

HOLY AND GREAT COUNCIL OF CRETE (2016)

THE PARTICIPATION OF THE LOCAL ORTHODOX CHURCHES IN THE PREPARATORY PROCESS OF THE HOLY AND GREAT SYNOD – PREREQUISITE FOR THE RECEPTION OF ITS DECISIONS

VIOREL IONIȚĂ*

ABSTRACT. In this paper the author emphasises the preparation, the proceedings and the reception process of the Holy and Great Council, that is one of the most complex radiographies of the Orthodox Church evolution out of a late Middle Ages to the present postmodern challenges. All these challenges have shown that the identity of the Orthodox Church is ensured through her faith transmitted through the Orthodox worship, which is the written expression of the Holy Tradition.

Keywords: Holy and Great Council, participation, preparation, reception, Pan-Orthodox Conferences.

I. The Preparation, the proceedings and the reception process of the Holy and Great Synod is one of the most complex radiographies of the Orthodox Church evolution out of a late Middle Ages to the present postmodern challenges. Preceded by changes in the life of the Orthodox Churches during the second half of the nineteenth century, the preparation of this Synod began in the third decade of the last century through a series of consultations between the local Orthodox Churches, then emerged formally in 1961 through the first Pan-Orthodox Conference at Rhodes and entered the practical Preparation in 1976 at the first Pan-Orthodox Pre-Conciliar Conference. During this period of one and a half century, the Orthodox Church went through unprecedented organizational changes in the emergence of new Autocephalous Churches and elevating some of them to the rank of Patriarchate. Another development was the spread of the

* Rev. Professor, Bucharest/Geneva. E-mail: pr.vionita@yahoo.com.

Orthodox tradition worldwide, following the migration of millions of Orthodox believers out of their traditional area into countries outside the Orthodox canonical territory. This latter phenomenon has led to the constitution of the *Orthodox Diaspora*, which is to this day a great challenge but also a missionary chance for the local Orthodox Churches. Thus, a Church reduced to a political and cultural space, traditionally the *Church of the East*, the Orthodox Church has now become an universal Church in the geographical sense of the term. In addition to these developments, most of the local Orthodox Churches were sometimes dramatically confronted with the extremist ideologies and political systems of the twentieth century. Another development during this period of time was the increase of contacts between the Orthodox Churches with other Christian communities and other religions.

All these challenges have shown that the identity of the Orthodox Church is ensured through her faith transmitted through the Orthodox worship, which is the written expression of the Holy Tradition. As the Orthodox worship remained the same in any cultural context, this demonstrated that the Orthodox faith was not affected by the cultures in which it was adapted and affirmed during the twentieth century. But this cultural diversity has led to a diversification and development of Orthodox theological thinking especially in the Diaspora. Thus, over the past century one has noticed an enrichment of the Orthodox Theology, which was received but not uniformly in all Orthodox Mother Churches. All the challenges the Orthodox Churches were facing in this period of time have highlighted the need for the formulation of common answers of all these churches, which imposed the idea of the preparation and convocation of a Synod for the whole Orthodox Church.

II. During the preparations for a Synod of the whole Orthodox Church the attention of theologians and of the Synods of the local Orthodox Churches was mostly focused on identifying issues to be discussed at this Synod. After proposals of themes made from several Orthodox Churches, as the ones by the Primate Metropolitan Miron Cristea of the Romanian Orthodox Church in 1920,¹ the Ecumenical Patriarchate held, from 8 to 23 June 1930 at the Vatopedi Monastery on Mount Athos, an Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission which approved a list of 17 themes, including “most urgent issues”² to be discussed at a *Pro-Synod*, which was an intermediary Pan-Orthodox level for the preparation of the Synod of the whole Orthodox Church. These themes were recommended

¹ Gheorghe Soare, “De la Vatopedi la Rhodos,” *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* LXXIX, no. 9-10 (1961): 844.

² See the list at Viorel Ionita, *Towards the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church. The Decisions of the Pan-Orthodox Meetings since 1923 until 2009*, trans. Remus Rus, *Studia Oecumenica Friburgensia* 62 (Basel: Friedrich Reinhard Verlag, 2014), 112-113.

to be studied in each local Orthodox Church. The next step depended on the answers of the Churches which were too slow in coming, so that the continuation of the just initiated Synodical process was blocked by the outbreak of World War II. The Ecumenical Patriarchate relaunched the preparatory process of a Synod for the whole Orthodox Church by organizing the first Pan-Orthodox Conference at Rhodes, from 24 September to 1 October 1961, which adopted a catalog of themes grouped in 8 categories.³ Each of these groups included a longer or shorter list of subtopics, which in total cover the entire orthodox theology.

Realizing that the proposed list at Rhodes was too long, the Fourth Pan-Orthodox Conference, held from 8 to 16 June 1968 at the Orthodox Center of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Chambésy - Geneva, Switzerland, proposed to draw up a short list with themes recommended by all local Orthodox Churches. This conference also proposed that the title of the council in preparation shall be: *The Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church*.⁴ The same conference recommended to the Ecumenical Patriarchate to convene a series of Pan-Orthodox Pre-Conciliar Conferences, name that was meant to replace the one of *Pro-Synod*. Thus, the final list of themes for the Holy and Great Synod was adopted by the First Pan-Orthodox Pre-Conciliar Conference held from 21 to 28 November 1976 at the Orthodox Center of Chambésy. That list included the following ten themes:

1. Orthodox Diaspora
2. Autocephaly and its manner of proclamation
3. Autonomy and its manner of proclamation
4. Dyptychs (namely the order of priority of the churches in their liturgical commemoration)
5. The issue of the new calendar
6. Impediments to marriage
7. Readapting the church dispositions concerning fasting
8. Relations of the Orthodox Church with the rest of the Christian world
9. Orthodoxy and Ecumenical Movement
10. The contribution of the local Orthodox Churches to the realization of the ideals of peace, freedom, brotherhood and love among peoples and the removal of racial discrimination.⁵

³ As follows: I. Faith and Dogma; II. The Divine Worship, III. Church Administration and Order; IV. The Relations of the Orthodox Churches among themselves; V. The Relations of the Orthodox Church with the other Christian World; VI. Orthodoxy in the World; VII: Theological Themes and VIII. Social Problems (see Ionita, *Towards...*, 125-130).

⁴ Liviu Stan, "A patra Conferință Panortodoxă," *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* LXXXVI, no. 7-8 (1968): 873-880.

⁵ See Ionita, *Towards...*, 147.

III. The first Pan-Orthodox Pre-Conciliar Conference found that Orthodox Churches, which have undertaken the task to prepare drafts of texts for one of the themes chosen for the Synod, sent to the office of the Secretariat for the preparation of the Holy and Great Synod texts adopted by the Holy Synods of their Churches as final decisions. Therefore, the conference recommended that the churches responsible for developing drafts for the themes shall “submit the fruits of their work purely as a scientific result and not as an official position, in order to leave free space for discussion and dialogue at the pan-orthodox level.” However, some churches have disregarded this recommendation and continued – up to the last stage of preparation of the Holy and Great Synod - to bring their proposals to the draft texts in the form of texts formally adopted by the Holy Synods of their churches. If the delegations of these churches didn’t find exactly their proposals in the texts submitted for adoption they refused to sign those texts, which constituted a major obstacle to a constructive debate at the pan-orthodox level.

The second Pan-Orthodox Pre-Conciliar Conference held at the Orthodox Center of Chambésy from 3 to 12 September 1982, adopted the draft texts concerning two of the ten themes from the list adopted in 1976, namely: 1. *Impediments to marriage* and 2. *The issue of the new calendar*. This conference set the agenda for the Third Pan-Orthodox Pre-Conciliar Conference that would have to treat the last four themes of the 1976 list. During the conference in 1982 it became evident that there was no regulation to conduct these conferences which were guided by the “*Rules of conduct and work of the first Pan-Orthodox Conference*” in 1961,⁶ but which did no longer correspond to the new format of the meetings. Also during the conference in 1982 it was recommended to establish the official working languages at these conferences. Therefore, the 1982 Conference mandated the Inter-Orthodox preparatory Commission to draw up a draft Regulation of these conferences.

After 1982, the preparation of the Holy and Great Synod continued steadily, so that only after four years it was possible to convoke the Third Pan-Orthodox Pre-Conciliar Conference held at Chambésy from 20 October to 6 November 1986. According to the mandate set by the previous conference, this meeting adopted the draft texts of the four themes appointed to it in the following order: 1. *The contribution of the local Orthodox Churches to the realization of the ideals of peace, freedom, brotherhood and love among peoples and the removal of racial discrimination* 2. *Orthodoxy and the Ecumenical Movement*; 3. *Relations of the Orthodox Church with the rest of the Christian world* and 4. *Readapting the Church dispositions concerning fasting*. Regarding the latter

⁶ See the text of these Regulations at Anastosios Kallis, *Auf dem Weg zu einem Heiligen und Großen Konzil. Ein Quellen- und Arbeitsbuch zur orthodoxen Ekklesiologie* (Münster: Theophano Verlag, 2013), 246.

issue, in order to avoid the impression that the Orthodox Church would try to change the fasting principles, the conference changed its title as follows: *The importance of fasting and its observance today*.

The 1986 Conference adopted also the text of *The Regulation of the Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conferences*, consisting of 19 articles, which stated, inter alia, that the official working languages of these conferences are: *Greek, Russian and French*. As for the character of the decisions on each issue on the agenda of the Synod, the *Regulation* provides that they “*have a preparatory character for the Holy and Great Synod. Therefore, following the authentic Orthodox tradition on the topics discussed, they do not have the authority to engage directly the Churches before the Holy and Great Synod has ruled.*” This *Regulation* also states that every draft text of the ten themes is to be adopted only by consensus or unanimity. For if unanimity is not reached on one of these topics, the article 17th of the *Regulation* provides that: “*If no unanimity of the delegation is reached on a certain theme in the plenary session, a decision in the matter is postponed and the Secretariat for the preparation of the Holy and Great Synod sends the theme for complementary study, elaboration and preparation, according to the procedure set up at the Pan-Orthodox level. The theme thus postponed is placed at the head of the list of the future Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference and is examined as such by the Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission. If this time no unanimity is reached on the theme under discussion or if all delegations reject the proposals by the Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission, after the first and the second examination in plenary session, the Secretariat for the preparation of the Holy and Great Synod completes the file constituted at this stage and sends it once more, following the procedure mentioned above.*”⁷

Thus, the *Regulation of the Pan-orthodox Pre-Conciliar Conferences* did not foresee the possibility of excluding one theme from the agenda of the Holy and Great Synod even if it was not possible to achieve unanimity on the draft text on that theme, but provided that the Secretariat for the preparation of the Synod should insist until the desired unanimity is obtained. The Pan-Orthodox Pre-Conciliar Conferences together with the Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission and the Secretariat became an introverted mechanism and operated by the rules adopted by themselves. According to these principles, several church delegations insisted to continue the preparatory process until draft texts for all ten topics set for the Holy and Great Synod will be adopted.

After the 3rd Pan-Orthodox Pre-Conciliar Conference the preparation of the Holy and Great Synod came to a standstill, first because it was not possible to reach unanimity on the first four topics from the list adopted in 1976. The stagnation of this process was also due to some inter-Orthodox

⁷ See Ionita, *Towards...*, 182.

tensions as well as to quite important changes in attitude of many local Orthodox Churches after the fall of communism, both in respect to ethical-social issues, and especially in their relations with the Ecumenical Movement and other Christian communities.

IV. Overcoming this impasse was possible through the decisions of the Synaxis of Primates of the Orthodox Churches in Fener/Istanbul from 10 to 12 October 2008, during the commemoration of “*St. Apostol Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles*”. The message published at the end of this meeting, where the Romanian Orthodox Church was represented by His Eminence Metropolitan Laurentiu of Transylvania, stated that “*we welcome the proposal of the Ecumenical Patriarchate to continue during 2009 ... the preparation of the Holy and Great Council.*”⁸ This decision led to the organization of the fourth Pan-Orthodox Pre-Conciliar Conference from 6 to 13 June 2009,⁹ convened to discuss only one issue and not four as provided for by the previous conference. The 2009 conference discussed the issue of the *Orthodox Diaspora* and adopted the draft text on it. The Synaxis from October 2008 also decided that the Pan-Orthodox preparatory process for the Holy and Great Synod shall be attended exclusively by representatives of the Autocephalous Orthodox Churches and not by those of the Autonomous Orthodox Churches, as had happened so far. After 2009, the Inter-Orthodox preparatory Commission has been convened on still two occasions, namely in December 2009 and February 2011, but it adopted a draft text only on the issue of *Autonomy* and nothing more. Thus, the preparation of the Holy and Great Synod has once again stalled and the Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission was dissolved.

The impasse was again overcome by the decisions of the Synaxis of the Primates of the Orthodox Churches, this time meeting from 6 to 9 March 2014, again at Fener/Istanbul. A direct result of the decisions at this meeting was the establishment of an Inter-Orthodox Special Commission for the preparation of the Holy and Great Synod, which worked between October 2014 and April 2015. This Commission had the mandate *to review* the following three texts, which were already adopted almost 30 years before and needed to be revised: 1) *Orthodox Church and the Ecumenical Movement* 2) *Relations of the Orthodox Church with other Christian Communities* and 3) *The contribution by the local Orthodox Churches to the realization of the ideals of peace, freedom, brotherhood and love among peoples and the removal of racial discrimination*. At the same time, the Special Commission had the mandate *to supervise* the other three texts

⁸ <http://orthodoxeurope.org/page/14/156.aspx#1>.

⁹ See Viorel Ioniță, “A 4-a Conferință Panortodoxă Presinodală, Chambésy/Geneva, 6-12 iunie 2009,” *Studii Teologice* V, no. 2 (2009): 235 a.f.

adopted by the Pan-Orthodox Pre-Conciliar Conferences in 1982 respectively in 1986, namely: 1) *The issue of the calendar*; 2) *The importance of fasting and its observance today* and 3) *Impediments to marriage*. The Special Commission reviewed the three themes mentioned and oversaw the theme on Fasting. On the calendar issue and on the impediments to marriage, the Special Commission stated in its final communiqué that these “*texts have not been amended for the lack of consensus from the members of the Commission on the proposed changes. 2. The Themes 'Autocephaly and the modus of its proclamation' and the 'Diptychs' ... were not considered due to lack of time*”.¹⁰ The work of this Special Commission was hampered firstly by different understanding of its mandate in respect to the expressions to “review” and to “supervise” the texts because, while the chairperson allowed no change on the texts to be supervised several delegates considered that these texts must be updated as the other, so to be changed.

According to the decisions of the March 2014 Synaxis, as soon as the work of the Special Commission was done, there followed the Fifth Pan-Orthodox Pre-Conciliar Conference, organized at the Chambésy Orthodox Centre from 10-17 October 2015. This conference adopted the draft texts to the following three themes: 1) *Autonomy and the Means by Which it is Proclaimed* 2) *The Orthodox Church and the rest of the Christian world*,¹¹ and 3) *The importance of fasting and its observance today*. Only after this approval, the texts could be published, to be made available to all Orthodox believers and then sent directly to the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church for approval. In connection with the text entitled: “*The mission of the Orthodox Church in the contemporary world*” which was adopted only by 12 of the 14 delegations present, the Conference noted that this text will be presented to the next Synaxis of the Primates of the Orthodox Churches, to the follow-up. The 5th Pan-Orthodox Pre-Conciliar Conference made an important contribution to the preparation of the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church, but stressed at the same time, that there were still many issues to be settled in the preparatory process for the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church. This was highlighted mainly by the fact that during this last Pan-Orthodox Pre-Conciliar Conference as well as during the Synaxis of the Primates of the Orthodox Churches in January 2016 several delegations specifically requested to continue the preparation for this Synod until draft texts will be adopted for all ten themes on the agenda of the Holy and Great Synod. This attitude clearly expressed the fact that not all Orthodox Churches were prepared for the Synod.

¹⁰ Viorel Ioniță, *Sfântul și Marele Sinod al Bisericii Ortodoxe. Documente pregătitoare* (București: Basilica, 2016), 48.

¹¹ In this formulation were put together the draft texts of two topics namely: 1, *Relations of the Orthodox Church with the other Christian world* and 2. *Orthodoxy and Ecumenical Movement*.

On the other hand, the resumption of the preparation for the Holy and Great Synod in 2009, i.e. after 23 years of break, revealed a discontinuity of it especially through the fact that the 14 Autocephalous Orthodox Churches were represented now by new delegations in other ways than before the political changes in Eastern Europe. A first difficulty which confronted the preparation of the Holy and Great Synod during this period was that discussions on the draft texts often took the form of a confrontation between the delegations of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Russian Orthodox Church. In such situations there emerged two groups, the first consisting of Churches of Greek tradition (the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Patriarchate of Alexandria, Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Church of Cyprus, the Church of Greece, and often also the Orthodox Church of Albania) and the second of the Slavonic tradition (Russian Patriarchate, Bulgarian Orthodox Church, Orthodox Church of Poland, Orthodox Church in the Czech Lands and Slovak Republic, as well as the Orthodox Church of Georgia, although not of Slavonic tradition). The Serbian Orthodox Church, represented by bishops who knew very well both Greek and Russian, was mostly seeking to mediate between the two positions. The delegation of the Antiochian Patriarchate was often determined by its membership to the Apostolic Patriarchates and most often voted with the first group. In such cases, the delegation of the Romanian Orthodox Church did not automatically join a particular group, but adopted her attitude depending on the subject matter.

Draft texts that were to be discussed and adopted by the last two Pan-Orthodox Pre-Conciliar Conferences were first prepared by the Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission, respectively between 2014 and 2015 by the Special Inter-Orthodox Commission for the preparation of the Holy and Great Synod. At that time, almost all 14 Autocephalous Orthodox Churches were represented both in the Preparatory Commission as well as in the Pan-Orthodox Pre-Conciliar Conferences by the same heads of delegations accompanied almost always by the same consultants, except that at the top-level delegations were officially formed by two bishops. The presence of the same heads of delegations ensured continuity, but paradoxically the same delegates who adopted the draft texts at preparatory level attacked them only few months later at the Pan-Orthodox level. This phenomenon indicated the risk that those delegations which adopted and signed the decisions taken at the Pan-Orthodox Pre-Conciliar Conferences would then attack the respective texts at the Holy and Great Synod.

The organization of the Synaxis of the Primates of the Orthodox Churches from 21 to 28 January 2016 at the Orthodox Center of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Chambésy, was planned by the Synaxis of March 2014. The meeting of the Orthodox Primates in January 2016 was the first which took over the tasks of a Pan-Orthodox Pre-Conciliar Conference in the sense that it discussed and adopted draft texts

of the two following themes: 1. *The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World* and 2. *The Mystery of marriage and its impediments*. This last text was not signed by the Georgian Orthodox Church delegation led by His Beatitude Catholicos and Patriarch Elias II, for this delegation did not accept the idea of applying the concept of Church *oikonomia* to Inter-Christian marriages. However, this text was considered as adopted and recommended to be presented to the Holy and Great Synod. Secondly, the Synaxis of Chambésy decided to remove the following three topics from the agenda of the Holy and Great Synod: 1. *Autocephaly*, 2. *Calendar* and 3. *Diptychs*, because they “were not approved unanimously throughout many successive meetings of the preparatory Inter-Orthodox Commissions to be finally approved by one of the Pan-Orthodox Pre-Conciliar Conferences”. And about the issue of the Calendar, the Synaxis held that “it is appropriate that every Church feels free to implement what it considers proper for the spiritual formation of their parishioners, but without changing the date of common celebration of Easter by all the Orthodox Churches.”¹²

On the agenda for the Holy and Great Synod six topics were thus kept which covered actually seven points of the list adopted in 1976, for two of them were merged into a single text. Some of the draft texts on the six topics listed on the agenda of the Holy and Great Synod were discussed during more than three decades in the Orthodox Churches. Upon the adoption of draft texts on these subjects by one of the Pan-Orthodox Pre-Conciliar Conferences, those texts were published, studied and endorsed by the Holy Synods of the local Orthodox Churches. Thus, the draft texts for the Holy and Great Synod always fully mirrored the teaching of the Orthodox Church on the respective themes.

Finally, the January 2016 Synaxis adopted the text of the *Organization and Working Procedure of the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church*. This Synaxis also decided on the precise dates and venue of the Synod, namely from 18 to 26 June 2016 at the Orthodox Academy of Crete and not in the Saint Irene Church from Istanbul as proposed by the Synaxis of March 2014. The Synaxis meeting of January 2016 concluded in an atmosphere of excitement, most participants being convinced that the long awaited Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church will take place for sure.

V. However, several issues remained unresolved, including the most urgent one which was the need for the restoration of communion between the Patriarchates of Antioch and Jerusalem, interrupted in 2013 on the ground that the latter has established a diocese in Qatar, which belongs to the canonical territory of the Patriarchate of Antioch. His All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch tried unsuccessfully to solve this problem during the Synaxis at Chambésy. The

¹² Ibid., 79

Ecumenical Patriarchate then proposed to set up a joint committee of experts from both Churches, which would have to find the solution of reconciliation, but that unfortunately did not happen. Moreover, the representatives of the Patriarchate of Antioch have firmly stated that unless this issue is resolved, their Church would not attend the Synod. This was officially announced by the Patriarchate of Antioch on June 6, 2016, immediately after the Ecumenical Patriarchate announced in a press release that the resolution of the dispute between the two Apostolic Patriarchates will take place after the Synod of Crete.

A second problem on the way of preparation for the Holy and Great Synod was the fact that until January 2016 the Synodal themes were almost completely unknown among the faithful and even among the clergy in the local Orthodox Churches. The long way of the preparatory process was leading up to a general perception that this council would not take place soon and consequently to the lack of interest in its themes. Recently, a Roman Catholic theologian from Germany noted that „curiously the Pre-Conciliar 'process' enjoyed a much greater interest in the West than in the local Orthodox Churches ... in the 90s, the Synodal draft texts adopted by then were discussed and analyzed intensively in seminars”¹³ at Faculties of Theology of this country. Indeed, the issue of the Holy and Great Synod was known until the beginning of 2016 almost exclusively in the very restricted circles of those directly involved in the preparatory process.

Shortly after the publication of the January 2016 Synaxis decisions, interest in the topics and composition of the Holy and Great Synod was expressed almost exclusively in conservative circles opposed to the council. One of the main causes of this event has originated in the confrontation between two groups of Greek scholars, one around His Eminence Metropolitan Joannis of Pergamon (Zizioulas) and the other around the followers of late Prof. Ioannis Romanides (1927-2001). Metropolitan Joannis was wrongly considered the author of problematic formulations - such as the concept of the *human person* from the text on *Mission* – and especially of those from the text on relations with other Christian churches. Arguments against the themes and convocation of the Holy and Great Synod have spread through conferences and especially through the internet beyond the Greek context without studying carefully the draft texts adopted at the Pan-orthodox level.

A third problem arising on the way of preparation for the Holy and Great Synod was due to the meeting between Patriarch Kirill and Pope Francis at the airport in Havana, Cuba, on February 12, 2016, where the two pontiffs

¹³ Johannes Oeldemann, “Die Heilige und Große Synode der Orthodoxen kirche. Eine erste Einordnung aus katholischer Sicht,” *Ökumenische Rudschau*, no. 1 (2017): 49.

have adopted a joint statement, which we do not question. But the matter of fact is that this meeting caused the first actions of canonical disobedience of some bishops to their primate. Canonical attitude of disobedience was quickly integrated into an amalgam and were transferred to the different canonical territories on issues related to the Holy and Great Synod. In this way was relaunched with unprecedented violence the old issue related to the relationship of the Orthodox Church to Christian communities in the world today. This issue was never clarified enough in these churches. The debate around this issue has been one of the main reasons¹⁴ that led the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church to announce, on June 1, 2016, its decision not to participate in the Holy and Great Synod. The same reasons led the Orthodox Church of Georgia to announce on June 10, 2016, and then the Russian Orthodox Church on 13 June the same year that they will not participate in the Holy and Great Synod, although these churches had published on the internet the lists of their delegates designated to participate in this Synod.

Finally, a fourth problem in the preparation of this Synod was it constantly being compared with the seven Ecumenical Councils. From this comparison there were born expectations called by some Orthodox theologians “maximalist”¹⁵ in relation to the Holy and Great Synod, namely the expectation that this council will make decisions as important as those taken by the Ecumenical Councils. This vision was due to the fact that until January 2016 the profile of the Holy and Great synod had not been defined. During Chambésy Synaxis, several primates stressed that this council will be an Ecumenical Council. The most important role here, however, was that of His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel, by stating that this council should be considered as “*an important historic event to develop the Synodal practice at the Pan-Orthodox level.*”¹⁶ In respect to the decisions to be taken by the Holy and Great Synod, His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel said already in the spring of 2016 that it “*won't formulate new dogmas or canons but it would like to reaffirm, in communion and co-responsibility, the holy and living light of the Orthodox faith, in a world in spiritual crisis of guidance and ideal.*”¹⁷

In connection with the preparation of the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church, as it happened also during the course of this council, the relationship between the delegations of different local Orthodox Churches has always been animated by the spirit of brotherhood and of the awareness that all of them belong to the one and the same Church. All meetings at the Pan-Orthodox level were opened and closed with the celebration of the Divine Liturgy which all

¹⁴ See Martin Illert, “Die Bulgarische Orthodoxe Kirche und die Heilige und Große Synode,” *Ökumenische Rudschau*, no. 1 (2017): 42 a.f.

¹⁵ Georgios Vlantis, “Die Angst vor dem Geist. Das Heilige und Große Konzil und die orthodoxen Anti-Ökumeniker,” *Ökumenische Rudschau*, no. 1 (2017): 39.

¹⁶ Ionita, *Sfântul și Marele Sinod...*, 75.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

shared together, even if some of them had different views on some of the topics discussed. Looking more closely, the controversial views between some delegates did not relate to fundamental aspects of the Orthodox Christian faith and usually the delegates with different opinions behaved toward each other beyond the sessions as friends. I always had the impression that if Orthodox delegations had sufficient time available they would have had reached a greater consensus. In some specific cases, there was also some pride and personal ambition to be overcome. In other words, in these preparations, which were an integral part of the Synodal practice, it was obvious that the representatives of the Orthodox Churches have succeeded in developing more and more a culture of dialogue. Thus, the draft texts on the topics on the agenda of the Holy and great Council were completely along the faith always confessed by the one Orthodox Church.

REFERENCES

- Illert, Martin. "Die Bulgarische Orthodoxe Kirche und die Heilige und Große Synode." *Ökumenische Rudschau*, no. 1 (2017).
- Ioniță, Viorel. "A 4-a Conferință Panortodoxă Presinodală, Chambésy/Geneva, 6-12 iunie 2009." *Studii Teologice* V, no. 2 (2009): 235 a.f.
- Ioniță, Viorel. *Sfântul și Marele Sinod al Bisericii Ortodoxe. Documente pregătitoare*. București: Basilica, 2016.
- Ionita, Viorel. *Towards the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church. The Decisions of the Pan-Orthodox Meetings since 1923 until 2009*. Translated from Romanian by Remus Rus. *Studia Oecumenica Friburgensia* 62. Basel: Friedrich Reinhard Verlag, 2014.
- Kallis, Anastosios. *Auf dem Weg zu einem Heiligen und Großen Konzil. Ein Quellen- und Arbeitsbuch zur orthodoxen Ekklesiologie*. Münster: Theophano Verlag, 2013.
- Oeldemann, Johannes. "Die Heilige und Große Synode der Orthodoxen kirche. Eine erste Einordnung aus katholischer Sicht." *Ökumenische Rudschau*, no. 1 (2017).
- Soare, Gheorghe. "De la Vatopedi la Rhodos." *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* LXXIX, no. 9-10 (1961).
- Stan, Liviu. "A patra Conferință Panortodoxă." *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* LXXXVI, no. 7-8 (1968).
- Vlantis, Georgios. "Die Angst vor dem Geist. Das Heilige und Große Konzil und die orthodoxen Anti-Ökumeniker." *Ökumenische Rudschau*, no. 1 (2017).