

The Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church: Problems and its Ecclesiological Significance*

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It is a great honor for me and a special privilege to speak to such a renowned ecumenical institute as the PRO UNIONE, celebrating this year the 50 years from the Second Vatican Council. A special word of gratitude is also due to the Society of the Atonement, the Founders of which, the franciscans Fr. Paul Watson and Mother Lurana White, have been a shining example to all Christians committed to the unity of the Church, following our lord's command "*that we may all be one*" (John 17:20-21). It will not be an exaggeration to say that the Center of Ecumenical, Missiological and Environmental Studies "Metropolitan Panteleimon Papageorgiou" (CEMES), which I preside, follows the example of the Society of the Atonement, in its effort to promote the ecumenical awareness. Driving force toward this vision in the Church of Greece, for more than two decades was the late Metropolitan of Thessaloniki Panteleimon Papageorgiou (1902-1979), our spiritual father and a close companion of the visionary Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras. To revitalize his vision and further contribute to the ecumenical cause, a number of academics, as well as some of his direct or spiritual relatives, established in his name the aforementioned Center.

* Τὸ κείμενο αὐτὸ ἀποτελεῖ προφορική ὁμιλία στὶς 10 Δεκεμβρίου 2015 στὸ Centro Pro Unione τῆς Ρώμης, πού τῆ χρονιὰ αὐτὴ γιόρταζε τὰ 50 χρόνια ἀπὸ τὴ λήξη τῆς Β΄ Βατικανῆς Συνόδου τῆς Καθολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Πρόκειται νὰ δημοσιευτεῖ στὸ ἀνοιξιὰτικο τεύχος τοῦ 2016 τοῦ *Centro Pro Unione Bulletin*, μὲ τὴν εὐγενική παραχώρηση τῆς διεύθυνσης τοῦ ὁποῦ ἀναδημοσιεύεται καὶ στὴ *Θεολογία*. Τέλος Ἰανουαρίου 2016, ἐνάμιση δεκάδῃ μῆνα μετὰ τὴν ὁμιλία, μιὰ ἀκόμη Σύναξη τῶν Προκαθημένων ἔλαβε χώρα στὴ Γενεύη, στὴν ὁποία ἀποφασίστηκαν ἡ σύγκληση τῆς Συνόδου τελεσίδικα στὴν Κρήτη τὸν Ἰούνιο, ὅπως ἐπίσης καὶ οἱ τελευταῖες διαδικαστικὲς λεπτομέρειες (γραμματεία, παρατηρητές, σύμβουλοι κ.λπ.).

** Ὁ Πέτρος Βασιλειάδης εἶναι Ὁμ. Καθηγητὴς τῆς Θεολογικῆς Σχολῆς Α.Π.Θ.

Our focus this academic year, as a humble contribution on our part, the Orthodox academics, ecumenists, missiologists and environmentalists, was our Orthodox Church's titanic effort toward her Pan-Orthodox Synod next year. And it was for this reason that I accepted with pleasure my brother Jacob Puglisi's very kind invitation to give this year's lecture on "The Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church: Problems and its Ecclesiological Significance". Obviously its importance is not only for the Orthodox world but for all Christians.

I will start with some preliminary remarks; then I will move to the pre-history, the history, its preliminary stages, the issues to be decided and the procedural principles of this unique for the Orthodox world event; I will then refer to the problems, some fears, hesitations and even reactions in certain "Orthodox" circles, and few optimistic expectations; and I will end with its ecclesiological significance.

Some preliminary remarks

From the very start of the process toward this synod the title proposed and finally accepted was that of a Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church, not an Ecumenical one. Such a title, although it refers to the 1st Ecumenical Synod, is reserved only for the entire Christian world, at least when participation of the Catholic Church is secured. That decision was not a novel one, but was based on the long canonical and ecclesiological tradition of the entire Eastern Christian world, according to which no bishop has ever been installed on a city that originally belonged to the jurisdiction of the bishop of Rome. This is because the Orthodox never considered the separation, and consequently loss of communion, between East and West, between the Old and the New Rome, as being in a real state of a schism.

The Orthodox, in addition, always gave preeminence to synodality, over against the necessary primacy, in ecclesiological matters. This idea was intensified after the complete separation between East and West, sometimes reaching the extreme and completely denying the importance of a *primus* in local, regional and universal level. One can look at the discussion that is still going on about the *primus* as an honorific title (*primus inter paris*) and the *primus sine paribus*. Even the Eucharistic ecclesiology, which has made after Vatican II a tremendous impact on ecumenical discussions – and today is the methodological tool

of the official Catholic-Orthodox dialogue – at its earlier stages (e.g. in Afanassiev) developed as to exclude altogether the idea of a primacy.

In my talk today I will deliberately use the term Synod and not Council (synodical and not conciliar, synodality and not conciliarity), in order to underline the authoritative nature of this event; despite the fact that in English the two terms have the same meaning. The forthcoming Pan-Orthodox Synod will be a “Synod” of binding significance, almost equal to the 7 Ecumenical, not just a council of theological deliberations.

As such – and this is my last preliminary remark – its ultimate goal cannot be other than “the union of all”. Despite the fact that there will be no thorough theological analysis on the nature of Church unity, the quest for unity permeates the most important documents to be discussed and decided upon.

The pre-history of the Pan-Orthodox Synod

The Pan-Orthodox Synod, according to a high ranking Russian hierarch, is important in that, after the era of ecumenical Synods, it will be the first one representing today all the canonical (recognized) Orthodox Churches. For the last 12 centuries, there were councils of various levels attended by representatives of various Churches, but this one will be the first Pan-Orthodox Synod to be convened in modern era. There is, however, a pre-history, to which I now turn.

The last synod of the Orthodox Church of this scale was convened again in Constantinople more than a millennium ago, to reinstall Photius to the Patriarchal throne. Just fewer than 400 hundred bishops attended it from almost all Christian Churches in the East. Having to deal also with a dividing the East and the West issue of a dogmatic character, the *filioque*, this synod became the first major conciliar meeting in the East that unlike the forthcoming Pan-Orthodox focused not on the unity of the whole Church of Christ, but on the dogmatic peculiarities of the Orthodox world. Some Orthodox count it as the 8th Ecumenical, and together with another one in the 14th century that rehabilitated St. Gregory Palamas and his teaching (counted as the 9th), believe that they both represent an authentic point of reference of the Orthodox faith. Officially, however, the Orthodox Church consider as Ecumenical only 7 Synods. It is not without significance that all consecrated bishops give to this very day an oath to follow and protect the Bible and only 7 Ecumenical Synods.

Along with the 879 Synod the Eastern Orthodox Church continued exercising her synodality with the famous institution of the *endemousa* synod, a synod consisting of all the residing in Constantinople bishops and even Patriarchs of the East, when the Roman empire had lost most of its territories in the East. This *endemousa* synod used to manage ecclesial matters not only of the local Church of Constantinople but of the entire Eastern Church. After all, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople and New Rome, had historically (since at least the fifth century) coordinated such assemblies, facilitating unity, while at the same time serving as a center of appeal among all Orthodox Churches.

The history of the Pan-Orthodox Synod

The real history of the Synod started early in the 20th century, when the Ecumenical Patriarch Joachim III felt again the duty to reunite the Orthodox Churches that lost contact among themselves, despite holding the same faith. Because of the apparent disarray and ecclesiological irregularity the Orthodox Churches started discussing the possibility of convening a Pan-Orthodox Synod. In 1923 with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire Constantinople called an inter-Orthodox assembly to pave the way to a real Pan-Orthodox Synod. There were several attempts to convene such an event in the interwar period, the most exceptional of which was the 1930 conference in the Vatopedi Monastery in Mount Athos. But they were all unsuccessful, mostly because the Russian Church was isolated and suffered severe persecutions.

The Orthodox Churches returned to this idea after World War II, despite the fact that in the meantime other Orthodox Churches in the Balkans suffered similar with the Russians repression. At this crucial moment WCC, at its peak in that period, played a catalytic role serving as a safe forum which helped Orthodoxy to be reunited, especially after 1961 when the entire Orthodox Church (with the exception of Albania leaving under extreme atheistic regime) officially joined the council. The event, however, that rekindled the idea of a Pan-Orthodox Synod was the corresponding synodical process of the Catholic Church, Vatican II, which really inspired the Orthodox to accelerate the process of preparation for their Pan-Orthodox Synod.

Inter-Orthodox pre-conciliar consultations, very instrumental in the preparation process, started taking place at Rhodes early in 1960s (1961, 1963, 1964),

and in Geneva in 1968. These consultations were succeeded by a Pan-Orthodox commission and Pre-conciliar consultations, which took place from the 1970s and up to the 1980s. The 3rd pre-conciliar consultation (1986) promulgated almost all the important documents with ecclesiological and ecumenical significance. No further progress was made after the 3rd pre-conciliar consultation, mainly because in the 1990s and in the 3rd millennium, and up to the convocation decision, the general theological discussion was overwhelmed by the great success of the official theological dialogue with the Catholic Church, and particularly the primacy issue, still opposed by the Russian Orthodox Church.

After the elevation to the throne of Constantinople of Patriarch Bartholomew a second (after the *endemousa*) conciliar institution filled the gap of the Orthodox Church's synodality: the *Synaxis* of the Primate of all the Orthodox Autocephalous Churches. Although an unprecedented institution in the canonical history of the Church, this semi-synodical instrument proved extremely important and effective. Gleaning from the pre-conciliar process and its unanimously agreed decisions, this institution gave the Church a common voice to the pressing problems of modern era. It was in the 5th and last such *Synaxis*, meeting in Constantinople (March 6-9, 2014) that was finally agreed that a Pan-Orthodox Synod be at last convened. A "Communiqué of the Primate of the Orthodox Churches" released on March 9th stated that "the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church...will be convened and presided by the Ecumenical Patriarch in Constantinople in 2016." God willing it was scheduled to be held in the Church of Haghia Irene, the site of the 2nd Ecumenical council of 381, which completed the "creed" recited by most Christians today. Now a museum, Haghia Irene has never been converted into a mosque after the fall of Constantinople in 1453. To be honest, only if some unforeseen circumstances do not prevent it, will this long awaited Synod take place¹.

The preliminary stages of the Pan-Orthodox Synod

The 2014 *Synaxis* agreed that each Autocephalous Church will be represented by her Primate accompanied by 24 bishops, a number doubled from 12 bishops, plus the Primate, which was agreed in the midway. Because some Orthodox Churches do not have so many bishops, they will be represented by all their bishops. The initial idea to allow these Churches to "borrow" bishops from other

Churches was abandoned. Since, however, all Churches will have only one vote, the number of the participating bishops does not matter at all. All the sessions will be presided over by the Patriarch of Constantinople.

Most analysts and commentators insist that these decisions were the result of compromises achieved through very tense negotiations between the Patriarchs of Constantinople and Moscow. The Patriarch of Moscow, with over 320 bishops in his Church, initially suggested that all Orthodox bishops should participate in the Synod. The majority of the Churches rejected this proposal, not because this would give the Russian Church a distinct advantage, but for practical reasons and the lack of parity among all the autocephalous Churches. After all, the one Church-one vote decision of the *Synaxis* overrules such an argument. However, as one of Patriarch Bartholomew's advisors put it, "it is naïve to dismiss disagreements among various churches sweepingly, implying that these merely result from rivalries of power".

The roadmap towards the Synod included a pre-synodical inter-Orthodox preparatory committee – unfortunately without so far a single Orthodox woman theologian – which started work in September 2014 and will probably be in charge up to the opening of the Synod. The committee's most important assignment was the updating of most of the 1986 documents of the Geneva pre-conciliar consultation and the finalization of a couple of others, in addition of course to dealing with the details of its procedures. It was also authorized to quickly intervene if difficult issues arise in inter-Orthodox relations during the period up to the Synod.

The themes of the Pan-Orthodox Synod

The issues for discussion and decision at the Synod were determined long ago. The original long list included items, such as the *diptychs*, a common calendar, and even a common celebration of Easter, as well as many others, such as the canon of the Bible, a fuller participation of the laity in the life of the Church etc. When in the 1980s the last item (on lay participation) was deleted from the list, after pressure for obvious reasons by Churches then under communist rule, this pre-synodical process saw a strong reaction and the withdrawal of John Karmiris, the most prominent Orthodox dogmatic theologian of the time.

In short, from the longer list only 10 themes were dealt with: The Orthodox Diaspora, autocephaly, autonomy, the diptychs, the Church calendar, the canonical impediments to marriage, fasting, the relations with the other Christian Churches, the ecumenical movement, and the mission of the Church to the world. On all these themes an equal number of documents were drafted. Now the final list is further reduced to 8, because only on these have all Orthodox Churches unanimously agreed upon. These documents with some improvements will be submitted to the Synod. They all address problems that emerge from adapting an ancient faith to a modern reality, like precepts of fasting, regulations of marriage, and most importantly issues of sensitive nature, like the relations of the Orthodox Church with the other Churches and Christian confessions, the witness of the Orthodox Church to the contemporary world, and hopefully non-canonical governance issues facing the Orthodox Church in the Orthodox diaspora.

At some stage there was a suggestion not to convoke a Pan-Orthodox Synod now, in order to better prepare all issues at large, but a more sober view prevailed: to finish now what has been painstakingly prepared so far and leave to the next generation the rest. After all, many Primates who took the decision were active participants in some previous preparatory stages. According to a Ukrainian theologian, if the Synod does take place, “it will summarize the history of the Orthodox Church of the last century and will be the most important event in modern Orthodox history”. And for the above mentioned patriarchal advisor, “the very conception, let alone the convocation of such a Pan-Orthodox Synod, which will gather all the ancient patriarchates, with the exception of Rome, is entirely unprecedented”.

While the last issues may seem quite normal and uncomplicated to an outsider, they are vital to the growth of the Orthodox Church. For instance, the ecumenical openness of an otherwise profoundly traditional Church is of crucial importance, especially in view of the existence of tiny but vocal conservative minorities and traditionalist circles in the Greek and Slavic worlds.

The procedural principles of the Pan-Orthodox Synod

To balance the decision on the number of participants, the Russian Church insisted on *consensus* among the voting Churches in taking decisions; not only in the Synod itself, but also in all pre-synodical process. And this was a decision

that was listed first among all the other decisions of the 2014 Synaxis. It is important to know that in his opening speech at this Synaxis the Ecumenical Patriarch suggested the traditional “majority vote” procedural principle (ἡ τῶν πλειόνων ψῆφος κρατεῖτω). I was the first to publicly alert my Church in an article I wrote before the opening of that crucial Synaxis on the real meaning of consensus, knowing the Russian Orthodox Church administration’s adamant position. I expressed my fear that the unity of Orthodoxy was at risk and the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew’s determination for convocation of a Pan-Orthodox Synod, to complete a more than half a century pre-synodical process, would collapse before it even started.

My arguments were that the Church cannot, of course, use in decision-making the procedures customarily used in secular bodies, such as parliaments. In the Church, as the body of Christ and a divine-human (*theanthropic*) organization this adversarial approach, which can even become confrontational, thus undermining its unity, is inappropriate for any Church seeking to “understand what the will of the Lord is” (Ephesians 5:17), or His mind (cf. “it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us...”, Acts 15:28). Therefore, procedures that allow more room for brotherly consultation, prayerful reflection, and “effective through love” (Galatians 5:6), can better promote the purposes of an Orthodox Synod.

This is not to say that a Synod should attempt to work without rules; on the contrary, rules that are fair are indeed essential. The question is the style, content and application of such rules. And the consensus method is a means of arriving at the proper decisions.

I made, however, clear that the consensus *is not* the same as, or even identical with, unanimity. The crucial element in a consensus decision-making process is to make sure that all minority views are heard, understood, thoroughly discussed and respected. Consensus can be the normal procedure, but not the invariable procedure. A consensus should by no means lead to a veto. A consensus is reached *not only* when all are in agreement (unanimity); but also when most are in agreement and those who disagree are content with the discussion and convinced that the decision expresses the general “mind of the Synod”; in rare cases of serious disagreement, the final decision is addressed to, and thoroughly discussed in, the pre-synodical inter-Orthodox preparatory committee.

To my disappointment, the communiqué – probably drafted and agreed upon in English – even in the Greek translation renders *consensus* as *ὁμοφωνία* (unanimity), which means a right to veto for any Church. Such an understand-

ing of consensus significantly reduces beforehand the possibility of the Synod taking any decision regarding burning issues, especially those of ecumenical and ecclesiological nature, let alone those related to Christian anthropology or to social and moral issues. And because in the Orthodox Church only a Synod could have an authority to take a binding decision, the wider Christian community should not be optimistic or create high expectations. This is one of the weakest points of the Synod, although in the pre-synodical committee efforts were made to minimize its negative effect; but the damage was already done.

The problems of the Synod

No one can deny that the Pan-Orthodox Synod is of great significance. The problem is how effective it will be in addressing the issues that really matter for the Orthodox Church, without risking an already fragile unity. The two main problems are the possibility of its *postponement* (or even worse its complete cancelation) and its *reception*. As to the former, there is indeed a real possibility that the Synod will be postponed, if the tensions between local Orthodox Churches become more intense, thus making it impossible, or if international politics prevent it. Fortunately, the tension between the Antioch and Jerusalem Patriarchates over mutual territorial claims, although they existed before the 2014 *Synaxis* and as a result was the main reason for the Antiochean delegation not signing its final communiqué, did not prevent the normal process toward the Pan-Orthodox Synod.

Some of course still consider the forthcoming Synod as being of little significance or consequence. They claim that no doctrinal issue will be discussed or defined. But even in the past in the classical Ecumenical Synods the bishops were not only dealing with theological disputes and ecclesiastical controversies but also with the current problems.

Even a greater problem seems to be the way the decisions of the Synod will eventually be received, given the fact that there are at least two issues to be decided at the Synod that encompass universal and unparalleled authority. The first is the straight condemnation of separatist, extremist and subversive elements and factions – sometimes in circles influenced by monastics – within the Orthodox Church, along with a condemnation of religious fundamentalism and fanaticism; and the second the unanimous decision in favor of the multi- and bi-

lateral dialogues. Such a clear at a top level commitment to ecumenical openness will end once and for all any anti-ecumenical feeling, haunted as a ghost within Orthodoxy for more than a century (I refer to the calendar dispute). It is expected, however, to instigate and ignite some reactions. Time will show just how much the Orthodox want the Holy and Great Pan-Orthodox Synod, and how it will be received by the faithful and their leaders. It is a matter of how much each autocephalous Church is ready and willing to lay aside trends of phyletism, which though condemned as a contemporary heresy by a 19th century Orthodox regional Synod (1872) it is still in force among Orthodox, who do not resist the temptations of secular power and nationalism.

Fears, hesitations and reactions in certain “Orthodox” circles

Many ultra-conservative Orthodox faithful opposed the idea of a Pan-Orthodox Synod as utterly undesirable, considering the mere concept of it as either arrogant or irrelevant. They stick to the arguments put forward by Fr Justin Popovic of Chelije (now a saint), who back in 1977 wrote against a ‘Pan-Orthodox Synod’, because most Orthodox Churches at that time were under atheist regimes, but also because he famously called ecumenism a “pan-heresy”, with Papacy and WCC as its real manifestation. These people are still afraid of an unconditional surrender of their Church to Papacy and to deviating from the traditional faith and ecclesiology to Protestantism. Behind such a naive reaction lies the experience of proselytism against the Orthodox in earlier periods. For this reason in one of the documents for final adoption there is a clear condemnation of proselytism.

In any case, even positive toward the Synod Orthodox theologians recognize with regret that the earlier ecumenical achievements have faded away, due to the rising anti-ecumenical climate within Orthodoxy. It is quite true that ecumenism, while prominent in the early preparatory stages of the Synod, may be at its nadir at the time of its convocation, or even at the crucial period of its reception.

The expectations

There are, however, also positive expectations from the Synod, especially from those Orthodox Churches and individuals ministering in non-Orthodox

countries. Will the Synod pronounce a proper and canonical administration and organization for all Churches, especially those in diaspora? The proper canonical status of one bishop per diocese (or city) is currently an exception. Normally in one city a number of ethnic Orthodox Churches co-exist, and, therefore, more than one bishop render their services. “Will church leaders grant some standing of autonomy? Will leaders in countries such as the United States be interested in a unified, collaborative organization? Or will they remain obsessed with narrowly nationalistic interests?”

Regrettably most Orthodox Churches seem to be retreating into a stifling, sheltered and safe provincialism, they appear less interested in transcending any prejudice and parochialism; they consider their own national concerns as more important pastorally than concerns for collaboration or collegiality. Therefore, the most theologically educated faithful eagerly expect solutions by the synod to such or similar problems.

And of course there are genuine expectations from the Synod by non-Orthodox. Many expect what Orthodoxy will say on issues other Christians have been struggling for generations to resolve regarding gender and sexuality; there will be no discussion on these. Others, knowing that the various Orthodox jurisdictions take different approaches to the reception of non-Orthodox Christians, are asking pressing questions on how we view the nature of the other “churches” or “ecclesial communities”. Again, no answer is going to be given to this question too, as it happened with the same question posed 15 years ago in WCC within the framework of the Special Committee of Orthodox Participation.

The ecclesiological significance of the Synod

To properly assess such an important event one has to have access to the final documents. However, the secretariat denied any official access to all drafted documents, in order to prevent negative comments, or even biased manipulation of them. This is perhaps one of the reasons why there was no provision of a wider official consultation in the preparatory stage, even among Orthodox theologians, let alone an ecumenical one. I remember the late prof. Nikos Nisiotis, after his positive experience as an observer at Vatican II, envisaging for the Pan-Orthodox a preliminary consultation even with non-Orthodox with voting rights and episcopal representation – especially of the Oriental Orthodox.

Now it is doubtful that non-Orthodox observers will even be invited. [Fortunately all these problems were solved at the 2016 Synaxis of the Primate of the Orthodox Church in Geneva].

We must be content, nevertheless, that the Synod will at least address ecumenical relations, although, as it has been reported, the 1986 approved document on ecumenism will not mention the term in the title, in order to avoid reactions from ultra-conservative Orthodox. It will be submitted to the Synod combined with other documents dealing with the bilateral dialogues.

Even with these limitations the Synod will have an exceptional ecclesiological significance, at least for the Orthodox. The supposedly secondary issues from an ecclesiological perspective for non-Orthodox have enormous significance for the Orthodox Church, especially if she manages to speak and act as a unified body.

There is still, of course, a general feeling that Orthodoxy can hardly succeed in witnessing to the Gospel with a single voice and in a unified mode, at least to the extent the Catholic Church does. And this is evident by the fact that the ecumenical openness shown all these years by Orthodox Church leaders and theologians is very often questioned or met with suspicion by certain circles. I will try to explain this by using as a methodological tool the approach to religious systems used in the discipline of the history of religions. According to specialists in the field it is important to take into consideration the radical prophetic movement, starting from the OT Prophets, the Historical Jesus, through the various marginal groups (most notably the Manicheans), and up to Muhammad in Islam. This thread is the single most important characteristic of all the Abrahamic religions, though it remains very often hidden and outside the mainstream religious systems. It generates inner conflict, disunity, and in some cases even heresy. The figures of the Gnostic, a martyr, a holy man, or a mystic are all sequels of the OT prophecy. It reflects a mode of religiosity that is characterized by high intensity and extreme actions. It is centripetal and activist by nature and emphasizes sectarianism and polemics, esoteric knowledge, or gnosis, and of course charisma. The other mode of religiosity, as we move geographically from the East to the West in all three monotheistic religions, is obviously more common than the first one. It is centrifugal, and irenic, it favors an ecumenical attitude; it contents itself with a widely shared faith and concentrates on commonly agreed dogmas. In Weberian parlance, it reflects the routinization of all religious movements. This is the mode in religious systems with centralized author-

ity, a mode of priests and bishops, rather than of martyrs and holy men. These two main modes of religion, high versus low intensity, exist simultaneously, and cross the boundaries of all religious communities. The present dramatic situation in Europe perfectly explains the chaotic image of Islam. Compared e.g. to Catholicism (geographically in the West) Islam (geographically located in the East) is lacking of any centralized authority. Orthodoxy lies somewhere in between (not only geographically, not even because of its autocephaly with the ensuing de-centralization, and even nationalism). In Orthodoxy, despite its canonical structure and ecclesiology, monastic and other charismatic figures exercise similar authority, or at least exert considerable influence, similar to their religious leaders. It is therefore extremely difficult to control all anti-ecumenical feelings that can diminish the importance and consequences of even an authoritative synod.

It is for all these and many other reasons that the very fact of its convocation, let alone the repeatedly underlined necessity of Church unity, gives the Pan-Orthodox Synod an ecclesiological significance of its own. Above all, the ecclesiological consequences of this Synod will be manifested only after its final reception; and its significance for the entire Christian world will be clearly felt, when its principal concern for the Church unity will start being widely applied.