



Vasilios N. Makrides &
Sebastian Rimestad (eds)

The Pan-Orthodox Council of 2016 – A New Era for the Orthodox Church?

Interdisciplinary Perspectives



PETER LANG

The Pan-Orthodox Council of 2016 – A New Era for the Orthodox Church?

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Reflecting on the Pan-Orthodox Council of 2016 – An Introduction

Vasilios N. Makrides / Sebastian Rimestad

Contextualising and Assessing the Pan-Orthodox Council

On 19 June 2016, the Sunday of Pentecost according to the Eastern Orthodox Church, Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople presided a solemn Liturgy in Heraklion, on the island of Crete in Greece, in which he was joined by nine further Primates of other autocephalous Orthodox Churches. High-ranking delegations from ten out of the fourteen universally recognised autocephalous churches had gathered at the Orthodox Academy of Crete for the long-awaited Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, commonly referred to as the Pan-Orthodox Council.¹ This Council had been awaited since more than a century, and the concrete preparations had lasted more than five decades. Ever since the first Pan-Orthodox Conference on the island of Rhodes in 1961, the Orthodox Church had longed for such a gathering, which would, ideally, resolve many long-standing problematic issues within the Eastern Orthodox Church family.

The Council lasted for a little more than a week (17-26 June 2016) and had been carefully staged, with daily press briefings, official social media channels, and concomitant rhetoric. In the end, it adopted six conciliar documents, plus a “Message”, and an “Encyclical”. The documents were mostly based on previous drafts and versions that had already been discussed for several decades, while the consultations at the Council itself could only make very minor adjustments to them. In general terms, these consultations took place in a very collegial and uncompetitive atmosphere, where the word of every delegation seemed to count equally. The ten delegations left Crete at the end of June with the feeling of having accomplished a great feat for the future of the Orthodox Church.

At the same time, there had been frictions and problems. For one, the four churches that did not send delegations to Crete (the Patriarchate of Antioch, as well as the Churches of Russia, Bulgaria, and Georgia) had announced this decision a few weeks before the Council, citing different open and contentious issues that rendered their participation impossible. Interestingly enough, this happened although they had all agreed to participate in the planned Council during the last official pre-conciliar Synaxis of the Primates of the autocephalous Orthodox Churches in Chambésy, Switzerland (21-28 January 2016). The churches present in Crete tried to downplay the importance of perfect attendance and unanimity

¹ All information about the Council is available in four languages (English, Greek, Russian, and French) on its official website, URL: <https://www.holycouncil.org/> [20.06.2021].

and to promote the many positive sides of the gathering, while those staying at home portrayed the Council as incomplete, lacking a Pan-Orthodox character. The direct or indirect role of the Moscow Patriarchate as forming the leading pole of opposition to the Council and trying to stop or delay the entire conciliar process should be emphasised here. The future of a united global Orthodox Church seemed even bleaker than before.

Is it then legitimate to call this Council a Pan-Orthodox one? No doubt, the absence of four churches denied its status as Pan-Orthodox in the strict sense of the word. However, the Council was conceived and scheduled to be a Pan-Orthodox one from the very beginning. It is thus no wonder that it was constantly termed “Pan-Orthodox” on various occasions in numerous documents, official announcements, and discussions preceding the Council of 2016. Also the fact that the above four churches participated regularly in all preparatory stages, attended all the pre-conciliar meetings, and worked together on the preliminary documents attests to the basic Pan-Orthodox character of the Council. The same holds true for the aftermath of the Council, as these four Churches have received the documents finally approved in Crete so that they may respond to them. It is thus possible that the eventual broader reception of the Council may render it truly Pan-Orthodox at a later stage. For all these reasons, even if *de jure* and *de facto* we cannot speak of a Pan-Orthodox Council in the strict meaning of the term, it is hard to avoid acknowledging its Pan-Orthodox dimension and significance, especially considering the decades-long pre-conciliar process.

Even so, the developments in the aftermath of the Council have confirmed the fragile condition of Pan-Orthodox unity. Emboldened by the success of the Pan-Orthodox Council, which strengthened its related legitimacy, the Patriarchate of Constantinople two years later replied favourably to a request by the Ukrainian Parliament and President Petro Poroshenko to investigate the possibility of re-organising the Ukrainian Orthodox Church structure – much to the chagrin of the Russian Orthodox Church, which claimed to be the only canonically legitimate actor in Ukrainian Orthodoxy. Constantinople’s investigation led to a re-appraisal of a historical document from 1686, with which Constantinople had transferred the right to designate bishops in the Kievan Metropolis to the Moscow Patriarchate. In fact, Constantinople had *de jure* kept the canonical jurisdiction over Kiev, designating the decision of 1686 as a temporary one. In other words, this decision had been underlined by the historical conditions of that time and could be revoked under new circumstances.²

2 On this document, see Cyril Hovorun, “Комментарии к Константинопольским синодальным грамотам 1686 года” [Comments on the Constantinopolitan Synodal Tomos of 1686], 06.11.2018, URL: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/комментарии-к-константинопольским-синодальным-грамотам-cyril-hovorun> [20.06.2021]; Vera G. Tchentsova, “Синодальное решение 1686 г. о Киевской митрополии” [The Synodal Decision of 1686 about the Kievan Metropolis], *Древняя Русь. Вопросы медиевистики*

As a result, the Patriarchal Synod of Constantinople lifted the sanctions on the heads of the two uncanonical and unrecognised Ukrainian Orthodox Churches, Meletii (Maletich) from the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church and Filaret (Denysenko) of the Kiev Patriarchate. Moreover, a “Unification Council” under Constantinople patronage was summoned to Kiev in December 2018, at which all Orthodox bishops in Ukraine, regardless of their canonical standing in world Orthodoxy, were invited. Understandably, the vast majority of the bishops belonging the Ukrainian Orthodox Church under the Moscow Patriarchate refused the invitation, since the entire process had been followed through without concerting with the Moscow side. The resulting “united” Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) was *de facto* a reunion of two previously unrecognised churches. Intending to overcome the long-standing ecclesiastical problems in Ukraine, Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople proceeded with solemnly granting the OCU autocephaly on 5 January 2019. Its designated head, Metropolitan Epifaniy (Dumenko), was enthroned on 3 February 2019, and thus Ukrainian Orthodoxy entered a new phase in its history.

However, instead of calming the waves, the episode brought world Orthodoxy into serious turmoil. In response to these actions, the Russian Orthodox Church decided to break off communion with Constantinople and called on all other Orthodox Churches to do the same. This new chasm between the two main Patriarchates in the Orthodox world has at the time of writing not yet healed and is not likely to heal soon. Up to now, only three other Orthodox Churches have proceeded, although with internal dissensions, to the recognition of the new Ukrainian Church autocephaly: the Patriarchate of Alexandria as well as the Churches of Greece and Cyprus. The other Orthodox Churches have preferred to keep a diplomatic stance on the matter, without officially condemning Constantinople’s actions, yet being at the same time considerate of the sensitivities of the Russian side. Attempts at a mediation (e.g., by the Greek-controlled Patriarchate of Jerusalem) have also failed. It is hard to predict what will be the outcome of this conflict and schism. In all probability, it is likely to persist at least until a generational change has happened in both Patriarchates.

Without doubt, the crisis over Ukraine is a consequence of the Pan-Orthodox Council of 2016. The Council validated Constantinople’s claim to leadership in the Orthodox world at the expense of the Russian Church, emboldening it to act in Ukraine. It claims to possess the exclusive right to grant autocephaly status to an Orthodox Church, which is, after all, the case with all modern Orthodox Church autocephalies starting with that of Moscow in 1589/1593. This claim is

2 [68] (2017), 89–110; Oles Kulchynskyy and Ömer Kul, “Kyiv Metropolia and Moscow Diplomacy: An Ottoman Viewpoint”, *Scrinium* 15 (2019), 256–276.

questioned, however, by the Russian Church, which has granted its own autocephalies in the course of the 20th century. In its view, Constantinople's rushing ahead in Ukraine was a direct threat to the traditional Orthodox approach to problem-solving, namely conciliarity. The question on autocephaly, thus, remains a contentious one, and it is hardly accidental that it was left out of the agenda in the Council of Crete. The resulting split, while not fully unexpected, shows that Orthodox unity is still a dream and far from reality. Instead of overcoming the centuries-long "Cold War" between Moscow and Constantinople,³ the current Orthodox world seems to be drifting even further apart. One thing remains certain, however: Had the Russian Orthodox Church participated in the Council of Crete, Constantinople would have been much more sensitive and cautious with regard to actions of Pan-Orthodox significance. This also means that the Ukrainian Church autocephaly would not have been granted and under such circumstances so quickly following the Council.

How should this Council be evaluated, then? The following section mentions a few important points and considers them through an interdisciplinary lens. In hindsight, it is clear that the Council was a successful event, despite various constraints and limitations. Most Orthodox Churches came together and managed to speak with one voice on a variety of crucial topics. However, the Council also revealed a number of weaknesses within global Orthodoxy, as well as future challenges that the Orthodox world unavoidably has to deal with, hoping to find viable solutions or at least temporary compromises.

First, this concerns the different approaches to the question of primacy in the Orthodox world, which has an immediate impact on decision-making within this pretty much differentiated and decentralised structure of independent churches. Inter-Orthodox relations are characterised by numerous ambiguities and fluctuations. Without doubt, this is hardly a recent phenomenon, as it has existed through most of the history of Eastern Christianity due to the polycentric system of church administration. This plurality was, however, enhanced from the 19th century onwards due to the development of ecclesiastical nationalism(s), leading to the rapid multiplication of Orthodox Churches and consequently to serious problems of cooperation and mutual understanding. The situation was further exacerbated by various socio-political developments, such as the long communist rule in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, which was applied to several countries with a predominant Orthodox Church and created barriers to inter-Orthodox communication. In addition, the existence of various autonomous Orthodox Churches

3 See Serge Keleher, "Orthodox Rivalry in the Twentieth Century: Moscow versus Constantinople", *Religion, State & Society* 27 (1997), 125–137; Łukasz Fajfer and Sebastian Rimestad, "The Patriarchates of Constantinople and Moscow in a Global Age: A Comparison", *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 10 (2010), 211–227.

as well as of those with a non-canonical status, which however *de facto* operate as independent structures, has rendered the entire situation even more complex. Although the Orthodox world does not lack moments of unity, at the official and non-official level alike, the rules for a smoother inter-Orthodox cooperation have not been set yet. The aforementioned problems regarding the participation in the Pan-Orthodox Council attest to this.

It is quite easy to comprehend the existing problems in inter-Orthodox relations with reference to the fact that strongly contested issues were not discussed at all at the Council. This relates especially to the issue of autocephaly and the conditions of its proclamation. This is an issue of heightened debate, given the fact that opinions diverge especially between the Patriarchates of Constantinople and Moscow. The problem is not a new one, and there is a long controversy about it in the past as well.⁴ But the proliferation of Orthodox Churches in recent times and the need to create new autocephalous ones have aggravated the whole situation; consider, for example, the self-proclaimed autocephaly of the Macedonian Orthodox Church in 1967 and the autocephaly of the “Orthodox Church in America”, declared unilaterally by the Patriarchate of Moscow in 1970. These complications are in most cases locally based and involve geographically close churches, yet they are still of great importance for the unity of the broad Orthodox Church body, especially in a period of enhanced tensions between globalising trends and national aspirations. At times, there is much more at stake, as the aforementioned Ukrainian Church autocephaly of 2019 and the resulting schism between Constantinople and Moscow clearly demonstrate.

What the Council achieved to formulate was a document on the conditions and the ways to proclaim the autonomy of an Orthodox Church entitled “Autonomy and the Means by Which it is Proclaimed”. This is again a contentious issue, but of lesser intensity than the one of autocephaly. It goes without saying that in both the above cases the main difficulty lies on how to balance the synodal tradition of Orthodoxy with a specifically Orthodox (and not Roman Catholic) idea of primacy. There is a danger lurking behind the tradition of granting autocephaly, which may transform the Orthodox world into a “(Con)Federation of Churches”, as Patriarch Bartholomew made clear at his opening address to the Council (20 June 2016). Here again the Orthodox world faces a significant problem, as the exact role and the responsibilities of the *primus*, which were historically undertaken by the Patriarch of Constantinople, remain up to a certain degree contested, especially from the Moscow side.⁵ It is about a recurrent issue that is

4 See Marie-Hélène Blanchet, Frédéric Gabriel, and Laurent Tatarenko (eds), *Autocéphalies. L'exercice de l'indépendance dans les Églises slaves orientales (IXe-XXIe siècle)*, Rome 2021.

5 See Anargyros Anapliotis, “Primus und Synode in den Statuten der Orthodoxen Kirche am Beispiel des Ökumenischen und des Moskauer Patriarchats”, in Christoph Böttigheimer and Johannes Hofmann (eds), *Autorität und Synodalität*, Frankfurt am Main 2008, 275–

closely related to the administrative pluralism of the Orthodox Church structures. These used to function better and more effectively until the appearance of Orthodox nationalism(s), yet the present situation renders these difficulties clearer than ever. The rich and intense Orthodox discourse and rhetoric on conciliarity, collegiality, catholicity, and community, which were highlighted quite strongly during the Council, seem to have little impact upon real church politics, which are often divided between competing ethno-religious camps and aspirations. As a result, there is a historically documented cleavage between on the one hand the Byzantine, Greek-oriented tradition, and on the other hand the Slavic, especially Russian-oriented tradition of Orthodox Christianity in different constellations. The recent Ukrainian Church crisis once more revealed the existence of these two fronts and the vicissitudes associated with them. The Serbian case illustrates this dilemma quite well. With regard to the Council of Crete, the Serbian Orthodox Church did not succumb to internal and external pressure to decline participation. Yet in the Ukrainian Church crisis, it seems to be more supportive of the Russian side. At the same time, other traditions of Orthodoxy (e.g., the Arab-speaking) also try to promote their interests and profit from the above tensions and conflicts whenever possible. All this takes place against the background of the decline of Orthodox universality due to the rise and pervasive influence of Orthodox nationalism(s), which seems to set the rules in the present situation.

Another related challenge for the Orthodox world is to find the necessary and fruitful balance between the global and the local in the respective Orthodox cultures of today. It is not about the establishment of the former over the latter or vice-versa, but about finding and applying a strategy to accommodate both trends at a trans-Orthodox level. In fact, what we observe in the history of Orthodox Christianity (and beyond that, of course) are continuous and repeated “glocalisation processes”, namely the mixing and fusion of local elements with global trends.⁶ Historically speaking, this was not problematic as such, and the Orthodox showed an amazing flexibility and capacity to find this balance; for example, in their historical missions.⁷ The advent of the modern age, however, has changed

295; Hilarion Alfeyev, “Primat und Katholizität in der orthodoxen Tradition”, *Una Sancta* 63 (2008), 225–233; Athanasios Vletsis, “Wer ist der Erste in der Orthodoxie? Das Ringen der Orthodoxen Kirchen um die Gestaltung einer panorthodoxen Rangordnung”, *Una Sancta* 66 (2011), 2–4.

6 See Victor Roudometof, “The Glocalisations of Eastern Orthodox Christianity”, *European Journal of Social Theory* 16 (2013), 226–245; idem, *Globalization and Orthodox Christianity: The Transformations of a Religious Tradition*, New York/NY 2014.

7 See Vasilios N. Makrides, “The ‘Individuality of Local Cultures’: Perceptions, Policies and Attitudes in the Context of Orthodox Christian Missions”, in Martin Fuchs, Antje Linkenbach, and Wolfgang Reinhard (eds), *Individualisierung durch christliche Mission?*, Wiesbaden 2015, 152–169.

many of these traditional Orthodox orientations and practices and left the Orthodox world unprepared to develop further and address new problems. This explains why the Orthodox, out of defensiveness, during this period turned to traditionalism, conservatism, and glorification of their past achievements. The consequences of this introversion are felt until today, as becomes evident from the many challenges that the Pan-Orthodox Council intended to deal with.

Considering the local variety and multiformity of present-time Orthodoxy, though, one realises that rediscovering this balance is a quite complicated and demanding task. Some of the documents approved by the Council touched upon such issues, yet it is clear that the Orthodox world is still at the beginning of a new search for the accommodation of the global and the local in its tradition. To mention just one example: In 2000, the Russian Orthodox Church published an official document expounding its own “Bases of the Social Concept”. This lengthy document was characterised as a Russian Orthodox one from the very beginning and was treated like this by the other Orthodox Churches, namely as not reflecting a Pan-Orthodox consensus on this highly sensitive topic. Interestingly enough, most Orthodox Churches reacted with a complete silence towards this document as if it were not particularly important. What thus remained unresolved was the passage from the local Russian to a Pan-Orthodox level, something that has not been effected so far, not only with regard to social questions, but also concerning a variety of other issues. There is only a recent new social document in 2020 by the Patriarchate of Constantinople, to which we shall refer later.

Second, another important point concerns the relations of the Orthodox Church to other Christian Churches and confessions in the context of Ecumenism, as well as the various reactions to such inter-Christian openness, not only by Orthodox rigorist/fundamentalist circles, but at times also by mainstream Orthodox.⁸ The issue became a prominent one both before and during the Council on various occasions, especially concerning the recognition of the “ecclesiality” of non-Orthodox Churches and confessions.⁹ Truth be told, the Orthodox Church considers itself as the sole bearer of the authentic and unadulterated Christian truth. Moreover, the Eastern Orthodox Churches do not view themselves as mere confessions, even if they are still perceived by others (especially by Protestants)

8 See Paul Ladouceur, “Neo-traditionalist Ecclesiology in Orthodoxy”, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 72 (2019), 398–413; Brandon Gallaher, “Ecumenism as Civilisational Dialogue: Eastern Orthodox Anti-ecumenism and Eastern Orthodox Ecumenism. A Creative or Sterile Antinomy?”, *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 19 (2019), 265–285.

9 See Paul Ladouceur, “On Ecumenoclasm: What Is Church?”, *Public Orthodoxy*, 05.06.2016, URL: <https://publicorthodoxy.org/2016/06/05/on-ecumenoclasm-what-is-church/> [20.06.2021].

as such within the broader Christian confessional body. The related conciliar document "Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World" begins with a statement, which reveals from the outset this Orthodox self-understanding and the concomitant sense of self-assurance. On the other hand, it is well known that the Patriarchate of Constantinople, along with other Orthodox Churches, was a pioneer in promoting inter-Christian contacts and dialogue in the 20th century and participated in the Ecumenical Movement from its very inception, a fact that basically continues until today.¹⁰ At the same time, this particular area of Orthodox activity has been a source of heightened debates and conflicts. Possessing religious truth was thought to be coterminous with demarcating the Orthodox faith from all others, safeguarding it through persistent introversion and defensive attitudes, and castigating potential deviations. In fact, this was the path followed by many Orthodox as a reaction to the attempts at initiating inter-Christian dialogue and understanding in various ecumenical fora. Such tendencies appeared quite early in the 20th century considering the Old Calendarist schism in Greece, the role of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia, as well as the Zealots among the monks on the Holy Mountain Athos. The initiation of the "Dialogue of Love" between Pope Paul VI and Patriarch of Constantinople Athenagoras in the 1960s and the lifting of the mutual excommunications of 1054 also sparked quite intense reactions from various Orthodox circles. This was because such contacts with the "heretics of the West" were evaluated as threatening compromises and deviations from the right Orthodox path. It is not amiss to argue that such reactions originated mostly from the multifaceted groups of Orthodox rigorists/fundamentalists.

In post-communist times, such tendencies received a strong impetus, as a large number of Orthodox peoples from the former Eastern Bloc were suddenly and for the first time exposed to the challenges of Western values including liberal democracy, individuality, secularity, multiculturalism, and globalisation. As a result, it is not surprising that this radical political change led to a massive re-traditionalisation of numerous Orthodox actors, either at the official church level or not, who feared liberal trends, ecumenical openness, and inter-Christian dialogue. This does not relate solely to various Orthodox movements and individual clerics or thinkers. Even the church leadership was sometimes affected, given that some of its members openly expressed or sympathised with such views. In fact, Orthodox rigorists/fundamentalists often put direct pressure upon the church hierarchy and consequently force it to follow a more conservative course and take respective decisions. This concerns, for instance, the Churches of Georgia and Bulgaria, which withdrew their membership from the World Council of Churches in 1997 and 1998 respectively for such reasons. Not accidentally, these two

10 See Pantelis Kalaitzidis *et al.* (eds), *Orthodox Handbook on Ecumenism: Resources for Theological Education*, Volos 2014.

Churches belonged to the four ones that also decided not to participate in the Council of Crete.

Given this particular situation, the Council faced considerable difficulties in drafting the related document, which had to keep the necessary balance and to satisfy all trends, from the liberal to the more traditional. To this purpose, it took into consideration different possibilities and explored potential solutions. Even so, there were many disagreements about the wording used there and its wider implications. For example, this concerned the ecclesiastical status of Western Churches and whether they deserved the designation “church” altogether. Ironically, this pertained to the Roman Catholic Church as well, despite its long historical background and connection with the Christian origins and despite the recent official discourse in Orthodox-Catholic relations about the “sister churches”. In fact, there were some members of Orthodox Church delegations, who refused to accept the above wording and made their individual disagreement and position publicly clear,¹¹ although their church delegation officially signed the related document. All this clearly indicates the tensions between maximalist/inclusivist and minimalist/exclusivist tendencies within the Orthodox world vis-à-vis other Christians.

In spite of the attempts to find an acceptable balance, it became once more clear during the Council that the issue of rigorism/fundamentalism will be a major challenge to the Orthodox world in the future, as it will probably be strengthened in many respects.¹² Such attitudes can be observed among those Orthodox bishops, clerics, and thinkers, who from the very beginning expressed doubts about the canonicity and the viability of the Pan-Orthodox Council and were openly against its convocation. The same attitude can be discerned among those Orthodox who in the aftermath negatively evaluated the results of the Council as potentially dangerous for safeguarding the Orthodox tradition. No doubt, such reactions are normal among numerous Orthodox, who have always viewed the Ecumenical Movement and inter-Christian dialogue with suspicion. On the other hand, this kind of challenge was known to the participants of the Council, explaining why

11 See Vasilios N. Makrides, “Orthodox Christian Rigorism: Attempting to Delineate a Multifaceted Phenomenon”, *Interdisciplinary Journal for Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society* 2:2 (2016), 216–252; Aristotle Papanikolaou and George E. Demacopoulos (eds), *Fundamentalism or Tradition: Christianity after Secularism*, New York/NY 2020; Davor Džalto and George E. Demacopoulos (eds), *Orthodoxy and Fundamentalism*, Lanham/MD (forthcoming).

12 See George Demacopoulos, “Innovation in the Guise of Tradition: Anti-Ecumenist Efforts to Derail the Great and Holy Council”, *Public Orthodoxy*, 22.03.2016, URL: <https://publicorthodoxy.org/2016/03/22/innovation-in-the-guise-of-tradition-anti-ecumenist-efforts-to-derail-the-great-and-holy-council/> [20.06.2021]; Ladouceur, “On Ecumenoclasm” (as n. 9).

there were explicit and critical references to the anti-ecumenical attitudes and actions of some Orthodox Churches.

Yet, we are talking about a quite influential phenomenon that has deep roots in Orthodox history and is intrinsically connected with the very notion of religious truth, exclusively claimed by the Orthodox.¹³ In modern times, especially in the wake of related socio-political changes, such rigorist/fundamentalist reactions became stronger and louder. It is thus a quite serious challenge to the Orthodox world at present, creating problems not only in the historical Orthodox heartlands, but in the Orthodox diaspora as well. This becomes clearer by the fact that more and more Orthodox thinkers show a vivid interest in this phenomenon, criticise it, and try to neutralise it whenever possible. At the same time, one should make necessary differentiations and avoid putting all Orthodox reactions against Ecumenism in the same category. For example, the official Russian Orthodox Church in post-communist times has often exhibited a critical attitude towards various facets of Ecumenism and the values of Western modernity (e.g., individual human rights). Yet, this does not render the Russian Church automatically a rigorist/fundamentalist one, because the very same church does not insulate and isolate itself in its own truth discourse, but seeks the dialogue to other contemporary actors, religious, political, secular, or otherwise. In this respect, this church represents a median position between rigorist/fundamentalist and liberal trends, which may be termed “traditionalist”. Nonetheless, the possibility of such a traditionalism lapsing into rigorism/fundamentalism always remains imminent and cannot be excluded. This is also due to the overlapping relations between rigorists/fundamentalists and church leadership, which are not clearly differentiated and strictly demarcated.

Third, a point worth mentioning relates to the Orthodox attitude towards mission in the modern world, as articulated and formulated in the respective conciliar document “The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today’s World”. The church is certainly portrayed there as a divine-human organism, yet the question is what predominates in this connection and where the emphasis lies. This may become clearer if we compare Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant attitudes towards the world as such. In this respect, the Orthodox remain much more other-worldly oriented than the other two major Christian traditions. This situation is mainly due to socio-historical reasons; for example, to the fact that Orthodox

13 See Vasilios N. Makrides, “»Orthodoxie« als der einzig wahre Glaube: Rechtgläubigkeit als spezifische Ursache des orthodoxen Rigorismus/Fundamentalismus”, in Jennifer Wasmuth (ed.), *Fundamentalismus als ökumenische Herausforderung*, Paderborn 2021, 141–179.

Christianity did not face modernity the way this was done by the Western Churches and did not develop a systematic exposition of its social teaching.¹⁴

Talking about the Orthodox attitude towards the modern world in general, it is helpful to distinguish between two vital dimensions of the present topic. On the one hand, the stance towards the world as such is an issue that concerned Christianity as a new religion from the very beginning and thus has a very long history. On the other hand, the position vis-à-vis modernity is a more recent phenomenon and has presented various challenges to the Orthodox world, especially in the last three centuries. No doubt, both issues are connected, yet they are far from identical and have significant repercussions for a comparative analysis of related Christian approaches to the world in East and West. First, the Orthodox have historically shown less world-affirming attitudes than Western Christians. Second, they were less influenced by the (Western) project of modernity, which has basically changed the overall profile of Western Christianity over the long run. These differences do not reflect value-judgements, but simply diverging developmental trajectories across history. All the above aspects are also closely related, given that modernity went hand in hand with a more positive valuation and ontological affirmation of the mundane world. Nevertheless, this complex situation remains a challenge for the Orthodox world, which still struggles to find an appropriate place within the overall setting of modernity. For example, the official position of the Russian Orthodox Church on modern human rights from 2008 was such an attempt, yet it clearly showed the existing differences to Western Christian positions on the same issue.

More importantly, despite several common presuppositions (e.g., eschatological), the Orthodox Churches still do not have a uniform position on their role and mission in the modern world, thus their respective suggestions vary significantly. A cursory look at related statements from the Patriarchates of Constantinople and Moscow suffices to make this clear. Yet, nobody disagrees that this is a key issue needing systematic attention and treatment from an Orthodox point of view. This explains why the Council issued such a specific document,¹⁵ which touched upon a variety of issues, ranging from peace, justice, and responsibility to the freedom of the human person, human dignity, and discrimination. Social problems, such as poverty, economic imbalances, environmental destruction, and biotechnological challenges were also briefly addressed. By taking a closer and comparative look at the document, it becomes, however, clear that it is not a radical one, namely one that breaks with the past. It represents an openness to the modern

14 See Vasilios N. Makrides, “Why does the Orthodox Church Lack Systematic Social Teaching?”, *Skepsis. A Journal for Philosophy and Interdisciplinary Research* 23 (2013), 281–312.

15 See Vasilios N. Makrides, “Zwischen Tradition und Erneuerung. Das Panorthodoxe Konzil 2016 angesichts der modernen Welt”, *Catholica. Vierteljahresschrift für ökumenische Forschung* 71 (2017), 18–32.

world, yet its sources, theological argumentation, and priorities remain quite traditional and reflect long-established Orthodox notions; for example, the need to transform the world according to Orthodox criteria and vision. What is categorically denied is any worldliness of the church, i.e., to render the world a criterion for the church by secularising it. In this way, the boundaries between the church and the world are strictly drawn, whereas the church is presented as being ontologically by far superior to the world. All this does not indicate any greater world-affirming attitude among the Orthodox than before.

Furthermore, by comparing this conciliar document with its earlier drafts, one realises that there has been a “conservative turn” in the argumentation manifested on several occasions; for example, by emphasising the role of moral principles in conceptualising human dignity and limiting human freedom. In all probability, this was aimed at satisfying various positions critical towards modernity (especially raised by the Russian Orthodox side) and reaching a compromise. The tone of the document is balanced and its language conventional, while the topics discussed are rather harmless to the church and not particularly challenging. It is more about a controlled, careful, and timid openness to the world of today, yet without breaking new ground or attempting to radically innovate. The church is and should be part of this world, yet it should always keep its main character uncontaminated from it – so the main argumentation line. In general, this document was quite short for the range of issues it attempted to cover, especially if we compare it with the “Bases of the Social Concept” of the Russian Orthodox Church from 2000, which was a much more systematically articulated text. As stated in the Patriarchal and Synodal Encyclical on the Convocation of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church by the Patriarchate of Constantinople (18 March 2016), as well as in other instances and official addresses, the Council’s primary objective was to deal with the internal problems of the Orthodox world first and only then to look at its mission in the modern world, which also belongs to its responsibilities. Yet, a more systematic treatment of the latter topic was postponed to a future Council. This ranking of priorities may be understandable, but it is again indicative of the fact that engagement with the modern world is not on the top of the Orthodox agenda.

It is characteristic, however, that the Council document proceeds to an explicit critique of some consequences of modernity; for example, individual human rights and freedom, various forms of liberality and individuality, as well as the overall secular environment, which is portrayed as in need of a re-evangelisation. It thus seems that the purpose of the document is not an Orthodox arrangement with modernity, but rather its fundamental critique. Here the differences to the respective attitudes of the Western Churches towards modernity are quite evident. Interestingly enough, many central topics that have concerned Western Churches in modern times are not reflected at all by the Orthodox; for instance, the need and the development of an Orthodox economic ethic or of an Orthodox political

theology. In addition, the readiness for a sustained dialogue with secular institutions and actors about the modern world and the conditions of its existence is lacking – things that are rather self-evident and quite normal in the Western Christian context since a long time.

All this makes clear that a major challenge for the Orthodox world in the future is to develop its own well-founded and pragmatic, yet critical stance towards modernity at large. Such a change presupposes a real familiarisation with the basic tenets of the modern project and the structure of the modern world. It should lead to a basic acceptance of the legitimacy of the modern age and its later phases (e.g., postmodernity, post-secularity) in a critical manner, coupled with a re-orientation towards the future. For various socio-historical and other reasons, the Orthodox world has not managed so far to do this and cannot be held responsible for this deficit. If we look, for instance, at the Orthodox evaluation of the Enlightenment heritage, we find that it is an overwhelmingly negative one, a fact that shows vividly the lack of a more constructive dealing with modernity as a whole.

In general, the need for the Orthodox world to proceed further and initiate a systematic and fruitful encounter with modernity is nowadays expressed by many Orthodox actors. To this purpose, the Orthodox may be helped by the Western Christian experience in this matter, both Protestant and Roman Catholic.¹⁶ This does not mean that they should copy or just replicate what these churches have already done. Every church, after all, has had its own, different experience with modernity and has, respectively, attempted to come to a more productive encounter with it. For example, it took the Catholics many centuries to achieve this, after prolonged, intense, and complex conflicts. The breakthrough took place solely with the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) and the *aggiornamento* it set forth. On the Protestant side, things were a little “easier”, given that Protestant Churches arose in parallel with modernity and from the outset exhibited stronger world-affirming attitudes. Yet, even here, problems and conflicts of all sorts were not out of the ordinary, especially if one considers the later rise of Protestant fundamentalism. However, all this remains to a large extent a *terra incognita* for the Orthodox world, which in many cases still thinks and operates with categories drawn from a pre-modern frame of reference. It is thus necessary that the Orthodox become familiar with the logic of the modern world and try to formulate their message accordingly. It is not accidental that the Orthodox have shown little interest so far in the important document *Gaudium et Spes* of the Second Vatican Council, which was the one that enabled the critical engagement with the modern

16 See Athanasios Vletsis, “Das II. Vaticanum und die Orthodoxie: Ein Beispiel zur Nachahmung”, *Catholica* 66 (2012), 161–179; Vasilios N. Makrides, “Der konstruktive Umgang mit der Moderne – oder was die Orthodoxie vom Katholizismus zu lernen vermag”, in Dietmar Schon (ed.), *Identität und Authentizität von Kirchen im „globalen Dorf“*. *Annäherung von Ost und West durch gemeinsame Ziele?*, Regensburg 2019, 103–127.

world for the Catholics. On the contrary, the Orthodox mostly preferred to comment on the ecclesiological, liturgical, and dogmatic documents of this Council, a fact that once more underlines their disregard for the pressing issues of modernity and the contemporary world. After all, in the long pre-conciliar period as well as in the initial plans and preliminary documents, the mission of the Orthodox Church in the modern world was never a priority and was put on the discussion agenda much later. No doubt, especially over the last three decades there have been numerous Orthodox thinkers of varied provenance and in diverse institutional settings, who endeavour a dialogue with the modern world at an international level with considerable results and success. The Patriarchate of Constantinople is aware of this vast Orthodox potential and the related resources and appears ready to hear the respective suggestions. The new social document of the Orthodox Church of 2020, already briefly mentioned above, is a clear evidence of such a progress. Yet, other widely circulating Orthodox discourses promote an anti-modern agenda (e.g., especially the Russian one with its rhetoric for the defense of “traditional values”) and enjoy significant influence and appeal. The question is then which trend will set the pace in the future for articulating the role and the mission of the Orthodox Church in the modern world.

Fourth, another important issue that the Council made plainly evident was the geopolitical background, on which church authority plays out,¹⁷ and the broader role of Orthodoxy in domestic and foreign politics as well as in international relations.¹⁸ In general terms, it is more clear than ever that much of what is

17 See François Thual, *Géopolitique de l'orthodoxie*, Second edition, Paris 1994; Dan Dungaciu, “The Geopolitics of Orthodoxy and the Religious Resurrections in Southeastern Europe – The Case of Serbia-Montenegro, Ukraine and Republic of Moldavia”, *Romanian Journal of Sociology* 15 (2004), 121–132; Dmitrii Sidorov, “Post-Imperial Third Romes: Resurrections of a Russian Orthodox Geopolitical Metaphor”, *Geopolitics* 11 (2006), 317–347; Michał Wawrzonek, *Religion and Politics in Ukraine: The Orthodox and Greek Catholic Churches as Elements of Ukraine's Political System*, Newcastle upon Tyne 2014; Marlène Laruelle, *The “Russian World”: Russia's Soft Power and Geopolitical Imagination*, Washington/DC 2015; Lucian N. Leustean, “Eastern Orthodoxy, Geopolitics and the 2016 'Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church’”, *Geopolitics* 23 (2018), 201–216.

18 See Robert C. Blitt, “Russia's ‘Orthodox’ Foreign Policy: The Growing Influence of the Russian Orthodox Church in Shaping Russia's Policies Abroad”, *University of Pennsylvania Journal of International Law* 33:2 (2011), 363–460; Maria Engström, “Contemporary Russian Messianism and New Russian Foreign Policy”, *Contemporary Security Policy* 35 (2014), 356–379; Lucian N. Leustean (ed.), *Eastern Christianity and Politics in the Twenty-first Century*, London 2014; Greg Simons, “Religious Diplomacy in International and Inter-Orthodox Relations”, in Greg Simons and David Westerlund (eds), *Religion, Politics and Nation-Building in Post-Communist Countries*, London and New York/NY 2015, 21–44; David Cadier and Margot Light (eds), *Russia's Foreign Policy: Ideas, Domestic Politics and External Relations*, Houndmills and New York/NY 2015; Nicolai N. Petro, “How the West Lost Russia: Explaining the Conservative Turn in Russian

happening in the Orthodox world today is not justified primarily or solely through theology and church tradition, but also through geopolitical principles and power struggles. The whole issue is of course not a completely new one, as the church has played a geopolitical role in the past too; for instance, in the context of the Byzantine or Tsarist Russian foreign policy. The main difference from the past relates basically to the globalisation process of today, which has become more intense and influential than before and has implicated in its course religion (and in our case: Orthodox Christianity) as well. As a result, religion can no longer be conceived without its broader ramifications, (geo)political, social, cultural, or otherwise. The strong connection between geopolitics and Orthodoxy is thus made clear on several levels and deeply affects inter-Orthodox relations, especially in debatable or conflict situations. It goes without saying that all this divides the Orthodox world as divergent geopolitical concepts and orientations arise, which do not leave the Orthodox Churches unaffected. Given the long tradition of strong and mutual relations between church and state in predominantly Orthodox countries, the Orthodox Churches are often transformed into geopolitical players in the global arena with far-reaching consequences.

In the first place, this concerns the Patriarchate of Constantinople, which has a particular status today. It is devoid of a direct state support and alliance as it is placed in a rather inimical Muslim environment having to deal with the aspirations of the modern Turkish history and foreign policy. Necessarily, this renders the condition of its existence precarious and hence its overall policy diplomatic. On the other hand, it is found firmly in “Greek hands”, while preserving its ecumenical role in the present global environment and avoiding identification with the narrow national interests of Greek political or ecclesiastical actors. Its occasional problems or even conflicts with the Greek Orthodox Church are a case in point. Especially in the period of the current Patriarch Bartholomew (since 1991), the Patriarchate has tried to become a global player on a number of levels, ranging from inter-religious and cultural to ecological and political. To this purpose, Constantinople has been supported by both religious (e.g., the Vatican, the World Council of Churches), political (e.g., the USA, the European Union), and other actors around the world. The ties between Constantinople and the Western world grew during the 20th century in the context of the political and ideological opposition between the liberal West and the communist East. It was in fact in the Cold War period that the USA discovered the great geopolitical significance of

Foreign Policy”, *Russian Politics* 3 (2018), 305–332; idem, “The Russian Orthodox Church”, in Andrei P. Tsygankov (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy*, London 2018, 217–232; Tobias Köllner, *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Russia: Beyond the Binary of Power and Authority*, London 2020.

the Ecumenical Patriarchate and started supporting it,¹⁹ a situation that continues until today (e.g., in the context of the Ukrainian-Russian political and ecclesiastical conflict). It is also no wonder that there is a strong lobby in the USA for multifaceted support of the Ecumenical Throne (e.g., the Order of Saint Andrew the Apostle: Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in America) and that the Council of Crete was also subsidised by American Orthodox circles. The refusal of the Moscow Patriarchate to participate in the Council of Crete is of course not unrelated to the alleged “Americanisation” of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. The latter is also supported by the Western world in general due to its sensitive location in a Muslim country, considering that the parameter “Islamic world” has acquired such a key dimension worldwide in recent times. These are central geopolitical questions that cannot be ignored by various influential international institutions and actors today, for which religion is a central instrument of (foreign) policy. Consequently, this becomes a kind of mixed blessing for Constantinople. On the one hand, it acquires the much-needed strong external support, which is vital for its future survival in the difficult modern Turkish political framework. On the other hand, it deeply politicises this historical see of Eastern Christianity, not the least by affecting its supranational and impartial ecumenical role, which is not completely recognised as such by other powerful Orthodox actors, especially from the Moscow Patriarchate.

As expected, the Patriarchate of Moscow follows a completely different agenda if one takes into consideration its impressive domestic and international development and establishment in close relation to the state after the fall of the Soviet Union (1989–1991). Needless to say, this is hardly a new phenomenon, given the centuries-old close relations between church and state in the Russian Empire. Characteristically, this was also continued to some extent under the atheistic Soviet regime, which instrumentalised the Orthodox Church for its own ideological and other goals. An attempt to convoke a Pan-Orthodox Council in Moscow in 1948 was even initiated under Joseph Stalin, who after World War II had become tolerant towards the church, yet this Council enjoyed solely a limited Orthodox attendance.²⁰

The developments in post-Soviet times led once more to an extraordinary strengthening of the Moscow Patriarchate and the Russian Church as a whole, connected with the aspiration to become, at least *de facto*, the most prominent Orthodox actor in the world today – usually, at the dispense of Constantinople.

19 See Pavlos Serapheim, *Το Οικουμενικό Πατριαρχείο στη δίνη του Ψυχρού Πολέμου. Η εκλογή του Πατριάρχη Αθηναγόρα (1948)* [The Ecumenical Patriarchate in the Throes of the Cold War. The Election of Patriarch Athenagoras (1948)], Thessaloniki 2017; Paschalis M. Kitromilides, *Religion and Politics in the Orthodox World: The Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Challenges of Modernity*, London and New York/NY 2019, 72–91.

20 See Daniela Kalkandjieva, *The Russian Orthodox Church, 1917–1948: From Decline to Resurrection*, London 2015, 307–344.

The various forms of strong collaboration between political and religious leadership under Vladimir Putin's regime in Russia today have already become the topic of numerous studies.²¹ The church ideologically supports the regime and its foreign policy (e.g., in the case of the internationally disputed annexation of Crimea in 2014), while it is an integral part of Russian foreign policy. The state also shares its fears about Western distorted ideas and influences that might threaten the "Orthodox traditional values" of Russia. In fact, the Russian Church upholds a new traditionalism in fighting off potential Western threats while remaining an international player. It is connected with active religious diplomacy in quite diverse settings, religious and cultural. This becomes evident, for example, in the context of the Foundation "Russian World" (Русский мир),²² or if one considers the recent opening (2016) of a Holy Trinity Cathedral and a Russian Orthodox Spiritual and Cultural Centre in central Paris near the Eiffel Tower. The trip of Patriarch Kirill to Latin America in 2016, his meeting with Pope Francis in Havana (Cuba), and the way he was received there by religious and non-religious actors also reveals the importance of his position within the overall Russian geopolitical agenda.

All this may offer some explanations as to why the Russian Church, together with the other churches under its immediate influence, attempted first to postpone the Council of Crete and finally decided not to participate in it. Despite the unanimous Pan-Orthodox decision in January 2016 to proceed with the convocation of the Council in June, the problems and the objections multiplied as the date of the Council was approaching. Political conflicts at that time, as the one between Russia and Turkey, also played a role, which explains the transfer of the Council from Constantinople to Crete in the first place. For an outside observer, it became more than clear that one was looking for a reason to say "no" and avoid taking part in the Council, which is what finally happened. After such long and intense pre-conciliar preparations, the Pan-Orthodox Council could have been regarded as a further success for Constantinople and its claims for primacy within the Orthodox world, to which Moscow did not necessarily want to consent. It is also not accidental that one can observe various attempts from the Russian Church

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- 21 See Lee Trepanier, *Political Symbols in Russian History: Church, State, and the Quest for Order and Justice*, Lanham, 2007; Fajfer and Rimestad, "The Patriarchates" (as n. 3); Irina Papkova, *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics*, New York/NY 2011; Katja Richters, *The Post-Soviet Russian Orthodox Church: Politics, Culture and Greater Russia*, London 2013.
 - 22 See Daniel P. Payne, "Spiritual Security, the Russkiy Mir, and the Russian Orthodox Church: The Influence of the Russian Orthodox Church on Russia's Foreign Policy Regarding Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, and Armenia", in Adam Hug (ed.), *Traditional Religion and Political Power: Examining the Role of the Church in Georgia, Armenia, Ukraine and Moldova*, London 2015, 65–70; Michał Wawrzonek, Nelly Bekus, and Mirella Korzeniewska-Wiszniewska (eds), *Orthodoxy Versus Post-Communism? Belarus, Serbia, Ukraine and the Russkiy Mir*, Newcastle upon Tyne 2016.

to legitimise a higher ecclesiological and geopolitical role for itself than for Constantinople in today's complex world.

Bearing all this in mind, it becomes obvious that the increased politicisation and nationalisation of the Orthodox world contribute significantly to the problems of inter-Orthodox cooperation and coordination. Many local Orthodox Churches are closely linked to state and national policies and aspirations, which leads them at times to endorse a different agenda towards sister churches and thus promote Orthodox disunity. In fact, it is about the internal secularisation of the Orthodox world, as it falls victim to non-religious objectives and state instrumentalisation. To be fair, politicisation is not a new phenomenon in Eastern Orthodox history. However, the main difference of today concerns the fact that it is taking place in the context of the nation-state, coupled with respective nationalisation processes, which have historically had a divisive impact upon the Orthodox world as a whole and still play a significant role in church politics. All this is related to specific characteristics of the structure of the Orthodox world (e.g., the system of autocephaly, administrative pluralism, decentralisation), which in the modern context was transformed into a national one in close association with the rise of modern nation-states. In addition, the strong closeness between church, state, and nation in Orthodox contexts continues to create various problems, as it connects the church with various secular discourses, visions, and goals.²³

A related issue, however, is that of the Orthodox diaspora, which faces a number of varied problems, theological and jurisdictional alike,²⁴ and received attention during the Council in the document entitled "The Orthodox Diaspora". In this context, it is crucial to underline that this issue has strong geopolitical implications for local Orthodox Churches too, given that it pertains to their international presence and the transnational ties kept by their believers respectively.²⁵ It is thus not accidental that the Orthodox Churches, especially those of Constantinople and Moscow, are at pains to keep Orthodox diasporic communities under their control and influence and to incorporate new ones into their jurisdictions. This important issue was addressed by the Council in an

23 See Vasilios N. Makrides, "Why are Orthodox Churches Particularly Prone to Nationalization and even to Nationalism?", *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 54 (2013), 325–352; Lucian N. Leustean, "Afterword: Why are Orthodox Churches Prone to Political Mobilization Today?", in Sabrina Ramet (ed.), *Orthodox Churches and Politics in Southeastern Europe: Nationalism, Conservatism, and Intolerance*, Cham, Switzerland, 2019 (corrected 2020), 249–255.

24 See Maria Hämmerli and Jean-François Mayer (eds), *Orthodox Identities in Western Europe: Migration, Settlement and Innovation*, Farnham 2014; Sebastian Rimestad, *Orthodox Christian Identity in Western Europe: Contesting Religious Authority*, London 2020.

25 See Victor Roudometof, "Orthodox Christianity as a Transnational Religion: Theoretical, Historical and Comparative Considerations", *Religion, State & Society* 43 (2015), 211–227.

attempt to deal with the growing differentiation of the Orthodox Church body in diasporic contexts along national lines and simultaneously to keep broader Pan-Orthodox unity alive and functioning. It is in this context of “global Orthodoxy” that we may also encounter new forms of an Orthodox identification and practice adapted to the respective local diasporic environment, which at times have an influence on the mother churches too.²⁶ Moreover, this is exactly where the previously discussed issues of autocephaly, synodality, and primacy acquire additional significance. This is due to the lurking danger of an enhanced autonomisation of Orthodox diasporic communities, which may thereby attempt to acquire a more independent status at the expense of a mother church.

The Contributions

All the above issues as well as various connected ones are treated in the various chapters of the present volume devoted to the Pan-Orthodox Council of 2016 and its broader significance for the Orthodox world and Christianity at large. This volume arose from an international conference at the University of Erfurt (25-27 February 2016) in the historical venue of the Augustinian Monastery (where Martin Luther lived as an Augustinian friar from 1505 until 1511) under the auspices of the “Deutsche Gesellschaft für Osteuropakunde” (DGO). The contributions were all conceived before the Council took place and were completed after it. The idea was to shed light on the current state of the Orthodox Church, with the Pan-Orthodox Council as the common background, from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. The focus of the conference was not solely on the Council as an ecclesiastical and theological event, but enabled various other perspectives including (geo)political, historical, and sociological ones. In this volume, these have been grouped not according to the respective discipline, but depending on the specific topics discussed.

In the first and main part of the volume, six authors take a closer look at the Pan-Orthodox Council itself and its participants. Paul Valliere opens up the section with a chapter on the notion of “council” in the Orthodox tradition, alluding to the difficulties in convening the Council of 2016 due to the lack of a clarified concept of conciliarism and a reformist spirit, as well as due to the selective amnesia of the Orthodox Church. Valliere makes clear that there have been many different historical realisations and theoretical treatments of the theological principle of Orthodox conciliarity. At the same time, the Council of Crete also revealed a rival principle – that of *metropolitan* authority, a vertical and more centralised principle, the phenomenon of hyper-episcopal conciliarism and

26 See Giuseppe Giordan and Siniša Zrinščak (eds), *Global Eastern Orthodoxy: Politics, Religion, and Human Rights*, Cham, Switzerland 2020, 13–39.

hierarchical centralism in the church. Nevertheless, the claim that the Council of Crete was not a true one, coming both from those arguing that it was not democratic and from the last-minute defectors arguing that their absence invalidated it, misses the mark. The Council was indubitably one, whereas its place in the history of the Orthodox Church will be premised on future developments. To this purpose, contacts with Roman Catholics may be proven productive, as these have also discovered the significance of a creative ecclesiology and conciliarity, despite the existence of various authoritarian trends within their church structure.

In her chapter, Eva M. Synek considers the Council of Crete and its participants from a canon law perspective, as legality in the Orthodox context is often based on historical precedent. Moreover, the canon law of the Orthodox Church originates from a long and bygone historical period, which makes it unsuitable for the many questions and dilemmas that have arisen only in the modern era. In fact, no clear answers can be given in many instances due to the new political realities of today. With all these caveats in mind and numerous examples to point to, Synek provides a succinct overview of the distinction between universal and local church in its historical and current guises. It is more than obvious that canon law issues at the level of the universal church also have clear repercussions on the local level. On the other hand, the local church is often better suited to resolve many of the open questions. Synek therefore argues for a bottom-up approach to Orthodox canon law rather than the other way around in order to lessen canonical problems and complications in inter-Orthodox relations.

Daniela Kalkandjieva, on her part, charts the difficult geopolitical relationship between the Patriarchates of Constantinople and Moscow from the mid-19th century to the late 20th century revealing their constant rivalry on the geopolitical scene. Due to the communist takeover, Orthodoxy has been virtually ignored in modern studies of international relations and geopolitics, which remained more secularly oriented. As is well known, this situation has changed radically in post-communist times. Kalkandjieva speaks of a special category of “ecclesiastical geopolitics” with regard to Orthodoxy, which is not state-driven, although it remains connected to state policies. She divides these developments into four phases, each of which shows a different geopolitical set-up, in which the two main Patriarchates of the Orthodox world deployed their power resources and gathered secular allies. For Kalkandjieva, it is this fateful interlinkage between theology and geopolitics that lies at the root of many current problems in the Orthodox Church, especially its apparent lack of visible unity, as demonstrated in the Council of Crete.

In their joint chapter, Alexander Kyrlezhev and Andrey Shishkov attempt to develop a viable typology and categorise the different autocephalous church structures that make up the Orthodox world. Their main argument is that the different churches have widely divergent self-understandings (e.g., different ecclesiologies and notions of primacy), which makes Pan-Orthodox unity a

difficult endeavour, as the claimed rights of many churches are contested by others. This is especially applicable to the Patriarchates of Constantinople and Moscow, who are different in many vital respects (e.g., Moscow's "materiality" vs. Constantinople's "immateriality") and entertain radically distinct views of their role within global Orthodoxy. For Kyrlezhev and Shishkov, it was, first of all, this element that led four Orthodox Churches to cancel their participation in the Council of Crete. The Council also demonstrated the inefficiency of the pre-conciliar instruments to ensure Pan-Orthodox unity. Nevertheless, the authors see the potential for a more thoroughly Pan-Orthodox process to emanate from what they consider a "failed" Pan-Orthodox Council of Crete.

A look at "alternative Orthodoxy" from the perspective of Religious Studies is offered in the contribution of Sebastian Rimestad. The inapplicability of the democratic ideal for an Orthodox council had already been alluded to in Valliere's chapter, but Rimestad takes up again the question of who was not invited to the Council of Crete. Next to its demographic incompleteness, this includes many groups that are not considered part of the mainstream Orthodox Church (including women, lay people, and diasporic church structures). According to Rimestad, most of these groups are not concerned with developments in mainstream world Orthodoxy anyway, as they do not consider these developments relevant to them. However, the distinguishing line between "canonical" and "alternative" Orthodoxy is far from clear-cut and is often the result of issues of politics and/or church discipline. Generally speaking, "alternative Orthodoxy" is an issue that the Orthodox mainstream cannot fully ignore or neglect, given that several matters involved are of true Pan-Orthodox significance and relevance.

The second part of the volume entitled "The Orthodox Church and the Modern World" groups four contributions together that are concerned with how the Orthodox Church relates to the secular world of today. It begins with the chapter of Alexander Agadjanian, who looks at the conciliar document "The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World" and contextualises it in the overall Orthodox discourse about the modern world. Comparing this document to earlier Russian Orthodox texts on similar topics, Agadjanian highlights the ambivalent and less pronounced attitude of Orthodox theologians towards the world "out there", which is cautiously approached and only partly embraced because of the strong Orthodox predilection for the inward perspective and of otherworldly orientations. This is a fundamental issue that highlights many differences between East and West. A closer look at the history of the Orthodox engagement with the world can reveal such Orthodox peculiarities. No doubt, this engagement does exist, but it is often neglected or downplayed. Moreover, the tendency to remain vague and uncommitted, as mentioned above, shines through in several passages of the conciliar document as well. Agadjanian makes clear that the conservative tone of this document owes much to the objections of the

Russian Orthodox side, which in the pre-conciliar discussion rounds systematically tried to suppress any liberal tone and trend, even if in the end it did not participate in the Council itself. Hence, the approved document appears to be a compromise that oscillates between a critique of secularism and a controlled positive attitude towards the world.

The second contribution in this part by Aristotle Papanikolaou approaches a similar question, but from a more liberal point of view, based on the experience of Greek Orthodoxy in the pluralistic US milieu. Here it is not about the full compatibility between secularity and Orthodox Christianity, but about the kind of democratic liberalism that the church should endorse in the current public political space. This raises the issue of the potential differences between Orthodox diasporas in Western settings and Orthodox majority countries as far as their respective relationship to the modern world is concerned. Using the example of the legalisation of gay marriage, which is a fact in the USA, Papanikolaou argues that much of the Orthodox theology opposing modern developments *per se* are thinly veiled attempts at identity politics, which do not deserve to be called theological arguments at all. He also criticises the conciliar document on the church's relations to the modern world as based on a rather outdated notion of secularity. This is because secularity implies, among other things, the notion of pluralism, which does not necessarily turn against religion. Traditional Orthodox cultures as majorities privilege a cultural and historical monism and try to impose their morality everywhere, which is highly problematic in modern pluralistic and differentiated societies. In this context, Papanikolaou attempts to articulate the contours of an "Orthodox Christian secularism" in the broader context of an Orthodox political theology, aimed at thinking anew the position of the church within the currently evolving public political space.

In his contribution, Lucian N. Leustean offers a historical view on the relationship between Orthodox identity, alterity, and nationalism. He takes the reader on a journey to a past where ethnic or national affiliation did not play such a significant role as today. This recalls the fact that, even in the modern world, such identities are not always clearly identifiable. In Leustean's opinion, the Council of Crete failed to address the crucial issues in relation to nationalism, simply because it did not want to acknowledge the "elephant in the room": The Orthodox Church today factually exists within the modern system of nation-states; hence, it must adapt and act accordingly on various levels. This is especially important for the status of the so-called "diaspora structures" that exist outside the borders of nation-states, recognised as having their own Orthodox Churches.

Similarly, Vassilis Pnevmatikakis in his chapter argues that the Orthodox diasporic communities, which are generally considered as an ecclesiastical anomaly in Orthodox ecclesiology and as living in a "jurisdictional chaos", are in fact valuable assets. They show an Orthodox world that is freer and more independent from direct political interference in contrast to the "mother churches" in

predominantly Orthodox countries. In addition, the Orthodox diaspora is very significant in terms of historical and current geopolitics. For Pnevmatikakis, the issue of the diaspora is not in itself a pressing issue for the Orthodox Church nowadays, given that jurisdictionalism proves to be very useful and productive under specific circumstances. Jurisdictional plurality is a reality and works according to a flexible system. Despite the existence of still unresolved ecclesiological problems, this situation should not necessarily lead to Orthodox disintegration and ensuing schisms. Indeed, this issue reveals once more the underlying problematic relationship between the church and the modern world, and there can be no solution until this fundamental tension has been comprehensively understood in its various articulations.

The last part of the volume is devoted to the place of the Orthodox Church within broader Christianity and Ecumenism, as illustrated by the conciliar document on Orthodox relations with the rest of the Christian world. From a Roman Catholic perspective, Peter De Mey compares this document with the corresponding document from the Second Vatican Council, *Unitatis Redintegratio*. He also compares both Councils more broadly, showing numerous similarities and parallels, but also considerable differences between them (e.g., concerning the role of foreign observers, theologians, and canon law specialists). In addition, he points to various problematic and unresolved issues in the self-understanding of the Orthodox Church (e.g., exclusivity, fundamentalism) that complicate ecumenical relations. Nevertheless, De Mey characterises the Council as an important step forward in the ecumenical dialogue underway between the Orthodox and the Roman Catholics and recognises that the Orthodox have a tradition of openness towards other Christians and churches, which may be reactivated today. After all, dialogue is the preferential method in contemporary Ecumenism.

In her contribution, written from a Hussite theological point of view, Ivana Noble appears to be both optimistic and critical with regard to the Council of Crete. She concedes that the Council and its documents contain shortcomings and unclear passages, yet she also finds the potential to open up a new era for the Orthodox Church including its relations to the other Christian Churches. Truth be told, the Orthodox do exhibit various deficits from a Western Christian point of view: exclusivity, lack of self-critique, sense of superiority, limited historicisation, prioritisation of a contemplative rather than an active world engagement, as well as a one-dimensional ecclesiology. What is mostly needed, though, in her view, is a true ecumenical mutuality between the Christian Churches in East and West, namely the readiness both to give and to take. To this purpose, the Orthodox need to rediscover their openness, which can be testified several times across history, and render it their mainstream orientation today.

The last contribution by Pantelis Kalaitzidis closes the circle with an Orthodox theological account of the Council and its challenges going forward. Overall, he recognises the achievements that have been reached through the conciliar

process within the Orthodox Church. At the same time, he points to some steps that were not taken during the Council of Crete, which could have rendered the Orthodox Church even more relevant with a global reach in the contemporary world. He contends that the Council revealed the serious problems that many Orthodox still have with Ecumenism by relying on their religious exclusivity. During the Council itself, it became clear that the “ecclesiality” of other Christian Churches is still under question (cf. the debates whether the term “church” should be used for them too). Officially, most Orthodox Churches do participate in the Ecumenical Movement (e.g., in the World Council of Churches) but at the same time, there is an ambiguity towards Ecumenism because of more conservative and exclusive Orthodox voices and trends. More importantly, such theological differences among the churches were often transformed into cultural ones with far-reaching repercussions. Such trends are currently expressed on an official level (e.g., by the Russian Orthodox Church), as well as by Orthodox hardliners of varied provenance trying to stop many creative developments within the Orthodox world (e.g., concerning the ordination of women, an issue discussed more systematically in recent years). In the end, what Kalaitzidis supports is the need to avoid identifying Orthodox unity with Orthodox uniformity and to allow room for Orthodox diversity and plurality.

Concluding Remarks

Has the Pan-Orthodox Council of 2016 ushered in a new era for the Orthodox Church, as asked in the title of the present volume? No doubt, it is not an event that can be simply ignored and passed over in silence. On the contrary, it is a milestone for the Orthodox world and an important step in the conciliar process, which scholars a century from now might consider a watershed. The already now existing wide literature on the topic attests to the significance of the event. All contributions in this volume are united in their emphasis that the Great and Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church was a landmark occurrence, even if it did not fully live up to the expectations either of its participants or of those who decided not to attend it. Yet, as already indicated, the post-conciliar period was characterised by alarming developments for the Orthodox world. Instead of promoting and deepening Pan-Orthodox unity, which was – after all – the goal of the Council, it came to unleash centrifugal forces that became stronger and more pervasive. The previously mentioned rift between Constantinople and Moscow that followed the declaration of Ukrainian Church autocephaly in 2019 may serve as a pertinent example for the current lack of unity within the Orthodox Church.

Aside from this, the Pan-Orthodox Council certainly had various limitations. It cannot, for instance, be compared to the Second Vatican Council as far as its production and appeal are concerned. The approved documents tried to address

various vital issues of today in a constructive way, yet they seemed to be bound more to tradition and basically did not break any new ground. In some cases, this fidelity to tradition was coupled with a controlled openness to new realities and challenges, yet in a balanced way and avoiding more radical options. Even so, it is surprising to witness that various Orthodox circles (e.g., the Monastic Community of the Holy Mountain Athos) considered the Council highly problematic in many respects and basically backed those churches that officially refused to participate in it. Such voices mostly came from the multifaceted current of Orthodox rigorism/fundamentalism, which, as already noted, has significantly gained in intensity and influence during the last decades and receives support from many sides, even from selected church hierarchs.

In the end, all this reveals the plurality of voices within the contemporary Orthodox world and how difficult it is, realistically speaking, to reach a broader and durable Pan-Orthodox agreement on key issues. In such a disparate Orthodox environment, it is advisable to remain rather modest and avoid setting high standards from the outset. The Orthodox conciliar process still has a long way to go. This is not only evident in the fact that many issues were completely left out of the Council deliberations and negotiations; for example, the Orthodox attitudes towards non-Christian religions (especially to Islam) or a critical examination of the intricate relations between church, state, and politics and the consequences thereof. It is also worth mentioning that the approved conciliar documents are rather short, even though they try to treat huge issues in a concise way. All this means that the Orthodox Churches have a lot to do in the years to come, not only in terms of overcoming their jurisdictional differences, but also in developing further their theological reflection. The conciliar documents are but a first timid step in making Orthodox deliberations known to a wider public. They also reflect various compromises that were reached between a fidelity to tradition and a controlled openness towards the future.

Historically speaking, the Christian Churches have not remained bound to their past and tradition. Although in many cases reluctant and hesitant, they were forced by socio-historical developments to adapt themselves to new necessities and reformulate their message accordingly. Such transitions were not necessarily portrayed as breaks with the past and as moments of discontinuity in the history of the Christian Church, but often as continuities in disguise. Without question, the whole issue always depends on the respective observer and the concomitant perspective. Was, for example, Martin Luther a reform-oriented Catholic? Or did the Reformation mark a break in the history of Western Christianity? No doubt, there were elements of continuity with the past, and Luther's intention may primarily have been the reform of the Roman Catholic Church instead of the creation of a new Christian Church. Yet, what counts more here are the results of his whole endeavour, which unleashed uncontrollable forces that led to the emergence of the various Reformed Churches. From this angle, the Reformation

in the end meant a break with the past and led to the liberalisation and pluralisation of Western Christianity, regardless of whether this was Luther's initial intention. However, what is important and deserves to be emphasised here is that Western Churches in many respects appeared readier to deal with such challenges, which often engendered painful consequences. However, they were able to change and adapt their policies and strategies accordingly. This is due to various reasons pertaining to the specificities of this religious field. It holds true for the Protestant Churches, but also for the Roman Catholic Church, whose establishment has been attacked and seriously challenged in modern times. It took several centuries for the Catholics to come to terms with the basic tenets of modernity, especially after the Second Vatican Council, and articulate a new course of development. But simply the fact that both Roman Catholics and Protestants have profited from one another in the long run, even if often tacitly and implicitly, attests to the potential of the Western Churches to develop further and explore new paths and territories.

The case of Orthodox Christianity is different in many respects, as Orthodox Churches generally show less readiness for change, reform, and innovation.²⁷ The assumption that the Christian message has a perennial significance beyond time and space corroborates such attitudes. There still exists a notorious and influential Orthodox traditionalism, which inhibits further developments within the Orthodox world. This is often connected with a credulous, uncritical veneration of the past, which is valued higher than the present and the future. Further Orthodox characteristics, such as the virulent anti-Westernism and defensive introversion, complicate the picture. No doubt, the Orthodox world is not a monolithic block, and one may certainly find examples, both historical and current, that reveal another and more reform-oriented picture of it. Yet, it is still quite important to remember what represents the mainstream and sets the rule, not the potential exceptions from it. Metropolitan Meliton of Chalcedon at the Second Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference in Chambésy (3-12 September 1982) sincerely lamented that in most cases Orthodox Christians still live today in a situation of eudaimonic, self-complacent inertia and immobility and in the blissfulness of the sacred heritage of the Church Fathers. This is why they can neither properly address nor solve current problems, either those of the Orthodox world

27 See Vasilios N. Makrides, "Ohne Luther. Einige Überlegungen zum Fehlen eines Reformators im Orthodoxen Christentum", in Hans Medick and Peer Schmidt (eds), *Luther zwischen den Kulturen. Zeitgenossenschaft – Weltwirkung*, Göttingen 2004, 318–336; idem, "Orthodox Christianity, Change, Innovation: Contradictions in Terms?", in Trine Stauning Willert and Lina Molokotos-Liederman (eds), *Innovation in the Orthodox Christian Tradition? The Question of Change in Greek Orthodox Thought and Practice*, Farnham 2012, 19–50; Pantelis Kalaitzidis, "Challenges of Renewal and Reformation Facing the Orthodox Church", *The Ecumenical Review* 61 (2009), 136–164.

or those of others.²⁸ In fact, the entire pre-conciliar process sought to accomplish a major breakthrough in the Orthodox world by overcoming this traditional Orthodox inertia and immobility.

All in all, the documents of the Council in most cases do not say anything radically new, but mainly confirm the existing *status quo*. Moreover, it is difficult to discern any creative theological statements in them that can be used as specific markers of Orthodox Christianity. The fact that the documents took several decades to prepare ensures that they are not even completely up to date on the current challenges of the world. Thus, comparing the Pan-Orthodox Council of June 2016 to the Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church of the 1960s reveals that the latter was much more creative. Its sessions lasted for several years, while the Pan-Orthodox Council was scheduled for a little more than a week. Moreover, in the Second Vatican Council, external observers did play a role in the formulation of the conciliar documents, which was not foreseen for the Council of Crete. Finally, the Vatican Council was a relatively open-ended one that sought to make the church conform to the demands of modernity, whereas the Pan-Orthodox Council was bent on preserving the *status quo* and avoid destabilisation. It is still possible, though, that the conciliar documents, when they are received in the local churches, become the seeds of a creative re-interpretation of the modern Orthodox Church. But it is unlikely that this re-interpretation can parallel the post-conciliar developments within the Roman Catholic Church. Whether they will play an important role in the development of bilateral and multilateral ecumenical relations remains questionable. In any case, the short and critical reaction of the Russian Orthodox Church to the conciliar documents does not seem to be promising.²⁹

Seen from this perspective and despite its limitations and ensuing problems, the Pan-Orthodox Council of Crete did cause a reform dynamic, which has already led to productive and promising developments. We are referring here to the already mentioned new social document that was published under the auspices of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and its Synod in March 2020. It was entitled “For the Life of the World: Towards a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church”³⁰ and can be characterised as “progressive” in many respects. It was conceived as an official Orthodox social teaching in order to fill a perceived vacuum.

28 See Secretariat for the Preparation of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church (ed.), *SYNOAIKA VII*, Chambésy-Geneva 1994, 200.

29 See Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, “The Documents of the Council of Crete. The Results of the Study of the Documents of the Council of Crete Prepared by the Synodal Biblical-Theological Commission of the Russian Orthodox Church”, *The Ecumenical Review* 72 (2020), 429–434.

30 See URL: <https://www.goarch.org/social-ethos> [20.06.2021]. See also David Bentley Hart and John Chryssavgis (eds), *For the Life of the World: Toward a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church*, Brookline/MA 2020; Barbara Hallensleben (ed.), *Für das Leben der*

This plan had been announced at the Council of Crete, given that the conciliar document “The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today’s World” was only a first attempt to officially deal with social issues. The concrete steps were initiated just after the Council of Crete through the appointment of a special international theological commission to work on such a document in consultation with the Hierarchs and the Dioceses of the Ecumenical Throne worldwide. The new social document was in a way a “response” to the previous initiatives of the Russian Orthodox Church, which in 2000 had published its own official document “Bases of the Social Concept”. Despite commonalities, there are important differences between these two Orthodox social documents in that the new one attempts to put the whole issue on a stronger Pan-Orthodox basis. This development, which has already been positively evaluated by various sides, is without doubt a direct and quite rapid outcome of the Council of Crete.³¹ If nothing else, it attests to the dynamic the Council has unleashed, from which further developments are expected to take place in the future.

Welt. Auf dem Weg zu einem Sozialethos der Orthodoxen Kirche. Mit einem Geleitwort des Ökumenischen Patriarchen Bartholomäus, Münster 2020.

- 31 On the new social document, see Vasilios N. Makrides, “Le nouveau document social de l’Église orthodoxe. Son orientation, son élaboration, son contexte et son importance”, *Istina* 65 (2020), 387–413; Dietmar Schon, *Berufen zur Verwandlung der Welt. Die Orthodoxe Kirche in sozialer und ethischer Verantwortung*, Regensburg 2021. See also the special thematic issue of the journal *Religion und Gesellschaft in Ost und West* 48:11 (2020).

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zwingt nicht“. *Zum Gesetzesbegriff der Apostolischen Konstitutionen* (Kirche und Recht, 21), Wien 1997; *Oikos. Zum Ehe und Familienrecht der Apostolischen Konstitutionen* (Kirche und Recht, 22), Wien 1999; „*Wer aber nicht völlig rein ist an Seele und Leib...*“ *Reinheitstatus im Orthodoxen Kirchenrecht* (Kanon Sonderheft, 1), Egling 2006; *Das „Heilige und Große Konzil“ von Kreta*, Freistadt 2017; and (together with Richard Potz *et al.*) *Orthodoxes Kirchenrecht. Eine Einführung*, Freistadt 2014².

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The present volume, based on a related conference in Erfurt, offers interdisciplinary insights on the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church or the Pan-Orthodox Council, convened on the island of Crete in June 2016. Although some Orthodox Churches finally declined to participate – the most prominent being the Russian one –, the Council was a most significant development. It brought a considerable number of Orthodox Churches together and discussed crucial issues pertaining to today's Orthodox world. However, it also vividly revealed existing serious problems of inter-Orthodox communication and collaboration. The contributions in this volume shed light on main issues related to this Council and their multiple repercussions for Pan-Orthodox unity and the future of the Orthodox world.

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