

**ON THE HOLY
AND GREAT COUNCIL OF CRETE,
June 16-26, 2016**

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

**Translated by Petru Molodeț-Jitea
and Alin-Bogdan Mihăilescu**

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2

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FOREWORD

One of the most important recent ecclesiastical events was the convening of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Churches on the Island of Crete, Greece, on June 16-26, 2016.

The event offered an occasion to the delegated bishops of ten autocephalous Orthodox Churches to meet and manifest communion, so as to confirm together the self-consciousness of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ. *The Holy and Great Council of Crete did not formulate new dogmas or canons, nor did it bring about changes in the liturgical life. The hierarchs who participated in the Council addressed some of the topical issues and sought solutions to the problems that the contemporary man faces.*

Thus, in order to emphasize the importance of this event for the life of the Orthodox Church, in his Address during the opening session of the Holy and Great Council, His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel said: *“The Holy*

and Great Council of the Orthodox Churches is, at the same time, a rare event and the beginning of normality, because synodality is a canonical rule of the life of the local Churches in order to express the unity of the Orthodox faith, of the sacramental life and of the canonical discipline of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. If synodality is a canonical norm at the local level, it should be a norm at the pan-Orthodox or universal level too. Synodality is fulfilled in the sacramental concelebration of the Holy Eucharist in order to express both the unity of the Orthodox faith and the mystery itself of the communion of the Church with the Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church. The autocephaly of the Orthodox Churches expresses their administrative and pastoral liberty, while the pan-Orthodox Eucharistic concelebration and the pan-Orthodox synodality express the unity of the entire Orthodoxy”.

Published with the blessing of the Holy Synod of our Church, the present booklet addresses all the faithful of the Romanian Orthodox Church. Its purpose is to provide the members of our Church with answers to questions, queries or concerns that rise regarding the Holy and Great Council and its approved documents.

It has been noticed that those who contest the proceedings of the Holy and Great Council do not make concrete references to the six approved documents, but extract from the context certain passages, which they misinterpret, or rely on tendentious commentaries of

the synodal texts and not on the texts themselves, adopting a radical position against the Council of Crete.

For this reason, attempts have been made to answer questions as much as possible on the basis of the approved documents. The answers also refer to other official documents of the autocephalous Churches issued before and after the Holy and Great Council, as well as to the position of renowned hierarchs and theologians. In order that the debated topics be easily perused, this booklet was written in the form of questions and answers.

The Chancery of the Holy Synod

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. How is the Church defined according to the documents of Crete?

According to the documents of Crete, *“The One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church is a divine-human communion in the image of the Holy Trinity, a foretaste and experience of the eschaton in the holy Eucharist and a revelation of the glory of the things to come, and, as a continuing Pentecost, she is a prophetic voice in this world that cannot be silenced, the presence and witness of God’s Kingdom “that has come with power” (cf. Mark 9.1)”* (Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council I, 1).

From this testimony, we clearly understand that **the Holy and Great Council reaffirmed the content and the mission of the Church**, according to the teaching of the Apostles, the Holy Fathers, the Seven Ecumenical Councils¹ and the subsequent Orthodox Councils of universal authority (879-880; 1341, 1351; 1368; 1484; 1638; 1642; 1691).

¹ Ecumenical Council = Council of bishops from the whole world, i.e. universal Council. The Seven Ecumenical Councils gathered in the first Christian millennium (325-787 AD).

2. What is the form of Church government?

The form of Church government is synodal. After the Ascension of our Saviour Jesus Christ to heavens, the Holy Apostles were aware of their joint responsibility for the faithful entrusted to their pastoral care. For this reason, in the year 49 AD the Holy Apostles gathered in Jerusalem *in the first Council of the Christian Church*, so that, later on, those consecrated by them – the bishops – would preserve this practice of synodal assemblies.

Apostolic Canon 37 shows that the *Council of bishops should gather twice a year* in order to study the doctrine of faith and to solve the problems the Church encounters.

3. Why is the Church organized synodically?

The Orthodox Church practiced from the beginning the gathering of bishops in councils or *synods* (in Greek language: *syn* = together, *odos* = path: i.e., a common endeavour) by which to express a *common and unitary position regarding the debated issues*.

The synodal organization of the Church has also a spiritual reason for its existence, so that no one should consider themselves greater than others, even if they had lived a holy life (*Matthew 20:26-28*).

Edifying in this sense are the words of Saint Anas-tasius of Sinai (7th century): *“Knowing the great vainglory and the arrogance of man, God does not want us to receive the rewards by ourselves, even if we had a virtuous life and*

holiness, but wants that in our petitions to Him, considering ourselves unworthy, to take with us other same-minded persons to plead and labour alongside: for the one who requests alone and sees his pleas fulfilled oftentimes falls into pride, but when many offer prayers together, all remain in humility” (Questions and Answers 97, Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca 59, Turnhout: Brepols, 2006, p. 153).

4. Is it necessary to organize General or Universal Councils when general issues arise?

Yes, it is. Canon 19 of the Fourth Ecumenical Council, convened in the year 451 AD, points out that, if councils do not gather problems multiply.

If regional councils are to be convened for regional issues, when matters are of general concern, synodality must manifest itself at a general level. Once modern means of transport have facilitated the assemblies of bishops around the world, and since the development of the means of communication has made some regional issues have a general impact, the need to give unitary answers to major issues that the Church from all over the world is facing has become even more evident.

5. When and why did the idea of organizing a Great Council of the Orthodox Church, gathering bishops from all over the world, come up?

The formation of national states in the second half of the 19th century – states among which some were in majority Orthodox – has also caused the emergence of

new realities from the ecclesiastical point of view. The Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, in the canonical territory of which this process took place, considered with reticence the formation of autocephalous Churches², signalling the need for a General Council in which this new situation would be discussed. Thus, on June 12, 1902, the Ecumenical Patriarch Joachim III (1901-1912) sent a letter to the autocephalous Orthodox Churches stressing the importance of a better communication between the Orthodox Churches, and launched the initiative to organize *some pan-Orthodox assemblies, that is, assemblies of the entire Orthodoxy*³.

In time, other problems arose in the life of the Orthodox Church, which required clarification by the Orthodox bishops. This is why the organization of a General Council of the Orthodox Churches became a priority for all the autocephalous Orthodox Churches.

² The autocephalous Churches are self-governing local Orthodox Churches, yet, in full dogmatic, liturgical and canonical communion with each other. Autocephaly represents the form of organization of a local Orthodox Church, which has self-government and a canonical administrative-territorial organization that is independent from other autocephalous Churches (from the Greek word *autokephale* – self-governing). There are currently 14 autocephalous Orthodox Churches.

³ Pan-Orthodox – which regards all autocephalous Orthodox Churches: *belonging to the entire Orthodoxy* (in Greek: *pan* = all, whole, general).

6. Why is the general Council of the Orthodox Churches, which took place in Crete, called “Holy” and “Great”?

It is called “Holy” following the designation with which the Synod of every autocephalous Orthodox Church is called (“Holy Synod”), and “Great” because it is a general Council and thus greater than the Synod of a single autocephalous Orthodox Church.

The Holy and Great Council gathers the delegations of the Holy Synods of the autocephalous Orthodox Churches. The importance of a Holy and Great Council in the history of the Church will be valued by a future Council, which will be able to fully accept, interpret and develop some formulations used in its final documents. This practice has been usually assumed in the history of the Church.

7. Why did the Holy and Great Council need its own regulation of organization?

An event of such magnitude as the general Council naturally implied the observance of some precise rules, without which it could not have carried through its proceedings. The *Regulation of organization and operation of the Holy and Great Council*, fruit of the collaboration of all the autocephalous Orthodox Churches, guaranteed a balanced and fair debate of all the documents within the Holy and Great Council. According to the *Regulation, the Primates of the autocephalous Churches expressed*

*in a unitary way the unanimous or general will of the delegations they were leading, thus showing that **during the Holy and Great Council the synodality and autocephaly of the local Churches were not cancelled.** Even the autocephalous Orthodox Churches, which eventually did not participate in the Council of Crete, have actively contributed to the drafting of the *Regulation*.*

8. Why were the working sessions of the Holy and Great Council not public?

Except the *opening and closing sessions*, only the members of the official Orthodox delegations have attended all the other working sessions. In fact, this practice is also used at the level of the local Synods of the autocephalous Churches, meaning that the *sessions are not public so as not to affect the debates and the smooth running of the proceedings*. Instead, *the decisions taken are made public*, as was the case with the documents approved by the Holy and Great Council of Crete.

9. Were the participating bishops of the Council of Crete able to speak freely?

Yes, they have. In Article 10 of the aforementioned *Regulation*, it was established how members of a delegation could actively participate in the proceedings, noting that: *“Discussions during the Council’s proceedings are open”*. Each session was led by the Chairman (His All-Holiness, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of

Constantinople), who ensured the smooth unfolding of the debates, discouraging interruptions or overlapping of the speeches, according to the *Regulation* that states: “no one may speak without first requesting and receiving approval by the Council’s Chairman”.

10. Was the synodal organization of the Church violated in any way by setting a precise number of participating bishops?

It was certainly not. In the canonical tradition of the Church there is no express requirement regarding the number of participants in a Council for it to be a canonical one. The number of bishops participating in Ecumenical Councils varies a lot from one Council to another. Therefore, one cannot speak of a rule regarding *the participation of all the bishops in a Council* for it to be a canonical or valid one. Such a criterion would have led to the impossibility of organizing any council of bishops, taking into account the difficulties of travelling, accommodation and carrying out the proceedings.

11. Did all the bishops participate in the Ecumenical Councils of the Church?

No, they did not, because, during the Councils, which could take several months, the ecclesiastical life of the Metropolises could not be suspended. Some of

the bishops remained in their dioceses to supervise the good course of Church life.

A clear example in this respect is the letter of convocation of the Third Ecumenical Council, dated November 30, 430, sent by the emperors Theodosius and Valentinian to the metropolitans of the various provinces of the empire: “Your Eminence should consider to come, after the feast of Holy Easter, with the help of God, to Asia, to Ephesus, on the Holy day of Pentecost, taking care that the few reverent bishops from your diocese come there too, **as many as you deem fit, so that it may remain enough (bishops) for the Holy Churches within that diocese, but also that the ones qualified for the Council by no means be absent from it**” (Rev. Fr. Ioan Mihălcescu, *The Third Ecumenical Council of Ephesus (431)*, Bucharest, 1931, p. 55). *It follows that at the Council were summoned the Metropolitans of provinces, who, in their turn, had the obligation to designate for participation also part of the suffragan bishops, as many bishops as the metropolitans considered to be “qualified for the Council”, at the same time taking care not to leave the Metropolis without archpastors.*

12. Did all the Churches participate in the Holy and Great Council of Crete?

At the Primates’ Synaxes from March 2014 and January 2016 *all the autocephalous Orthodox Churches announced their participation in the Holy and Great Council*

and subsequently received an invitation from the Ecumenical Patriarchate. For several reasons, shortly before the meeting of the Orthodox bishops in Crete, four autocephalous Churches (Antioch, Russia, Georgia and Bulgaria) announced that they could not participate in the Council of Crete, mainly due to the failure to resolve the canonical dispute between the Patriarchate of Antioch and the Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

13. Did the lay faithful also participate in this Council?

Yes, they did, as special advisers and assistants of the hierarchs. According to the *Regulation*, the lay faithful, having a well-determined role, participated in the plenary sessions of the Council, being of great help to the Secretariat and the Committees, where they could take the floor. *“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” (Regulation, Article 3, 2-4).*

14. Did people of other faiths participate in the proceedings of the Holy and Great Council?

No, they did not, because the Council’s *Regulation* did not allow this. Representatives of Christian confessions and of inter-Christian organizations were

present *as observers only at the Council's opening/closing sessions*, as stated in Article 14 of the *Regulation*: “*Observers from other Christian Churches or Confessions, as well as leaders of inter-Christian organizations, shall be present at the opening and closing sessions of the Council but will not possess the right to vote or speak*”.

15. Were the final documents voted by the Primate of the autocephalous Churches in their personal capacity?

No, they have not. The idea that the Primate of the autocephalous Churches voted in their personal capacity is false, being contrary both to the Council's working procedure stipulated by the *Regulation*, and to reality. In the *Regulation* it is clearly stipulated that the vote belongs to each local autocephalous Orthodox Church, *and the internal debate, within each delegation, led to the final position of the respective Church*. **The Primate of each local autocephalous Church was the one who announced the unitary or majority position of his Church by his vote as president of the Synod of the local autocephalous Orthodox Church and as president of the official delegation of the respective Church. Thus, it was pointed out that the Holy and Great Orthodox Council did not annul the synodality and autocephaly of the local Orthodox Churches.**

Article 12 of the *Regulation* specifies that: “*Regarding the process of voting for issues discussed and reviewed vis-à-*

vis the texts of the Council: In accordance with the unanimous decision of the Sacred Synaxis of the Primates of the Orthodox Churches (Synaxis according to which each autocephalous Church has one vote), votes shall be cast by each autocephalous Orthodox Church and not by individual members of their delegations. The vote of each Church—and not that of each member of its delegation—allows for one or more Hierarchs in the delegation of a particular autocephalous Church to hold a dissenting opinion on proposed amendments or on entire texts”.

The contrary views expressed by some members of the delegations on amendments or documents were not discouraged, *even if they did not express a majority position within the delegations.* The Regulation provided for these different views to be recorded in the minutes.

16. Why did some of the participating hierarchs not sign some of the documents?

Some hierarchs did not sign all the documents of Crete, considering that there are some phrases or formulations in these texts (such as: “The Orthodox Church accepts the historical denomination of other non-Orthodox Christian churches and confessions”, “the unity of all Christians” or the participation of the Orthodox Churches to the ecumenical movement) that require some improvements, clarifications, developments and nuances. However, *none of the hierarchs who did not sign the documents stated that the reason for not*

signing would be heresy allegedly contained by the texts of Crete. Therefore, these hierarchs continued and continue to be in communion with all the hierarchs of the Orthodox Church. Yet, if the heresy had been the reason for not signing the documents, undoubtedly they would not have preserved their communion with the other hierarchs.

All the final documents were signed by all the Primates of the Orthodox Churches and by the overwhelming majority of other Orthodox hierarchs present in Crete, although some Synods of the autocephalous Churches, the Holy Community of the Holy Mount Athos, some hierarchs, theologians and lay faithful consider that certain parts of the documents can be explained, developed and nuanced.

In this respect, the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church, during its session of October 28-29, 2016, stated: *“the Holy Synod took note that the documents can be explained, nuanced or developed by a future Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church. However, the explanation of these texts and the drafting of other synodal documents on different subject matters should not be made under the pressure of time, but if there is no pan-orthodox consensus, they must be postponed and refined until a consensus is reached”* (<http://basilica.ro/en/conclusions-of-the-holy-synod-regarding-the-proceedings-and-the-decisions-of-the-holy-and-great-council-of-the-orthodox-church-crete-16-26-june-2016/>). The Holy Synod of the Patriarchate

of Alexandria also stated: *“We believe that in the near future any imperfections and shortcomings of this Council will be overcome with the help of God at the Councils that will follow”*(<http://basilica.ro/en/evaluation-of-the-holy-and-great-council-in-crete-by-the-holy-synod-of-the-patriarchate-of-alexandria/>), and the Holy Community of the Holy Mount Athos specified that *“the Council’s official final documents should be studied with caution, their positive aspects should be assessed and any possible vagueness that they may contain and that requires further elucidation should be noted”* (<http://basilica.ro/sinodul-din-creta-sfanta-chinotita-tendintele-de-intrerupere-a-pomenirii-ierarhilor-nu-sunt-justificate/>).

17. How was the participation of the Romanian delegation and of the Patriarch of our Church in the Council of Crete perceived?

All the participants in the Council were impressed by the theological education of the members of the Romanian delegation as well as by their pastoral approach to the debated documents. We present some of the most representative testimonies in this regard:

Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos: *“First of all, the Romanian Patriarchate was very well prepared for the Council and made important suggestions for correcting the texts, especially the document on the “Relations of the Orthodox Church with the rest of the Christian world” (...)* When the text was finalized and was read in the plenary, the

Patriarch of Romania found that the translation in the French language was not correct and that his observations had not been introduced in the text. Then he said that he would not sign the text unless his corrections were introduced.

Of all the Primates, Patriarch Daniel of Romania proved he possessed full theological knowledge and the ability to support his views. He also had the ability to make alternative proposals when his proposals were not accepted.

Furthermore, some important observations were also made by the Metropolitan Teofan of Moldavia and Bukovina, who spoke with an Orthodox ecclesiastical consciousness, based on the teaching of the Church.

I consider that the Romanian Orthodox Church impressed with her entire presence. When the acts of the Council will be published this will be fully visible (<http://basilica.ro/en/metropolitan-hierotheos-vlachos-on-the-delegation-of-the-romanian-patriarchate-at-the-council-of-crete-well-prepared-and-firm-on-stand/>).

Archimandrite Tikhon, Abbot of Stavronikita Monastery, Holy Mount Athos: *“With regard to Article 22 [of the sixth Document], in spite of the generous theological effort of the Patriarch of Romania, who expressed the views, similar to ours, of the Church of Romania (regarding the authority of the Council), the Patriarch faced the inability of the others to understand his correct views, although a slight improvement was eventually passed at the end: «That has always been in the Church the highest authority in matters of faith and canonical ordinances» (Canon*

6 of the Second Ecumenical Council), the expression «The competence and the ultimate judge» being deleted” (<https://doxologia.ro/documentar/epistola-intaistatatorului-manastirii-stavronichita-catre-sfanta-chinotita-sfantului>).

Father Rafail Noica: “The Romanian Church was very well prepared; everybody was amazed at how well it was prepared. Second point: our Patriarch Daniel, far from being an ecumenist, was the backbone of Orthodoxy in this Council, where we were risking all sorts of things. And I believe, as I have heard, that there is no other like His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel who can defend our Church nowadays. And in the same article, His Eminence Hierotheos used fewer words, but not of less praise for His Eminence Teofan (<http://www.cuvantul-ortodox.ro/recomandari/parintele-rafail-noica-sinodul-din-creta/>; see also: <http://basilica.ro/en/father-raphael-noica-about-the-holy-and-great-council-nothing-was-done-on-the-line-to-sell-orthodoxy/>).

18. Is it true that the Orthodox Church recognizes through the documents of the Council of Crete other genders beside «male» and «female»?

This is definitely not the case. In a manner utterly lacking honesty it was brought into discussion that the documents of Crete and, especially, the document the *Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World*, would legitimize “gender theory”. Gender theory affirms that a person’s gender is not determined by the biological sex and that every human being can decide by a simple choice whether he or she is a man or a woman. In other

words, if a man considers he is a woman, he automatically becomes a woman. These theories are firmly rejected by the Orthodox Church, which accepts only the two natural genders as they were created by God: male and female. Any other interpretation is unacceptable for the tradition of the Church.

19. Does the Church have the right to profess her faith in the public sphere?

Of course she does. In the document on the *Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World*, the Church stresses her freedom to affirm herself in the public sphere without any constraints, being aware of the responsibility she has in contemporary society. *"The Church, in the spirit of respecting human rights and equal treatment of all, values the application of these principles in the light of her teaching on the sacraments, the family, the role of both genders in the Church, and the overall principles of Church tradition. The Church has the right to proclaim and witness to her teaching in the public sphere"* (see *The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World*, 5, 3).

20. Are modern scientific researches on man allowed?

Yes, they are, on condition that they respect the moral and spiritual principles of the Christian Orthodox Church. Also, *"The Orthodox Church believes that the human being is not merely a composition of cells, bones, and organs; nor again is the human person defined solely by*

biological factors. Man is created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) and reference to humanity must take place with due respect” (as stipulated in the document on the Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today’s World, Chapter F, 12).

21. What are the dangers to avoid today?

The Council of Crete notes that *“The Church is concerned about the ever-increasing imposition upon humanity of a consumerist lifestyle, devoid of Christian ethical principles. In this sense, consumerism combined with secular globalization tends to lead to the loss of nations’ spiritual roots, their historical loss of memory, and the forgetfulness of their traditions. (...) The Church warns her children of the risk of influence on their conscience by the mass media, as well as its use to manipulate rather than bring people and nations together”* (as stipulated in Chapter F, 7, 8, of the document on the *Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today’s World*).

Furthermore, the *Encyclical* of the Holy and Great Council of Crete lists other dangers that a Christian is called upon today to become aware of in order to act appropriately: the crisis of marriage and family (*Encyclical* III, 7); “new tendencies in the realm of upbringing and education in regard to the content and aims of education as well as in the way childhood, the role of both teacher and student and the role of the contemporary school are viewed” (*Encyclical* IV, 9); “extreme or even provocative expressions of the ideo-

logy of secularization, inherent in political, cultural and social developments”, “the full autonomy of man from Christ and from the spiritual influence of the Church, by the arbitrary identification of the Church with conservatism and by the historically unjustified characterization of the Church as an alleged impediment to all progress and development” (*Encyclical V*, 10); “the dangers of the manipulation of human freedom, of the use of man as a simple means, of the gradual loss of precious traditions, and threats to, or even the destruction of, the natural environment” (*Encyclical V*, 11); “the uncontrolled use of biotechnology at the beginning, during, and at the end of life” (*Encyclical V*, 12); “the contemporary ideology of globalization” (*Encyclical VI*, 15); “the proliferation of violence and military conflicts; the persecution, exile and murder of members of religious minorities; the violent displacement of families from their homelands; the tragedy of human trafficking; the violation of the dignity and fundamental rights of individuals and peoples, and forced conversions” (*Encyclical VI*, 18).

22. What is the definition of family in the document “The Sacrament of Marriage and its Impediments”?

The Church has manifested and manifests a constant pastoral care towards Christian family, which is nowadays exposed to numerous attacks from the secularized world. “*The union of man and woman in Christ*

constitutes “a small church” or an icon of the Church. (...) Protecting the sacredness of marriage has always been crucially important for the preservation of the family, which reflects the communion of the persons yoked together both in the Church and in society at large. Therefore, communion achieved through the sacrament of marriage does not merely serve as an example of a typical natural relationship, but also as an essential and creative spiritual force in the sacred institution of the family. It alone ensures the safety and formation of children, both for the spiritual mission of the Church as well as in the life of society” (Article I, 4, 5).

23. Did the Council of Crete approve same-sex marriage?

Of course it did not. Only those opposing the Church could support such an idea entirely alien to Orthodox Christian teaching. The Orthodox Church will never support such practices. In this respect, the Romanian Orthodox Church has recently blessed the civic initiative launched by the *Coalition for the Family*, which seeks to protect the natural family, based on the marriage between a man and a woman.

24. However, did the Council have any position regarding civil partnerships?

Yes, it did. In the document *The Sacrament of Marriage and Its Impediments* it is clearly stated that the Orthodox

Church does not agree with civil partnerships: *“The Church does not allow for her members to contract same-sex unions or any other form of cohabitation apart from marriage”* (I, 10).

25. Are mixed Christian marriages (between Orthodox and non-Orthodox Christians) a novelty introduced by the Council of Crete?

No, that is not the case. It has to be emphasized that this problem existed since the beginning of Christianity. The environment in which the Church developed was one in majority pagan or Jewish, which raised questions regarding marriages between Christians and non-Christians.

In order to encourage marriages only among Orthodox Christians, the Church manifested over the centuries a firm attitude against mixed marriages *in order to preserve the spiritual unity of the Orthodox faith of the family*. However, mixed Christian marriages have often taken place over the centuries, and the Church referred to them by applying *the principle of economy* (implementation of a rule with understanding and dispensation), a fact noted in the *Nomocanon* of Saint Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople (810-895 AD), which specifies that the Church was facing the reality of such mixed marriages, which were recognized by the state through the Code of Emperor Justinian (6th century).

Mixed marriages between two Christians of opposite sex, of which one is of Orthodox faith, and the other of another Christian confession (Catholic, Anglican, Protestant etc.), are not a novelty, neither for the Romanian Orthodox Church, which, in 1881, stated in the *Regulation for the ecclesiastical relations of the Romanian Orthodox clergy with non-Orthodox Christians or of other rites and with the nonbelievers who live in the Romanian Kingdom* that: “Mixed marriages between Orthodox and non-Orthodox people or of other rites are blessed by the Orthodox Church, preserving the usage made thus far that the children born of these marriages become members of the Orthodox Church”.

26. Why is economy applied in the case of mixed Christian marriages?

Because many Orthodox Christians live nowadays in predominantly Catholic or Protestant countries, they cannot avoid contacts with non-Orthodox Christians. Thus, oftentimes a spiritual closeness is formed between them and, eventually, the desire to marry.

Nonetheless, the *Orthodox Church does not recommend mixed Christian marriages*. However, starting from the reality of this phenomenon, *it adopted a pastoral attitude, based on the principle of economy, to keep its spiritual sons and daughters in the Orthodox Church and to help them advance as much as possible on the path of a life lived in accordance with God’s commandments.*

*“«Mixed» marriages have often happened in the past in spite of all the canonical prohibitions. In our own pluralistic society, where the Orthodox represent only a small minority, they represent a very large and ever-increasing percentage of all marriages blessed in our churches and also, unfortunately, outside of Orthodoxy. We all know that some of them lead to the creation of happy families, and it would be unwise and utopian to discourage them all. Actually, it may well be that some of such marriages end up being more durable and happier than those contracted by nominal Orthodox who never heard about the meaning of Christian marriage and who never accepted personally and responsibly any true Christian commitment” (Pr. John Meyendorff, *Marriage – An Orthodox Perspective*, Saint Vladimir’s Seminary Press, Crestwood, New York, 2000, p. 52).*

The Holy and Great Council recognizes these situations and states that *“With the salvation of man as the goal, the possibility of the exercise of ecclesiastical oikonomia in relation to impediments to marriage must be considered by the Holy Synod of each autocephalous Orthodox Church according to the principles of the holy canons and in a spirit of pastoral discernment” (The Sacrament of Marriage and its Impediments, Article II. 5, ii).*

27. To whom does the economy apply and in what way?

In case of a mixed Christian family the economy refers to the Orthodox Christian person, and not to the non-Orthodox Christian person. Receiving the blessing

of the Church through the Sacrament of Marriage, the Christian Orthodox avoids the cohabitation in fornication and oblivion of Christ and, thus, can partake of the other Holy Sacraments, without being denied the Holy Eucharist because of the sin of fornication. However, economy cannot become a norm, because mixed marriage does not ensure the spiritual unity in the Orthodox faith during the education of children.

“It would nonetheless be desirable that the practice of economy should not be done in a way that would seem systematic and self-evident, and akribeia – that is, the fact that the Church is opposing the marriage of an Orthodox person with a non-Orthodox one – should always be remembered” (Jean-Claude Larchet, *The Sacramental Life*, Basilica Publishing House, Bucharest, 2015, p. 396).

28. Are the marriages of Orthodox Christians with non-Christians allowed according to the documents of the Holy and Great Council?

Not at all. The Holy and Great Council excludes the possibility of concluding such marriages. The final document states the following: *“Marriage between Orthodox and non-Christians is categorically forbidden in accordance with canonical akribeia”* (*The Sacrament of Marriage and its Impediments*, Article II. 5, iii).

“It should be clear, for example, that an Orthodox priest can never bless a marriage between an Orthodox and a non-Christian. It would be obviously improper to invoke the name

of Jesus Christ in the marriage service for a person who does not recognize Him as his or her Lord. Such an invocation would actually be disrespectful, not only towards the Lord, but also towards this person or towards his or her convictions (or lack of convictions)” (Pr. John Meyendorff, Marriage – An Orthodox Perspective, pp. 52-53).

29. How important is fasting today?

Fasting is of great spiritual benefit. *“It is a fact that many faithful today do not observe all the prescriptions of fasting, whether due to faint-heartedness or their living conditions, whatever these may be. However, all these instances where the sacred prescriptions of fasting are loosened, either in general or in particular instances, should be treated by the Church with pastoral care, “for God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live” (Ezekiel 33:11), without, however, ignoring the value of the fast (Cf. The Importance of Fasting and Its Observance Today, Article 8). Saint John of Damascus says: It is good to fast, but may the one who fasts not blame the one who does not fast. In such matters you must neither legislate, nor use force, nor compel the flock entrusted to you; instead, you must use persuasion, gentleness and a word seasoned with salt” (John of Damascus, On the Holy Fasts, Homily 3, PG 95, 68 B, quoted in the synodal document The Importance of Fasting and Its Observance Today, Article 8).*

30. Is it true that the Council of Crete reduced the fasting periods?

Not at all. As mentioned in Articles 6 and 9 of the synodal document with regard to fasting: *“Following the example of the Holy Fathers, the Church preserves today, as she did in the past, the holy apostolic precepts, synodal canons, and sacred traditions, always advancing the holy fasts as the perfect ascetic path for the faithful leading to spiritual perfection and salvation, while proclaiming the necessity to observe all the fasts throughout the year, namely, the fasts of Great Lent, Wednesdays and Fridays, testified in the sacred canons, as well as the fasts of the Nativity, the Holy Apostles, and the Dormition of the Theotokos; there are also the single-day fasts on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, on the eve of the Epiphany, and on the day commemorating the Beheading of John the Baptist, in addition to the fasts established for pastoral reasons or observed at the desire of the faithful”*.

“Fasting for three or more days prior to Holy Communion is left to the discretion of the piety of the faithful, according to the words of Saint Nicodemus the Hagiorite: “... fasting before partaking of Communion is not decreed by the divine Canons. Nevertheless, those who are able to fast even a whole week before it, are doing the right thing” (Commentary of the 13th canon of the Sixth Ecumenical Council, Pedalion – English translation, 307). However, the totality of the Church’s faithful must observe the holy fasts and the abstinence from food from midnight for frequent participation

in Holy Communion, which is the most profound expression of the essence of the Church”.

31. What does economy applied to fasting mean?

“The Church, however, has also established, with pastoral discernment, boundaries of philanthropic dispensation (oikonomia) concerning the rules of fasting. In this regard, the Church has considered physical infirmity, extreme necessity, and difficult times where she has ordained the application of the principle of ecclesiastical oikonomia, through the responsible discernment and pastoral care of the body of bishops in the local Churches” (The Importance of Fasting and Its Observance Today, Article 7).

32. Were the unity and uniqueness of the Orthodox Church asserted by the Council of Crete?

Yes, they were. Throughout the entire document *Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World*, the essential unity of the Orthodox Church was clearly stipulated, being emphasized that she is the *One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church*, whom we profess in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. By this, her uniqueness has also been professed, that she is the only Church *“because the non-Orthodox Churches and confessions have diverged from the true faith of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church”* (Article 21), that is, from the Orthodox Church.

The Orthodox Church is deeply aware that she is the Church of Christ, as the Holy Apostles, the Holy Fathers of the Seven Ecumenical Councils, those of the other councils of universal authority and all the Holy Fathers up to our day have understood her, professed her, and experienced her in their deep faith. For this reason, the delegation of the Romanian Orthodox Church insisted greatly on expressing the belief that it is only on the basis of the Orthodox faith that Christian unity can be restored through the return of the non-Orthodox Christians to the Orthodox Church.

33. Was the phrase “*the lost unity of Christians*” approved?

In the pre-conciliar version of Article 5 of the document *Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World*, the phrase “*the lost unity of Christians*” was used to show the purpose of the Orthodox Church's participation in bilateral dialogues and in the Ecumenical Movement. This phrase gave rise to controversies, being amended by the reports of several autocephalous Churches. It was considered that, from an ecclesiological point of view, this phrase could suggest a certain loss of Church unity, or that it could be interpreted as “*the lost unity of the Church*”.

Given these discussions on Article 5 of the document, His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel emphasized the importance of mentioning in the text that all the Christians

of various confessions, with whom the Orthodox are in dialogue, are Christians who separated themselves from the Orthodox Church, or non-Orthodox Christians, and the unity, or more precisely the communion, with these Christians can be accomplished only by their accepting the faith of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, that is, of the Orthodox Church. His Beatitude insisted that this clarification was absolutely necessary, because *dogmatic relativism* must be avoided in the formulation of this text that defines Orthodox ecclesiology in relation to different Christian communities. By this clarification it is explained to all the Orthodox believers the reason why the Orthodox Church in her entirety participates in the inter-Christian dialogue, without thereby abandoning the Orthodox doctrine of faith. In this sense, the proposal of His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel to substitute the phrase “*the lost unity of Christians*” with “*the unity of all Christians*” was approved by the plenary session of the Synod.

Accordingly, the final form which Article 5 of the document received in the end was: “*The contemporary bilateral theological dialogues of the Orthodox Church and her participation in the Ecumenical Movement rest on this self-consciousness of Orthodoxy and her ecumenical spirit, with the aim of seeking the unity of all Christians on the basis of the truth of the faith and tradition of the ancient Church of the Seven Ecumenical Councils*”.

34. What is the Orthodox Church aiming at by participating in the inter-confessional dialogue?

The dialogue with various Christian confessions is carried out, firstly, *in order to profess our Orthodox faith and the apostolic and patristic understanding of the Church, thereby contributing to highlighting the eternal values of Orthodoxy and to the rapprochement among Christians.* At the same time, however, our relations with other Christians are unavoidable. It is known that the Orthodox Diaspora in the West cannot avoid relations with Roman Catholics and Protestants, who are the majority in some Western countries. Undoubtedly, we must profess the true faith in these regions as well, except not with confessional hatred, but with humility and Christian love, which are recommended to us by Saint Paul the Apostle, when he speaks about “*faith working through love*”. Accordingly, the profession of the true faith must reflect itself in living righteously, which presupposes for the Orthodox the effort to live in good relations with Christians of various ethnicities and confessions, so *that, together, we give a credible witness to Christ's humble love* in a world ever more secularized, ever more departed from God and the Church. This is the essence of the doctrine that ensues from the proceedings of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church in Crete, with regard to inter-confessional dialogues. In this sense, the Orthodox Church considers it is through dialogue with other Christians that the

authentic doctrine of the One Church of Christ, from which they separated themselves in time, by diverging from the Orthodox faith, is made known.

However, the restoration of the unity of all Christians is accomplished by the return of the non-Orthodox to the Orthodox Church, without any theological compromise or dogmatic minimalism on the part of the Orthodox Christians. The document explains very clearly how this restoration is understood, namely “*in the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church*”, that is, in the Orthodox Church.

35. How are the inter-confessional dialogues evaluated?

“The bi-lateral and multi-lateral theological dialogues need to be subject to periodical evaluations on a pan-Orthodox level” (Article 9).

“Upon the successful conclusion of the work of any theological dialogue, the pan-Orthodox decision about the restoration of ecclesiastical communion must, however, rest on the unanimity of all the local Orthodox Churches” (Article 15).

These articles are welcome, because they come to set the practice of inter-confessional dialogue in order, and even to show that the latter must be re-evaluated. It is for the first time that, in an official document of the Orthodox Church, the evaluation of dialogues and pan-Orthodox consensus on ecumenical agreements are requested. These agreements will not be able to generate

real effects in the Church, except only after their unanimous acceptance at the pan-Orthodox level.

By the fact that the ecumenical dialogue will be periodically evaluated at the pan-Orthodox level, and by the stipulation that all the autocephalous Churches are involved in the process of decision-making with regard to inter-Christian dialogue, it is understood that the document in question can be supplemented or reformulated, when the autocephalous Churches, including those who did not participate at the Council of Crete, will convene another Council.

36. Was ecumenism proclaimed as a new dogma of the Church?

No, categorically not. *The Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church did not formulate new dogmas or liturgical changes*, but professed that the Orthodox Church is the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ. **Neither this Council, nor any other Orthodox Synod has ever declared ecumenism as a dogma of faith, just as no autocephalous, canonical Orthodox Synod has ever declared ecumenism as “pan-heresy”.** The document refers to ecumenical dialogue and rejects the idea of a super-Church, as well as of negotiating over the truth of faith. Accordingly, the accusations brought by some objectors to the Council of Crete on this issue are unjust, irresponsible and harmful to the unity of the Church.

For the Orthodox Church, participation in the dialogue with other Christians – which is generally known under the name of *ecumenical movement* – is understood as a chance to profess the Orthodox faith in front of non-Orthodox Christians. Therefore, this Orthodox participation in the inter-Christian dialogue cannot be considered a heretical attitude, as dialogue among Christians is not a dogma of faith, but an attitude of cooperation among Christians, instead of the polemics full of confessional hatred and the violent confrontation that unfortunately have been manifested for centuries in the history of Christianity.

By participating in this movement of dialogue with members of various Christian confessions, the Orthodox Church considered, however, that *the restoration of the unity of Christians can be accomplished only by the return of the non-Orthodox to the Church, on the basis of the faith of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ, that is of the Orthodox Church*, which we confess in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. Ecumenical dialogue can become problematic, insofar it is understood as a theological compromise based on a “*dogmatic minimalism*” (G. Florovsky). This fact is also underlined in the *Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council*: “*The multi-lateral dialogues undertaken by the Orthodox Church have never signified, and do not signify, nor will they ever signify, any compromise in matters of faith*” (VII, 20).

37. Why was “the historical name of Churches” (Article 6) accepted for the non-Orthodox Christian communities?

Article 6 of the document *Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World* stipulates that: “the Orthodox Church accepts the historical name of other non-Orthodox Christian Churches and Confessions that are not in communion with her”. This formulation, which gave birth to extensive debates during the Holy and Great Council, was considered by some critics of the documents as an ecclesiological declaration of the Council, in the sense of acknowledging the Church quality of the other Christian communities. Although other different formulations were also proposed, so as to indicate the organization of the Christians who diverged from the Orthodox faith, finally the formula “historical name of other non-Orthodox Christian Churches and Confessions” met the consensus of all delegations of the Autocephalous Churches. In fact, it was accepted the idea that the term “Church” can also have other meanings and usages from a juridical, historical, social, cultural point of view, which are different from the ontological and theological meanings used exclusively for the Orthodox Church. In the present-day context, the laws regulating the relations between Christian religious denominations and the European states currently use the word “Church” in their official title. For example, in Romania, besides the Romanian Orthodox Church, ten Christian denominations recognized by the state have the term “Church” attached to their titles.

38. Was the designation “Churches” used before in the Orthodox theology for the non-Orthodox communities?

Yes, it was. It was pointed out at the Council of Crete that the acceptance of the historical designation of “Churches” for the non-Orthodox communities *does not represent an innovation*, because, in fact, *only the historical designation used for these communities is recognized, not their ecclesiastically Orthodox character*. Such terminology has been used before in the course of time. For example, the Council of Constantinople gathered in 1484, which condemned the forced attempts to unite the Orthodox Christians with the Church of Rome during the unionist synods of Ferrara-Florence (1438-1439), uses the term “Church” for the Catholic (Western) Christian community as well, during the service for reception of those of other faith into Orthodoxy, claiming that the persons who return from Catholicism to Orthodoxy must give up their heretical dogmatic teachings “and the rest of their Church’s customs” (I. Karmiris, *Τα Δογματικά και Συμβολικά Μνημεία της Ορθοδόξου καθολικής-Εκκλησίας*, vol. II, Athens, 1953, p. 988).

Other authorities of the Orthodox Church, who cannot be suspected of having diverged from the true faith, but did not use the term “Churches” for the non-Orthodox communities, are: Saint Basil the Great (4th century AD), Joseph Bryennios (14th century AD), or Saint Mark of Ephesus (15th century AD), *The Encyclical of the Orthodox Patriarchs* of 1848, or more recently Saint Nektarios of Aegina († 1920) and others.

When some theologians or councils referred to “the Church of Rome” after its schism in the year 1054, they did not betray Orthodoxy, because they did not recognize another true Church outside the Orthodox Church. For example, Saint Mark of Ephesus addresses “His Beatitude the Pope of Old Rome” with the following words: “Until when will we, who belong to the same Christ and to the same faith, argue and slaughter each other? Until when will we, worshipers of the same Trinity, bite and devour each other (*Galatians* 5:15), so far as to annihilate one another and be annihilated by the enemies outside?” (Saint Mark Eugenikos, *Works*, vol. I, Ed. Pateres, Bucharest, 2009, p. 199). Therefore, we understand that, although this Holy Orthodox Hierarch distances himself from the errors of Western Christianity, he does not give up the ideal of the unity of all Christians in the true faith.

Therefore, accepting the term “Churches” for the non-Orthodox does not represent an innovation introduced by the Council of Crete. Well-known manuals of Orthodox Dogmatics (as those of P. Trembelas, I. Karimiris, and Father D. Stăniloae) refer to the “Roman-Catholic Church”, or to the “Protestant Churches”, and this terminology was not considered to represent a deviation from the true faith, **because by these terms only the historical title or term “Church” is recognized, not the ecclesiastically Orthodox character of the respective communities.** By using the phrase “*Non-Orthodox Churches*” that diverged from the Orthodox faith, the Council of Crete also stipulates that “*the*

Orthodox Church is the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church”.

39. Did the Holy and Great Council approve the Declaration of Toronto (1950)?

No, it did not, because it was not the case; instead, this document was mentioned only once in order to express the Orthodox position on ecumenical dialogue. In the document on the *Relations of the Orthodox Church with the rest of the Christian World*, a reference is made in Article 19 to the *Declaration of Toronto (1950)*, one of the initial documents of the “World Council of Churches”, noting that this Council has never intended to become a *super-Church*.

By quoting this *Declaration* in the document of the Holy and Great Council, the intention was to present the statutory framework of the World Council of Churches as an organized platform for inter-Christian dialogue, which presupposes the freedom of those involved in this dialogue to confess their own faith.

40. Does the Council of Crete somehow endorse an “ecclesiology of branches” that would presuppose the existence of more Churches as part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church?

Not at all. The Council categorically rejects such an approach. Two fundamental truths are very clearly professed in the documents of the Holy and Great Council: 1. The Orthodox Church is “*the One, Holy,*

Catholic, and Apostolic Church” (Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World, Articles 1; 4; 21), which excludes any form of participation of the non-Orthodox Christians in the internal life of the Orthodox Church, and 2. “The non-Orthodox Churches and Confessions have diverged from the true faith of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church” (Article 21) – the proposal of the Romanian delegation, which emphasizes the break or divergence of non-Orthodox Christians from the Orthodox Church.

The Holy and Great Council of Crete did not endorse in any way the ecclesiology of branches, but, on the contrary, it denounced any form of doctrinal negotiations, syncretism, or theological confusion: *“the multilateral dialogues undertaken by the Orthodox Church have never signified, and do not signify, nor will they ever signify, any compromise in matters of faith” (Encyclical VII, 20).*

41. What is heresy? And what is schism?

Heresies and, at the same time, schisms have emerged throughout the centuries even since the era of the Holy Apostles. The first known heretic is Simon the Magician, who was excluded from Church communion by Saint Peter the Apostle himself (*cf. Acts 8, 9-24*).

Heresy (gr. *chairesis*) means separated opinion, wrong teaching as regards the truth of faith. While dogmas of faith are truths revealed by God to mankind, heresies represent a deformation of these dogmas,

teachings that mix the truths revealed by God with the teaching from “outside”, that is, alien to the Church.

Schism (gr. *schisma*, break, division, separation) constitutes a breaking of Church communion (most often manifested as an interruption of the Eucharistic communion between various communities and individuals), which has a problem of Church and moral discipline, or of a different nature, at its basis. Schisms did not always have a theological problem, that is, a heresy at their basis, but rather motives of other nature (canonical, political, ethnical or other). Although some of the Church Fathers did not always make a very clear distinction between schism and heresy, nevertheless Saint Cyprian of Carthage considers them different facets of the same critical reality of the Church. In this sense, Saint Cyprian, in his work *On the Unity of the Catholic Church*, which is in fact one of the oldest and most important patristic approaches on this issue, saw schism as a problem so serious for the Church, that he considered it a sin against the Holy Spirit (*Matthew* 12:31-32). This is why the Holy Fathers included heretics and schismatics among criminals, asserting that both separation by schism and separation by heresy mean spiritual death, and persistence in this state was associated with eternal death. For the Orthodox Church, schism represents a denial of the authority and of the ecclesial unity by some persons or rebellious groups.

Separation by schism is always based on pride, on judgement and confrontation of the hierarchical superiors, on disobedience, on the desire to rule or

dominate, or on excessive zeal without discernment and measure, which is harmful to the life of the Church.

42. How did the Holy Fathers of the Church see the gravity of schism?

Because of its direct negative effects upon the life of the mystical Body of Christ, which is the Church, the Holy Fathers were categorical in their condemnation of any schism, in order to preserve the unity, health and peace of the Church. This is why schism is considered by Saint John Chrysostom to be the gravest sin, one “that not even the blood of the martyrdom can wash out” (Saint John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians*, 11, Migne, PG 62, 85, English translation by Gross Alexander in: Phillip Schaff ed., *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vol. XIII, Eerdmans Publishing, Michigan, 1956, p. 106).

Saint John Chrysostom, “the teacher of repentance”, who at the end of his life accepted all the unjust accusations, the wickedness of others, betrayal, exile, out of his love for the Church and for her unity, when he endured all these tribulations, did not create a “parallel Church” for himself, but considered all his sufferings to be rather a praise and a crown from the Lord of Grace, the Crucified, the Dead and the Risen One:

“Nothing so provokes God’s anger than the division of the Church. Yea, though we have achieved ten thousand glorious acts, yet shall we, if we cut to pieces the fullness of the Church, suffer punishment no less sore than they who mangled His body. For that indeed was brought to pass for the benefit of

the world, even though it was done with no such intention; whereas this produces no advantage in any case, but the injury is excessive. [...] This injury is not less than that received at the hands of enemies, nay, it is far greater. For that indeed renders her even more glorious, whereas this, when she is warred upon by her own children, disgraces her even before her enemies. Because it seems to them a great mark of hypocrisy, that those who have been born in her, and nurtured in her bosom, and have learned perfectly her secrets, that these should of a sudden change, and do her enemies' work" (Saint John Chrysostom, Homilies in Ephesians, 11, Migne, PG 62, 85, English version in: Phillip Schaff ed., A Select Library of the Nicene..., p. 106).

The same Saint John Chrysostom tells us that schism is nothing less than heresy, because of the injury it brings to the Body of Christ, equally hard to heal. *"Tell me, suppose a subject of some king, though he did not join himself to another king, nor give himself to any other, yet should take and keep hold of his royal king purple, and should tear it all from its clasp, and rend it into many shreds; would he suffer less punishment than those who join themselves to the service of another? And what, if withal he were to seize the king himself by throat and slay him, and tear his body limb from limb, what punishment could he undergo, that should be equal to his deserts? Now if in doing this toward a king, his fellow-servant, he would be committing an act too great for any punishment to reach; of what hell shall not he be worthy who slays Christ, and plucks Him limb from limb?" (Saint John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, 11,*

Migne, PG 62, 87, English version in: Phillip Schaff ed., *A Select Library of the Nicene....*, p.107).

At the beginning of the unionist Council of Ferrara (almost 400 years after the great schism of the Catholic Church in 1054), in addressing Pope Eugene IV an exhortation to unity at the request of the Emperor, Saint Mark Eugenikos, Metropolitan of Ephesus, says with regard to the great schism: *“I believe that those who introduced this separation and tore the robe woven in a single piece of the Master’s Body will receive a punishment greater than those who crucified Him and all the unbelievers and heretics of this age. Yet, on the contrary, it is possible for you, most blessed father (i.e. Pope Eugene IV), if you just want it, to unite what is separated and to break down the middle wall of partition (Ephesians 2:14) and to accomplish the work of divine economy. You yourself have made its beginning and enhanced it with bright honours and great gifts; consent to bring it also to its end, as you will find no better occasion than the one God gave you this day!”* (Saint Mark Eugenikos, [Works], vol. I, Ed. Pateres, Bucharest, 2009, p.203).

43. Is the existence of some schismatic tendencies within the Orthodox Church after the Holy and Great Council of Crete justified?

Not at all. After the Holy and Great Council many unfounded accusations were launched in the public sphere regarding the participation of the Romanian Orthodox Church delegation and the documents signed at the Holy and Great Council, the main accusation

being that the hierarchs had signed “heretical” documents and had thus betrayed the Orthodox faith.

On the other side, however, it was strongly stressed that “the documents approved by the Holy and Great Council **do not formulate new dogmas, but represent a reaffirmation of the continuity in professing the Orthodox faith by the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church**, that is, in continuity with the doctrine of faith preached by the Holy Apostles and the Holy Fathers of the Church, in continuity with the Seven Ecumenical Councils, but also with the Orthodox Councils that followed them starting from the 9th century and continuing with the 2nd millennium, which defend the Orthodox faith against some erroneous teachings arisen especially in Western Christianity. *Thus, the Council of Crete confirmed the previous Orthodox synodal tradition and recognized the universal value of other synods of major importance in the history of the Orthodox Church (including the Council of Iași in the year 1642)*” († DANIEL, Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, *An Important Step in the Practice of Universal Orthodox Synodality – The Liturgical, Pastoral and Missionary Signification of the Council of Crete*, <http://basilica.ro/un-pas-important-in-practica-sinodalitatii-ortodoxe-universale-semnificatia-liturgica-pastorala-si-misionara-a-sinodului-din-creta/>). Therefore, since there is no betrayal of the Orthodox faith and there are no “heretical” documents, schismatic attitudes are not justified.

44. How should profession and defence of the Orthodox faith be seen?

Profession and defence of the Orthodox faith is an evangelical commandment for every Christian. Moreover, this is one of the fundamental responsibilities of the bishops. However, it has to be accomplished with discernment, giving the good testimony of the faith of *the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church*. Any excess of zeal implies very high risks and can turn into radical, rebellious, and even schismatic attitudes.

45. How do the Holy Fathers of the Church see zeal without discernment?

Actually many heresies and schisms that the Church has been confronted with over the centuries, such as Nestorianism, Monophysitism, or others, until the various schisms of the 20th century, were produced by pious persons with a zealous attitude towards defending the faith. Unfortunately, their piety or ardour, unless it is also the fruit of personal repentance, of humility and purification from passions, troubles the peace of the Church. In fact, what kind of defence of the Church's faith can one still speak about, when disunion, schism and separation from the Church are encouraged?

But this negative attitude is manifested, according to Saint Maximus the Confessor, because of the zeal without discernment/reasoning for the Orthodox faith, a zeal that, when out of control, like a bull (*Exodus 21:29-36*), endangers the entire soul (Saint Maximus the

Confessor, *Quaestiones et dubia*, 24, *Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca* 10, Turnhout: Brepols, 2006, p.21).

Saint John Chrysostom, too, deploras those who separated themselves from the Church by schism, considering this a state a lot worse even than spiritual negligence: *“those who, forsooth, seem to be in earnest, these are the very persons who work this mischief. Yet surely, if it is for these things (i.e. for schism) ye are in earnest, it were better that ye also were in the ranks of indifferent”* (Saint John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians*, 11, Migne, PG 62, 88, English version in: Phillip Schaff ed., *A Select Library of the Nicene...*, p. 108).

46. Why is cessation of commemoration of the bishop during the holy services forbidden in the Orthodox Church?

Cessation of commemoration of the hierarch by the serving cleric inevitably entails the sanctioning of that cleric by the Church due to the violation of the canonico-liturgical order. Where the hierarch, whose liturgical presence is visible in the Antimins of the Holy Table, which is signed by him, is no longer commemorated, there the Holy Eucharist is not celebrated canonically, in accordance with the Orthodox faith and discipline. The priest who does not commemorate his canonical hierarch during the holy services cannot legitimate himself anymore as a servant of the Holy Altar.

For example, Saint Ignatius Theophorus († 107), who personally knew the Apostles of the Lord, says: *“Let no*

man do anything connected with the Church without the Bishop. Let that be deemed a proper Eucharist, which is [administered] either by the Bishop, or by one to whom he has entrusted it” (Epistle to the Smyrnaeans, VII, 1, in Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325. Vol. 1: The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, revised and chronologically arranged with brief prefaces and occasional notes by A. Cleveland Coxe, New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885, pp. 89-90).

In the same sense, Father Dumitru Stăniloae highlighted the importance of the liturgical commemoration of the bishop as a fundamental aspect in manifesting the unity of the Church: *“We pray first for the commemoration of the bishop, through whom all the charismas of Christ – which come from the Apostles and which he has in communion with all the bishops, therefore with the whole Church – are communicated to us. In this it is shown that we want to abide in the unity and true faith of the Apostolic Church. We cannot save ourselves, except in it. Separation from it is identical to separation from Christ, from the unity of those who recognize Him in His truth, as the Apostles knew Him. Not only do the bishop and the priest pray for the pastored believers, but also the believers for them. Not only does the blood flow from the heart to the limbs, but also the other way around. This is how the unity and life of the organism are maintained” (Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Spiritualitate și comuniune în liturghia ortodoxă [Spirituality and Communion in the Orthodox Liturgy]*, E.I.M.B.O.R., București, 2004, p.380).*

47. What do the Church canons say about the cessation of commemoration of the bishop?

The aforementioned about the connection between the bishop and the Church and about the liturgical commemoration of the bishop are confirmed by the entire canonical Tradition. One of the oldest canons on this matter is the Apostolic Canon 31: *“If any presbyter, despising his own Bishop, shall collect a separate congregation, and erect another altar, not having any grounds for condemning the Bishop with regard to religion or justice, let him be deposed for his ambition; for he is a tyrant; in like manner also the rest of the clergy, and as many as join him; and let laymen be excommunicated (denied the Holy Eucharist). Let this, however, be done after a first, second, and third admonition (warning) from the Bishop”* (in: Philip Schaff & Henry Wace ed., *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Volume XIV, The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, translated by Henry R. Percival, New York, p. 595).

In the first centuries of the Church there were cases of priests who, arbitrarily separating themselves from their canonical (legal) bishops, established communities, set up churches that were separated, independent from the bishop’s authority, also recruiting believers in their own way. Thus, they created schism or disunion to the detriment of the Church. Therefore, the Apostolic Canon 31 punishes with excommunication any rebellious priest who shows disobedience towards his canonical bishop and separates himself from him. If it seemed to some priest that his bishop did something

against the true faith, the latter must be judged by the synod (Canon 9 of the Fourth Ecumenical Council), and if the synod declares the bishop guilty and excommunicates him, only in this case will the priest be released from his relation to the respective bishop (Nicodim Milaș, *Canoanele Bisericii Ortodoxe însoțite de comentarii* [Canons of the Orthodox Church accompanied by commentaries], vol. I, part I, translations by prof. Uroș Kovincici and dr. Nicolae Popovici, Ed. Diacezană, Arad, 1930, pp. 231-234).

48. Can Canon 9 of the First-Second Council of Constantinople (861 AD) offer a canonical legitimation to schism under certain conditions?

Lately, some of the clerics and lay faithful, who ceased the commemoration of their bishops after the conclusion of the Holy and Great Council of Crete, have invoked Canon 15 of the First-Second Council of Constantinople, which took place in 859-861. But what does this canon assert more precisely?

„The rules laid down with reference to Presbyters and Bishops and Metropolitans are still more applicable to Patriarchs. So that in case any Presbyter or Bishop or Metropolitan dares to secede or apostatize from the communion of his own Patriarch, and fails to mention the latter's name in accordance with custom duly fixed and ordained, in the divine Mystagogy, but, before a conciliar verdict has been pronounced and has passed judgement against him, creates a schism, the holy Council has decreed that this person shall be held an alien to every priestly

function if only he be convicted of having committed this transgression of the law. Accordingly, these rules have been sealed and ordained as respecting those persons who under the pretext of charges against their own presidents stand aloof, and create a schism, and disrupt the union of the Church.

*But as for those persons, on the other hand, who, on account of some heresy condemned by holy Councils, or Fathers, withdrawing themselves from communion with their president, who, that is to say, is preaching the heresy publicly, and teaching it barehead in church, such persons not only are not subject to any canonical penalty on account of their having walled themselves off from any and all communion with the one called a Bishop before any conciliar or synodal verdict has been rendered, but, on the contrary, they shall be deemed worthy to enjoy the honor which befits them among Orthodox Christians. For they have defied, not bishops, but pseudo-bishops and pseudo-teachers; and they have not sundered the union of the Church with any schism, but, on the contrary, have been sedulous to rescue the Church from schisms and divisions” (Hieromonk Agapios & Saint Nikodemos, *The Rudder (Pedalion) of the Metaphorical Ship of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of Orthodox Christians*, translated by Denver Cummings, Orthodox Christian Educational Society, Chicago, 1957, pp. 470-471).*

The *Canon* clearly states that the one who, in the absence of an explicit synodal condemnation, does not commemorate his hierarchical superior, who ordained him to accomplish the holy services, *generates a schism*. Therefore, we observe that *the new interpretation that*

circulates today, namely that ceasing to commemorate the hierarch would be a warning, or a sanction given to the hierarch by his subordinates, but not a schism, is erroneous. It is obvious that this is an erroneous interpretation, because **cessation of commemoration is nothing less than schism**, even if, for a while, it is not associated with the commemoration of another bishop, who is not in communion with the non-commemorated bishop, in the case of priests, or with another ecclesial structure, in the case of bishops.

Canon 15, however, does not oblige anyone to cease the commemoration of the bishop, except after the synod has pronounced on this matter. In any circumstance, humility, united with obedience towards the hierarch, is preferable to schism.

The second part of Canon 15 cannot be invoked in arguing for a so-called “sanction by breaking the communion” or “cessation of commemoration” of those who accept ecumenical dialogue, *because this dialogue is not condemned by any Orthodox, canonical, autocephalous Synod as heresy.* Therefore, cessation of commemoration of the bishop, metropolitan, or patriarch places the respective cleric in a state of schism.

49. What are the consequences when a cleric breaks the communion with the local bishop, unless the Holy Synod had sanctioned that hierarch?

If a cleric breaks the connection with the local bishop, he breaks the connection with the whole Church, and then all his services are no longer services

of the Church, but mere ritual acts, which the Church cannot recognize as canonical or valid. In such a situation, the diocesan bishop must delegate another priest to carry out pastoral responsibility, because, in ceasing to commemorate the hierarch during the Divine Services, the rebellious priest has broken the communion with the Orthodox Church.

50. How should an Orthodox Christian behave towards those who address him/her unjust accusations regarding the Council of Crete?

They should keep the true faith and remain in communion with the Orthodox Church, who keeps the unaltered truth of the teachings received from our Saviour Jesus Christ, preached by the Holy Apostles under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and professed by the Church Fathers. At the same time, the Orthodox Christians will ask the advice of their confessor, who is in communion with his hierarch, on their uncertainties regarding the decisions made by the Holy and Great Council of Crete; but, most of all, Orthodox Christians should participate in the life of the Church and continue to pray for her peace and unity.

51. How were the documents of the Holy and Great Council received by the Synods of the local Churches?

They were received in two stages: firstly, by their approval by the delegations present at the Council, and

secondly, by *the transmission of the approved documents to the clergy and believers of all dioceses.*

The believers of the Orthodox Churches participating in the Council of Crete received positively, in general, the documents of the Council. There were also certain believers who showed reticence towards some documents of the Council. But most of them have remained in communion, showing trust in their hierarchs and priests. Unfortunately, some decided to walk on the path of schism, separating themselves from the Orthodox Church.

Of course, some documents of the Council of Crete could be *“explained, nuanced or developed by a future Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church”* as the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church decided during its working session on the 28th-29th of October 2016.

The same realistic attitude was shown by other local Orthodox Churches as well. For example, the Church of Greece, in its *Message to the People*, shows that *“the texts are subject to further study, and the believers are advised to give no weight to the words of those who instigate them to secede from her in order to set up separated gatherings outside the pleroma of the Church”* (http://ecclesia.gr/epikairotita/main_epikairotita_next.asp?id=2044).

The Patriarchate of Alexandria, too, in its message to the believers on the 16th of November 2016, stated that: *“The Council was the seal on a long course of several decades amidst intense theological consultations, agreements and disagreements. It was the vision of our enlightened and*

charismatic predecessors who prayed to witness the day of its convening, but they were not fortunate” (<http://www.patriarchateofalexandria.com/index.php?module=news&action=details&id=1207>).

52. What is the position of the Holy Community of Mount Athos towards the documents of the Holy and Great Council and the hierarchs who participated in it?

We recall that the monks of Mount Athos too, being anchored in “a long tradition of professing the Orthodox faith, self-consciousness and ecclesiology, but also of support for the tried Ecumenical Patriarchate”, through the special Commission entrusted by the Holy Community to study the final documents of the Holy and Great Council, drew attention to the necessity of improving the documents, “so as to offer the world the synodal word of the Orthodox Church, pure from the elements that are not redemptive, but enclose in this age” (see p. 2 of the original document that can be found at <http://orthodoxia.info/news/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/athos.pdf>).

Likewise, after the Holy and Great Council, which approved all six documents, the Holy Community emphasized that “the majority of bishops, even in the form of delegations, participated in the Holy and Great Synod in order to confirm the self-consciousness of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, and not to approve an ecumenist direction”, as some have unjustly asserted afterwards.

The Holy Community, in appreciation of the hierarchs' efforts to finalize the documents, recognized *"the theological efforts of some bishops to eliminate the theologically ambiguous concepts and sentences and to add the proposals necessary in order to avoid the ecumenist connotations of the documents"*.

The same position is also expressed in the *Message of the Double Synaxis of the Holy Mountain on the 17th/30th of June 2017*, that denounces the tendencies of some Christians to separate themselves from their hierarchs on the pretext that the Council of Crete had approved heretical documents: "One sees continuously a smouldering agitation, generated by those who go against the decisions of the Holy and Great Council (Crete, 2016). Delimitations and cessation of the commemoration of our bishop are proposed" (see p. 1 of the original document that can be found at http://basilica.ro/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/DIPLI_CRETE.pdf).

From what has been said thus far, we easily conclude that the problem of theological accuracy and fidelity in keeping and asserting the true faith has concerned all the local Churches. They drafted the texts, submitted them to the approval of the Synods of the Autocephalous Churches in the pre-conciliar stage, and on the occasion of the Holy and Great Council the texts that had generated discussions were improved, so as to answer the inquietudes and challenges of the contemporary world in the spirit of the canonical doctrine and tradition of the Church.

In conclusion, we can say that the Council of Crete is both in line with the doctrine preached by the Holy Apostles and the Holy Fathers, and with all the Orthodox Councils that reasserted the true faith of the Church of Christ, paying also attention to the problematic context of the present-day world.

For this reasons, even the Autocephalous Orthodox Churches that did not participate at the Council of Crete have remained in ecclesial Eucharistic communion with all the Orthodox Churches participant in this Council.

53. Appeal to re-establish the ecclesial communion

In the light of the questions and answers presented above, all those who, from too much zeal or other reasons, have ceased communion with their canonical hierarch are called, with love in Christ, to acquire in humility the peace of forgiveness and the joy of restoring the communion in the Church of Christ.

CONTENTS

<i>Foreword</i>	3
1. What is the Church according to the documents of Crete? ...	7
2. What is the form of Church government?	8
3. Why is the Church organized synodically?	8
4. Is it necessary to organize General or Universal Councils when general issues arise?	9
5. When and why did the idea of organizing a Great Council of the Orthodox Church, gathering bishops from all over the world, come up?	9
6. Why is the General Council of the Orthodox Churches, which took place in Crete, called "Holy" and "Great"?	11
7. Why did the Holy and Great Council need its own regulation of organization?	11
8. Why were the working sessions of the Holy and Great Council not public?	12
9. Were the Bishops participating in the Council of Crete able to speak freely?	12
10. By establishing a precise number of participating Bishops, has the synodal organization of the Church been violated in any way?	13
11. Did all the Bishops participate in the Ecumenical Councils of the Church?	13

12. Did all the Churches participate in the Holy and Great Council of Crete?	14
13. Did the lay faithful also participate in this Council?	15
14. Did people of other faiths participate in the proceedings of the Holy and Great Council?	15
15. Were the final documents voted by the Primates of the autocephalous Churches in their personal capacity?	16
16. Why did some of the participating Hierarchs not sign some of the documents?	17
17. How was the involvement of the Romanian delegation and of the Patriarch of our Church in the Council of Crete perceived?	19
18. Is it true that the Orthodox Church recognizes, through the documents of the Council of Crete, other genders beside «male» and «female»?	21
19. Does the Church have the right to profess her faith in the public sphere?	22
20. Are modern scientific researches on man allowed?	22
21. What are the dangers to avoid today?	23
22. What is the definition of family in the document “The Sacrament of Marriage and its Impediments”?	24
23. Did the Council of Crete approve same-sex marriage?	25
24. However, did the Council have any position regarding civil partnerships?	25
25. Are mixed Christian marriages (between Orthodox Christians and non-Orthodox Christians) a novelty introduced by the Council of Crete?	26
26. Why is economy applied in the case of mixed Christian marriages?	27

27. To whom does the economy apply and in what way? ...	28
28. Are the marriages of Orthodox Christians with non-Christians allowed according to the documents of the Holy and Great Council?	29
29. How important is fasting today?	30
30. Is it true that the Council of Crete reduced the fasting periods?	31
31. What does economy applied to fasting mean?	32
32. Were the unity and uniqueness of the Orthodox Church asserted at the Council of Crete?...	32
33. Was the phrase “the lost unity of Christians” approved?	33
34. What is the Orthodox Church aiming at by participating in the inter-confessional dialogue?	35
35. How are the inter-confessional dialogues evaluated?	36
36. Was ecumenism proclaimed as a new dogma of the Church?	37
37. Why was “the historical name of Churches” (Article 6) accepted for the non-Orthodox Christian communities?	39
38. Was the designation “churches” used before in the Orthodox theology for the non-Orthodox communities?	40
39. Did the Holy and Great Council approve <i>The Declaration of Toronto</i> (1950)?	42
40. Does the Council of Crete somehow endorse an “ecclesiology of branches”, that would presuppose the existence of more Churches as part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church?	42
41. What is heresy? And what is schism?	43

42. How did the Holy Fathers of the Church see the gravity of schism?	45
43. Is the existence of some schismatic tendencies inside the Orthodox Church after the Holy and Great Council of Crete justified?.....	47
44. How should profession and defence of the Orthodox faith be seen?.....	49
45. How do the Holy Fathers of the Church see zeal without discernment?	49
46. Why is the cessation of commemoration of the bishop during the holy services forbidden in the Orthodox Church?.....	50
47. What do the Church canons say about the cessation of commemoration of the bishop?	52
48. Can Canon 9 of the First-Second Council of Constantinople (861 AD) offer a canonical legitimation to schism in certain conditions?.....	53
49. What are the consequences of the cleric’s breaking the communion with the local Bishop, unless the Holy Synod had sanctioned that Hierarchy?	55
50. How should an Orthodox Christian behave towards those who assault him/her with unjust accusations regarding the Council of Crete?	56
51. How were the documents of the Holy and Great Council received by the Synods of the local Churches?	56
52. What is the position of the Holy Community of Mount Athos towards the documents of the Holy and Great Council and the hierarchs who participated in it?	58
53. Appeal to re-establish the ecclesial communion	60