

Lecture delivered at the Clergy Retreat of the Eastern American Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia

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Howell, New Jersey

Tuesday, March 21st, 2017

Your Eminence, Metropolitan HILARION

Your Eminence, Metropolitan JONAH

Your Grace, Bishop NICHOLAS,

Your Grace, Bishop IRENEI,

Venerable fathers and brothers in Christ,

Christ is in Our Midst!

I consider it an honor to stand before you today, to speak to the Shepherds and Pastors of Christ's rational flock, and in particular to the successors of the great work begun in the Russian Diaspora by such holy ones as St. John the Wonderworker and Metropolitans Anthony, Anastasi, Philaret, and Vitaly, Archbishop Averky and Metropolitan Laurus and many others, who are revered fathers not only of the Russian Church Abroad, but indeed of the Church Catholic.

The witness given by the Fathers of the Russian Church Outside of Russia with regard to the Holy Tradition, the monastic and ascetic ideal and in particular the ecclesiology of the Church, continues to inspire and guide Orthodox throughout the world.

Today, as the Ark of the Church sways in the wake of the passing of the self-styled 'Great and Holy Council' of Crete, we have great need of their exactitude in life and faith - or, better, we have great need to follow and imitate them in these.

In the short time allotted me today, I hope to succinctly but clearly lay out before you what of notability and significance happened in Crete in June of last year, that being informed you may act according to God's will. In particular I will briefly examine and critique the following three aspects of the "Council" and its aftermath:

1. Organization and Execution
2. Documents
3. Outcome and Implications

We will focus, in particular on those aspects of the gathering which represent departures from the Holy Tradition and Holy Faith of the Church, for these necessarily merit a response from the fullness of the Church.

Before I begin this analysis, it is necessary to state the following, in order to remove what has become a kind of "red herring" in the whole discussion of Crete and its significance. Supporters, sympathizers and those indifferent to the event respond to criticism of it in a variety of ways. One hears them say, for example:

- The success of the meeting was the meeting itself!
- This is just a beginning and it will be improved upon!
- Nothing of consequence transpired, so there is no need to make a fuss!
- Why even bother with Crete now? It has died and been buried! Within a few years it will be forgotten. (And other such sentiments.)

We can all be sympathetic to the "power of positive thinking," however, I am afraid all of these nice thoughts only function to skirt the issue: what of the "Council" itself? What of its decisions and its impact? One cannot be expected to believe that we've waited more than 50 years (or by other counts 100!) for a grand council the main purpose of which was. . .to happen! Certainly, whatever happened in Crete will and already has impacted the Church (in some places greatly) and will become a precedent for the future.

Indeed, it is for this reason that those clerics who ignore it or downplay it do so to their own - and their flock's - detriment. In the history of the Church, councils - whether false or ecumenical - are either accepted or rejected by the pleroma [the fullness] of the Church. They are not and must not be ignored, especially when they innovate and introduce false teachings into the Church. Just as a fall must be repented of, not swept under the rug, so too errors introduced and accepted in council must be rejected and corrected [ideally in council]. We do not ignore illnesses when they infect our body. How much more should be our care for the Body of Christ! We are all co-responsible, bearing one another's burdens.

### **1. Organization and Execution:**

Let us begin by looking briefly at the basic statistic composition of the "Council:"

- 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%**).

If we compare this with the truly "Great and Holy Councils" of the Church, those later recognized as "Ecumenical," the difference is enormous, especially when we consider the obstacles the ancient hierarchs faced in terms of travel and communication. For example, the First Ecumenical Council had 325 fathers, the Fourth 630 fathers and the seventh 350 fathers - all of which participated with the right to vote.

What, then, did the world go to Crete to see? A "Great and Holy Council"? What went they out to see? A free gathering of the Orthodox Bishops from around the world? Behold, most of them were not invited and nearly all that came were not given a vote. So, what went they out to see in Crete? "A council of primates with their entourages." [1]

This last phrase - "a council of primates with their entourages" - is how Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos of Nafpaktou characterized the gathering, which he attended and which he now severely criticizes for introducing novelties with regard to our Faith. The great irony and tragedy is that for all of the organizers' grand claims that conciliarity had led to and would be on display in Crete, it was rather a new eastern form of Papal primacy - of the Primates - which took center stage. [2]

The tragic irony is that while representatives of the Ecumenical Patriarchate criss-crossed internet highways touting the conciliarity of the pre-synodical process and Council-to-be, the Holy Synods of the several Local Churches were only beginning to examine the orthodoxy of the texts accepted by their Primates without their approval. This illustrates that the failure of this "council of Primates with their attendees" was assured ahead of time.

### **A. Pre-Conciliar Portents of the Impending Disaster**

Much has been made of the long conciliar process which led up to the Cretan gathering. Undoubtedly, much sweat and ink had been spent to bring the event to pass. During the 55 years of active, organizational preparation for the convocation there took place:

- Six meetings of the "Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission"
- Three gatherings of the "Special Inter-Orthodox Commission"
- Five Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conferences
- Three meetings of the Synaxis of the Primates of the Local Churches
- Two special theological conferences for the drafting of the Rules of Operation of the Episcopal Assemblies in the Diaspora
- Two academic conferences, on the issue of a common ecclesiastical calendar and a common celebration of the feast of Pascha with the heterodox and another on contemporary bioethical issues.
- And one academic conference on the issue of the Ordination of Women in Rhodes, in 1989.

It is truly tragic that after such an extensive amount of time and effort the outcome pleases virtually no one, nor brings honor or glory to the organizers or to the Church. Perhaps the hierarch of the Ecumenical Patriarchate who characterized the council as a "fiasco" or the ecclesiastical reporter who called it "the headline which ended up a footnote" were unjust? {It is apparent that the ancient saying has been fulfilled in Crete: *"it bore a mountain and gave birth to a fly."* Would that it were only this and not worse! For such travail in giving birth to such a "council" is a shame upon the entire Church. }

One has to ask: what was at fault, that, in spite of so much work - unique in the conciliar annals - we've had such a tragic outcome?

We have an expression in Greece: "a good day is apparent from the outset." Well, the opposite is also true in the case of the grand council. Early on in the conciliar process it was

apparent that the normally sunny Crete would not shine brightly for Orthodoxy. As I have examined elsewhere at length,[3] the visionaries behind Crete sealed their Council's fate to not follow the Holy Fathers by imbibing the "spirit" of another, even grander and thrice-flawed gathering of recent memory: the Second Vatican Council.

The two councils shared common roots and beginnings, a similar methodology and similar aims, and at least a superficial allergy to dogma. Both gatherings aimed at, and claimed to, solidify their hierarchies' commitment to ecumenism and both allowed for their conciliar decrees and documents to be shaped by academic theologians. And, most importantly, both gatherings saw the introduction of a new "inclusivist" ecclesiology, foreign to the Church's Faith in the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.[4]

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 [5]
- Heresy,[6] heretic, schism or schismatic

However, discernment of the methods of the fallen spirits, or demonology, is a requirement in the formation of Christology and Ecclesiology.[7] As the Evangelist John writes, "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). The absence of any mention of the evil one or his machinations (heresy, schism, etc.) from any conciliar text is indicative of a worldly, secularized outlook, not the patristic mindset.

Finally, following Vatican II and not the holy fathers, the "Council" in Crete not only made no reference to heresy but invited representatives of heretical confessions to attend as observers, including those recognized as such by previous Ecumenical Councils. Although unprecedented in the history of the councils, it had been practiced in the Vatican councils, confirming once again the spirit and mindset which unfortunately animated the organizers.

## **B. The "Conciliar" Abolition of Conciliarity**

Let us look now more particularly at the conciliarity (or lack thereof) of the pre-synodal period and the Council itself. The unity of the Church is manifest and molded through conciliarity. As the 34th Apostolic canon states: "for so there will be unanimity, and God will be glorified through the Lord in the Holy Spirit." When the conciliar way is lost the first and often immediate victim is the unity of the Church.

A careful examination of the "Council" of Crete in this regard reveals that, paradoxically, there occurred a "conciliar" abolition of conciliarity. In the history of the Church, with the exception of the robber councils, no other council showed so much disdain for the very meaning of conciliarity as did the "Council" of Crete.

Firstly, the people of God, the *pleroma* of the Church (which includes clergy, monastics and laymen), was bypassed entirely in the run-up and execution of the "Council." This is not only a major oversight, it is a serious ecclesiological flaw. The Orthodox Patriarchs declared to the Pope in 1848 that in the Church of Christ "neither Patriarchs nor Councils could have

introduced novelties amongst us, because the protector of religion is the very body of the Church, even the people themselves...".[8]

However, not only was the body of the Church kept in the dark but even much of the hierarchy itself. The majority of the bishops and even synods of the Local Churches were uninvolved in the preparation of the "Council," including the drafting of its texts. In this regard, we recall the painful cry of protest issued by Met. Hierotheos of Nafpaktou months before the "Council" that the pre-conciliar texts "were unknown to most hierarchs and to myself, remain hold-up in committee and we don't know their contents." [9]

It is not overstating our case to state that the judgement of the Seventh Ecumenical Council with regard to the false iconoclast council of Hieria is applicable here: "their things were said as in a corner, and not upon the mountain of orthodoxy." This is because those responsible for the preparation of the texts knew very well the people of God's opposition to the problematic texts and for this reason refused to publish them. As is apparent from the minutes of the 5th (and final) Pre-Conciliar Conference (in October of 2015), it was only upon the insistence of the Patriarchate of Georgia and (later at the Synaxis of the Primates in January of 2016 - just 5 months before the "Council") the request of the Patriarchate of Moscow that the texts were finally released to the Church. With this in mind, then, one can better understand why four Patriarchates ended up pulling out at the last minute.

Metropolitan Irenei of Batskas (Serbian Church) had this to say about that last, crucial meeting of the Pre-Conciliar Commission which took place in October of 2015:

*"With regard to the text 'Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World' serious review and correction was, unfortunately, proven impossible, because for most of the meeting...in spite of the disapproval of many and the sharp criticism exacted, the text - for reasons never divulged - was not seriously re-evaluated. Rather, it was sent on as is, essentially untouched, to the Council, where, due to a lack of time and consensus, only cosmetic changes were made."* [10]

A careful study of the minutes of the 5th Pre-Conciliar, Pan-Orthodox Conference (October of 2015) reveals that the work was carried out in a atmosphere of pressure and haste with responsibility for this resting with the president of the meeting, Met. John of Pergamon, who was subsequently replaced.

It is apparent and a view commonly held among critics of the "Council" that one of the main causes for turning Crete into a "fiasco" was this anti-synodical, unorthodox methodology and pre-conciliar secrecy enforced by the organizers.

We said previously that the hierarchies of the Local Churches were kept in the dark with respect to the preparatory period and texts. This is also apparent when one considers that the rules of preparation for the Council only required the signatures of two representatives of each Church in order to confirm the pre-conciliar texts - that is, without the approval of the Holy Synods. Thus, the unorthodox text on the heterodox was considered "approved" by the Local Churches after the October 2015 meeting without being sent, without being discussed, and without being confirmed by the Holy Synods of the Local Churches. In this way, on the strength of two representatives' signatures, the text was considered accepted and binding for the Church of Greece, and then forwarded to the Council.

## **Where is the conciliar character of the Church at work here?**

But that is not all. For the text to be amended, or even one phrase of it to be changed in Crete, it required the approval of all the Local Churches. If only one disagreed with the change, it remained as it was because it was considered already approved by all the Churches at the 5th Pre-Conciliar Conference!

Once again, here we can see why the Churches of Bulgaria and Georgia declined to attend: they understood that essential changes to the texts would be impossible.

This same process was at work with the Rules of Operation for the Council itself. The texts were approved by the Primates (with the exception of the Church of Antioch) without discussion or approval of the Local Church Hierarchies.

Objectionable and unfortunate as the pre-conciliar process appears, it is rather benign in comparison to the pinnacle of disdain of conciliarity on display at the Council itself. There the right and proper function of each bishop to vote on the proposed texts was scorned and denied and reserved for the Primate alone. Unbelievable, unprecedented, and total inadmissible canonically speaking.

The irony is that many of the bishops in attendance enthusiastically declared that there was great freedom and ease for the bishops to speak. While this is significant, it is obviously secondary in importance to voting. What matters is not who speaks first but who has the last word, that is, who decides. Even if all 152 non-voting bishops disagreed with a word or passage or even an entire document, it mattered little, for the votes of the 10 Primates was all that was registered.

As is well known, according to Orthodox ecclesiology, bishops are equal. The Primate is not above all the bishops. Rather, he is the "first among equals." In this context, then, does not the practice in Crete to recognize the vote of the Primate alone, and not that of the whole of the hierarchy, represent a fall from conciliarity and slide into papism? This "papal" elevation of the Primates is extremely dangerous for the entire Church, for besides meaning the abolition of conciliarity in each Local Church, it will quickly lead to the Primate of Primates being elevated to the status of Pope of the East sine paribus (without equal), to use the preferred term of Met. Elpidophoros of Brusa.

Allow me to provide three examples which illustrate that in Crete there occurred a "conciliar abolition of conciliarity."

Before the "Council" of Crete, the Hierarchy of the Church of Greece unanimously agreed and stated their position that in the conciliar texts heterodox communities must not be referred to as "Churches." The hierarchy mandated that the Archbishop and his entourage convey and champion this decision. There was no conciliar authorization for any modification of the decision of the Hierarchy. Nevertheless, the Archbishop of Athens and his entourage (with the exception of Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktou) changed their stance and voted for a modified version of the text in question (#6) which clearly contradicted the unanimous decision of the entire hierarchy. In doing this he and those with him disdained the 34th Apostolic Canon, which reads: "neither let him (who is the first) do anything without the consent of all; for so there will be unanimity, and God will be glorified through the Lord in the Holy Spirit."

In our second example, of the Church of Serbia, we have an even more flagrant example of creeping papalism. The Serbian Church's entourage consisted of 24 bishops. Of these only 7 stood in favor of the final text on the Heterodox (#6). Seventeen of the 24 hierarchs refused to sign it. Nevertheless, because the Patriarch of Serbia was favorable and signed the text, the "Council" considered that the Church of Serbia accepted the text! Once again, the Council disdained the 34th Apostolic Canon which calls upon the First Hierarch "to do nothing without the consent of all." The irony is, of course, that while Orthodox representatives to the dialogue with Rome underline the need of the Vatican to base relations between a Primate and Local Church upon the 34th Apostolic Canon, the Pan-Orthodox "Council" violated it repeatedly.

In our third example, we have the tragic anti-synodical and papal approach of the Archbishop of Cyprus. Four of the 17 bishops in attendance from Cyprus refused to sign the final text on the Heterodox (#6), including Metropolitan Athanasius of Lemesou. After these bishops had departed, the Archbishop's response was to sign it for them, as if he had their agreement! In an interview which he later gave to a Greek-American newspaper, the Archbishop characterized these dissenting bishops of his own Church as a "fifth column" at the Council.

It is apparent here that these examples indicate not only a disdain for the conciliar system and even its abolition, but also contempt for the episcopal dignity by the "first hierarchs." These innovations and diversions were not only tolerated and accepted by the "Great and Holy Council;" upon them the "Council" was carried out. Indeed, without such anti-conciliar activity the "Council" would have disintegrated entirely.[11]

In hindsight, given the anti-conciliar foundation and the failure of the "Council" to unite the Orthodox, the following idiom is applicable: "a house is only as good as the foundation upon which it is built" (see Luke 6:48). The "Great and Holy" Council's house was not built on the rock of conciliarity - "it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" - but on the sand of papalism - "our holy patriarch has spoken"!

## **2. The Documents and Declarations of the Council**

Let us now turn from the organization of the "Council" to its documents.

Three of the six documents presented serious problems for several of the Churches. These were: The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World,[12] The Sacrament of Marriage and Its Impediments, and Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World. I will speak only briefly concerning the second text and focus on the third, which really constituted the basis of the Council.

### **A. The Sacrament of Marriage and Its Impediments**

In the document on Marriage, three statements are made in succession concerning the issue of "mixed-Marriages," that is marriage of an Orthodox Christian with the member of a Heterodox confession or one of the non-Christian religions of the world:

1. Marriage between Orthodox and non-Orthodox Christians is forbidden according to canonical *akriveia* (Canon 72 of the Penthekte Ecumenical Council).

2. 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.

3. Marriage between Orthodox and non-Christians is categorically forbidden in accordance with canonical akribeia.

Now, to be sure, this question of mixed-Marriages is a thorny and difficult pastoral matter, especially for the Church outside of traditional Orthodox lands, such as America. Without wanting in the least to belittle this pastoral challenge, a challenge rightly dealt with by the pastors on a case by case basis, it is imperative that the pastoral practice never be loosed from its dogmatic moorings. My interest here are the dogmatic implications of this decision.

According to Professor Demetrios Tselengides, the move "to legitimize the service of mixed marriage [is] something clearly forbidden by canon 72 of the Penthekte Council. [It is unacceptable, therefore,] for a council such as the "Great and Holy Council" in Crete to explicitly turn a decision of an Ecumenical Council into something relative." [13]

In the relevant excerpt I read of the conciliar document, note that while the kat'oikonomia marriage of the Heterodox with the Orthodox is considered possible, the same is strictly forbidden for the non-Christians. Why the difference? On what basis are the Heterodox admitted to a mystery of the Church? What are the criteria of acceptance?

Let us remember Canon 72, which could not be stated more clearly to show that it is a canon based on the dogma of the Church and thus does not admit of oikonomia:

***"An orthodox man is not permitted to marry a heretical woman, nor an orthodox woman to be joined to a heretical man. But if anything of this kind appear to have been done by any [we require them] to consider the marriage null, and that the marriage be dissolved. For it is not fitting to mingle together what should not be mingled, nor is it right that the sheep be joined with the wolf, nor the lot of sinners with the portion of Christ. But if any one shall transgress the things which we have decreed let him be cut off. But if any who up to this time are unbelievers and are not yet numbered in the flock of the orthodox have contracted lawful marriage between themselves, and if then, one choosing the right and coming to the light of truth and the other remaining still detained by the bond of error and not willing to behold with steady eye the divine rays, the unbelieving woman is pleased to cohabit with the believing man, or the unbelieving man with the believing woman, let them not be separated, according to the divine Apostle, "for the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife by her husband."***

What is significant here is that the Council in Crete introduced, for the first time in history, a synodical decision which allows for the overturning of a canon of an Ecumenical Council and - most importantly - its underlying dogmatic basis. I don't see how one could understand it otherwise, for on what basis are they allowing for mixed marriages if not some (new) consideration of the Church and Her Boundaries, now including the heterodox (somehow - "because they are baptized"?). For, otherwise, it would be madness to speak of marriage - a true mystery of unity in Christ - between a baptized and initiated member of the Body of Christ and one not baptized and not initiated.

Therefore, the implication, even when the decision is referred to as "kat'oikonomia" here, is that the heterodox are "baptized" and on this basis they (as opposed to those of other religions) can participate in the mystery of marriage. Indeed, this is what one hears when he pays attention to the reasoning of those champions of mixed marriages. This, however, means that underlying the supposed "oikonomia" of mixed-Marriages is the so-called "baptismal theology" and "inclusive church" theories, which lie at the heart of syncretistic ecumenism. This is consistent with the fruits we have seen from mixed-Marriages, namely, that on the basis of mixed-Marriages the ecumenically-minded justify other violations of the canons, such as joint prayer with the heretics, or even communing them during the marriage ceremony. (I am told that, in fact, this is practiced by a prominent professor at a North American Orthodox seminary).

It is clear that there is no theological basis for mixed-Marriages, that it cannot be considered "*oikonomia*" since it does not lead to *akriveia*, but rather overturns the unity-identity of the mysteries with the One Mystery of Christ, and that it opens the door to further erosion of the canonical and sacramental order of the Church.

## **B. Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World**

Let us turn now to the text which many consider constituted the basis of the Council: "Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian world." [14] It is the common view that this text, the sixth and final text accepted by the "Council," is fraught with error and confusion, notwithstanding occasional praiseworthy passages.

### **1. The Product of an Ecumenistic Outlook**

As a text with a clear dogmatic-ecclesiological orientation this text ought to have been distinguished by an absolute clarity of meaning and exactitude in formulation, such as to exclude the possibility of a variety of interpretations or intentional misinterpretations. Unfortunately, to the contrary, in key passages we encounter obscurity and ambiguity, as well as theological contradictions and antinomy, which permit polar opposite interpretations.

It is characteristic with what difficulty the "Council" met the task of approving this text that nearly thirty bishops refused to sign it and many others only signed it after the termination of the Council, after the four versions (in four languages) had finally been completed.

To see that the text is a product of an ecumenistic - and not truly ecumenical - mindset, one only need to consider what Metropolitan Hierotheos (Vlachos) wrote concerning the text and the debate surrounding it during the "Council":

"When the minutes of the Council are published, where the true views of those who decided on and signed the text are recorded, then it will be clear that the Council was dominated by the branch theory, baptismal theology and especially the principle of inclusiveness, i.e. a retreat from the principle of exclusivity to the principle of inclusiveness. During the works of the Council in Crete various distortions of the truth were said [in order to bolster the text] regarding St. Mark of Ephesus, the Council of 1484 and the Synodical encyclical of the Eastern Patriarchs in 1848, with regard to the word "Church" as applying to Christians cut off from the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church."

The Metropolitan relates elsewhere that proponents of the text and the recognition of the "ecclesiality" of the Western confessions employed aggression and much pressure, including explicatives against those opposed.

## **2. Endorsement of Ecumenism**

We mentioned earlier that one of the aims of this "Council" was to solidify the Orthodox Church's commitment to ecumenism. This text on relations to the Heterodox achieves this goal. It contains positive references to the World Council of Churches, made with apparent enthusiasm.

In paragraph 21 of the text, the following is stated:

*"The Orthodox Church wishes to support the work of the Commission on 'Faith and Order' and follows its theological contribution with particular interest to this day. It views favorably the Commission's theological documents, which were developed with the significant participation of Orthodox theologians and represent a praiseworthy step in the Ecumenical Movement for the rapprochement of Christians."*

The positive evaluation of the texts accepted within the WCC alone is sufficient for an Orthodox Christian to reject the text. Is it possible for a Pan-Orthodox Council to favorably view theological documents of the WCC when these very texts are filled with heretical Protestant views that have been repeatedly criticized by many Local Orthodox Churches?

In paragraph 19 of the text, the Toronto Statement of the WCC is referred to positively, as a foundational document for Orthodox involvement. What, however, does this statement express? Among other things it states that the WCC includes churches which hold that:

- the Church is essentially invisible,
- there is a distinction between the visible and invisible body of the Church,
- the baptism of other churches is valid and true,
- there are "elements of a true Church" and "traces of Church" in other member churches in the WCC and the ecumenical movement is based on this
- there are church members extra muros (outside the walls), and that
- these aliquo modo (in some way) belong to the Church, and that
- there is a "Church within a Church."

Upon this foundation the Orthodox participate in the WCC, an organization in which the anti-Orthodox "invisible and visible Church" theory clearly dominates, overturning the whole of Orthodox ecclesiology.

The "Council" of Crete is the only council of bishops ever to recognize, promote, praise and accept ecumenism and the World Council of Churches. This stands in direct opposition to the witness of the choir of saints, including - among many others - the great elder Ephraim of Katounakia who by revelation was informed that ecumenism is dominated by unclean spirits.

The implications are enormous: what experience and inspiration of the Holy Spirit could they be expressing in Crete when they stand in opposition to the saints of the Church?

### **3. A Long Path to the Recognition of the Ecclesiality of the Heterodox**

This path to the conciliar acceptance of ecumenism has been long and tumultuous. The passage of this text on Ecumenism was clearly the number one goal of the visionaries of the "Council" - a goal which was apparent as early as 1971.

The first text produced within the pre-conciliar process that recognizes the so-called ecclesiality of the heterodox confessions is the Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission text from **1971** entitled "Oikonomia in the Orthodox Church," which stated: "For our Orthodox Church recognizes - even though being the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church - the ontological existence of all those Christian Churches and Confessions." [15] (This text was severely criticized by theologians in Greece at the time and eventually removed.)

This phrase was later modified at the Third commission meeting in **1986** to "recognizes the actual existence of all the Christian Churches and Confessions."

It was changed again in **2015**, at the Fifth such meeting of the preparatory commission, to "recognizes the historic existence of other Christian Churches and Confessions not found in communion with Her."

When, in January of **2016** the final text was finally made public, this phrase provoked a host of reactions and protests from the fullness of the Church and Local Church Synods, including the Russian Church Abroad.

After the last minute proposal in Crete in **June of 2016** by the Archbishop of Athens was generally accepted by the Primates and their entourages (although nearly 30 bishops refused to sign), the final text included the formulation: "the Orthodox Church accepts the historical name of other heterodox [16] Christian Churches and Confessions that are not in communion with her."

One can see that progressively, over the last 45 years, the phrase has been modified in response to objections advanced by the Local Churches. Nevertheless, the final version remains unorthodox and unacceptable, or, as Metropolitan Hierotheos (Vlachos) writes, "anti-orthodox." There are several important points to make in this regard.

### **4. Anti-Orthodox and Synodically Condemned as a Heresy**

**Firstly**, as Metropolitan Hierotheos remarks, it may be that, in accepting the term "church" for the heterodox confessions, an important distinction was lost on the participating hierarchs. St. Gregory Palamas clearly defined this issue in the Synodical Tomos of the Ninth Ecumenical Council of 1351. He writes there: "it is one thing to use counterarguments in favor of piety and another thing to confess the faith." That is, one should use every argument in countering something, while confession should be brief and doctrinally precise. Hence, in this context, in council, for the sake of doctrinal precision the use of the term "church" for the heterodox is clearly inadmissible.

We can only hope, together with Metropolitan Hierotheos, that the hierarchs in Crete "were misled" by those who argued - without extensive references - that during the second millennium the Orthodox characterized heretical groups as Churches. The truth is that it wasn't until the 20th century that Western Christianity was characterized as a church, when

Orthodox terminology and theology was differentiated from the terminology and theology of the past, especially with [and after] the 1920 Encyclical of the Ecumenical Patriarchate "Unto the Churches of Christ Everywhere." One has only to recall that St. Gregory Palamas likened the Latin heresy akin to Arianism and the Latins as being obedient organs of the evil one.

The term Church is used not simply as a description or an image. Rather, it indicates the actual Body of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Church is identified with the very Theanthropic Body of Christ and because as Head He is one, His Body is one. As the Apostle Paul wrote:

*"...and [He] gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:22-23)*

*"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph. 4: 4-6).*

Although it has been claimed that the offensive phrase referring to "churches," particularly in its last form, is consistent with Orthodox ecclesiology and the Apostle Paul, the truth is that it is, rather, consistent with the new, "inclusivist" ecclesiology. As Metropolitan Hierotheos stated: "while prima facie it seems harmless, it is anti-Orthodox."

Why "anti-Orthodox?" Firstly, it is impossible to speak of "simply" "accepting the historical name" of "other heterodox Christian Churches," for there is no name without existence, because otherwise an ecclesiological nominalism is expressed.

**Secondly**, far from hearkening back to the Apostle Paul, "the mouth of Christ," the phrase "the Orthodox Church accepts the historical name of other heterodox Christian Churches," when understood in context, reminds one of the invisible church theory of Calvin and Zwingli, what Vladimir Lossky called a "Nestorian ecclesiology." This ecclesiology supposes that the Church is split into invisible and visible parts, just as Nestorius imagined the divine and the human natures in Christ to be separated. Other heretical theories have sprung from this idea, such as the branch theory, baptismal theology and ecclesiological inclusiveness. This invisible church theory has actually already been rejected in council by the Orthodox Church.

The idea that a church can be characterized as heterodox (heretical) was condemned by the Councils of the 17th century on the occasion of the so-called "Confession of Loukaris," supposed to have been written or adopted by Kyrillos Loukaris, Patriarch of Constantinople. The condemned phrase was: "it is true and certain that the Church may sin and adopt falsehood instead of the truth." On the contrary, the Councils of the Church at the time condemned this faithlessness to Christ declaring that the Church cannot err.

This conciliar teaching is very important and must be stressed again in our day, for it comes to heal the delusion of those humanists in our midst who have lost faith in Christ and the continuation of the Incarnation. It is this faithlessness that lurks behind the unwillingness of many to embrace the "scandal of the particular," the scandal of the Incarnation, and to declare that the Church is One as Christ is One, and it is in a particular time and place, being the continuation of the Incarnation and the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. This faithlessness amounts to an abandonment of orthodoxy as a pre-requisite of ecclesiality and it is not simply

a crisis of convictions, but, as Fr. George Florovsky wrote some 60 years ago, it signals that people "have deserted Christ."

To be sure, the contemporary forms that the heresy of the "invisible church" theories take are a bit more nuanced than those in the 16th century, but not by much. Let us look again at the offensive phrase in context and we'll see the similarities more clearly. The text reads:

*"In accordance with the ontological nature of the Church, her unity can never be perturbed. In spite of this, the Orthodox Church accepts the historical name of other Heterodox Christian Churches and Confessions that are not in communion with her, and believes that her relations with them should be based on the most speedy and objective clarification possible of the whole ecclesiological question, and most especially of their more general teachings on sacraments, grace, priesthood, and apostolic succession." (Paragraph 6)*

It begins by stating that according to the ontological nature of the Church, unity cannot be disturbed. Here the invisible, united Church in the heavens is implied. This is the meaning of "ontological." This is immediately followed by, "but in spite of this..." and reference is made to the fractured, visible aspect of the Church, with the acceptance of other, "Heterodox Churches."

## **5. An Already Accepted Expression of the New Ecclesiology**

This is not the first time this dichotomy of the ontologically united Church in heaven, outside of time, with the divided Church on earth, in time, has appeared among the Orthodox hierarchy. Here is how the Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew, expressed it in the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem of 2014:

*"The One, Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, founded by the "Word in the beginning," by the one "truly with God," and the Word "truly God", according to the evangelist of love, unfortunately, during her engagement on earth, on account of the dominance of human weakness and of impermanence of the will of the human intellect, was divided in time. This brought about various conditions and groups, of which each claimed for itself "authenticity" and "truth." The Truth, however, is One, Christ, and the One Church founded by Him.*

*Both before and after the great Schism of 1054 between East and West, our Holy Orthodox Church made attempts to overcome the differences, which originated from the beginning and for the most part from factors outside of the environs of the Church. Unfortunately, the human element dominated, and through the accumulation of "theological," "practical," and "social" additions the Local Churches were led into division of the unity of the Faith, into isolation, which developed occasionally into hostile polemics.*

The similarity with the invisible Church theory condemned by the Church and these words of the Patriarch are apparent in the sharp distinction of the ontologically united heavenly Church with the supposedly fragmented earthly Church. This mirrors the "Nestorian" division of the divine and human natures of the Body of Christ. This view is, however, not surprisingly, in harmony with the new ecclesiology propounded at the Second Vatican Council, which posits an earthly church with greater or lesser degrees of fullness[17] due to the so-called "tangles of human history." [18]

These views of the Church imply the identification of the Church with heresy, of the holy things with the fallen and worldly. With pain of heart the words of Saint Tarasios, Patriarch of Constantinople, to the Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council, are brought to mind, when he rebuked the decisions of the iconoclasts' false-council of Hieria:

*"O the derangement and distraction of these [men]. They did not separate between the profane and the holy, and as tavern-keepers mix wine with water they mixed the true word with the perverted, truth with falsehood, just as [as if they were] mixing poison with honey, to whom suitably does Christ our God address through the prophet: 'the priests set aside my law, and defiled my sanctuaries. They did not distinguish between the profane and the holy.'"*

It should be clear, then, that the offensive text with its heretical ecclesiology must be rejected by the Church (by every Local Church separately and then in a future Council), and replaced, for it will undoubtedly be the source of a falling away from Orthodoxy.

There is still time to correct course and heal the wound already inflicted upon the Church. One practical solution, given by Metropolitan Hierotheos, which would help facilitate the restoration of Orthodoxy, is for a future council to correct the errors and to issue a new, orthodox document. There is both contemporary support for this (from the Patriarchates of Antioch, Serbia, Russia, Georgia, Bulgaria and even Romania) as well historical precedent (the meetings of the Ecumenical Councils extended for months and years, the Penthekte Council completed the 5th and 6th Councils and the Ninth Ecumenical Council was actually four separate councils).

Let us hope that bishops everywhere take immediate steps in this direction, for the matter is most urgent in those Local Churches which have accepted the text and Council.

### **3. The Aftermath and Implications of the "Council" of Crete**

#### **A. The Responses of the Local Churches**

Let us now turn briefly to the aftermath of the council and the current state of things.

Firstly, among those who attended the Council, there were nearly 30 bishops who refused to sign its final document on the Heterodox and Ecumenism. Among those are the well-known bishops, Metropolitan Hierotheos (Vlachos) of Nafpaktou (Greece), Athanasius of Lemesou (Cyprus), Neophytos of Morphou (Cyprus), Amphilochios of Montenegro, (Serbia), and Irenei of Batskas (Serbia).

Bishop Irenei of Batskas in Serbia summarized the stance of many post-Council:

*"Concerning the recently concluded, triumphantly yet not entirely persuasively, "Great and Holy Council" of our Church in Columbari of Crete: it is already not recognized as such by the Churches that were absent, indeed even characterized by them as a "gathering in Crete", and also disputed by most of the attending Orthodox hierarchs!"*

The supporters and sympathizers of the Council call upon the example of the Second Ecumenical Council as precedent, as an example of a council at which some Local Churches were absent (namely Rome and Alexandria). What they do not say, however, is that the Second Ecumenical Council was not called as an Ecumenical or Pan-Orthodox Council to

begin with, but rather as one of many Local Councils of the Eastern Empire and on account of the Orthodox decisions that were made it was later accepted by all of the Local Churches as Ecumenical.

In Crete we actually have the opposite: it was called as Pan-Orthodox and four Patriarchates refused to attend. Moreover, and most importantly, they also have refused to recognize it as a Council, even after the fact.

**The Patriarchate of Antioch**, in its June 27th decision of last year, stated that it considered the meeting in Crete as "a preliminary meeting towards the Pan-Orthodox Council," that it "refuses to assign a conciliar character to any Orthodox meeting that does not involve all of the Orthodox Autocephalous Churches," and, thus, that "the Church of Antioch refuses to accept that the meeting in Crete be called a "Great Orthodox Council" or a "Great and Holy Council."

**The Patriarchate of Moscow** (in the July 15, 2016 decision of its Holy Synod) stated that "the Council which took place in Crete cannot be considered Pan-Orthodox, nor can the documents which it ratified constitute an expression of Pan-Orthodox consensus."

**The Patriarchate of Bulgaria** (in its decision dated November 15, 2016) stated in a gathering of the entire hierarchy that "the Council of Crete is neither great, nor holy, nor Pan-Orthodox. This is due to the non-participation of a number of Local autocephalous Churches, as well as the accepted organizational and theological mistakes. Careful study of the documents adopted at the Crete Council leads us to the conclusion that some of them contain discrepancies with Orthodox Church teaching, with the dogmatic and canonical Tradition of the Church, and with the spirit and letter of the Ecumenical and Local Councils. The documents adopted in Crete are to be subject to further theological consideration for the purpose of amending, editing and correcting, or replacing with other (new documents) in the spirit and Tradition of the Church."

**The Patriarchate of Georgia** met in December of last year and issued a final decision on the Council of Crete. In that it stated that it is not a Pan-Orthodox Council, that it abolished the principle of consensus and that its decisions are not obligatory for the Orthodox Church of Georgia. Furthermore, the documents issued by the Council of Crete do not reflect important critiques made by the Local Churches and they are in need of correction. A truly Great and Holy Council does need to be held and the Georgian Church is confident that it will take place in the future and it will make decisions by consensus, based on the teaching of the Orthodox Church. Towards this goal, the Holy Synod has formed a theological commission to examine the documents accepted in Crete and to prepare for a future Council which will be Pan-Orthodox.

**The Patriarchate of Romania**, which participated in the Council, later stated that "the texts can be explained, nuanced in part or further developed by a future Great and Holy Council of the Orthodox Church. However, their interpretation and the drafting of new texts on a variety of issues must not be made hastily or without Pan-Orthodox agreement, otherwise they must be delayed and perfected until agreement can be reached.

**The Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Greece**, while not cataphatically ruling in favor of the final decisions of the Council, has issued an encyclical representing it as an Orthodox Council. Many have concluded that this stance signals agreement, even though within the

hierarchy there are bishops which have sharply rejected and condemned the "Council." This confusion has given rise to disgust on the part of the faithful.

## **B. The Post-Cretan Developments in Greece and Romania**

Before I close, I believe it is also important to inform you of the latest developments with respect to the reception or rejection of the Cretan "Council" by the people of God.

There have been positive responses, especially among the official organs of the participating churches, which have taken the form of lectures and small conferences on the significance of the "Council," sometimes involving the Heterodox. One can also observe a surprising dissatisfaction among supporters that the "Council" did not do enough or go far enough in recognition of the Heterodox or in terms of other "hot button" issues for, mainly, Orthodox academics in the West. No doubt there will be a continued effort to influence the faithful in favor of the "Council" - a hard task, given that most never felt the "Council" was at all relevant to them.

In spite of the official, positive reception given the "Council" in Greece and Romania, the overwhelming response among the people of God has been negative. The implications of the Cretan Council are far-reaching for many in those Local Churches which have accepted the Council. The response of many clergy, monastics and theologians to the favorable reception given to the Cretan "Council" by their hierarchy has ranged from written and verbal rejection by well-known theologians to the grave decision to cease commemoration of erring bishops by monastics and pastors.

The cessation of commemoration of the Patriarch of Constantinople which began on Mt. Athos in the Fall of last year, with perhaps 100 monastics participating, has now spread to many dioceses in the Church of Greece, as also Romania, where several monasteries and clergy ceased commemorating their bishops.

One of the most significant developments occurred just two weeks ago. The eminent Professor of Patrology Protopresbyter Theodore Zisis announced on the Sunday of Orthodoxy that he was ceasing commemoration of his bishop, the Metropolitan of Thessaloniki, Anthimos, due to the latter's enthusiastic reception of the Cretan "Council" and its texts. Due to his stature and high profile (he was the teacher of many of the current hierarchs in Greece), this decision has influenced others and "shaken up" the ecclesiastical status quo in Greece. This path has been followed by four clergy on the island of Crete, three monasteries in the Diocese of Florina, clergy and monastics in the Dioceses of Thessaloniki, Cephalonia, Syros and Andros, and elsewhere.

In addition to this, just a few days ago Archimandrite Chrysostom, the Abbot of the Holy Monastery of the Life-Giving Spring in Paros, Greece (where the Holy Elder Philotheos Zervakos shone in the ascetic life) submitted to the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece an historic formal accusation of heresy against Patriarch Bartholomew. Abbot Chrysostom has petitioned the Holy Synod to recognize, repudiate and condemn the Patriarch's "eterodidaskalia" (heterodox teachings) as contrary to the right teaching of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ.

He wrote to the Holy Synod:

*"In submitting this letter to you, we place before the honorable Body of the Hierarchy of the Church of Greece the scandal caused to myself, our brotherhood, clergy, monks and countless laity, by the successive waves of heterodox teachings which have been expressed at various times by His Holiness, the Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomew, the pinnacle of which being [expressed at] the Holy and Great Council held in Kolympari of Crete."*

The formal petition provides 12 examples of heterodox teaching issued by the Patriarch over several decades, as well as 9 relevant canons of the Church, and ends with a list of 13 bishops, 14 abbots, hieromonks and clergy, and 9 theologians which the abbot is suggesting be called as supportive witnesses before the Holy Synod when he will be formally called to defend his accusation.

### **Your Eminences, Graces and reverend fathers,**

These and other, similar developments in the Ukraine, Moldavia and Romania serve to underscore the mounting pressure upon all the shepherds of the Church to respond patristically to the danger posed to the unity of the Church by the ill-planned and executed, and finally, anti-Orthodox, Cretan "Council."

Church history clearly instructs us that this priceless unity in Christ exists and flourishes only when all are of "one mind" and confess the same faith in the One Church. Moreover, recent history also teaches us that accommodation of, or indifference to, a new, innovative ecclesiology, such as that expressed in word and deed in Crete, is not an option and will only lead to further polarization and shipwrecks on both the left and the right of the Royal Path. It is in such rocky spiritual seas as these that the skill of the spiritual leader is tested and confirmed, showing that he not only knows Truth but is also skilled in the WAY by which all can arrive at it safely.

By God's providence, the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad continues to occupy a unique place in the Orthodox Church from which it can speak freely and even prophetically the word of Truth - "a word" which unites the faithful, healing old schisms and averting new ones. The Church Catholic has need of it now in these trying times.

Through the prayers of our holy fathers, and especially the holy new martyrs and confessors, and by the wise pastoral guidance of our chief Shepherds, may we all continue in the saving confession of faith in the One Church, which is the continuation of the Incarnation - to the up-building of the Church and salvation of the world!

I thank you all for your attention and graciousness in listening to me today and I wish you all a bright and radiant Pascha!

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Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos and St. Vlassios, 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>.

## Notes:

[1] 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>.

[2] This is but one of several alarming ecclesiological innovations introduced in Crete, superseded in gravity only by the acceptance of the self-contradictory "heterodox Churches." It was, however, the former - the sundering of conciliarity - which made possible the latter - the acceptance of the incongruity (if not monstrosity) that is "heterodox Churches." This is true in more than one way. If all of the bishops had had a vote, and not only the Primates, it is unlikely the offending text on the Heterodox would have been accepted. However, it is also the case that if the Archbishop of Athens had respected the the clear, conciliar mandate given him by his hierarchy, which voted unanimously to refuse to accept the term "church" for the heterodox, he would not have accepted the specious and ill-advised "correction."

[3] See: From the Second Vatican Council (1965) to the Pan-Orthodox Council (2016): Signposts on the Way to Crete: <https://orthodoxethos.com/post/from-the-second-vatican-council-1965-to-the-pan-orthodox-council-2016-signposts-on-the-way-to-crete>.

[4] In an article dating back from when Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew was still a Metropolitan, in the journal *The National Catholic Reporter*, the Patriarch said the following, revealing his intentions for the Pan-Orthodox Council: "Our aims are the same as John's (Pope John XXIII): to update the Church and promote Christian unity... The Council will also signify the opening of the Orthodox Church to non-Christian religions, to humanity as a whole. This means a new attitude toward Islam, toward Buddhism, toward contemporary culture, toward aspirations for brotherhood free from racial discrimination...in other words, it will mark the end of twelve centuries of isolation of the Orthodox Church." See: "Council Coming for Orthodox", interview by Desmond O'Grady, *The National Catholic Reporter*, in the January 21, 1977 edition. See also: <http://orthodoxinfo.com/ecumenism/towards.aspx>.

[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.

[7] See: J. S. Romanides, "The Ecclesiology of St. Ignatius of Antioch," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 7:1 and 2 (1961–62), 53–77.

[8] [http://orthodoxinfo.com/ecumenism/encyc\\_1848.aspx](http://orthodoxinfo.com/ecumenism/encyc_1848.aspx).

[9] <http://www.parembasis.gr/index.php/menu-prosfata-a...>

[10] <http://www.romfea.gr/epikairotita-xronika/9264-mpa...>

[11] This section of my lecture is based extensively upon the excellent research and writing done by Fr. Anastasios Gotsopoulos, Rector of the Church of St. Nicholas in the Diocese of Patra, Greece, with his permission.

[12] Due to its importance and the nature of the subject matter, an analysis of this text will be undertaken in a separate paper.

[13] See: <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/90489.htm>.

[14] My analysis will follow and be largely based upon that of Metropolitan Hierotheos (Vlachos) of Nafpaktou, Greece.

[15] Συνοδικά, ΙΧ, σ. 107, Γραμματεία Προπαρασκευής της Αγίας και Μεγάλης Συνόδου της Ορθοδόξου Εκκλησίας, Διορθόδοξος Προπαρασκευαστική Επιτροπή της Αγίας και Μεγάλης Συνόδου 16-28 Ιουλίου 1971, έκδ. Ορθόδοξο Κέντρο Οικουμενικού Πατριαρχείου Chambesy Γενεύης 1973, σ. 143, και Γραμματεία Προπαρασκευής της Αγίας και Μεγάλης Συνόδου της Ορθοδόξου Εκκλησίας, Προς την Μεγάλην Σύνοδον, 1, Εισηγήσεις, της Διορθόδοξου Προπαρασκευαστική Επιτροπή επί των εξ θεμάτων του πρώτου σταδίου, έκδ. Ορθόδοξο Κέντρο Οικουμενικού Πατριαρχείου Chambesy Γενεύης 1971, σ. 63.

[16] Translator's note: The official English version says "non-Orthodox" while the original Greek version says "Heterodox."

[17] "One can think of the universal Church as a communion, at various levels of fullness, of bodies that are more or less fully churches. . . . It is a real communion, realized at various degrees of density or fullness, of bodies, all of which, though some more fully than others, have a truly ecclesial character" (Francis A. Sullivan, S.J., "The Significance of the Vatican II Declaration that the Church of Christ 'Subsists in' the Roman Catholic Church," in René Latourelle, ed., Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives, Twenty-five Years After (1962–1987) (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 283).

[18] 267. Joseph Ratzinger, "The Ecclesiology of Vatican II," a talk given at the Pastoral Congress of the Diocese of Aversa (Italy), Sept. 15, 2001, <http://www.ewtn.com/library/CURIA/CDFECCV2.HTM>.