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**Pending Issues and Future Challenges
After the Convening of the Great and Holy Council**

Abstract

The Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church was held in June 2016, in the island of Crete. A long-awaited event, as the initial idea was already discussed since the beginning of the 20th century, whereas its preparation started already in 1961. In fact, over five decades, a truly momentous task has been achieved, not only for the appropriate preparation of the selected topics and the convening of the Council, but also for the reinforcement of the conciliar self-conscience of the Orthodox Church. The long preparation of this event has triggered not only the official conciliar process, but also the theological discussion, while it is hoped that will further enhance the awareness of conciliarity and the level of synodality within the Orthodox Church.

But this time consuming process had also opposite effects. Due to this long preparation, the Council was unfortunately convened with an overall dated agenda which could correspond perhaps to the expectations and concerns of the people of the 60s and 70s, but which does not fit to the today's concerns. The Holy and Great Council of Crete barely touched the wider crucial and still pending issue of the relationship between Orthodoxy and Modernity, although many of the problems faced today by the Orthodox Church are clearly related to this pending relationship.

My argument is that the catalogue of the pending issues not raised or seriously discussed at the Council of Crete, which the Orthodox Church should dare to address at the next Pan-Orthodox Council or at any other Pan-Orthodox meeting of similar importance, is quite long. In what follows I will attempt to list, and to briefly reflect and comment on pending issues like:

a) *Synodality and Primacy*: Although Orthodoxy is proud to refer to itself as “the Church of the conciliar tradition,” conciliarity and all-level-synodality did not find their place nor even at the occasion of the preparation of the Great and Holy Synod, which in most of the cases remained an affair of the bishops and of the ecclesiastical bureaucracy.

b) *Orthodox Diaspora and Nationalism*: The problem of the Orthodox diaspora was not finally resolved by the Council, but was just accommodated with the synodal approval of the establishment of the local Assemblies of the Orthodox bishops. The painful reality of the National Churches is always there, however, while the ecclesiology of “mother churches” continues to play a much more important role than the principle of the local church or Eucharistic ecclesiology;

c) *Anthropological issues (gender, sex, women)*; According to Metropolitan Kallistos Ware of Diokleia the major problem that Orthodox theology will deal with in the 21st c. is anthropology. In fact, an increase of the awareness of the Orthodox with regard to anthropological issues took place the very last years. Questions like “what is the content of biblical anthropology?”, “how did the fathers understand human nature?”, “how did the fathers understand the division of the first Adam into male and female form?”, “what is the meaning of the expression in Orthodox dogmatic teaching that the Son of God was ‘perfect human being’?”, “what is to be a human?”, “what makes a being to be human?”, “what is to be a person?”, “to what consist the personal identity?”, or “what is and how is defined gender identity and sexual orientation?”, “in what way are biological realities—male or female identity—connected with our salvation?”, and more, arise more and more among Orthodox theologians and intellectuals. This questioning, and this kind of problématique, unfortunately did not find its way to our hierarchs, and the institutional church;

d) *Orthodoxy and Science*: Although, the Orthodox should now address the major changes introduced by biotechnology, mechanic engineering, medical sciences and neurosciences, bioethical challenges, etc., they feel not prepared for doing this as there is not any serious attempt to give a theological account of all these developments, and to reflect theologically on the meaning and the anthropological consequences of the new scientific revolution we are experiencing during the last decades;

e) *Orthodoxy and the challenge of the Modern world*: While we are living in a post-modern world, Orthodoxy seems to stop before modernity, and has not yet resolved

the problem of its relationship to it. Throughout recent history, Orthodoxy seems more or less to have been afraid of modernity and has not embarked on a meaningful dialogue with it;

f) *Orthodoxy and Social Issues*: Despite the socially sensitive theology of the church Fathers, and their fervent preaching and commitment to social justice, and against social inequalities and economic exploitation, political and liberation theology are still remaining an underdeveloped domain in contemporary Orthodox theology;

g) *The Move of Christianity to the Global South and the Danger of Historical Marginalization of Orthodoxy*: In our rapidly changing world, it seems like Christianity is departing from the secularized Europe, and even from the more religious America, to the previously missionary continents of the South, while its center of gravity is also similarly moves from the traditional institutional churches to the new Protestant Evangelical, Pentecostal churches or charismatic congregations. It seems that Orthodoxy has not seriously taken into account this great demographic shift, which is going to shape the map of World Christianity in the forthcoming years;

h) *The challenge of the post-hellenistic world*: The adoption of the ontological language by Christian theology was a great achievement realized mainly thanks to the efforts of the great church Fathers. It seems, however, that Eastern Orthodoxy in its entirety, both the Greek-speaking and not the Greek-speaking, cannot depart from its strong connection with the Hellenistic world, and its mode of thinking, as the only, or the main vector of the relationship between church and the world.