



His Beatitude, Archbishop Chrysostomos of Cyprus participates in the opening session of the Holy and Great Council. Photo: Romanian Orthodox Church/Robert Nicolae.

STATE OF AFFAIRS

Address of His Beatitude, Archbishop Chrysostomos of Cyprus to the Holy and Great Council

Translated by Christopher Sprecher

Your All-Holiness, holy brothers,

I do not think it to be a disadvantage that I, in speaking after many brothers, am constrained to repeat many things that have already been said. The event we are experiencing is an extraordinary and very great one, and for this reason, while stressing its significance and expressing our joy, we must persuade ourselves and the whole world of [the Council's] dimensions and the expected outcomes.

After many centuries of introspection, the Orthodox Church finds itself once again gathered together in council, in one joint journey towards confronting the pressing problems of the world. The historical transformations that have taken place since the eighth century until the present day, and which greatly wounded all the churches of

the first millennium—social, epistemological, and economic changes, which quickened in pace in later centuries; the explosion of media and the rapid dissemination of knowledge and ideologies in our electronic age; the migration from the south to the north that we see nowadays; the many problems afflicting people. All this drives us to movement and action, and to take responsibility. Orthodoxy must hear and understand these problems and propose life-giving alternatives to the thorny issues of the day.

Therefore, the time has come when we should be measured against what is great. Finding ourselves, by God's providence, in the place where the apostles trod, here where the great Paul, together with Titus, preached Christ, we continue in the same footprints of this sacred history.

Note: this text is a translation of the Address of His Beatitude Archbishop Chrysostomos of Nova Justiniana & All Cyprus, originally given in Greek, to the Holy and Great Council at its opening session on Monday, June 20, 2016.

The convocation of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, as much as it may seem unbelievable, is a reality! The absence of some local Churches does not diminish the importance of the Holy and Great Council. Both the themes and the texts of the Council, as well as the convocation of the Council, had been discussed and unanimously approved by the representatives and primates of the Orthodox Churches. Their absence today is not related to the themes and the substance of the discussions, but is due, in my opinion, to reasons of communication or other internal matters of the Churches in question. For us, this event remains extremely important and a crowning achievement in the life of the Church. Even in their absence, we can say: "Now what was unheard of has been heard".¹

The fulfillment of the dream, in which the Orthodox people of God have cradled and nourished their hope, causes every Orthodox person, and especially us pastors, to rejoice: because it not only stimulates inter-Orthodox relations, but also puts forward the credible witness of the Orthodox Church to the modern-day pressing problems of the human being and the world.

Even though the convocation of the Holy and Great Council is a collective act—not only of us who are alive, but also of our departed fathers and brethren, who, by God's leave, will have a share in our joy—we must, from the start, admit that the mastermind and guide behind this whole endeavor has been His All-Holiness, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew.

His All-Holiness has shaped and directed the many years of efforts, oftentimes gathering various tendencies together on the effective and saving foundation of these [fathers]. In the mo-

saic of the preparations for, and convocation of, the Holy and Great Council, each Church, each primate, and each hierarchy, has their place. In the center, however, the imposing figure of His All-Holiness presides. A great man at a great hour in history! We thank you, Your All-Holiness.

Being filled right now with many emotions, and looking back, we are aware of the difficulties we faced in the long lead-up to the Council: the reefs and shoals, the Symplegades,² through which our efforts passed.

Nevertheless, all of us Orthodox understand that such a summit was needed to shed light, through the Gospel, on the major problems of a world that is subject to constant changes, and to confront the new challenges facing society, though a series of difficulties threatened to frustrate its convocation.

In my opinion, the inter-Orthodox rivalries on account of ethnophyletism were the first reason why the preparations for the Council took so long. Ethnophyletism is what blocked the question of autocephaly and of the diptychs from coming to the Council, and is also the cause behind the less-than-canonical solution given to the issue of the diaspora. Nowadays, at a time when national barriers are being eliminated one after the other, we Orthodox do not just set ourselves at naught, but also set ourselves up for ridicule by setting up ethnicity as a constitutive element of our ecclesiology and our ecclesial identity.

The fundamentalist groups, the fanatics—among whom are found both theologians and hierarchs, and who themselves do little—and who are pretty much everywhere in the Orthodox world today, equally merit serious consideration: not only on account of

¹ This is the first line of the second troparion, Ode 7, second canon at Matins of the Feast of Transfiguration.

² The Symplegades [Gr. Συμπληγάδες] or "Clashing Rocks," also known as the Cyanean Rocks, were, according to Greek mythology, a pair of rocks at the Bosphorus that clashed together when somebody went through. They were defeated by Jason and the Argonauts, who would have been lost and killed by the rocks except for Phineus's advice. Jason let a dove fly between the rocks; it lost only its tail feathers. The Argonauts rowed mightily to get through and lost only part of the stern ornament. After that, the Symplegades stopped moving permanently.

the delay in convening the Holy and Great Council, but also on account of the danger threatened [by them]. The opposition of these groups to every notion of rapprochement with other Christians has indirectly affected even our local councils, which have attempted and continue to attempt to make profuse amendments to the texts and regulations of the documents that were prepared by the pre-conciliar meetings. We have no illusions. For these groups, we have been found to be mired in heresy and apostasy.

These situations in the Church are neither unknown nor unprecedented. The field of the Church also brings forth tares that have been sown by the enemy; The Church shall live thus until the end of the ages.

Moreover, the hardships suffered by all the Orthodox Churches in the years of preparation are known and should not be ignored. Thus far, 1964 marks the last great persecution of the Orthodox Church of Constantinople, which was a continuation of the [persecutions] of 1922 and 1974. There was the expatriation of 1955, continuing to this day, of the Orthodox element in our Church. In recent years, there has been the martyrdom of the patriarchates of the Middle East. Throughout nearly the entire twentieth century, there were the tribulations for most Orthodox Churches under the Communist regime. All of these sufferings, of course, exercised a negative impact on the preparations of the Council, both in terms of the timeline as well as the themes.

And, yet, the change in the structures and the symbolic universe of Orthodox societies greatly hampered our work. The Orthodox communities that had been rural and agrarian gradually became urban and industrial. Migrations, both internal and external,

overthrew the social and cultural cohesion of communities. The Internet and other media questioned the uniqueness of Orthodox teaching and led many to move away from this. Under these circumstances, human problems are constantly changing shape and priorities are constantly changing, which fact often leads to questioning the value or effectiveness of the issues dealt with by the Council.

And most importantly: we talk about the Greek East (τὴν καθ' ἡμᾶς Ἀνατολήν); about our particular way of living and thinking, our values, traditions, and ideals. But how can we be distinguished in our ethos and traditions when we have all adopted a culture imported from the West, and a Western lifestyle? Half of Orthodoxy today is culturally a part of Europe; our countries are members of the European Union, where the Western expression of Christianity dominates. How easy is it to express our beliefs by means of a system of labels contrary to our own values?

But glory be to God! The difficulties and the suffering are today a thing of the past. And sitting now in Council, we glorify God who has led us "to this hour".³

Naturally (thanks to technology), everyone has their eyes on us in these days, waiting for a word of life, a word of substance that appeals to everyone. Especially now, with the crisis of the Western world's turning away from its own Christianity, we have become an expectation of hope. Events determine our own responsibility, pushing us to focus not so much on the internal problems of Orthodoxy. In the eyes of the modern world, which desperately seeks for a sign of life and a vision of salvation, we might resemble the sons of Zebedee, if we continue to make a

³ Cf. John 12:27.

fuss over the diptychs and primacy, over insignificant things of life.

It is certain that the world is watching us, seeking to learn what efficacious word Orthodoxy has to say to the problems and concerns of people today. We have to demonstrate our ability to grasp the message of the times.

Primarily, however, the Orthodox world expects from the Holy Council a practical expression of the unity of Orthodoxy in the face of these problems, and a single position in its relations with the rest of the Christian world. And it is, I think, a huge responsibility of all to avoid harming this unity. When we are unable properly to prioritize values, to distinguish what is great from what is secondary and insubstantial, what response will our call to the people find to rise from what is earthly to what is spiritual? The aim, then, of the Council will be the healing of wounds, divisions, and failures, and to create the framework for a single voice in the body of the Orthodox Church.

I am sure we all realize that an equally important purpose of the Holy and Great Council is the promotion of the spiritual treasures of Orthodoxy to all those beyond its limits in order to prepare the path leading to unity. At the same time, having the conviction which we openly declare, that the Orthodox Church is the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church of Christ, we reaffirm that our primary effort and concern, in all dialogues, is the offering of Orthodox teaching and experience to other Christians.

The fullness of our Orthodoxy awaits us from the Council: that it also turn its attention to Orthodox societies, which day by day descend increasingly into corruption; that it seek the causes [of

this] and offer options for treatment; that it express the ethos and values of the Church, as an effective means of combating corruption; and that it highlight the evolution of spiritual values with public values and provide [the Church's] liturgical dimension with a moral one as well.

The messages expected to be promulgated by the Council are neither few in number nor are they to be disparaged. It is recognized, however, by all that we lagged somewhat in preparing and this delay has had an impact on the results of the Council as well. The many problems we have faced, and which have dragged out the preparations over many years, have brought us to the point (in the words of Melito, the Bishop of Chalcedon of blessed memory) where the problems of yesterday have not been overcome by the problems of today, nor by the problems of tomorrow, but by those of the day after next. The world of 1961 or 1986 no longer exists. In its place, another more complicated world was born. We see set before us the external existential problems of humanity, as well as other issues such as the environment, bioethics, drugs, information technology, and the economy, which has gone awry. A new way of life based on consumption and individualism has replaced the timeless Orthodox lifestyle with its austere way of life and the pursuit of virtue. The human being of today is now living out a tragedy. Atop the most unsettled things of life, he tries to build his happiness.

The mentality of our culture today leads many to exploit not only their fellow human beings but also to exploit nature and to destroy the environment itself, with the final result of having no deeper meaning in life. As has been aptly said, underlying the murder of the earth [γροικτωνία] is the spiritual suicide [αυτοικτωνία] of the

modern human being, and underlying our ruined environment is ruined human nature.

It may, therefore, be necessary that by this Council we solve the issues of the canonical organization of the Orthodox Church; however, we should harbor no illusions that these problems concern or interest our flock more than they do other Christians. With the experience we have gained, therefore, we should proceed quickly to a new Great Council that will chiefly deal with the problems of ecology, bioethics, the non-symmetrical development of material and spiritual values, and a lacking meaning of life in the modern world, and that will give hope to the staggering world. A period of three to five years will suffice for this aim, I think. Such a new Great Pan-Orthodox Council should have the additional aim of creating a way for receiving heterodox [Christians] into the Orthodox Church, as did the Ecumenical Councils of the first millennium, and creating conditions for exercising for its part an influence, both in terms of mission work as well as in other ways, on the rest of the world. To borrow a phrasing from physics: it should aim at keeping Orthodoxy open to osmosis into the heterodox and diffusion outwards to other religions. It should also study reforms that do not affect the core of the faith and doctrine of the Church and which refer to practical, moral, and canonical issues in a world that is con-

stantly changing in terms of structures and functions. The packaging can be modified, making the content of our Orthodox faith more accessible to human beings.

Even though people have been distanced from the will of God, even though our society has become secularized, the world forever remains the object of Divine Providence. Its creation entails a goal to be attained. And we, the Church, must support and guide this world towards the fulfillment of the will of God. Our responsibility is, therefore, neither terminated nor reduced by this Holy and Great Council. On the contrary: considering the expectations of the people, we should redouble our efforts to express the will of God in our time and place, illuminating the way for people in the various straits of life.

Once again glorifying God, we first thank Your All-Holiness from the bottom of our heart, for all your care, for the convocation and the smooth operation of the Holy and Great Council, within the bounds of your jurisdiction, and furthermore the Reverend Archbishop and episcopate of Crete, for the many labors and various cares with which they have been entrusted.

We pray for God's bountiful light on us all so that the work we shall undertake might also be bountiful. ✽

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Chrysostomos II (Demetriou) is Archbishop of Nea Justiniana and All Cyprus. In 1972, he graduated from the Theological School of the University of Athens and became Hegumen of the Monastery of St. Neophytos. He was consecrated Metropolitan of Paphos in 1978 and enthroned as primate of the Church of Cyprus in 2006.