

Just before the Holy and Great Council

Metropolitan of Nafpaktos and St Vlassios

HIEROTHEOS

Translated into English, original text (in Greek):

Αίγο πρὶν τὴν Ἀγία καὶ Μεγάλη Σύνοδο

We are approaching the time when the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Churches is to be held in Crete to discuss the six texts which have been prepared in Preconciliar conferences, and to give a message of unity among the Orthodox Churches.

Many texts have been written recently by experts and non-experts, by those who are competent and those who are not, on this great event. Unfortunately, as I have pointed out in another text, in some of them we see that theology is mixed with politics, or rather, various ecclesiastical elements get involved knowingly or unknowingly in the aspirations of politicians, and politicians, too, use various ecclesiastical elements in order to implement their plans through the Church.

Of course, the Council of 1872 in Constantinople condemned racialism and nationalism as a heresy, but unfortunately racialism and nationalism use the Orthodox Church as a vehicle with varying results.

At present most of the discussion is about whether all fourteen Orthodox Churches will participate in the Council and what the impact of the absence of some Churches will be, and not so much about the content of the texts and the corrections that ought to be made.

By a decision of the Standing Holy Synod and the Hierarchy of the Church of Greece, I will be a member of this Council and Great Council and I am possessed by a high sense of responsibility to the Orthodox tradition and to himself. I am seriously concerned about the decisions that this Council will take and first and foremost about what will happen next.

This is said from the point of view that Councils were eventually approved by the theological consciousness of the Church. Just as the organism of the human body keeps the elements it needs from food and discards unnecessary elements, the same thing happens in the divine and human organism of the Church, since the Church over time confirms the truth of something or rejects it.

As a member of the Holy and Great Council, I would like to say something before the start of the proceedings. I will not mention here the reasons that led me to accept this proposal by the Hierarchy of the Church of Greece to take part in the Holy and Great Council, which I shall do later, but I will articulate some of my thoughts.

1. The self-awareness of the Council

With regret I hear and read some of the views expressed that, namely, the Holy and Great Council is the first Great Council to take place in the second millennium of Christianity. Others claim that it is the first Great Council since the 'Schism' which occurred in 1054, whereas the excommunication of the Church of Old Rome took place in 1054 with the introduction of the filioque. Still others say that the Holy and Great Council will convene after an interval of 1200 or 1300 years, that is to say, after 787, when the Seventh Ecumenical Council convened, and others dare say officially too that it will be the Eighth Ecumenical Council!

The basis of this mindset is that the Orthodox Church has supposedly remained in a state of spiritual hypnosis or spiritual dementia, since 787, and that all this time it has been a ‘dead’, ‘sleeping’, ‘museum’ Church.

Such a conception is not only an insult to the holy Fathers of the Church who appeared and taught during the second millennium, but it also undermines the Orthodox Church itself, which is a continuous Synod and is the living body of Christ.

Ecumenical Councils mainly dealt with dogmatic definitions and administrative and pastoral rules (Canons), as seen from their Proceedings. On the other hand, when reading the texts that are being elaborated for final approval by the Great and Holy Council, we cannot distinguish the dogmatic definitions from the Canons. Assuming that individual paragraphs of the text are considered to be Canons, thorough discussion is required on whether the ‘Canons’ are in agreement with the canonical tradition of the Church or whether they overturn the basis and heart of Church Canon Law.

The problem, though, is that if this Holy and Great Council is considered, wrongly in my opinion, to be a continuation of the Seventh Ecumenical Council, then serious violence is being done to Orthodox truth. Because during this time Great and Ecumenical Councils and other glorious Councils of the Patriarchs of the East – that is to say, of the whole Orthodox Church at that time – were held, which discussed serious issues, and addressed important theological and ecclesiastical issues.

I have read that some people have used the views of the late dogmatic theologian Ioannis Karmiris to support views which are presented in the texts put forward for final approval by the Primates of the Orthodox Church. It would be advisable to study the two volumes of the book *The Dogmatic and Symbolic Monuments of the Orthodox Catholic Church* to see the pulse and vitality of the Orthodox Catholic Church until the nineteenth century. It finds there that until the nineteenth century there is basically one single language in ecclesiastical texts, and that differentiation began in the early twentieth century.

I would like to mention some important Councils after the Seventh Ecumenical Council, which are unfortunately ignored.

The Council of 879-80 under Photios the Great is a great Ecumenical Council, which was convened by Emperor Basil I. The representatives of the then Orthodox Pope were present and everyone accepted its decisions. The Council discussed the two types of ecclesiology, Eastern and Western, and the Eastern ecclesiology prevailed. It also pronounced on the primacy of the Pope and the heresy of the filioque.

There were Councils between 1341 and 1368, particularly the Council of 1351, which was convened by Emperor John VI Kantakouzenos in the presence of St Gregory Palamas and ruled that the energy of God is uncreated and that the Light of Christ which shone on Mount Thabor was uncreated. It condemned the heresy of Barlaam and Akindynos that the uncreated essence is identified with uncreated energy, what is known as the *actus purus*, and that God communicates with creation and man through created energies. So in reality the Council of 1351 condemns scholastic theology, which to a large extent is valid to this day in ‘Roman-Catholicism’.

The Council of 1484, with the participation of Patriarchs Simeon of Constantinople, Gregory of Alexandria, Dorotheos of Antioch and Joachim of Jerusalem called itself Ecumenical. It annulled the unifying Council of Ferrara-Florence and issued a Service, composed by Patriarch Simeon of Constantinople, for those returning to the Orthodox Church from the ‘the Latin heresies’. Although this Synod established that the Latins should return to the Orthodox Church by means of a written declaration and Chrismation, because at that time the standard ‘for Baptism’ still prevailed, the Service composed for the return of Latins to the Orthodox Church clearly refers to the heresy of the Latins, the ‘disgraceful and alien doctrines of the Latins’, and states that those returning to the Orthodox Church should “avoid completely the assemblies of the Latins in their churches” (obviously meaning the Council of Ferrara-Florence).

In this Service there is reference to Latins and to alien dogmas, among which the familiar filioque, i.e. procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son, and the heresy of the actus purus, namely, that uncreated energy is identified with the uncreated essence in God and therefore God communicates with the world through created energies.

The Council of 1590, which called itself an ‘Ecumenical Council’, and its continuation, the Council of 1683, which was characterised as a ‘Holy and Great Council’ are important. Both are Councils of the Patriarchs of the East, and they decided to assent to the elevation of the Church of Moscow to the honour and dignity of a Patriarchate, which had been previously granted by the Ecumenical Patriarch in 1589 by the relevant Patriarchal Chrysobull or Tome.

The Conciliar decision in 1756 by the three Patriarchs, namely, Cyril of Constantinople, Matthew of Alexandria and Parthenios of Jerusalem, refers to the rebaptism of Westerners who enter in the Orthodox Church.

Although this decision did not last for long, because in practice the Church reverted to the decision of the Council of 1484, it has never been repealed by another Conciliar decision.

It is well-known that the topic of ‘Economy in the Orthodox Church’, referring to the reception of heretics and schismatics, was on the agenda of the Holy and Great Council, as is clear from the Preparatory Committee meeting in 1971 in Geneva. But ultimately it was removed from the agenda of the Council and the Holy and Great Council has not been given the possibility of ruling officially on this issue. So the question is: Why was this issue included in the agenda of the Holy and Great Council, in order that there might be a discussion with theological arguments on the validity and existence, or the invalidity and non-existence, of the Baptism of heretics, which emerges to be dealt with in an indirect manner?

The Conciliar decision of the Patriarchs of the East in 1848, signed by the Patriarchs of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem with their Synods, calls ‘Papism’ a heresy, compares it with Arianism and condemns the basic Latin non-Orthodox teachings, such as the filioque, the primacy and the infallibility of the Pope, as well as other false beliefs related to baptism and the sacraments.

The Council of 1872 in Constantinople condemned racialism and nationalism in ecclesiastical life “that is to say racial discriminations and nationalistic conflicts, jealousies and dissensions in Christ’s Church.” Racialism and nationalism are “foreign” to the tradition of the Orthodox Church, a “modernist virus”. It is significant that in the epilogue of the Conciliar declaration there is a prayer to our Lord Jesus Christ to keep the Church “immaculate and untouched by any modernist virus, firmly established on the foundations of the Apostles and Prophets.”

I have mentioned a few of the ‘Ecumenical’, ‘Holy and Great’ Councils – there are others too – that were convened after the Seventh Ecumenical Council and until the nineteenth century, and have been accepted by the consciousness of the Church. Indeed, the decisions of the Great Council of 1351 in the time of St Gregory Palamas have been included in the ‘Synodikon of Orthodoxy’, which is read on the First Sunday of Lent, and have been introduced into hymns used in worship. This represents the strongest proof that the Council of 1351 has been accepted by the consciousness and judgment of the Church itself as Ecumenical.

One should also mention here the very important **three answers by the Ecumenical Patriarch Jeremiah II (1578, 1581) to the Lutheran theologians** of the University of Tübingen. These are remarkable answers sent by Patriarch Jeremiah in cooperation with Orthodox clergy and laity, among them Damascene the Studite, Metropolitan of Nafpaktos and Arta, who is counted among the saints.

In these important letters of reply, on the one hand, the Orthodox faith is presented, and, on the other hand, the beliefs of the Protestants are called into question. In these replies the Orthodox faith is expressed on the basis of the Faith and Tradition of the Church, without resorting to the teaching of Scholasticism that began with the Middle Ages and

Christology, the filioque, the man's free will, predestination, justification, the number of sacraments and how are performed, the infallibility of the Church and the Ecumenical Councils, worship, invocation of the saints, icons and their relics, fasting, and various ecclesiastical traditions.

These letters of reply are considered important texts. They are mentioned in the Proceedings of the local Council that took place in 1672 in Jerusalem under Dositheos, and they are ranked among the symbolic books of the Orthodox Catholic Church.

After all these I wonder how it is possible for all these important Councils to be put aside for the sake of the Holy and Great Council which is to be held in Crete? How can some claim that the upcoming Council is the Council of the second millennium? How is it possible and permissible to "trample underfoot" the entire Orthodox Ecclesiastical Tradition of 1200 years? Who directed journalists to speak of the Council of the millennium? do some journalists who are not even particularly involved in Church reporting know this?

This question is very important. That is why I consider it necessary, at least in the Message that will be decided upon and published by the Holy and Great Council, that these and other Councils should be mentioned, to show the continuous action of the Holy Spirit in the Church. We cannot play with ecclesiastical and doctrinal issues and the whole ecclesiastical tradition.

Therefore, to say that the upcoming Holy and Great Council will be a Council convening after 1200 years is misleading. In fact it bypasses all these Great Councils, and ultimately ends in a "betrayal" of the Orthodox Tradition. Perhaps the aim is to create a new ecclesiology.

If there is no such aim, the Message of the Holy and Great Council ought definitely to contain a reference to these Holy and Great Councils of the second millennium. Otherwise this suspicion will be confirmed.

2. Western Christianity

It is known to those who follow Church matters and read Church history that in 1054 Pope Sergius IV officially used the Creed with the addition that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son (filioque). For that reason Patriarch Sergius II deleted the Pope from the diptychs of the Eastern Orthodox Church, so there has been excommunication since then. Thus a large part of Christianity was cut off from the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

Then, in the early sixteenth century, from this Western Christianity that was cut off from the Orthodox Church other Christian groups broke away and cut themselves off. They were termed Reformers or Protestants, and many other names. Thus, the arbitrary actions of the Pope resulted in the secession of Western Christianity from the Church, but also to a further division among Western Christians themselves.

What is called Western Christianity is a sick, heretical system, having seceded from the Orthodox tradition of the first millennium. Of course, when we speak of Western Christianity, we do not mean the ordinary Christians who believe in Christ, pray and study the Bible. We mean the doctrinal teaching of Christian communities and Confessions. Similarly, when we speak of the Orthodox Church, we do not mean all Orthodox Christians, although baptised, may be atheists or indifferent, but the teaching as recorded in the decisions of Local and Ecumenical Councils.

Thus the doctrinal and confessional system of Western Christianity is largely sick and has even distorted Western society. The Latins ('Roman Catholics') have been changed for the worse by scholasticism, and the Protestants have been changed for the worse by some scholastic views that they inherited and the puritanism that they introduced, as well as by the study of Holy Scripture without the necessary interpretations of the Fathers, so they fall into various errors.

Scholasticism, which was developed in the West by the theologians of the Franks, mainly between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, blended the Christian faith with philosophy – what is known as the *analogia entis*. Some scholastic theologians used the theories of Plato and the Neoplatonists, others the theories of Aristotle, and some mixed both together. The main point is that they developed the view that scholastic theology is superior to Patristic theology and has surpassed it.

Protestant puritanism refuted the arbitrary views of scholasticism and reached the other extreme, while retaining some scholastic views, such as absolute predestination, the theory of propitiation of divine justice by the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross, and the study of the Bible using the *analogia fidei*.

In any case, both these Western traditions were influenced by the feudal system brought by the Franks into Europe. They regarded God as a “feudal lord” who is insulted by man’s sin, so He punishes man, who needs to propitiate God in order to return!

I do not want to analyse this further, but I would like to highlight the fact that all subsequent ideological currents that developed in the West, such as humanism, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, romanticism, German idealism, existentialism, psychologism, etc. were a reaction for different reasons to Western scholasticism, which was based on the omnipotence of reason and on moralism.

In Western theology we observe many theological distortions, which are related to the currents mentioned above. Let me recall some of them. God is characterised by selfish eudemonism. He directs the world through cruel means. He is the cause of death. He is insulted by man’s sin. Sin is considered as a reversal of the order that exists in creation. God predestined who will be saved and who will be condemned. Christ, through the sacrifice on the Cross, satisfied divine justice. The Pope is the representative of God on earth. The Pope has priesthood, which he transmits to the other bishops, and he is infallible. Penitents are required to satisfy God’s justice. The teaching of paradise and hell is materialistic, and so on.

In theology these views are called distortions and heresies, which, however, have also affected the social sphere. All theological deviations have social consequences as well. This explains the Vatican State, as well as the identification of Christian and secular authority in some Protestants. The regime imposed by Calvin in Geneva is a typical case of this mentality.

What has been mentioned here is not fundamentalism, conservatism or fanaticism. One should read the works of sociologists who interpret Western man following the influence exerted by scholasticism and puritanism.

I can recommend the study of the views of the famous sociologist **Max Weber** as recorded in his book: **Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism**. There one will find how Max Weber describes precisely and vividly the anxiety of the Western Christian to learn whether he is predestined by God to be saved. This is an inexorable dilemma of whether someone is “elect or condemned”. For, if he is not predestined, then he does not need to struggle in his life to be a good Christian. And eventually he will learn how Western Christianity developed the spirit of capitalism, with absolute predestination, pious individualism, Protestant asceticism, utilitarianism of professions, and so on.

Orthodox teaching never succumbed to such distortions. It preserved the teaching of the Prophets, the Apostles and the Fathers, not only of the first millennium, but of the second millennium as well, such as St Simeon the Theologian, St Gregory Palamas, St Mark of Ephesus and all the philokalic ascetic Fathers of the Church. Our recent saints, like St Paisios Velichkovsky, who brought a renaissance in Romania and Russia, St Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, St Kosmas Aitolos, St Porphyrios of Kavsokalyvia, St Paisios the Athonite and many others, all matured within this theology.

At the same time, it preserved the teaching of the Fathers, which brought the teaching of the Church to the masses of the

is a major problem. Disregarding the theology of the Church expressed through these saints, in order to find points in common with Western Christianity is a betrayal of the faith. I cannot find another milder characterisation.

Moreover, with this sort of ossified Christianity, cut off from the Holy Fathers of the second millennium, we do not help the Western Christians themselves, who are disappointed with the Western Christian tradition in which they grew up and are looking for the hesychastic tradition. Those Western Christians who become Orthodox are inspired by the Philokalia of the Neptic Fathers, the writings of St Silouan the Athonite and the teaching of the Fathers of Mount Athos. We cannot disappoint them all with insipid, tasteless and anaemic texts.

3. Church – Orthodoxy – Eucharist

The Orthodox faith is not abstract and does not remain in the libraries of churches and monasteries. It is the life of the Church, which is experienced in the sacraments, chanted in the holy services, partaken of in the Divine Eucharist, revealed in prayer and the ascetic struggle. This ‘theology of events’ is recorded in the confessional documents and decisions of Local and Ecumenical Councils.

There is no divergence between the sacraments and confession, prayer and daily life, the Divine Liturgy and Synodical conferences. The *lex credendi* is very closely linked with the *lex orandi*. If there is a split between the two, between doctrine and worship, this constitutes a deviation from the truth. This means that every Council decision which contrasts with the theology of the prayers of the Sacraments and of the hymns is an anti-Orthodox decision.

In an important study entitled *Church, Orthodoxy and Eucharist in Saint Irenaeus* (see Atanasije Jevtic, *Christianity at its beginning and end*, Editions Goulandris-Horn Foundation, Athens 1983, p. 109), the former Bishop of Herzegovina and Zahumlje, Atanasije Jevtic, records the link that exists between the Church, Orthodoxy, and the Eucharist as analysed by St Irenaeus Bishop of Lyons.

Let me recall that St Irenaeus is an Apostolic Father who lived in Lyons during a critical period (140-202) when the Apostles had gone and the heretic Gnostics had appeared, arguing that they had received an “occult knowledge” and “hidden mysteries”. Thus, St Irenaeus taught the close relationship that exists between Church, Orthodoxy and the Divine Eucharist.

According to St Irenaeus, the Church preserves the faith of the Apostles. “The apostolic tradition is guarded in the Churches by their successors, the presbyters.” St Irenaeus does not use the term “Church” or “Churches” for the Gnostics, only the word “synagogue” and “place of teaching”. He also urges the presbyters to obey the successors of the Apostles, who have “the secure gift of truth” and he characterises those who deviate from them “as heretics and people with corrupt judgment, or as those who rip (the Church) apart and are proud and insolent.”

Then, the Church is closely associated with Orthodoxy, the true faith. St Irenaeus writes: “The truth preached in the Church” and “the apostolic tradition in the Church and the preaching of the truth.”

Also, the Church and Orthodoxy are linked to the Divine Eucharist. St Irenaeus writes: “Our opinion agrees with the Eucharist, and the Eucharist in turn validates our opinion.” The Eucharistic prayers confess the mystery of the divine Economy, that is to say, of the incarnation of the Son and Word of God, and the mystery of the salvation of man.

Interpreting all these points, Bishop Atanasije Jevtic observes:

“According to the testimony of Irenaeus, in the awareness of the Church of his time there could not be separation or independence between the Church, the Eucharist and Orthodoxy, because neither the Church exists without Orthodoxy and the Eucharist, nor Orthodoxy without the Church and the Eucharist, nor again the Eucharist without the Church and Orthodoxy.”

and simultaneously find themselves “outside the Church” so, vice versa, those outside the Church are situated outside Orthodoxy (outside the truth) and outside the true Eucharist pleasing to God (communion in Christ’s body) as long as the faith is the expression of true tradition and life of the Church and of its true eucharistic practice in assembly.”

This truth has some remarkable consequences. Some of them will be noted here.

a) “The persistence of the Orthodox Catholic Church in the true faith and true practice and the true assembly of the Apostles and their true disciples, and as a consequence of this, the non-recognition of communion with any ‘church’ outside the one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Orthodox Church is the best proof of the survival until the present of that same awareness of the Church as Irenaeus, and generally the whole ancient church, possessed.”

b) “All the Ecumenical and local Councils of the Orthodox Catholic Church had this as their ultimate aim: the keeping of the apostolic tradition in the faith, life and worship of the Church, and the exclusion from ecclesiastical communion in the Eucharist of those who distort the redeeming “rule of truth”, which the Church received from the Apostles and their genuine disciples, the Fathers. This way the salvation of God’s creatures, human beings, is safeguarded.

For this reason, from the first centuries to this day, the Orthodox constantly underline that there is no salvation outside the Church, that is, outside unity with Christ and the communion of people and local Churches in the true and correct faith, in charismatic practice, in the eucharistic assembly and communion, and in the grace of the Spirit and His gifts. Salvation is union and communion with Christ, and this communion is realised only in the body of Christ which is the Church, particularly in the eucharistic communion of those in every local Church who have the right belief in Christ and are sincerely united around the Bishops as bearers of the ‘apostolic successions’ in the Churches.”

c) This “apostolic succession” of bishops is a succession of this very fullness of ecclesiastical communion of the local Churches in the world with Christ, and between those who share in the true faith, in the true and saving teaching, and in the grace of God’s Spirit and in the Body and Blood of Christ. The apostolic succession, according to Irenaeus, is not a succession of “ordination” alone, but a succession and continuity of the whole Economy of God for mankind, that is to say, of the whole substance and life of the Church, the whole of its fullness and universal mission.

d) “In our ‘ecumenistic’ but not rightly believing era, the theological and ecclesiastical testimony of Hieromartyr Irenaeus, Bishop of the ancient Church –in which the awareness of the indivisible unity of the Apostolic Catholic and Orthodox and Eucharistic character of God’s Churches dispersed throughout the world prevail – always means for us Orthodox the living tradition of the mystery of the Church and its unity, from which we must not depart and which we may not change. We Orthodox do not change our traditional consciousness concerning the Church, because this would mean changing the Church, in other words, breaking up the historical unity of the Church of the Godman Christ, and interrupting our unity and communion with the Apostolic and patristic Church of all the ages”.

Therefore, according to St Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, there is no Church without Orthodoxy and Divine Eucharist; there is no Orthodoxy without the Church and the Eucharist; and there is no Eucharist without the Church and Orthodoxy. This is the tradition that runs through the Church from the time of the Apostles until today in the Church’s consciousness.

4. The decisions of the Hierarchy of the Church of Greece

The Church of Greece is one of the fourteen Orthodox Churches. It received its autocephalous status with the Synodical and Patriarchal Tome of 1850, and several provinces were added to it over time, some by assimilation.

As it was my duty, I studied the texts prepared by the delegates of all the Churches and signed by the Primates. While the Permanent Holy Synod and the Hierarchy of the Church of Greece were studying the texts, it decided to make some changes, namely, corrections and additions with the intention of improving the texts. This was done in a spirit of unity, with unanimity in most cases, and very small minority votes in some cases, and a proposal with an open vote.

A result was reached that satisfied all the Hierarchs, and also those who learned about the decision. In what follows I will present the main elements of the decision.

The key point is that while in various sections of the text "Relations of the Orthodox Church with the rest of the Christian world" it was mentioned that the Orthodox Church "recognises the historical existence of other Christian Churches and Confessions", this was replaced with the phrase: "is aware of the historical existence of other Christian Confessions and Communities".

Another important point refers to the unity of the Church. While the text said that the unity of the Church is unshakable, subsequent sections mentioned the effort to restore unity among Christians, as if the branch that applied. Some corrections were made in the text, to the effect that the Orthodox Church believes that "the unity of the Church is unshakable" and participates "in the movement towards the restoration of unity of the Christian Churches" or "the lost unity of other Christians", and that it is working for that day to come when "the Lord will fulfil the hope of the Orthodox Church by gathering into it all those who are scattered, that it may become one Church with one shepherd."

Another important point is the one referring to the prospect "of theological dialogues of the Orthodox Church with other Christian Confessions and Communities". These dialogues "are always determined on the basis of the principles of Orthodox ecclesiology and the canonical criteria of the already formed ecclesiastical tradition according to the sacred Canons of Ecumenical and local Councils recognised by the Ecumenical Councils, as well as the Canons 46, 47 and 50 of the Holy Apostles; 8 and 19 of the First Ecumenical Council; 7 of the Second Ecumenical Council; 95 of the Quinisext Council; and 7 and 8 of Laodicea."

A necessary clarification was also added: "It is clarified that, when practising the reception of non-Orthodox Christians and their declaration and holy Chrism by economy, this does not mean that the Orthodox Church recognises the validity of their Baptism and other sacraments."

In the paragraph mentioning the condemnation of any disruption of the unity of the Church by individual groups, and the maintenance of the genuine Orthodox faith, which is guaranteed by the Conciliar system, Canon 6 of the Second Ecumenical Council and Canons 14 and 15 of the First-Second Ecumenical Council were added.

In another section mentioning the need for inter-Christian theological dialogue, without provocative accusations or confessional competition, the Unia was added in parenthesis, which means that the Orthodox Church does not accept this hypocritical way of uniting the Churches, as the Unia professes in practice.

A significant correction was made in the section saying that local Orthodox Churches "are called upon to contribute to inter-faith understanding and collaboration" by adding the words "for peaceful coexistence and brotherly coexistence of people, without this implying any religious syncretism".

There was a long discussion on the participation of the Orthodox Church in the World Council of Churches (WCC). The proposal of the Standing Holy Synod was to delete the relevant paragraphs referring to this. Following intense debate, the issue was decided by an open ballot (by a show of hands), with thirteen Hierarchs proposing to delete the paragraphs, sixty-two to retain it, and two expressing different views.

Greece should in the work of the WCC in accordance with the necessary pre-conditions. In the debate and v argued that we should remain in the WCC as observers, but this was the only proposal.

Nevertheless, in this text the phrase that the Orthodox Churches in the WCC contribute “by all means at disposal to the testimony of truth and promotion of the unity of Christians” was corrected by the phrase, contr “by all means at their disposal for the promotion of peaceful coexistence and cooperation on major socio-pol challenges and problems.” This means that the reason for our Church’s participation in the WCC is only for s purposes, and not for the testimony of truth and the promotion of Christian unity.

In the text entitled “The mission of the Orthodox Church in today’s world” there was reference to the “hu person” and the “communion of persons”. At the same time there were repeated references to “man”. So theological reasons and to consolidate the text, the phrase “the value of the human person” was replaced with phrase “the value of man.”

In the text entitled “Autonomy and the means by which it is proclaimed”, a paragraph was added: “Ch Provinces for which a Patriarchal Tome or Acthas been issued cannot ask for autonomy, and their ecclesiast status remains unshakeable”.

In another paragraph of the same text, mentioning the granting of autonomy from the Mother Church to a prov the word “unanimously” was added.

These were the key suggestions by the Hierarchy of the Church of Greece for improving the texts.

I would like to express two points.

First, these additions and changes reflect a traditional ecclesiology, within the possibilities that the Hierarchy our Church had to make such amendments. These decisions were basically unanimous and no one can argue the “conservative” Hierarchs defeated the “progressive” Hierarchs!!!

Of course there were also proposals to withdraw completely the text “Relations of the Orthodox Church with rest of the Christian world” for further elaboration, but they were not accepted by the Hierarchy.

Secondly, these decisions are binding for our Church, because they were accepted basically unanimously. means that our delegation to the Holy and Great Council has to support their inclusion in the text and has possibility to retract.

Conclusion

Following the above, I conclude that the Holy and Great Council, with those Churches that will participate, should definitely mention explicitly the Ecumenical and Great Councils in its Message. The unhistorical, non-theological anti-ecclesiastical “myth” that this Council was convened after 1200 years, or that it is the first Council after Schism, must stop being spread.

With much respect, I beg and entreat the Primates of the Orthodox Churches, who will attend eventually particular His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, who laboured to bring things this far, to mention explicitly that this Council is a continuation of the Councils of Photios the Great, of St Gregory Palamas, of Mark of Ephesus, of the Great Patriarchs of the East, their predecessors, some of whom were martyred for the sake of God and the Church. Otherwise there will be an additional reason for this Council to be discredited in the eyes of the Church faithful as an anti-Photian, anti-Palamite, anti-Mark (Mark Eugenikos), anti-Philokalic Council!

I feel that during the sessions of the Holy and Great Council there will be Council members who will be aware

the ascetics, the sweat of the missionaries, the prayers of “the poor in Christ”, the expectations of the pious people. Those who are neither aware of this nor understand it will be wretched.

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