Council to Pope Leon stating that there were 520 bishops⁴² present in the Council, being the highest number of participating bishops in an ecumenical council. The Fourth Ecumenical Council took place in 451, 20 years after the Third Ecumenical Council. It is incalculable to consider that 430 bishops did not participate in the Third Ecumenical Council in comparison with the Fourth Council due to illness or transport problems. Analysing the list of participants in the Fourth Ecumenical Council, after we take out the names of those who were not present, but whose names appeared on the lists because other bishops signed the documents on their behalf, it can be seen that in the Council of Chalcedon no more than 400 bishops⁴³ took part in person. The number 630 was received by the Tradition of the Church only at the end of the 7th century. Even if we consider that the number of 630 bishops was the real one, we will find that only 10 bishops were present from the Western Roman Empire: 3 papal delegates, 2 African bishops from the Saracens, one from Ethiopia and four Western refugee bishops⁴⁴. It means that half of the episcopate of the Orthodox Church did not attend the Fourth Ecumenical Council. Moreover, if 630 bishops really participated in the Council of Chalcedon, we can see from the lists that 620 bishops were exclusively from the Eastern provinces of the Empire, especially those under the jurisdiction of Constantinople. If we take the number of 400 bishops as the most possible

⁴⁰ Hovorun, 'Critique of the Church through the Prism of the Panorthodox Council', 64.

⁴¹ Périclès-Pierre Joannou, *Discipline générale antique (IIe-IXe s.)*, 1.1: *Les canons des conciles oecuméniques (IIe-IXe s.)*, Codification canonique orientale, Fonti, Série 1, (Roma: Grottaferrata, 1962), 55.

⁴² Périclès-Pierre Joannou, *Discipline générale antique (IIe-IXe s.)*, 67.

⁴³ A more accurate number can be found with Richard Price. He considered that in the Fourth Ecumenical Council 373 bishops participated. Richard Price, *The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon. 3. Sessions XI - XVI, Documents after the Council: Appendices, Glossary, Bibliography, Maps, Indices* (Liverpool: Liverpool UnivPress, 2010), 193-196; P. Th Camelot, *Éphèse et Chalcédoine* (Paris: Édde l'Orante, 1962), 120 considering that in the Council were 350 or 360 bishops.

⁴⁴ Price, *The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon. 3. Sessions XI - XVI, Documents after the Council*, 196, nota 10. In the Council participated: Paschasinus of Lilybaeum, Lucensius of Picenum, Julian of Kios and the priest Bonifacius As delegates of the Church of Rome, entrusted by the pope with the presidency of the council. However, at the Emperor's order, the council was chaired by 19 commissioners without the right to vote. Giuseppe Alberigo, *Conciliorum oecumenicorum generaliumque decreta: editio critica*, Corpus Christianorum 1, Istituto per le scienze religiose (Bologna), (Brepols: Turnhout, 2006), 121; Heinz Ohme, "Sources of the Greek Canon Law to the Quinisext Council (691/2) Councils and Church Fathers", in: Kenneth Pennington, *The History of Byzantine and Eastern Canon Law to 1500*, coll. *History of medieval canon law* 4, (CUA Press, 2012), 59.

one, then we can see that the number of Eastern bishops present at the Fourth Ecumenical Council did not exceed half of the total number of Eastern bishops, which reached 900 bishops⁴⁵. Therefore, if we take into account solely the number of bishops as a criteria of ecumenicity, it can be said that the Fourth Ecumenical Council was just an Eastern Council, not “Pan-Orthodox”, i.e. with the participation of all orthodox bishops of the world (*oecumene*). In the fifth century the number of bishops from the Western Roman Empire was approximately 1000, 800 bishops were in Africa alone⁴⁶, which meant that in the Fourth Ecumenical Council more than one-third of the episcopate of the entire Church did not participate, a large part of the “*Oecumene*” (οἰκουμένη - inhabited world), was not even represented. If we consider the number of bishops participating in the other ecumenical Councils, we will note the following: 318 bishops participated in Nicaea, the real number being probably much smaller⁴⁷, in Constantinople just 150 bishops participated exclusively from the Eastern part of the Roman Empire⁴⁸, 200 bishops attended the Council in Ephesus, at the fifth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople, according to the signatures, were just 166 bishops, of which only 152 were present⁴⁹, the vast majority of them being from the Eastern part of the Roman Empire, at the sixth Ecumenical Council, we have 165 bishops⁵⁰ and at the Council in Trullo we have 227 signatures on the final documents and probably the same amount of participating bishops, of which 183 were bishops of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople⁵¹. In the

⁴⁵ Based on the documents of Roman administration from the 5th century A.H.M. Jones believes that in the Eastern Empire were in all rather over 1000 units of government, and of these less than 100 were not cities. Arnold H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire: 284 - 602; a Social, Economic, and Administrative Survey. 2* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1964), 712-713. According to this information, R. Price that the number of bishops in the 5th century was around 900. Price, *The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon. 3. Sessions XI - XVI, Documents after the Council*, 196, nota 10.

⁴⁶ Johan Leemans, *Episcopal Elections in Late Antiquity* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2011), 225.

⁴⁷ Eusebius of Caesarea offers the total number of 250 bishops, Eustatius of Antioch said that there were 270 bishops, Athanasius the Great considered the total number to be 300, Ghelasius of Cyzicus said that there were more than 300 bishops, and Hilary of Poitiers gives the number of 318 bishops. This number was considered as the true one due to its symbolic character: the 318 servants of Abraham. Périclès-Pierre Joannou, *Discipline générale antique (IIe-IXe s.)*, 21; Giuseppe Alberigo, *Conciliorum oecumenicorum generaliumque decreta: editio critica*, 5, note 9 more references.

⁴⁸ With the exception of Ascolius of Thessalonica, the bishop who baptized Emperor Theodosius and other clergy from the West, all the bishops participating in the Council were from the Eastern part of the Empire. The Emperor also summoned 36 semi-arian bishops to persuade them to return to Orthodoxy, but they left the city before the Council. Peter L'Huilier, *The Church of the Ancient Councils: The Disciplinary Work of the First Four Ecumenical Councils* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996), 106-107.

⁴⁹ Giuseppe Alberigo, *Conciliorum oecumenicorum generaliumque decreta: editio critica*, 156.

⁵⁰ Giuseppe Alberigo, *Conciliorum oecumenicorum generaliumque decreta: editio critica*, 191.

⁵¹ H. Ohme, *Das Concilium Quinisextum und seine Bischofsliste*, AKG 56 (Berlin-New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1990); Heinz Ohme, *Concilium Quinisextum: Das Konzil Quinisextum*, *Fontes Christiani* 82 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006); R. Flogaus, “Das Concilium Quinisextum (691/2). Neue Erkenntnisse über ein umstrittenes Konzil und seine Teilnehmer”, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 102 (2009): 25-64;

seventh Ecumenical Council 367 bishops participated, plus 132 monks⁵², but the dogmatic Horos of the Council was only signed by 306 bishops⁵³.

Therefore, the number of bishops participating in the ecumenical councils is not a true criterion of ecumenicity⁵⁴. Some local Councils had a larger number of participating bishops than most ecumenical Councils. For example, the Council of Carthage in 419, a general Council of African bishops had a number of 217 participating bishops under the presidency of Bishop Aurelius of Carthage, with the participation of papal delegates under the representation of Bishop Faustinus of Potenza⁵⁵. This number exceeds the number of bishops present in some ecumenical councils. Moreover, some heretical Councils, which claimed ecumenicity but were rejected by the Orthodox Church, had more participating bishops than some of the ecumenical councils, for example the Council from Arminum-Seleucia, held in 359, had 560 bishops that attended the Council, and the Council of Hieria, held in 754, had a number of 338 bishops. Therefore, Kallistos Ware's remark from an article written in 1972 is very appropriate for our problem: "Truth and ecumenicity cannot be determined simply by counting heads"⁵⁶.

The erroneous understanding of the ecclesiological problem of those who consider the lack of participation of all bishops in the Holy and Great Synod as a "deviation" from synodality comes from their misunderstanding of the concept of "ecumenicity" and "synodality"⁵⁷. The Orthodox Church summoned ecumenical councils, but not Councils with ecumenical value⁵⁸. The ecumenical value of a Council was given in time after that Council was considered as normative for the dogmatic and canonical Tradition of the Church. A lot of councils call themselves ecumenical, but in the end they did not have ecumenicity or ecumenical value⁵⁹.

⁵² Spyros Troianos, "Byzantine Canon Law to 1100", in: W. Hartmann, K. Pennington (eds.), *The History of Byzantine and Eastern Canon Law to 1500*, 145.

⁵³ E. Lamberz, *Die Bischofslisten des VII. Ökumenischen Konzils (Nicaeum II)* (München: Verlag der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2004), 15-17, 33-35.

⁵⁴ Kallistos Ware, "The Ecumenical Councils and the Conscience of the Church", *Kanon. Jahrbuch Der Gesellschaft Für Das Recht Der Ostkirchen* II (1974): 219.

⁵⁵ For this Council see: Παύλου Μενεβίσογλου, "Ἡ ἐν Καρθαγένῃ σύνοδος τοῦ 419", *Aksum-Thyateira, Αφιέρωμα εις τον ἀρχιεπίσκοπον Θυατείρων και Μεγάλης Βρεταννίας Μεθόδιον* (Λονδίνον, 1985), 249-274; G. May, "Anklage- und Zeugnisfähigkeit nach der zweiten Sitzung des Konzils zu Karthago vom Jahre 419" *Theologische Quartalschrift CXL*, (1960): 163-205.

⁵⁶ Ware, "The Ecumenical Councils and the Conscience of the Church", 119.

⁵⁷ For a detailed analysis of Councils as manifestation of the Church see: Paul Valliere, 'Соборы как выявление Церкви', *Государство, религия, церковь в России и за рубежом* 1, no. 34 (2016): 10-50.

⁵⁸ For the concept of ecumenicity see: Ware, "The Ecumenical Councils and the Conscience of the Church", 218-219.

⁵⁹ The Council of Constantinople (879-880), held in the Cathedral of Hagia Sophia, described itself in its first canon as: "holy ecumenical council (ἡ ἅγια καὶ οἰκουμενικὴ σύνοδος)": Georgios A. Rhalles, Michael Potles, eds., *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱερῶν κανόνων*, 705; Périclès-Pierre JOANNOU, *Discipline générale antique (Ile-IXe s.)*, 482. The Council of Serdica described itself as ecumenical

The Council of Constantinople (381), summoned as a general Council of the Eastern Roman Empire became the second ecumenical Council. It confirms to us that not the summoning of a council as ecumenical gives ecumenicity to that council, nor its title: "holy and great Council", but the reception in the time of the Council as ecumenical or universal. For example, despite the fact that around 338 the Council of Nicaea was considered to have ecumenical value, it was only after 381 that the full ecumenical character of the Council could be confirmed. This is shown by the fact that the Council of Nicaea did not settle the doctrinal disputes, which developed and branched into other confrontations. In this regard, because of the dogmatic and administrative conflicts, between the first ecumenical council and the Council of Constantinople in 381, 56 local or general councils were summoned in order to solve these doctrinal dissensions⁶⁰.

Is the delegation of a certain number of bishops and the principle of representativeness against the canonical Tradition of the Orthodox Church, as the detractors of the Council of Crete affirm? Do we have any example or canon in the Orthodox Tradition according to which just a small number of bishops can be sent to the Council in order to represent that entire Local Church? Or can a delegation of bishops decide for the entire Local Church that sent them? In the Orthodox Tradition we can find multiple forms of putting synodality into practice. For example, the Pope of Rome did not participate in any ecumenical Council, despite the fact that at the fifth ecumenical Council the Pope was in Constantinople. The participation of the Church of Rome in the ecumenical council was made always by delegation. If we analyse carefully the universal corpus of canons of the Orthodox Church we can see not just that the delegation of a small number of bishops is canonical, but that we have canons that impose this delegation as we can find in the canons of the Council of Carthage (419), invested with ecumenical authority by the second canon of the Council in Trullo.

In the second part of the 18 canon of Carthage we can read:

council. None of these councils are regarded in the history of the Orthodox Church as Ecumenical (Geoffrey William Hugo Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 945). For the Council of 879-880, see: Παύλου Μενεβίσογλου, "Ἡ ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει σύνοδος τοῦ 879 (Ἀγίας Σοφίας)", *Ἐκκλησία καὶ Θεολογία* 6 (1985): 797-816; Spyros Troianos, "Byzantine Canon Law to 1100", in: Kenneth Pennington, *The History of Byzantine and Eastern Canon Law to 1500*, coll. *History of medieval canon law* 4, (CUA Press, 2012), 149-150; Johan Meijer, *A successful council of union. A theological analysis of the Photian synod of 879-880*, Thessalonike, 1975; P. Stéphanou, "Deux concils, deux ecclésiologies? Les concils de Constantinople en 869 et en 879", *Orientalia christiana periodica*, 39 (1973): 363-407; V. Peri, "C'è un concilio ecumenico ottavo?", *Annuario Historiae Conciliorum* 8 (1976): 53-79; Martin Jugie, "Les Actes du Synode photien de Sainte-Sophie (879-880)", *Échos d'Orient*, tome 37, n°189-190 (1938): 89-99.

⁶⁰ Lloyd G. Patterson, "Nikaia to Constantinople: the theological issues", *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 27, no. 4 (1982): 399-400.

“Διὸ βεβαιωτέον ἐστὶν ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ ἁγίᾳ συνόδῳ, ὥστε κατὰ τοὺς ἐν Νίκαια ὄρους, διὰ τὰς ἐκκλησιαστικὰς αἰτίας, αἵτινες πολλάκις πρὸς ὄλεθρον τοῦ λαοῦ παλαιοῦνται, καθ’ ἕκαστον ἐνιαυτὸν σύνοδον συγκαλεῖσθαι, πρὸς ἣν πάντες οἱ τῶν ἐπαρχιῶν τὰς πρῶτας καθέδρας ἐπέχοντες, ἐκ τῶν οἰκείων συνόδων δύο, ἢ καὶ ὄσους ἐπιλέξωνται, ἐπισκόπους τοποτηρητὰς ἀποστείλωσιν ἵνα ἐν τῇ συναχθείσῃ συνελύσει πλήρης εἶναι δυναθῆῃ ἢ αὐθεντία.”⁶¹

“C’est pourquoi il faut réaffirmer dans ce saint synode que, suivant les décisions prises à Nicée, un synode doit être convoqué chaque année pour les questions ecclésiastiques, dont les solutions tirent souvent en longueur au grand dam du peuple chrétien; à ce synode *les titulaires des premiers sièges de la province doivent envoyer comme évêques délégués de leur synode provincial deux évêques de leur choix ou même plus*, afin que l’assemblée réunie puisse avoir une autorité pleine et entière”⁶².

As we can see in the canons of Carthage the principle of representativeness and the delegation of a certain number of bishops (two or more) to a general council are well attested⁶³. This practice is well attested not just in the general canonical Tradition of the Orthodox Church, but in the particular canonical tradition of the Orthodox Autocephalous Churches.

Let us give the example of the Russian Orthodox Church. According to the Statute of the Russian Orthodox Church, chapter III, art. 1:

“The Bishops’ Council shall be the supreme body of the Russian Orthodox Church in doctrinal, canonical, liturgical, pastoral, administrative and other matters concerning both the internal and external life of the Church and in maintaining fraternal relations with other Orthodox Churches and defining the character of relations with non-Orthodox confessions and non-Christian religious communities and the state and secular society”⁶⁴.

The Orthodox Church of Russia participated in the pre-conciliar preparatory process⁶⁵, having a great influence on the drafting of texts⁶⁶. After signing all

⁶¹ Georgios A. Rhalles, Michael Potles, eds., *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱερῶν κανόνων*, vol. 3 (Athena, 1853), 356.

⁶² Périclès-Pierre Joannou, *Discipline générale antique (IIe–IXe s.), 1.2: Les canons des synodes particuliers (IVe–IXe s.)*, Codification canonique orientale, Fonti, Série 1 (Roma: Grottaferrata, 1962), 233.

⁶³ For the use of the words: “τοποτηρησία (delegation)” and “τοποτηρητής (delegate)” see: Pavlos Menevisoglu, *Λεξικόν των ιερῶν κανόνων* (Katerini: Επέκταση, 2013), 310.

⁶⁴ <https://mospat.ru/en/documents/ustav/iii/>

⁶⁵ Andrei Desnitsky, ‘Die Russische Orthodoxe Kirche vor dem Panorthodoxen Konzil’, *Religion und Gesellschaft in Ost und West* 2 (2016): 7–8; Sergei Chapnin, ‘Das Panorthodoxe Konzil ohne Russische Orthodoxe Kirche’, *Religion und Gesellschaft in Ost und West. Die Orthodoxe Kirche nach dem Konzil* 11 (2016): 11–13; Andrey Shishkov, ‘Einige Besonderheiten der Position der Russischen Orthodoxen Kirche im panorthodoxen vorkonziliaren Prozess’, *Una Sancta* 2 (2015): 119–29.

⁶⁶ Nicolas Kazarian, ‘Все православный собор: формирование новой православной геополитики (The Pan-Orthodox Council: Shaping New Orthodox Geopolitics)’, *Государство, религия, церковь в России и за рубежом* 1 (2016): 102–26.

the draft documents at the Synaxis of Primates in January 2016, the Orthodox Church of Russia submitted these texts for debate to the Bishops' Council, the supreme body of the Russian Orthodox Church in matters of doctrinal, canonical, liturgical, pastoral, and in maintaining fraternal relations with other Orthodox Churches, summoned on February 2-3, 2016⁶⁷. At the Bishops' Council were invited 354 bishops from 293 dioceses from Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldavia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Estonia, and "also from far abroad, countries with the dioceses of the Russian Orthodox Church"⁶⁸. More than 320 bishops attended the Bishops' Council. In his report read before the Bishops' Council, Patriarch Kirill highlighted the importance of the agenda⁶⁹ of the future Holy and Great Council, but also of its pan-orthodox character if all the Orthodox Churches attend the Council⁷⁰. In addition, he underlined that the future Council of Crete is not an ecumenical one, but only the reception makes the Council a ecumenical one, and showed that the Council will not take doctrinal decisions nor introduce innovations into the liturgical or canonical life of the Church. Patriarch Kirill's report analyses each document⁷¹. Regarding the document: "Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World", Patriarch Kirill said: "Certainly, no union of the Orthodox Church with the non-Orthodox is even mentioned in the document"⁷². The document "The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World"⁷³ is considered by the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church as "the key document on the

⁶⁷ Nicolas Kazarian, 'Всеpravославный собор: формирование новой православной геополитики (The Pan-Orthodox Council: Shaping New Orthodox Geopolitics)', *Государство, религия, церковь в России и за рубежом* 1 (2016): 102–26; Andrei Desnitsky, 'Die Russische Orthodoxe Kirche vor dem Panorthodoxen Konzil', *Religion und Gesellschaft in Ost und West* 2 (2016): 7–8.

⁶⁸ <https://mospat.ru/en/2016/02/02/news127655/>

⁶⁹ "His Holiness noted, the document affirms for the first time on the pan-Orthodox scale the obligatory character of the Nativity, the Apostles' and the Dormition fasts which were not mentioned, unlike Lent, in ancient sacred canons". <https://mospat.ru/en/2016/02/02/news127681/>

⁷⁰ "The reception by the whole Church of a particular Council has always been gradual and, 'as church history shows, no Council could impose its decisions on the Church if they proved to be rejected by the people of God, if there was no all-church reception of a Council's resolutions'. For this reason, no Ecumenical Council became such only by the fact of its convocation: its real significance became clear only after some, sometimes very long time." <https://mospat.ru/en/2016/02/02/news127677/>

⁷¹ "We do not call Ecumenical the forthcoming Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church. Unlike ancient Ecumenical Councils, it is not called to make decisions on doctrinal issues because such were made long ago and are not subject to revision. It is not called either to introduce any innovation in the liturgical life of the Church and her canonical order." <https://mospat.ru/en/2016/02/02/news127677/>

⁷² <https://mospat.ru/en/2016/02/02/news127683/>

⁷³ For an overview of the document see: Alexander Agadjanian, 'Православный взгляд на современный мир. Контекст, история и смысл соборного документа о миссии Церкви (Orthodox Vision of the Modern World. Context, History and Meaning of the Synodal Document on Church Mission)', *Государство, религия, церковь в России и за рубежом* 1 (2016): 255–79.

agenda of the Holy and Great Council"⁷⁴, but the document on Marriage and its impediments was regarded with scepticism because of the lack of consensus⁷⁵. As a conclusion, Patriarch Kirill pointed out that the great majority of the proposals made by the Russian Orthodox Church in the preconiliar panorthodox process were accepted⁷⁶, thus being pleased with the documents.

At the end of the Bishops' Council on February 3rd, 2016, more than 320 Russian bishops issued and signed the official document of the Orthodox Church of Russia regarding the Holy and Great Council of Crete⁷⁷. In the second paragraph of the document we can read the following:

"2. The Bishops' Council states with satisfaction that all the necessary amendments and additions have been made to the Pan-Orthodox Council's draft documents in accordance with the propositions of the Russian Orthodox Church and other Local Orthodox Churches. 3. The participants of the Bishops' Council witness that in their present form the draft documents of the Holy and Great Council do not violate the purity of the Orthodox faith and do not depart from the canonical tradition of the Church"⁷⁸.

⁷⁴ "His Holiness Patriarch Kirill believes that it is the key document on the agenda of the Holy and Great Council. As he noted, it was the Russian Orthodox Church that made her considerable contribution to drafting the document, since many of the social issues raised in it were already addressed in the "Basis of the Social Concept" and her other important documents."

<https://mospat.ru/en/2016/02/02/news127683/>

⁷⁵ "Nevertheless, the draft document did not suit all the Local Orthodox Churches, and Patriarchates of Antioch and Georgia refused to sign it. The further fate of this document will be determined in the course of inter-Orthodox consultations before the Council."

<https://mospat.ru/en/2016/02/02/news127688/>

⁷⁶ "In the course of preparations for the Pan-Orthodox Council, including those made at the Synaxis of the Primates in January in Chambesy, most of the proposals made by the Russian Orthodox Church were approved, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia stated. For instance, the Council will take place not in Istanbul but in Orthodox Greece, on Crete Island; the issue of calendar, on which there is no consent, will not be considered at all; concerning the issue of the diptychs, the long-stated idea of the Moscow Patriarchate that respect should be shown for the historically established peculiarities of Churches and each of them should have the right to use her own diptych (which is not always the practice, as His Holiness testified) is considered fair. 'Finally, the Synaxis approved the decision we proposed long ago to get all the draft documents of the future Council published for the information of the episcopate, clergy, the religious and all the people of God', Patriarch Kirill stressed, 'this is what we have done immediately, as all the Council's draft documents have already been published on the websites of the Moscow Patriarchate and the Department for External Church Relations. So, everyone can read them.'" <https://mospat.ru/en/2016/02/02/news127697/>

⁷⁷ <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/4367700.html>

⁷⁸ "3. Члены Архиерейского Собора свидетельствуют, что в своем нынешнем виде проекты документов Святого и Великого Собора не нарушают чистоту православной веры и не отступают от канонического предания Церкви." <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/4367700.html>. For the English translation see: <https://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/print90510.htm>

In the same document (paragraph 4) the Bishops' Council charged the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church with the forming of a delegation of the Russian Church for its participation in the Holy and Great Council. So, despite this general decision of the Bishops' Council, the supreme body of the Russian Orthodox Church, the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church, "consisted of the Chairman – the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia (or the Locum Tenens), nine permanent members and five temporary members summoned from among the diocesan bishops" (Chapter V, art. 3 of the Statute) decided on June 13, 2016, not to participate in the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church⁷⁹. How is it possible that the decision of almost all of the bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church be overturned by the decision of 15 bishops? If we consider the principle of representativeness and the delegation of a certain number of bishops for participation in a Council (here the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church) as uncanonical and against the Tradition of the Church, as the detractors of the Council of Crete said, then the decisions of the Council of Carthage and the decisions of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church should be considered as uncanonical. But if we cannot consider those decisions as uncanonical, it means that the delegation of bishops and the principle of representativeness are canonical realities in total accordance with the Orthodox tradition of the Church and valid manifestations of synodality.

The Council of Crete: a Council without laymen and monastics?

Another accusation raised by the detractors of the Council was that the Council of Crete was exclusively a Council of bishops, emphasizing the fact that clergy, monastics and laymen were totally bypassed in the preconiliar preparatory process and in the sessions of the Holy and Great Council⁸⁰. Some of the theologians even asked for a total representativeness not just of men and women, but of all social categories. The ecumenical council is an universal expression of synodality with general doctrinal, canonical and eschatological value. It is a special event in the history of the Church, but is based on synodality developed at local, regional and universal levels. In the history of the Church we can find many types of council, from mixed ones, where the laity and clergy were involved with a consultative vote, but never with a deliberative vote⁸¹, to councils of bishops (σύνοδος τῶν

⁷⁹ <https://mospat.ru/en/2016/06/13/news132897/>

⁸⁰ Athanasios Anastasiou, 'Participarea clerului și a poporului. Un Sinod Panortodox fără pliroima ortodoxă', in *"Sfântul și Marele Sinod" (Creta, 2016). Între providență și eșec*, ed. Tatiana Petrache (Oradea: Editura Astradrom, 2016), 135–46.

⁸¹ Liviu Stan, *Mirenii in Biserică: importanța elementului mirean in Biserică și participarea lui la exercitarea puterii bisericești. Studiu canonic - istoric* (Sibiu, 1939), 117. For the German translation see: Liviu Stan, *Die Laien in der Kirche: eine historisch-kirchenrechtliche Studie zur Beteiligung der Laien an der Ausübung der Kirchengewalt* (Ergon, 2011).

ἐπισκόπων), as the 37 apostolic canons confirm and impose it as a rule in the Church⁸², where laity and clergy were represented by their bishop⁸³. According to Orthodox synodality the bishop represents in the council of bishops his entire Church, because his participation is based on synodality at the local level, where clergy and laity are present. As regarding the first ecumenical Council, Socrates said in the first book of his *Church History* that at the Council of Nicaea: “many of the laity were also present, who were practiced in the art of reasoning, and each eager to advocate the cause of his own party”⁸⁴. Over time, the participation of laity and clergy in the Councils fade away, the only laymen present in the Councils were members of Byzantine bureaucracy and aristocracy⁸⁵. Coming back to the Council of Crete, if we analyse the lists of participants in the Pre-conciliar Pan-orthodox Conferences and in the Holy and Great Council we can observe the following. For example, in the 4th Pre-Conciliar Pan-orthodox Conference held in Chambesy (June 6-13, 2009) participated 41 delegates of the Autocephalous Churches, including 22 bishops, 3 archimandrites, 8 priests, 8 laymen⁸⁶. In the 5th Pan-Orthodox Pre-Conciliar Conference in Chambesy (October 10-17, 2015) participated 49 delegates of the Local Churches, including 27 bishops, 6 archimandrites, 7 priests, 1 archdeacon, 7 laymen theologians, 1 monk, all as counsellors of bishops with the right to speak, debate and vote⁸⁷. Regarding the number of members of the Holy and Great

⁸² D. Cummings, trans., *The Rudder (Pedalion) of the Metaphorical Ship of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of Orthodox Christians*, “λζ. Δεύτερον τοῦ ἔτους σύνοδος γινέσθω τῶν ἐπισκόπων, καὶ ἀνακρινέτωσαν ἀλλήλως τὰ δόγματα τῆς εὐσεβείας, καὶ τὰς ἐμπιπούσας ἐκκλησιαστικὰς ἀντιλογίας διαλύετωσαν ἅπαξ μὲν, τῇ τετάρτῃ ἑβδομάδι τῆς Πεντηκοστῆς· δεύτερον δέ, Ὑπερβερεταίου δωδεκάτῃ”.

⁸³ For the ministry of laity in the Church see: George Nahas, “The Pan-Orthodox Council: Suggestions for a Church on the Move”, *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 60, no. 1–2 (2016): 299–305; John Chrissyavgis, “The Status and Ministry of the Laity in the Orthodox Church”, *Sobornost* 17, no. 1 (January 1, 1995): 82–84; Anton C. Vrame, *One Calling in Christ: The Laity in the Orthodox Church* (Inter Orthodox Press, 2005); N. Karmiris, *The Status and Ministry of the Laity in the Orthodox Church* (Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1994); Hieronymus L. Kotsonis, “Die Stellung der Laien innerhalb des kirchlichen Organismus”, in: Panagiotis Bratsiotis, *Die orthodoxe Kirche in griechischer Sicht* (Stuttgart, 1970), 298–322; Staikos Michael, “Die Stellung der Laien in der Orthodoxen Kirche”, *Theologia*, 61 (1999): 73–95; Bartholomaios Archondonis, “The Participation of the Laity in the Synod of the Greek-Byzantine Church”, *Kanon* 3 (1977): 33–38. Anapliotis Anargyros, “Die Teilnahme der Laien an der Kirchenverwaltung der Orthodoxen Kirche am Beispiel des Russischen, Rumänischen und Bulgarischen Patriarchates”, in: Wilhelm Rees, *Unverbindliche Beratung oder kollegiale Steuerung? Kirchenrechtliche Überlegungen zu synodalen Vorgängen* (Freiburg im Breisgau 2014), 231–245.

⁸⁴ “Συμπαρήσαν δὲ λαϊκοὶ πολλοὶ διαλεκτικῆς ἔμπειροι, ἐν ἑκατέρῳ μέρει συνηγορεῖν προθυμοῦμενοι.” *Patrologia graeca cursus completus*, vol. 67, 64.

⁸⁵ Bartholomaios Archondonis, “The Participation of the Laity in the Synod of the Greek-Byzantine Church”, *Kanon* 3 (1977): 33–38;

⁸⁶ Secrétariat pour la préparation du Saint et Grand Concile de L’Église Orthodoxe, ed., *Ive Conférence panorthodoxe préconciliaire. Actes (6-13 juin 2009)*, Synodika, XII (Chambésy-Genève: Centre orthodoxe du Patriarcat Œcuménique, 2015), 9–10.

⁸⁷ Secrétariat pour la préparation du Saint et Grand Concile de L’Église Orthodoxe, ed., *E’ Προσυνοδική Πανορθόδοξος Διάσκεψις, Σαμπεζύ Γενεύης, 10-17 Ὀκτωβρίου 2015*, Synodika, XIII (Chambésy-Genève: Centre orthodoxe du Patriarcat Œcuménique, 2016), 9–10.

Council, as we said, there were 163 bishops and 2 consultant bishops. Observing this pre-conciliar practice of the Pan-Orthodox Conferences, the *Organization and Working Procedure of the Council* provided the possibility that the delegations of each Autocephalous Church can be accompanied by six special consultants and three assistants, monks, clergy or laymen⁸⁸, without the right to vote or to speak during the plenary sessions of the Council. However, they were offered, according to the *Organization and Working Procedure*, the right to speak in the Special Commissions and during the sessions of the Secretariat of the Council⁸⁹. Therefore, the number of official consultants of all delegations sent to the Holy and Great Council was 60, including 20 archimandrites, 19 priests, 6 deacons, 13 laymen, i.e. 11 men and 2 women and 2 nuns⁹⁰. An impressive number of stewards and

⁸⁸ Art. 3.2 from the Procedure: “The delegations may be accompanied by special consultants—clergy, monastics or laypeople—but their number may not exceed six (6). Invitations are also extended to three (3) assistants (stewards) for each autocephalous Orthodox Church.”

⁸⁹ Art. 3.3 from the Procedure: “The special consultants may attend the Council’s plenary sessions—without the right to speak or to vote—and are expected to assist the Council’s Secretariat or the Council’s Committees, with the right to speak and exercise special functions assigned to them.

⁹⁰ As Archimandrite participated: 1. Very Reverend Archimandrite Tikhon, Abbot of Stavronikita Monastery of Mount Athos; 2. Very Reverend Archimandrite Bartholomew Samaras, Chief-Secretary of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and Secretary to the Holy and Great Council’s President; 3. Archimandrite Paisios (Larentzakis); 4. Archimandrite Peter (Parginos); 5. Archimandrite Christophoros (Mousa); 6. Archimandrite Damianos (Panou); 7. Archimandrite Nikodemos (Skrettas); 8. Archimandrite Chrysostomos (Nasis); 9. Archimandrite Ieronymos (Delioglou); 10. Archimandrite Sava (Janjic), of the Visoki Dečani monastery; 11. Archimandrite Nicodemus (Kosovits), of the Krka monastery; 12. Archimandrite Ioannis (Ioannou), Igumen of Monastery of St. Barnabas; 13. Archimandrite Benedict (Ioannou), Director of St. Barnabas Seminary; 14. Archimandrite Papagrigorios (Ioannidis); 15. Archimandrite Gregory (Mousouroulis); 16. Archimandrite Augustinos (Kkaras); 17. Archimandrite Ignatius (Sotiriades), Secretary, Inter-Orthodox Relations; 18. Archimandrite Cherubim (Moustakas), Assistant, Inter-Orthodox Relations; 19. Archimandrite Seraphim (Šemjatovský); 20. Archimandrite Andreas. As priests participated: 21. Reverend Protopresbyter of the Throne Ecumenical Konstantinos Myron (Germany); 22. Protopresbyter Athenodoros Papaevropiadis; 23. Protopresbyter Joseph Kwame Labi Ayete; 24. Protopresbyter Georgios Dragas; 25. Protopresbyter-Staurophor Dr. Zoran Krstic; 26. Protopresbyter Gaja Gajic; 27. Pr. prof. dr. Viorel Ioniță; 28. Pr. Ștefan Ababei; 29. Pr. Michael Țița; 30. Pr. Patriciu Dorin Vlaicu; 31. Pr. Nicolae Dascălu; 32. Protopresbyter Adamantios Augoustidis, General Vicar of the Holy Archdiocese of Athens, Associate Professor of Theology, University of Athens; 33. Protopresbyter Basil Kalliakmanis, Professor of Theology School of Thessaloniki; 34. Archpriest Anatol Szymaniuk; 35. Archpriest Andrzej Kuźma; 36. Protopresbyter Jani Trebicka; 37. Father Anastasios Bendo; 38. Archpriest Milan Gerka, Secretary of the Holy Council; 39. Archpriest Michal Švajko; As deacons participated: 40. Deacon Emmanuel Kamanua; 41. Deacon Cyprian Kountouris; 42. Deacon Michael Nicholaou; 43. Archdeacon Paweł Tokajuk; 44. Archdeacon Maxim Durila; 45. Deacon Kiril Sarkissian. As laymen participated: 46. Mr. Panteleimon Vingas, Archon Grand Chartophylax of the Holy and Great Church of Christ (Constantinople); 47. Dr. Panagiotis Tzoumerkas, Professor, University Ecclesiastical Academy of Thessaloniki; 48. Professor Theodoros Yiangou; 49. Mr. Vladan Tatalović, Assistant Professor at Faculty of Orthodox Theology, Belgrade University; 50. Dr. Ionuț Mavrichi, Patriarch Consultant; 51. Mr. Michael Spyrou, Secretary of the Holy Council; 52. Mr. George Filias, Professor of Theology, University of Athens; 53. Mr. Jaroslaw Charkiewicz, journalist; 54. Mr. Jerzy Betelejko, interpreter; 55. Mr. Piro Kondili; 56. Dr. Dion (Vasil) Tushi.

assistants from each delegation is added to this number. Although insufficiently represented, it is worth mentioning the participation⁹¹ of 6 women⁹² in the Holy and Great Council, four of whom were official consultants of bishops and two as assistants in the official delegations. Even the Press Officer of the Holy and Great Council was a woman: Angela Karageorgou. Although we did not have so many women participating in the Holy and Great Council, it should be noted that there were no women at any ecumenical council⁹³, except for the Seventh Ecumenical Council, summoned by Irene, Emperor of Constantinople, as she called herself⁹⁴. Having this in mind, we cannot say that clergy, monastics and laymen were bypassed in the preconciliar preparatory process and in the sessions of the Holy and Great Council. By reading the Acts of the Pre-conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conferences we can see the great role of the laymen theologians that they had in the process of preparation of the Holy and Great Council.

Conclusions

The erroneous understanding of the ecclesiological problem of those who consider the lack of participation of all bishops in the Holy and Great Synod as a "deviation" from synodality comes from their misunderstanding of the concept of "ecumenicity" and "synodality".

The number of bishops participating in the ecumenical councils is not a true criterion of ecumenicity and the delegation of bishops and the principle of representativeness are canonical realities in total accordance with the Orthodox tradition of the Church and valid manifestations of synodality.

In the Council of Crete 163 participated bishops as well as clergy, monastics and laity, the entire Church being represented in the Holy and Great Council.

⁹¹ For the participation of women in the Holy and Great Council see: Carrie Frederick Frost, S et al., 'Women and the Great and Holy Orthodox Council', in *Toward the Holy and Great Council. Theological Reflections*, ed. Nathanael Symeonides (New York: Department of Inter-Orthodox Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations, 2016), 133–36.

⁹² In the Holy and Great Council participated the following women: 1. Dr. Elizabeth Prodromou, Professor (USA); 2. Mrs. Sonila Rëmbeci (former member of the Presidency, and of the Central Council of the CEC, 2009-2013); 3. Very Reverend Sister Theoxeni, Abbess of the Holy Patriarchal and Stavropegic Monastery of the Life-Giving Spring (Chrysopigi), Chania; 4. Nun Rakela Dervishi. 5. Ms Iveta Stacova (interpreter); 6. Rodi Kratsa-Tsagaropoulou Vice-president of the European Parliament. Natallia Vasilevich, 'Die Stille Der Frauen Am Heiligen Und Großen Konzil', *Religion Und Gesellschaft in Ost Und West. Die Orthodoxe Kirche Nach Dem Konzil* 11 (2016): 22–24 and the interview: <https://www.goarch.org/en/-/council-included-participation-by-women>.

⁹³ Carmel E. McEnroy, *Guests in Their Own House: The Women of Vatican II* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011), 51.

⁹⁴ Dominique Barbe, *Irène de Byzance: la femme empereur* (Perrin, 1990). For the Romanian translation, see: Dominique Barbe, *Irina, împărăatul Bizanțului*, trans. Ion Doru Brana (Bucharest: Nemira, 2013).

Regarding the issues that I have raised, the Council of Crete is in total accordance with the Canonical Tradition of the Orthodox Church.

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