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

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

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

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

(Acts 27:7-8)

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

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1 D. Cummings, trans., The Rudder (Pedalion) of the Metaphorical Ship of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of Orthodox Christians = or, All the sacred and divine canons as embodied in the original Greek text for the sake of authenticity and explained in the vernacular by way of rendering them more intelligible to the less educated, (Chicago: Orthodox Christian Educational Society, 1957), 226; “ἐχρῆν καὶ τοὺς ἀπολειφθέντας τῆς ἁγίας συνόδου, καὶ μείναντας κατὰ χώραν, ή πόλιν, διὰ τινα αἰτίαν, ἢ ἐκκλησιαστικῆν, ἢ σωματικῆν, μὴ ἀγνοῆσαι τά ἐν αὐτῇ τετυπωμένα, γνωρίζομεν τῇ ὑμετέρῳ ἁγίτητι καὶ ἁγάπῃ”. For the Greek text see: Giuseppe Alberigo, Conciliorum oecumenicorum
The importance of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, that took place on the island of Crete from June 16th to 26th, 2016, is given by its positive and simultaneously negative reactions and by the greatness of this historical event for our modern Orthodox Church and theology. In spite of this, the positive and negative approaches, both before and after the Council, have not yet received a detailed theological analysis, the comments on the Holy and Great Council being, almost all the time, an unjustified condemnation of the Council with arguments and slogans of Church propaganda, lacking in academic consistency, or just an immediate approbation of all its aspects, leaving aside certain deficiencies of the pre-conciliar and final decisions. A careful analysis of these reactions can show that the actual orthodox theological debate is based, in most of the cases, exclusively on interviews, online commentaries, blogs and newspaper articles, even on Facebook commentaries, such as Cyril Hovorun’s "book", entitled: "Curiosities of the Great and Awful Council", a book with more than 5000 views. At the same time, the official page of the Holy and Great Council (http://holycouncil.org) was visited in the last five months, from January to May 2017, just twenty thousand times, with average visit duration of 04:16 minutes. The reactions against the Council have more popularity than the final decisions of the Council. The texts are often rejected without being read in the framework of the whole canonical and doctrinal Tradition of

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

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

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

5 https://www.academia.edu/26715123/Кирил_Говорун_Кунсткамера_Великого_и_Ужасного_ Curiosities_of_the_Great_and_Awful_Council (Moscva: Христианский книжный кут, 2016)

6 https://www.similarweb.com/website/holycouncil.org#overview
the Orthodox Church. This shows, on the one side, the seriousness with which this Council is or is not treated, and, on the other side, the level of development of our current Orthodox theological debates on the final decisions of the Holy and Great Council. We even can find more academic studies and articles about the Council in Crete in the journals and books published by catholic and protestant theologians than by the Orthodox.

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

The lack of a consistent theological evaluation from the Orthodox academic community of the final documents of the Holy and Great Council\textsuperscript{9} led to the radicalization of those who wanted to "protect" Orthodoxy against itself. Even the final decisions of the Council of Crete are not yet published as official texts and translations of the Local Orthodox Churches, despite the fact that they can be found on the official website of the Holy and Great Council and on the websites of some Autocephalous Churches, being translated into several languages. At least we can find some translations and studies, but they are just few exceptions to this rule\textsuperscript{10}. 

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

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


12 A good example of this is represented by the statements of Professor Dimitrios Tselengidis at the Conference of Piraeus, March 23, 2016: “We will pray daily, with pain of heart, that the Triune God will not allow this Council to take place, because it is clear from its composition and subject matter that it will create more problems than it aspires to resolve.” For the Romanian translation see: Dimitrios Tselenghídis, ‘Poate un Sinod al ortodocșilor să acorde caracter de Biserică eterodocșilor și să definească diferit identitatea de până acum a Bisericii?’, in "Sfântul și Marele Sinod” (Creta, 2016). Între providență și eșec, ed. Tatiana Petrache (Oradea: Editura Astradrom, 2016), 107. For the Greek paper see: Κ. Δημήτριος Τσελεγγίδης. "Μπορεί μια Συνόδος Ορθόδοξας να προσδώσει εκκλησιαστικότητα στους Ετεροδόξους και να οριοθετήσει διαφορετικά την ένωση τόκο ταυτότητα της Εκκλησίας" http://www.impantokratoros.gr/dat/storage/dat/E9DAC65B/tselegidis.pdf
As far as the event and meeting on the island of Crete are taken into consideration, it should be emphasized that in Crete, synodality at the universal level, was reinforced in the pan-orthodox practice after a considerable absence. Even though the history of the second Christian millennium records some general councils\(^{13}\), however, the manifestation of synodality at the highest level – the universal one – appeared in the last decades more often in the voluminous handbooks of Orthodox ecclesiology, as a principle of the ideal structure of the Church, than in the real life of the Orthodox Church\(^{14}\). Synodality at the universal level is and remains a topic much debated in current Orthodox theology, creating various misunderstandings and disagreements, especially after the Ravenna document\(^{15}\). It is certain that the resumption of this synodal practice in the life of the Church and the dialog at the universal level were a considerable effort for the Orthodox Church\(^{16}\), being more than just an occasional sending of letters from the primate of an autocephalous Church to the others on the occasion of some Orthodox feasts that, apart from Easter, are not celebrated on the same day in the Orthodox Church\(^{17}\).

\(^{13}\) For a list of General Councils of the Orthodox Church, see: Chryssavgis, Toward the Holy and Great Council. Retrieving a Culture of Conciliarity and Communion, 13, note 18.


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

\(^{17}\) Unfortunately, the problem of the common calendar, although it was one of the most important themes, had not reached a consensus and it was pulled out from the agenda of the Holy and Great Council. Franz Mali, "Julianische Berechnung des Osterdatums und Gregorianischer Kalender?", Ostkirchliche Studien 53 (2004): 309-327; Alkiviadis C. Calivas, "The Date of Pascha, the Need to Continue the Debate", The Greek orthodox theological review, 35 (1990): 333-343. D. F. Ogitsky, "Canonical norms of the Orthodox Easter computation and the problem of the dating of Pascha in our time", St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly, 17 no 4 (1973): 274-284. Anastasios Kallis, Auf dem
effort has not been completely without difficulties and deficiencies. From the long period of pre-conciliar preparations\(^\text{18}\) to the refusal of participation of certain autocephalous Churches in the Holy and Great Synod\(^\text{19}\), the Council of


\(^{19}\) Four of the fourteen orthodox Autocephalous Churches decided not to participate in the Holy and Great Council two weeks before the Council. The Orthodox Church Bulgaria was the first Church refusing to participate in the Council (decision of June 1, 2016), then the Orthodox Church of Antioch (decision of June 6, 2016), the Orthodox Church of Georgia (decision of June 10), and the Russian Orthodox Church (decision of June 13). On June 1, 2016, two weeks before the Council of Crete, the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church decided, by an unexpected and surprising attitude, not to participate in the Holy and Great Council of Crete, although the approval and signatures of the Bulgarian Church delegations can be found on all Pre-conciliar Documents. The document “The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today’s World” was signed at the Synaxis of the Primates of the Orthodox Churches in Chambésy, January 21-28, 2016, by the Patriarch Neophyte of Bulgaria; The document “Autonomy and the means by which it is proclaimed” was signed on October 15, 2015 in Chambésy by Metropolitan John of Varna and Veliki Preslav; The document “The Orthodox Diaspora” was signed at the 4th Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference in Chambésy, June 6-13, 2016, by Metropolitan Neophytos of Reykjavík; the document “The Importance of Fasting and its observance today” was signed at the 5th Pan-Orthodox Pre-Conciliar Conference in Chambésy,
Crete was a great challenge for the Orthodox Church. However, given the relatively long-term atrophy of synodal practice at the universal level of the Church, the simple organizational problems are pardonable.

Nevertheless, the Holy and Great Council of Crete led us to the need for a fundamental debate on several theological themes of Church organisation and practice, that obviously involve doctrinal and theological consolidation and clarification\textsuperscript{20}. The themes on the agenda of the Council – from organizational and canonical structure of the Church to its mission in society, or its social\textsuperscript{21} and bioethical engagement, as we can see in the Encyclical of the Council, – are of a relatively great importance for the Orthodox Church and its witness in the world. In this context, both during the preparation of the texts for the Holy and Great Council and after the publication of the final documents, there were

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

some reactions to support or reject certain theological assertions found in the documents. The existing reactions, both for and against the Council, are necessary in the current theological debate, being the condition for the exercise of the faith and for a real theological dialogue between those who have different opinions, but just when they are taking place inside the Church and not through schismatic attitudes, by ceasing commemoration and communion with the bishops and with the whole Church. Therefore, even attitudes that reject certain parts of the documents or some theological assertions from them should be integrated into the process of synodality, as they lead to a fundamental debate not just of the documents, but of the Orthodox ecclesiology and theology of the 20th and 21st centuries. However, some approaches instead of being fundamental, that is, returning to the foundations of Orthodoxy, are on the verge of fundamentalism and extremism, diminishing the true importance of the Church’s manifestation in its unity, and accusing the Council and its participants of dogmatic innovations and betrayal of the faith of our Holy Fathers.22

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

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23 In the Romanian Orthodox Church as in the Greek Orthodox Church some priests ceased communion with the bishops who signed the document by bringing as a theological and canonical argument an abusive interpretation of the 15th canon of the Protodeutera Council (861). For a overview of this problem in the Romanian Orthodox Church see: Fr. Emilian-Iustinian Roman, “Debating the Documents of the Holy and Great Synod of Crete - A Canonical and Disciplinary Approach. Case Study: the Archbishopric of Iași”, published in this Journal. One of the most shocking instances, Cessation of commemoration of Bishop on account of the "teaching of Heresy" was that of Professor Theodoros Zisis, on March 3, 2017, the Sunday of Orthodoxy. For the "Letter of Protopresbyter Theodore Zisis to Metropolitan Anthimos of Thessaloniki (March 3, 2017)", entitled: “Defense and Declaration of Cessation of Commemoration of Bishop on Account of the Teaching of Heresy”, see: https://orthodoxethos.com/post/defense-and-declaration-of-cessation-of-commemoration-of-bishop-on-account-of-the-teaching-of-heresy.
faith in an unaltered form by keeping the Holy Tradition. In Orthodox theology we cannot speak of novelties as in natural science, but if we believe that Orthodoxy expresses the truth, then there are no new dogmas, just ways of expressing the eternal unchangeable truth, no new canons, because the canons are practical applications of the dogmas in the life of the Church. Which is the error of the attitudes against the Council of Crete and of those who condemn it? Although their attempts to analyse the documents were honest, they did not take into account the entire canonical and dogmatic tradition of the Orthodox Church, accusing the synodal documents of serious innovations.

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

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

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

24 Nikolai Afanas’ev, ‘Canons of the Church Changeable or Unchangeable’, St Vladimir’s Seminary Quarterly 11, no. 2 (1967): 54–68.
26 See for example the paper of Fr. Peter Heers, “The “Council” of Crete and the New Emerging Ecclesiology: An Orthodox Examination”, Lecture delivered at the Clergy Retreat of the Eastern American Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia. https://orthodoxethos.com/post/the-council-of-crete-and-the-new-emerging-ecclesiology-an-orthodox-examination. The author, having in mind a quantitative synodality, thinks that synodality can be expressed only when all the bishops of the Orthodox Church are gathered in one place. According to this
from around the Orthodox world transformed, according to their opinion, the Holy and Great Council of Crete into a simple “conference of representatives” or “a council of primates with their entourages” and not a Council with ecumenical perspective. Some of our Orthodox theologians considered the limitation of the number of bishops as a conspiracy against the principle of synodality because the organizers of the Council were afraid of giving to the bishops that were against the Council the right to vote and to condemn the documents. According to this opinion the Orthodox principle of synodality, which claims that all bishops are equal, was altered and in the end destroyed by the wilful selection of some “ecumenist” bishops. Let us analyse this accusation. After the withdrawal of the four Autocephalous Churches, in the Holy and Great Council of Crete, 163 bishops kind of perspective, synodality is equal to statistics: "Participating Churches: 10 of the 14 Local Churches (71%); Representation of Orthodox Christians: close to 30%; Participating Orthodox Bishops: 162 participated of the 350 invited (46%); Representation of Orthodox Bishops: 162 of a total of 850 (19%); Total number of Voting Bishops: 10 of the 162 bishops present (6%), or 10 of the 850 bishops in the Orthodox Church (1.1%).”


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

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

30 “With this anti-traditional measure the possibility that some bishops may oppose the decisions that are contrary to Tradition was avoided, or that any local Church has greater power in taking decisions because of the larger number of bishops”. Serafim Mitropolitul Pireului, Serafim, ‘Salutul Înaltpreasfinţitului Serafim, Mitropolitul Pireului’, in “Sfântul și Marele Sinod” (Creta, 2016). Intre providenta și ese, ed. Tatiana Petrache (Oradea: Editura Astradrom, 2016). 15. Μητροπολίτης Πειραιώς κ. Σεραφείμ: Χαιρετισμός στην Ημερίδα “ΑΓΙΑ ΚΑΙ ΜΕΓΑΛΗ ΣΥΝΟΔΟΣ· Μεγάλη προετοιμασία, χωρίς προσδοκίες”: ΜΕ τόν ἀντιπαραδοσιακό αὐτό τρόπο ἀποφεύγεται η πιθανότητα κάποιοι ἀποφάσεων νὰ ἀντιδράσουν σὲ ἀποφάσεις τῆς Συνόδου, πού θά εἶναι ἀντιτητικὲς τῆς Παραδόσεως, ή κάποια Τοπικὴ Ἐκκλησία νὰ ἔχει μεγαλύτερη δύναμι στὴν Λήφη τῶν ἀποφάσεων, λόγῳ τοῦ μεγαλύτερου ἀριθμοῦ ἐπισκόπων’. http://www.impantokratoros.gr/BACF6AA1.el.aspx

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

Carpatho-Russian Orthodox in the USA (Bishop Makarios of Christopolis (Estonia) as special Consultant); Delegation of the Patriarchate of Alexandria; 35. † Gabriel of Leontopolis; 36. † Makarios of Nairobi; 37. † Jonah of Kampala; 38. † Seraphim of Zimbabwe and Angola; 39. † Alexandros of Nigeria; 40. † Theophylaktos of Tripoli; 41. † Sergios of Good Hope; 42. † Athanasios of Cyrene; 43. † Alexios of Carthage; 44. † Ieronymos of Mwanza; 45. † George of Guinea; 46. † Nicholas of Hermopolis; 47. † Dimtriou of Iriomopoli; 48. † Damaskinos of Johannesburg and Pretoria; 49. † Narkissos of Accra; 50. † Emmanuel of Ptolemaidos; 51. † Gregorios of Cameroon; 52. † Nicodemos of Memphis; 53. † Melitios of Katanga; 54. † Pantaleimon of Brazzaville and Gabon; 55. † Inokentios of Burundi and Rwanda; 56. † Crisostomos of Mozambique; 57. † Neofytos of Nyeri and Mount Kenya; Delegation of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem; 58. † Benedict of Philadelphia; 59. † Aristarchos of Constantine; 60. † Theophylaktos of Jordan; 61. † Nektarios of Anthidion; 62. † Philumenos of Pella; Delegation of the Church of Serbia; 63. † Jovan of Ohrid and Skopje; 64. † Antilohije of Montenegro and the Littoral; 65. † Forintije of Zagreb and Ljubljana; 66. † Vasilije of Sirmium; 67. † Lukijan of Budim; 68. † Longin of Nova Gracanica; 69. † Irlie of Badca; 70. † Irinostom of Zvornik and Tuzla; 71. † Justin of Zica; 72. † Pahomiye of Vranje; 73. † Jovan of Sumadija; 74. † Ignatie of Braničevo; 75. † Fotije of Dalmatia; 76. † Athanasios of Bihać and Petrovac; 77. † Ioanikije of Niksic and Budimlje; 78. † Grigorije of Zahumlje and Herzegovina; 79. † Milutin of Valjevo; 80. † Maksim in Western America; 81. † Irlie in Australia and New Zealand; 82. † David of Krusevac; 83. † Jovan of Slavonia; 84. † Andrej in Austria and Switzerland; 85. † Serije of Frankfurt and in Germany; 86. † Ilarion of Timok (Bishop Jerome (Molević) of Jegar as Special Consultant); Delegation of the Church of Romania; 87. † Teofil of Iasi, Moldova and Bucovina; 88. † Laurentiu of Sibiur and Transylvania; 89. † Andrei of Vad, Feleac, Gui, Alba, Crisana and Maramures; 90. † Irlie of Craiova and Oltenia; 91. † Ioan of Timisoara and Banat; 92. † Iosif in Western and Southern Europe; 93. † Serafin in Germany and Central Europe; 94. † Nifon of Targoviste; 95. † Irlie of Alba lula; 96. † Ioachim of Roman and Bacau; 97. † Casian of Lower Danube; 98. † Timote of Arad; 99. † Nicolae in America; 100. † Sofronie of Oradea; 101. † Nicodim of Strelbaia and Severin; 102. † Visarion of Tuzla; 103. † Petroniu of Sakaj; 104. † Siuliu in Hungary; 105. † Siuliu in Italy; 106. † Timotei in Spain and Portugal; 107. † Macarie in Northern Europe; 108. † Varlaam Ploieșteanul, Assistant Bishop to the Patriarch; 109. † Emilian Lovisteanul, Assistant Bishop to the Archdiocese of Ramnic; 110. † Ioan Casian of Victina, Assistant Bishop to the Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese of the Americas; 111. † Georgios of Paphos; 112. † Chrysostomos of Kiton; 113. † Chrysostomos of Kyrenia; 114. † Athanasios of Limassol; 115. † Neophyto of Morphou; 116. † Vasileios of Constantin and Amnochorostos; 117. † Nikiphoros of Kyklos and Tylrya; 118. † Isaias of Tamassos and Oreini; 119. † Barnabas of Tremithousa and Lebbara; 120. † Christophoros of Karpasion; 121. † Nektarios of Arsinoe; 122. † Nikolaos of Amathus; 123. † Epiphanoys of Ledra; 124. † Leontios of Chytron; 125. † Porphyrios of Neapolis; 126. † Gregory of Mesoara; 127. † Prokopios of Filippoi, Neapolis and Thassos; 128. † Chrysostomos of Peristerion; 129. † Germanos of Elea; 130. † Alexandros of Mantinea and Kynouria; 131. † Ignatios of Artu; 132. † Damaskinos of Didymotehon, Orestias and South; 133. † Alexios of Nikaia; 134. † Hierotheos of Naupaktos and Agios Vlasios; 135. † Eusebios of Samos and Ikara; 136. † Seraphim of Kastoria; 137. † Ignatios of Demetrias and Almyros; 138. † Nicodemos of Kassandra; 139. † Ephraim of Hydra, Spetses and Aegina; 140. † Theologos of Serres and Nigrita; 141. † Makarios of Sidirokastro; 142. † Anthimos of Alexandropolis; 143. † Barnabas of Neapolis and Stavroupolis; 144. † Chrysostomos of Messenisa; 145. † Athenagoras of Ilion, Acharnon and Petropuli; 146. † Ioannis of Lakaleta, Litis and Rentinis; 147. † Gabriel of New Ionia and Philadelphis; 148. † Chrysostomos of Nikopolis and Prevenza; 149. † Theodotos of Ieriros, Mount Athos and Ardameri (Bishop Clement (Kotsomytis) of Methoni, Chief Secretary of the Holy Council); 150. † Simon of Lodz and Poznan; 151. † Abel of Lublin and Chelm; 152. † Iacob of Bialystok and Gdansk; 153. † George of Siemiatycze; 154. † Paisios of Gorlice; 155. † Ioan of Koritsa; 156. † Demetrius of Argyrokastron; 157. † Nikola of Apollonia and Fier; 158. † Andon of Elbasan; 159. † Nathaniel of Amanita; 160. † Acti of Byly; 161. † Michal of Prague; 162. † Isaias of Sumperk; 163. † Jeremy of Switzerland, Chief of the Panorthodox Secretariat of the Holy and Great Council; https://www.holycouncil.org/delegations
four missing Autocephalous Churches, the total number of bishops would have been 263³². The main accusation of those who condemned the Council for the lack of participation of all Orthodox bishops was precisely the delegation of a maximum number of 24 bishops from each Autocephalous Church with their Primate, totalling 25 bishops for each Orthodox Local Church. For some Autocephalous Churches, such as the Church of Albania, of Poland or for the Church of the Czech Republic and Slovakia, whose Holy Synods do not count more than 10 bishops, the number of 24 bishops was too large. But for the Russian Orthodox Church or for the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the number of 25 bishops represented a small percentage of the total number of their bishops. However, it is rather curious that since the adoption of this decision on the fixed number of bishops for each delegation at the Synaxis of the Primates of the Autocephalous Orthodox Churches, from Constantinople, on March 9th 2014 until January 2016 the delegation of bishops and their number was not a real subject of debate in Orthodox theology. This decision of the Synaxis in 2014 was taken over in the Organization and Working Procedure of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, a document signed at the Synaxis of Primate, in Chambésy, on January 27, 2016³³, by all the Primates of the autocephalous Churches, with the exception of the Patriarchate of Antioch. Noteworthy is the fact that the Patriarch of Antioch did not participate in the Synaxis of the Primates in Constantinople in March 2014. The Antiochian delegation refused to be part of this Synaxis because of Antioch’s dispute with Jerusalem over Qatar. If this issue is carefully analysed, it can be seen that the Synaxis of the Primates (March 2014)³⁴  

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

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

established the principle of representativeness, according to which at the Holy and Great Council every delegation will be composed of 24 bishops and the Primate of the Autocephalous Church and the decisions both during the Council and in the pre-conciliar preparation of the Council will be taken by consensus, a principle promoted in particular by the Orthodox Church of Russia and by the Romanian Orthodox Church, in opposition to the Ecumenical Patriarchate, a promoter of the majority decision-taking principle.

The Synaxis of Primates (2014) issued two documents: *Decisions of the Synaxis of the Primates* and *the Message of the Synaxis*. Unfortunately, only the *Message of the Synaxis* has been made public, its decisions remaining foreign to the pleroma of the Church, being an internal procedure for the Primates. In the *Message of the Synaxis* only one small chapter is dedicated to the future Holy and Great Council without specifying the number of the delegated bishops, the number of the participating bishops being mentioned in the *Decisions of the Synaxis*.

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

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38 Paragraph 6: ‘The Synaxis agreed that the preparatory work to the Synod should be intensified. A special Inter-Orthodox Committee will work from September 2014 until Holy Easter of 2015, followed by a Pre-Synodal Pan-Orthodox Conference to be convened in the first half of 2015. All decisions at the Synod and in the preparatory stages are made by consensus. The Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church will be convened by the Ecumenical Patriarch in Constantinople in 2016, unless something unexpected occurs. The Synod will be presided by the Ecumenical Patriarch. His brother Primates of the other Orthodox Autocephalous Churches will be seated at his right and at his left.’ For the English translation of the Message see: https://www.patriarchate.org/messages/-/asset_publisher/9mdht2FrjgbYo/content/id/957805.
39 Hovorun, ‘Critique of the Church through the Prism of the Panorthodox Council’, 64; Serafim, ‘Probleme eclesiale și pastorale care decurg din neparticiparea tuturor episcopilor ortodocși la Sfântul și Marele Sinod’, 43–44.
From the beginning it can be said that in no ecumenical or general council did all the bishops of the Orthodox Church participate, not only because they could not travel or they were sick, as some may say. A good example is the difference between the number of participants in the Third Ecumenical Council of Ephesus (431), which was around 200 bishops, and in the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon. The number of bishops participating in the Fourth Ecumenical Council varies between 450 and 630, the epistle of the Ecumenical Council to Pope Leon stating that there were 520 bishops present in the Council, being the highest number of participating bishops in an ecumenical council. The Fourth Ecumenical Council took place in 451, 20 years after the Third Ecumenical Council. It is inconceivable to consider that 430 bishops did not participate in the Third Ecumenical Council in comparison with the Fourth Council due to illness or transport problems. Analysing the list of participants in the Fourth Ecumenical Council, after we take out the names of those who were not present, but whose names appeared on the lists because other bishops sighed the documents on their behalf, it can be seen that in the Council of Chalcedon no more than 400 bishops took part in person. The number 630 was received by the Tradition of the Church only at the end of the 7th century. Even if we consider that the number of 630 bishops was the real one, we will find that only 10 bishops were present from the Western Roman Empire: 3 papal delegates, 2 African bishops from the Saracens, one from Ethiopia and four Western refugee bishops. It means that half of the episcopate of the Orthodox Church did not attend the Fourth Ecumenical Council. Moreover, if 630 bishops really participated in the Council of Chalcedon, we can see from the lists that 620 bishops were exclusively from the Eastern provinces of the Empire, especially those under the jurisdiction of Constantinople. If we take the number of 400 bishops as the most possible

40 Hovorun, ‘Critique of the Church through the Prism of the Panorthodox Council’, 64.
42 Périclès Pierre Joannou, Discipline générale antique (Ile–IXe s.), 67.
one, then we can see that the number of Eastern bishops present at the Fourth Ecumenical Council did not exceed half of the total number of Eastern bishops, which reached 900 bishops⁴⁵. Therefore, if we take into account solely the number of bishops as a criteria of ecumenicity, it can be said that the Fourth Ecumenical Council was just an Eastern Council, not "Pan-Orthodox", i.e. with the participation of all orthodox bishops of the world (œcumene). In the fifth century the number of bishops from the Western Roman Empire was approximately 1000, 800 bishops were in Africa alone⁴⁶, which meant that in the Fourth Ecumenical Council more than one-third of the episcopate of the entire Church did not participate, a large part of the “Œcumene” (οἰκουμένη - inhabited world), was not even represented. If we consider the number of bishops participating in the other ecumenical Councils, we will note the following: 318 bishops participated in Nicaea, the real number being probably much smaller⁴⁷, in Constantinople just 150 bishops participated exclusively from the Eastern part of the Roman Empire⁴⁸, 200 bishops attended the Council in Ephesus, at the fifth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople, according to the signatures, were just 166 bishops, of which only 152 were present⁴⁹, the vast majority of them being from the Eastern part of the Roman Empire, at the sixth Ecumenical Council, we have 165 bishops⁵⁰ and at the Council in Trullo we have 227 signatures on the final documents and probably the same amount of participating bishops, of which 183 were bishops of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople⁵¹. In the

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


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

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

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

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

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

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

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

56 Ware, 'The Ecumenical Councils and the Conscience of the Church', 119.
58 For the concept of ecumenicity see: Ware, ‘The Ecumenical Councils and the Conscience of the Church’, 218–219.
59 The Council of Constantinople (879–880), held in the Cathedral of Hagia Sophia, described itself in its first canon as: “holy ecumenical council (ἡ ἁγία καὶ ὁἰκουμενικὴ σύνοδος)”, Georgios A. Rhalles, Michael Polles, eds., Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱερῶν κανόνων, 705; Périclès Pierre Joannou, Discipline générale antique (Ile-Ixe s.), 482. The Council of Sardica described itself as ecumenical...
The Council of Constantinople (381), summoned as a general Council of the Eastern Roman Empire, became the second ecumenical Council. It confirms to us that not the summoning of a council as ecumenical gives ecumenicity to that council, nor its title: "holy and great Council", but the reception in the time of the Council as ecumenical or universal. For example, despite the fact that around 338 the Council of Nicaea was considered to have ecumenical value, it was only after 381 that the full ecumenical character of the Council could be confirmed. This is shown by the fact that the Council of Nicaea did not settle the doctrinal disputes, which developed and branched into other confrontations. In this regard, because of the dogmatic and administrative conflicts, between the first ecumenical council and the Council of Constantinople in 381, 56 local or general councils were summoned in order to solve these doctrinal dissensions.

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

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


“Διό βεβαιωτέον ἐστιν ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ ἁγίᾳ συνόδῳ, ὡστε κατὰ τοὺς ἐν Νίκαιᾳ ὄρους, διὰ τὰς ἑκατολιστικὰς αἰτίας, αἰτίας πολλάκις πρὸς ὀλέθρον τοῦ λαοῦ παλαιοῦνται, καθ’ ἐκαστὸν ἑναντίον σύνοδον συγκαλέσθαι, πρὸς ἢν πῶς ἐν τῶν ἐπαρχῶν τῶν πρῶτων καθέδρας ἐπέχοντες, ἐκ τῶν οἰκείων συνόδων δύο, ἢ καὶ δόσεις ἐπιλέξονται, ἐπισκόπους τοποτηρητὰς ἁποστείλωσιν ἵνα ἐν τῇ συνελεύσει συγκαλεύσει πλήρης εἶναι δυνηθῇ ἡ αὐθεντία.”61

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

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

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

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

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

63 For the use of the words: “τοποτηρησία (delegation)” and “τοποτηρητής (delegate)” see: Pavlos Menevisoglou, Λεξικόν των ιερών κανόνων [Katerini: Επέκταση, 2013], 310.
the draft documents at the Synaxis of Primates in January 2016, the Orthodox Church of Russia submitted these texts for debate to the Bishops’ Council, the supreme body of the Russian Orthodox Church in matters of doctrinal, canonical, liturgical, pastoral, and in maintaining fraternal relations with other Orthodox Churches, summoned on February 2-3, 2016⁶⁷. At the Bishops’ Council were invited 354 bishops from 293 dioceses from Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldavia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Estonia, and “also from far abroad, countries with the dioceses of the Russian Orthodox Church”⁶⁸. More than 320 bishops attended the Bishops’ Council. In his report read before the Bishops’ Council, Patriarch Kirill highlighted the importance of the agenda⁶⁹ of the future Holy and Great Council, but also of its pan-orthodox character if all the Orthodox Churches attend the Council⁷⁰. In addition, he underlined that the future Council of Crete is not an ecumenical one, but only the reception makes the Council a ecumenical one, and showed that the Council will not take doctrinal decisions nor introduce innovations into the liturgical or canonical life of the Church. Patriarch Kirill’s report analyses each document⁷¹. Regarding the document: “Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World”, Patriarch Kirill said: “Certainly, no union of the Orthodox Church with the non-Orthodox is even mentioned in the document’⁷². The document “The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today’s World”⁷³ is considered by the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church as “the key document on the

⁶⁸ https://mospat.ru/en/2016/02/02/news127655/
⁶⁹ ‘His Holiness noted, the document affirms for the first time on the pan-Orthodox scale the obligatory character of the Nativity, the Apostles’ and the Dormition fasts which were not mentioned, unlike Lent, in ancient sacred canons’. https://mospat.ru/en/2016/02/02/news127681/
⁷⁰ ‘The reception by the whole Church of a particular Council has always been gradual and, ‘as church history shows, no Council could impose its decisions on the Church if they proved to be rejected by the people of God, if there was no all-church reception of a Council’s resolutions’. For this reason, no Ecumenical Council became such only by the fact of its convocation: its real significance became clear only after some, sometimes very long time.” https://mospat.ru/en/2016/02/02/news127677/
⁷¹ “We do not call Ecumenical the forthcoming Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church. Unlike ancient Ecumenical Councils, it is not called to make decisions on doctrinal issues because such were made long ago and are not subject to revision. It is not called either to introduce any innovation in the liturgical life of the Church and her canonical order.” https://mospat.ru/en/2016/02/02/news127677/
⁷² https://mospat.ru/en/2016/02/02/news127683/
agenda of the Holy and Great Council”74, but the document on Marriage and its impediments was regarded with scepticism because of the lack of consensus75. As a conclusion, Patriarch Kirill pointed out that the great majority of the proposals made by the Russian Orthodox Church in the preconciliar panorthodox process were accepted76, thus being pleased with the documents.

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

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

74 “His Holiness Patriarch Kirill believes that it is the key document on the agenda of the Holy and Great Council. As he noted, it was the Russian Orthodox Church that made her considerable contribution to drafting the document, since many of the social issues raised in it were already addressed in the “Foundation of the Social Concept” and her other important documents.” https://mospat.ru/en/2016/02/02/news127683/

75 “Nevertheless, the draft document did not suit all the Local Orthodox Churches, and Patriarchates of Antioch and Georgia refused to sign it. The further fate of this document will be determined in the course of inter-Orthodox consultations before the Council.”. https://mospat.ru/en/2016/02/02/news127688/

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

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

In the same document (paragraph 4) the Bishops' Council charged the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church with the forming of a delegation of the Russian Church for its participation in the Holy and Great Council. So, despite this general decision of the Bishops' Council, the supreme body of the Russian Orthodox Church, the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church, "consisted of the Chairman – the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia (or the Locum Tenens), nine permanent members and five temporary members summoned from among the diocesan bishops" (Chapter V, art. 3 of the Statute) decided on June 13, 2016, not to participate in the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church\(^79\). How is it possible that the decision of almost all of the bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church be overturned by the decision of 15 bishops? If we consider the principle of representativeness and the delegation of a certain number of bishops for participation in a Council (here the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church) as uncanonical and against the Tradition of the Church, as the detractors of the Council of Crete said, then the decisions of the Council of Carthage and the decisions of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church should be considered as uncanonical. But if we cannot consider those decisions as uncanonical, it means that the delegation of bishops and the principle of representativeness are canonical realities in total accordance with the Orthodox tradition of the Church and valid manifestations of synodality.

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

Another accusation raised by the detractors of the Council was that the Council of Crete was exclusively a Council of bishops, emphasizing the fact that clergy, monastics and laymen were totally bypassed in the preconciliar preparatory process and in the sessions of the Holy and Great Council\(^80\). Some of the theologians even asked for a total representativeness not just of men and women, but of all social categories. The ecumenical council is an universal expression of synodality with general doctrinal, canonical and eschatological value. It is a special event in the history of the Church, but is based on synodality developed at local, regional and universal levels. In the history of the Church we can find many types of council, from mixed ones, where the laity and clergy were involved with a consultative vote, but never with a deliberative vote\(^81\), to councils of bishops (σύνοδος τῶν

\(^79\) https://mospat.ru/en/2016/06/13/news132897/
\(^81\) Liviu Stan, Mirenii in Biserica: importanţa elementului mirean in Biserica şi participarea lui la exercitarea puterii bisericeşti. Studiu canonic - istoric (Sibiu, 1939), 117. For the German translation see: Liviu Stan, Die Laien in der Kirche: eine historisch-kirchenrechtliche Studie zur Beteiligung der Laien an der Ausübung der Kirchengewalt (Ergon, 2011).
ἐπισκόπων), as the 37 apostolic canons confirm and impose it as a rule in the
Church82, where laity and clergy were represented by their bishop83. According to
Orthodox synodality the bishop represents in the council of bishops his entire
Church, because his participation is based on synodality at the local level, where
clergy and laity are present. As regarding the first ecumenical Council, Socrates said
in the first book of his Church History that at the Council of Nicaea: “many of the laity
were also present, who were practiced in the art of reasoning, and each eager to
advocate the cause of his own party”84. Over time, the participation of laity and
clergy in the Councils fade away, the only laymen present in the Councils were
members of Byzantine bureaucracy and aristocracy85. Coming back to the Council
of Crete, if we analyse the lists of participants in the Pre-conciliar Pan-orthodox
Conferences and in the Holy and Great Council we can observe the following. For
example, in the 4th Pre-Conciliar Pan-orthodox Conference held in Chambesy (June
6-13, 2009) participated 41 delegates of the Autocephalous Churches, including
22 bishops, 3 archimandrites, 8 priests, 8 laymen86. In the 5th Pan-Orthodox Pre-
Conciliar Conference in Chambesy (October 10-17, 2015) participated 49 delegates of
the Local Churches, including 27 bishops, 6 archimandrites, 7 priests, 1 archdeacon, 7
laymen theologians, 1 monk, all as counsellors of bishops with the right to speak,
debate and vote87. Regarding the number of members of the Holy and Great

82 D. Cummings, trans, The Rudder (Pedalion) of the Metaphorical Ship of the One Holy Catholic and
Apostolic Church of Orthodox Christians, Λς Δευτερον του ης συνδοσ γνεσθω των επισκοπων, και
ανακριντωσαν αληθως τα δογματα της ευσεβειας, και τας έμπιπτοσας εκλησιαστικας
αντλογιας διαλεκτουσαν άπαξ μεν, τη πετυμη εβδομα της Παντηκοσθης δε, Υπομεροσιον διοδηκατη,

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

84 Συμπαρῆσαν δὲ λαϊκοὶ πολλοὶ διαλεκτικῆς ἔμπειροι, ἐν ἕκαστῳ μέρει συγγραφὴν προθυμομήσον·
Patrologia graeca cursus completus, vol. 67, 64.

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

86 Secrétariat pour la préparation du Saint et Grand Concile de L’Église Orthodoxe, ed., IVe Conférence
panorthodoxe préconciliaire. Actes (6-13 juin 2009), Synodika, XII (Chambéry-Genève: Centre

87 Secrétariat pour la préparation du Saint et Grand Concile de L’Église Orthodoxe, ed., Ε’ Προσωνδοιος
Πανορθοδοξος Διακεχες, ΣυμεσηΩ Γενες, 10-17 Φεβρουαριου 2015, Synodika, XIII (Chambéry-
Council, as we said, there were 163 bishops and 2 consultant bishops. Observing this pre-conciliar practice of the Pan-Orthodox Conferences, the *Organization and Working Procedure of the Council* provided the possibility that the delegations of each Autocephalous Church can be accompanied by six special consultants and three assistants, monks, clergy or laymen, without the right to vote or to speak during the plenary sessions of the Council. However, they were offered, according to the *Organization and Working Procedure*, the right to speak in the Special Commissions and during the sessions of the Secretariat of the Council. Therefore, the number of official consultants of all delegations sent to the Holy and Great Council was 60, including 20 archimandrites, 19 priests, 6 deacons, 13 laymen, i.e. 11 men and 2 women and 2 nuns. An impressive number of stewards and

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

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

assistants from each delegation is added to this number. Although insufficiently represented, it is worth mentioning the participation\(^91\) of 6 women\(^92\) in the Holy and Great Council, four of whom were official consultants of bishops and two as assistants in the official delegations. Even the Press Officer of the Holy and Great Council was a woman: Angela Karageorgou. Although we did not have so many women participating in the Holy and Great Council, it should be noted that there were no women at any ecumenical council\(^93\), except for the Seventh Ecumenical Council, summoned by Irene, Emperor of Constantinople, as she called herself\(^94\). Having this in mind, we cannot say that clergy, monastics and laymen were bypassed in the preconciliar preparatory process and in the sessions of the Holy and Great Council. By reading the Acts of the Pre-conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conferences we can see the great role of the laymen theologians that they had in the process of preparation of the Holy and Great Council.

### Conclusions

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

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

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

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

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