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The Canons of the Orthodox Church from an Ecumenical Perspective

I would first like to express my warmest thanks to the organizer of the conference for the invitation to participate in it and present my views, regarding the canonical framework of the Orthodox Church from an ecumenical perspective. I feel particularly honored and pleased to be among you here, and I thank you again for this opportunity.

My topic, as I see it, is hardly easy to handle. This is because, while it is true that most Orthodox Churches, at least, are active participants in the so-called Ecumenical movement, as well as in the WCC and the international inter-Christian dialogues that the Orthodox Church is conducting under the coordinating tutelage of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, an anti-Ecumenical current has nevertheless been lurking in the interior of all the Orthodox Churches, which seems to be threatening their internal unity to an alarming degree that simply cannot be dismissed as insignificant. This anti-ecumenical current became manifest before, during and after the convocation of the Grand Synod of the Orthodox Church in Crete in 2016, as was evidenced by the strong pressure from ultra-conservative and fundamentalist groups within the Orthodox Churches to refrain from recognizing the ontological existence of the other heterodox churches, other than their historical designation as such. This occurred more than a century after the 1902, 1904 and 1920 circulars were issued by the Ecumenical Patriarchate, by which the Ecumenical Patriarch invited the other Orthodox churches to join through dialogue the rest of the Christian world, with a view to working toward unity. The reaction also comes several decades after the beginning of theological dialogues with Roman Catholics, Lutherans, old Catholics, Pre-Chalcedonians, Reformed Churches and Anglicans. Regardless of this, the Council of Crete is important because it has given a boost to inter-Christian dialogue while officially proclaiming that the sought after unity can only have a solid foundation when it is based on the common tradition, doctrinal as well as canonical, of the first millennium.

The true identity of this canonical tradition of the first millennium is, I believe, known to almost everyone. It comprises the canons issued by the Ecumenical Councils (minus the 5th and 6th Ecumenical Councils made up for by

the Quinnisext or Council of Trullo, of 691 AD) and the canons of the Church Fathers sanctioned by canon 2 of the Penthekti, along with the canons of local Councils also upheld by the same Council of Troullo. Included in subsequent canonical collections in the Corpus of the Orthodox Church's canons, are 17 more canons of the Constantinople Synod (the so-called First- Second) convened by Photius in 861, as are the three canons of the last Common Council also headed by Photios (i.e., Nicaea-Constantinople) that took place prior to the Schism, in the year 879/80 AD, which in view of the *Filioque* issue, denied any further additions to the Creed. Included as well in the Corpus of the Orthodox Church canons are the so-called 85 Apostolic canons, not of course set up by the Apostles, as their origins date as late as the 4th century AD. It would go beyond the scope of this presentation to ask which canons that are nowadays recognized by the Orthodox Church were later accepted in the West; for example, if Rome accepted 50 of the 85 Apostolic Canons, or whether it recognized Canon 28 of the 4th Ecumenical Council, which grants equal primacy of honor to the thrones of Rome and Constantinople, while still placing Constantinople second in rank of honor, or if and when the ecumenicity of the 7th Ecumenical Council was recognized in the West, and above all if the canons of Troullo were recognized and which of these were finally included in Gratian's Decretum of the 12th century AD, given the importance of this Decree for the formation of the canonical tradition of the Roman Catholic Church over the period of several centuries, up until 1917. Such a historical overview is always useful for the history of canon law in particular, albeit not as useful if it is aimed at demonstrating the ecumenical prospect of Orthodox and Roman Catholic canons. With such a purpose in mind, it is advisable to broach, even briefly, other points and issues entailing further parameters which either facilitate or raise obstacles to the common ultimate aim of achieving unity.

An ecumenical view of the canons of the Orthodox Church presupposes a clear answer to the question that for several decades has been troubling the minds of Orthodox theologians about the nature itself of the canons. Do canons constitute an *ius divinum*, which, precisely as *ius divinum*, commands absolute authority to the effect that canons cannot consequently be changed? Or should it rather be considered that canons have a historical nature, meaning that they were instituted under specific circumstances in order to meet specific needs and hence their authority can only extend so far these needs are met? The first view does not simply refer to sacred canons in general, but encompasses also the canons instituted by the Ecumenical Councils under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, as those canons themselves attest. The second view distinguishes between fundamental and non-fundamental canons and prioritizes the canonical conscience of the Church, as the sole expression of its doctrinal teaching. As a consequence, any change in the canons must appear, not as an

adaptation to historical circumstances, but in the sense of a desired deepening in the ecclesiastical mystery prompted by new conditions. A sub-group belonging to this second view concerning the nature of canons distinguishes between canons of general and specific use. The general canons concern fundamental questions of the authority and governance of the entire Church, a particular branch of ecclesiastical administration, or a specific ecclesiastical foundation. It is obvious that this distinction was introduced to support the thesis that the so-called specific canons possess more limited force and hence can more easily be changed than general canons can.

In any case, it is the proponents of the second view that raise the need for the codification of the canons of the Orthodox Church. Such a codification, should it ever occur, would entail, besides the adoption of new canons, the discarding of canons now deemed to have become obsolete and are either irrelevant to contemporary reality or contradict one another regarding their content. Followers of the first view overstress the value of the principle of Economy, which allows for the suspension of a canon's application depending on each particular case.

There is a common element between these two trends in the area of canon law. Supporters of both views reject any canonic revision pertaining to the structure, organization, and conciliar function of the Orthodox Church. To this category also belongs the function of Primacy and the First on the local, parochial, and world level. Another important component are the canons concerning relations with schismatics, heretics and heterodox. The crucial question here, which has Orthodoxy divided, is whether contemporary, 21st century heterodox, namely Roman Catholics and their splinter groups of Protestants, fall within the canonical regulations concerning first millennium heretics.

It is a fundamental tenet of the ancient Church that each local Church under its presiding Bishop expresses, constitutes, and materializes the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. Every single one of the local Churches understands itself as "autonomous" in every aspect of its organization and administration, but still draws its identity from the faith experience that it shares with every other local Church in the world. Local Churches thus enjoy a degree of inner self-sufficiency based on their full, authentic materialization of the body of Christ in history. In turn, local Churches have each by divine right always been headed by the local Bishop, who is seen as standing in "the form and place of Christ," and who also, as a result of apostolic succession, guaranteed the authenticity of the experienced faith through the celebration of the Holy Eucharist -- to the effect that only the Bishop's Eucharistic gathering was deemed a real one. At the same time, the Bishop, the organic head of the Church's body, served as the articulator of his Church's spiritual experience to

the other Churches, so that their common identity was always assured. As St. Ignatius famously put it, 'where the Bishop is seen, there must the crowd stand, just as where Christ is, there also lies the Catholic Church." The Bishop does not represent an absent from the local Church Christ, but due to the Grace he received at ordination, he confirms the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, for which reason he serves as the visible head of Christ's body, the Church. Thus the episcopal authority cannot be otherwise understood except in a Christocentric manner, and always in relation to the body of Christ in every local church. It goes without saying that local bishops fully actualize the one and the same episcopal authority in every local Church. This authority is exercised by divine right, and grants bishops the *charisma veritatis* witnessed to by St. Irenaeus. The canonical framework governing the structure and functioning of the Orthodox Church cannot be properly understood, as long as it is clear that all bishops receive the same authority through a process of ordination, which cannot subsequently be differentiated in terms quality or quantity by subsequent ecclesiastical decisions. In the Church, no one can claim to receive an authority higher than the one he received through his canonical sacramental ordination. Consequently, there is no such thing as a hierarchical ranking of bishops on a universal or local scale in Orthodoxy. This holds true not only in regards to the early centuries AD, but subsequently as well. Granting primacies of honor to the thrones of Rome, Alexandria, Constantinople, Antioch and Jerusalem, like the establishment of the metropolitan system in ecclesiastical administration on the rules of the 1st Ecumenical Council does not introduce inequality between the first and the other bishops on the level of provinces. The primacy of honor is given to the throne and not to the person who holds the throne; for which reason precisely the throne holder does not operate arbitrarily on his own, but is obliged to work synodically. The canons of the Ecumenical Councils, as well as those of the local Synods, such as Canon 34 of the Apostles, regulate the ecclesiastical structure based on the belief that each local Church is the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. The desired unity mandated by Apostolic Canon 34 reflects the unity and equal standing of the Trinitarian persons. As a result, the relationship between the First and the Bishops cannot break their shared equality, for the sake of preserving their unity. After all, the Church according to St. Maximus the Confessor, is an image of the Trinity.

At this point, it is useful to take a brief look at the text issued in 1980 in Munich by the Mixed Theological Committee of Dialogues of the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches, entitled "The Sacrament of the Church and the Eucharist, in the face of the mystery of the Holy Trinity." The inclusion and acceptance of Eucharistic ecclesiology (which is backed by ancient canons) in such a formal theological text is indeed impressive and marks some real

progress. As Metropolitan of Pergamon John Zizioulas has repeatedly indicated in numerous publications, Eucharistic ecclesiology is a basic characteristic of the unified and indivisible Church and, in particular, of Orthodox doctrinal and canonical tradition in subsequent centuries. The Munich text rightly speaks of the local dimension of the Church in history. In that context, every time it celebrates the Eucharist, the local Church is actualized and revealed as the body of Christ, as a sacrament of unity according to the model of Trinitarian communion, in which the bishop presides over as celebrant and guarantor of unity and apostolicity. The local church that celebrates the Eucharist around the Bishop is not a mere part of the body of Christ. The multiplicity of ecclesiastical gatherings does not divide the Church; on the contrary, it sacramentally denotes its unity. The ecumenicity and locality of the Church coincide sacramentally in the Eucharist, given that the catholic Church is Eucharistically manifested in the congregation of the local Church. For the local church to be in Eucharistic communion with other local churches, it is necessary that its sacrament be fully identified with the respective sacrament experienced in the early Church, and that a mutual recognition should exist between the local church and the other local churches. Because the one and only Church is sacramentally actualized solely within the local Church, no bishop can separate the care for his Church from the care for the entire Church. The overseeing of the Church in its entirety is assigned by the Holy Spirit, not to the sum total of the local bishops, but to their inter-communion, which is traditionally expressed by the synod. This is precisely what sets the norm, through the institution of the synod, for the correct understanding of the Primus and infallibility in the canonical and doctrinal tradition of the ancient and indivisible Church. This tradition demonstrates that the Primus has always functioned as *Primus cum Paribus* and never as *Primus sine Paribus*. Equally important in relevance is the text of the Mixed Dialogue Committee, published in New Valamo, Finland. In that text, it is emphasized that the role of the Bishop finds its fullness in the presidency of the Eucharistic assembly. Each bishop, by virtue of his ordination, becomes the successor of the Apostles, while the institution of Pentarchy and the regulation of Canon 34 of the Apostles constitute ancient canonical institutions organizing the synodical life and function of the Church throughout the first millennium.

The synodical function belongs to the very being, to the *esse*, of the Church, as opposed to its mere good operation. Chrysostom, moreover, tells us that the Eucharist co-terminus with the Synod, wherein the Primus coexists with the many, i.e. the other members of the ecclesiastical community. The canons of the first millennium and, more generally, the canonical tradition of the East, indicate to us that there can be no Council without a presiding Primus or on the local level, without a bishop, without whom no Eucharist can be

celebrated; just as true is it that no valid synod can be convened in the absence of a Primus, in accordance with the canons of the local council held in Antioch and the Apostolic canons. By "provincial level," the East does not only denote the synods held in the provinces in which the Byzantine state was divided, where the Metropolitan, i.e. the bishop of the province's capital presided over the Bishops having their thrones inside the boundaries of the province, according to the canons of the First Ecumenical Council; it also indicates the Synod operating within the Patriarchal System, formed by the canons of the Fourth Ecumenical Council (among those being canon 28 of Chalcedon). This Council was chaired by the Patriarch and membered by the Bishops of the provinces. There is no question that the five patriarchal centers of Rome, Constantinople, Antioch, Alexandria and Jerusalem were shaped by the primacies attributed to these ecclesiastical thrones by the canons of the 1st and 2nd Ecumenical Councils and were renewed by canon 36 of the Quinnisext, which also set the order of their pre-eminence, with the throne of Rome given primacy. The problem concerns the function of the Primus on the world level, inasmuch as the function of Pentarchy, like the Ecumenical Councils, constituted an extraordinary affair in the life of the Church and not an established institution, just as no Ecumenical Council was ever convened by the Bishop of Rome, nor has the Bishop of Rome ever presided on any of these.

This problem becomes even larger and the gap between East and West grows further in the second millennium, with the understanding of the Primus of Rome as a universal Primus. This cannot be accepted according to the doctrinal and canonical tradition of the Orthodox Church. However, a primacy could be accepted if it fulfilled the following canonical principles:

a) Primacy is not a Primacy of jurisdiction. Exercising jurisdiction means transgressing into the internal affairs of a local Church and rejecting its catholicity. Every local Church is a complete Church. No Synod, no Patriarch and no Metropolitan are allowed to intrude in a local church, which should be free to mind its own affairs insofar as it does not interfere with the affairs of other local churches.

b) The Primacy is not a privilege of an individual, but of a local Church. When we talk about the Pope's Primacy, we refer to the Primacy of a diocese, in particular the church of Rome. On the global level, ecclesiastically speaking, there is no communion or interaction of individuals, but of churches. Accordingly, the bishops participate in synods not as individuals but as heads of their churches, which in turn makes it necessary for synodical decisions to be approved by the faithful. A Synod of Bishops is not a "college" that exists by itself, over and above the local churches. The same is true for the Bishop of Rome as well, every time his Primacy is to be exercised.

(c) The Primacy, at whatever level it may be exercised, should not stray from the spirit and the conditions of the aforementioned Apostolic canon 34. The Primus always acts together with the other bishops on matters of common interest, while the Bishops, too, in such cases must act together with the Primus (d) Taking into account the modern structure of the Churches, the universal Primacy of the Church of Rome means that the Bishop of Rome should cooperate with the other heads of the autocephalous Churches on matters relating to the entire Church. The Primacy must thus be exercised in the spirit of communion and not in isolation or in a dominant manner over the entire Church. The Primus could be the President of all the heads, of every Church and the voice of the Church at large; still, all decisions made must be the fruit of consensus. Furthermore, this spirit of communion is not to be exhausted on the level of the heads of the Churches. It must rather permeate all levels of ecclesiastical life, from bishops and all clergymen down to the laity.

Another set of canons, which are inseparably linked to our subject, concern the relations of the Orthodox Church with those Christians that live outside its canonical borders. In other words, they concern the relationship with the Roman Catholics after the schism of 1054, and with those who in the course of the subsequent centuries, especially in the 16th century and thereafter, cut themselves off from Roman Catholicism with the emergence of Protestantism. There is indeed a huge set of canons established in the first millennium that concern heretics, with whom there cannot be any form of ecclesiastical *communio in sacris*, as they are not members of the Catholic Church. Heretics do not constitute a Church, nor do they have valid sacraments, since they are deprived of the Holy Spirit's grace; hence, praying with them is forbidden. These considerations are obviously based on the perception of St. Cypriot of Carthage, according to whom there is no salvation outside the Church. The terms heterodox and heretic are used indiscriminately and with the same exact meaning in the ecclesiastical literature of the first millennium. Yet, despite the austerity of these canons against those lying outside the Church, it is worth pointing out that even as early as the first millennium, the canons of the Ecumenical Councils have not upheld the views of St. Cypriot of Carthage, whose canon was pronounced by the Quinnisext as a mere custom, solely valid in the geographical area of Africa. Canons 1 and 4 of St. Basil, canon 7 of the Second Ecumenical Council and Canon 95 of the Quinnisext draw distinctions between heretics, instead of lumping them together into a single, undiversified entity. When these were to be readmitted to the canonical Church, some had their baptism recognized, to the effect that only the anointing needed to be

repeated, while others had both sacraments recognized, and were thus received in the Church with a written confession of the right faith and a simultaneous renunciation of the heresy from which they came. It is quite indicative that during the 7th Ecumenical Synod, the iconoclast bishops that proclaimed heretical misbeliefs, were admitted in the Church without a new Baptism, Chrism or even a new ordination.

While all this is happening during the first millennium AD, the problem in the Orthodox Church emerges in the course of the 2nd millennium, following the Schism of 1054, and the ensuing reciprocal anathemas of that year. The question then arises whether the Roman Catholics are heretics. This problem emerged in the first place because the characterization of anyone as a heretic presupposes a condemnation by an Ecumenical Council according to canon 6 of the Second Ecumenical Council, which does not apply to Roman Catholics as no Ecumenical Council has been convened by the Orthodox Church since 1054. As a consequence, the question remains open, whether the canons concerning heretics can apply to Roman Catholics. There is no doubt that the relations of the Orthodox Church with Roman Catholicism and all other Christians have gone through several phases during the 2nd millennium, not always related to theological reasons. The ecclesiastical relations between East and West dis enter a new phase, in which tensions were not altogether lacking. The sending of missionaries for the purpose of converting Orthodox people to Roman Catholicism and the activity of Uniates at the expense of the Orthodox flock certainly had their impact on the theological treatment of many questions concerning the relations between the two Churches. Thus many texts issued by Local Councils or even written by saints of the Orthodox Church are dominated by a polemical rhetoric, combined with a receding of the canonical sobriety found in earlier texts, prior to these tensions. An example of such sobriety is the position of the (anti-unionist, at that!) Patriarch of Constantinople, Gennadios Scholarios, the first Metropolitan of Constantinople (1453), who does not classify the Latins as heretics, but as schismatics and heterodox. In fact, he feels that Roman Catholics can join the Orthodox Church with a very simple Confession of faith, without being baptized or anointed. This position is on opposite from the stance assumed by the 1775 Synod of Constantinople, which considered the Latins' sacraments non-valid, including even baptism, which in turn rendered their re-baptism imperative. This harsh standpoint of Patriarch Cyril the 5th only lasted briefly, and resulted in his dethronement.

Besides recognizing Roman Catholic baptism, several things must also be considered, such as the possibility of mixed marriages, the permission to bury heterodox Christians by Orthodox clerics (but not vice versa), the celebration of water sanctification for their benefit, the reciprocal offering of church buildings for the celebration of the divine Liturgy, the exchange of preachers, the mutual attendance of services, and the offering of Antidoron or blessed bread to the heterodox in attendance of the Liturgy at the end. The emergence of the Ecumenical Movement in the 20th century could not be said to have changed things regarding the relationship of the Orthodox Church with heterodox Christians. The most important step, of course, was the distinction drawn between the heterodox and the heretics. Against the use of the general term "heretic", those who accept the doctrine of the Trinity and accept the Christ as the Redeemer and Savior are characterized as heterodox and so are distinguished from heretics. The term "heterodox" does not exist in the canons of the first millennium, and when it appears in patristic texts, it is totally identical to the notion of the heretic. However, since the 20th century, and certainly nowadays, the term "heterodox" is preferred, since "heretic" denotes a serious Trinitarian and Christological falsehood, whereas "heterodox" demonstrates the bearer of a different belief; as such, it is more neutral in content and free from the negative connotation of the term "heretic," that sports not only a pernicious deviation from the universality of faith, but also the hostile and polemical clash with the Orthodox Church. The term "heterodox," by contrast, denoting as it does a confessionally different Christian, suggests commonalities in fundamental aspects of faith, of the kind allowing the Orthodox Church to see the possibility of a possible convergence through dialogue and the achievement of *communio in sacris*. This modern nuance would be of great value, if the heterodox, as these came to be understood in the 20th century, were exempted from the application of the canons established during the first millennium. But this has not been the case. Despite the reciprocal lift of the anathemas of 1054, which began in 1965, and for all the on-going dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church that commenced in the 1980s, a strong counter-movement has been active within the Orthodox Church demanding the application of first millennium canons on heterodox Christians. Although no confrontation between East and West is argued for in Orthodox scholarship, but only a situation of non-communion until the convergence of faith has been reached through dialogue, in practice what actually applies for the heterodox is what has been in force for those denoted as heretics by first millennium canons.

The Orthodox Church considers itself today to be the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, and that it is the continuation of the Church founded by Christ. Consequently, as the Council of Crete stated in June last year, it does not recognize churches other than itself in an ontological sense, except for their historical names. At no point does the text of Crete imply that the Orthodox Church recognizes the validity of sacraments celebrated outside its canonical boundaries, nor that it recognizes even *vestigia ecclesiae* in other non-Orthodox communities. It is also impressive that mixed marriages are strictly forbidden by reference to canon 95 of the Quinnisext, which prohibits marriages with heretics. Mixed marriages are allowed only in the spirit of economy, but it is not obligatory for autocephalous Orthodox Churches to accept and to allow mixed marriages. The sole exception in practice concerns the question of joint prayer, but even this causes reactions within the Orthodox Church. In exceptional cases, as for example, in the beginning of dialogue meetings between the Orthodox and Roman Catholics, joint prayers have now become an usual act. But this doesn't mean that in a country with a homogeneous Orthodox population, an "Ecumenical Prayer" could easily be set up in the way that it is done in Europe. Generally speaking, the question of the relationship between the Orthodox Church and heterodox Christians is marked by two tendencies: the first wants to ignore the canonical context regulating the relationship with the heterodox as recorded in the canons of the first millennium, considering that the latter cannot apply to modern heterodox Christians. The second tendency, on the other hand, followed by zealots and fundamentalists, denounces any ecumenical idea and initiative. The first category encompasses, not without exceptions, the hierarchy, the bishops and most of the flock of the Orthodox Churches. The second group is made up of a smaller, but lively, part of the flock and a large portion of the monks, who even decry inter-Christian dialogues.

The aforementioned Synod of Crete is an important event, not in the sense that it set up canons in the same way as the Church did in the first millennium, but because it sets specific guidelines on the lives of believers in the face of modern new problems and modern challenges. In the first place, it emphasized the value of the human person, which derives from the creation of the human being in the image likeness of God. Our innate freedom, which is God's gift to the human race, enables us to move towards spiritual perfection, but also encompasses the risk of independence from God and the possibility of a fall, from which derive the tragic consequences of evil in the world. The various

forms of evil in modern society are secularization, violence, immorality, the use of drugs, wars, the arms race, the repression of social groups, religious communities and entire peoples, as well as social inequality, misinformation and the manipulation of public opinion, poverty, hunger, the refugees crisis, environmental destruction, the uncontrolled use of genetic biotechnology and biomedicine in relation to the beginning, duration, and the end of human life. In the face of all these indignities suffered by human persons, Orthodox theology must assert the truth of Christ's freedom. The Orthodox Church recognizes and raises to prominence the perennial centrality of peace and justice in the lives of human beings. The revelation of Christ is the "Gospel of Peace". The peace of Christ is the ripe fruit of the recapitulation of all things in His person, of the value and greatness of the human person as an image of God. This heavenly peace offered by Christ breeds freedom, social justice, and the love of men and peoples all over the world. Sin is a spiritual illness whose material symptoms are riots, strife, social conflicts, crimes and wars.

The Church condemns war in general but more so the wars of mass destruction, which not only can cause death to an unpredictable number of people, but will render life unlivable for those who survive, as incurable diseases, genetic mutations and other malignancies will affect the future generations. The Orthodox Church condemns nuclear, chemical, biological, and any forms of arms race that create the illusion of supremacy and sovereignty. While the Church must contribute to the prevention and deterrence of war, when it becomes inevitable, it is of course necessary to sympathize with her children when they defend their lives and their freedom; at the same time, however, it must do everything possible to facilitate the quickest possible restoration of peace and freedom. Naturally, the Orthodox Church condemns wars that are provoked by religious fanaticism and nationalism. Every human being, irrespective of time, religion, race, gender, nationality and language, has the same rights in society and cannot be discriminated against for any of these reasons. The Church respects human rights and, supporting as it does the equal treatment of human beings, assesses their application under the light of its teaching on the sacraments, the family, the place of the two sexes in society and on the basis of the values of ecclesiastical tradition. The Orthodox Church cares actively for those needing help, for the hungry, the needy, the sick, the disabled, the elderly, for prisoners, for the homeless, for orphans, the victims of natural disasters and armed conflicts, as well as for victims of human trafficking and every form of slavery.

The gap between rich and poor is dramatically widening, as a distorted economic activity is deprived of any sense of justice and social solidarity. A viable economy is one that combines production and efficiency with social solidarity. A consumerist way of life, lacking in true values in combination with secularized globalization, causes people to abrogate their spiritual roots, in all leading to the oblivion of historical memory and traditions. Mass media are often used to promote an ideology of liberal globalization and become channels of consumerism and immorality. They affect consciences and manipulate the people in the wrong direction. The Church is today confronted with the secularization of society. The Church of Christ is called upon to reformulate and proclaim its prophetic testimony in the world on the basis of its experienced faith, the proclamation of the Kingdom of God and the cultivation of a consciousness of unity in diversity in its flock. The desire for a continuous increase in living standards along with the unchallenged tendency for an intemperate consumption leads to the disproportionate use and exhaustion of natural resources. The ecological crisis, global warming, and the overall destruction of the environment make it the duty of the Church to protect the creation of God from human greed. The wealth of nature is the property of its Creator, not of man. The future generations are also entitled to the natural goods given to us by the Creator.

The capacity for a scientific exploration of the world is a God-given trait, but at the same time it isn't free from risk. The researcher must feel free to investigate, but s/he must interrupt his or her inquiry when basic Christian and humanitarian principles are violated. This is essential for safeguarding human freedom and securing the benefit of people from scientific breakthroughs, but also to prevent harm from irresponsible ventures into unchartered territory. Both in scientific research, especially in biosciences, and in the practical application of new discoveries and inventions, the non-negotiable right of every person to be treated with respect and honor at every stage of his or her life must be safeguarded. The pastoral care of the Church for the youth is included in the responsibility of the Church to support the sacrament of marriage, which mirrors the union of Christ with His Church. This support is essential in view of the attempt in some countries to legitimize forms of cohabitation that are contrary to the Christian tradition and teaching. The sacredness of the marriage bond, as well as the high spiritual content of marriage, justify Paul's claim that it "should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure" (*Heb*. 13:4), for which reason any damage incurred to that purity is strictly condemned in the New Testament. The Church has always balanced strictness with a good measure of pastoral sensitivity, as St. Paul urges (*Rom*. 7:2-3, 1 *Cor*. 7: 12-15, 39, etc.), in its treatment of marital requirements, both positive (gender, legal age,

etc.) and negative ones (such as blood and/or spiritual kinship, bigamy, religious differences). With regard to marriage impediments obtaining from adoption, blood, in-law and spiritual kinship, canons 53 and 54 of the Quinnisext still remain in force. A marriage that is still in effect or a terminated third marriage are considered to be absolute obstacles for further nuptials, in accord with the condemnation of bigamy and of a fourth marriage in the Orthodox tradition. Tonsured monks are also barred from marrying (Canon 16 of the 4th Ecumenical Council and 44 of the Quinnisext). Marriage is also forbidden after ordination.

Civil marriages between a man and a woman lack sacramental value, as they are simply a cohabitation sanctioned by the State. Church members that have married in civil ceremonies must be treated with pastoral sensitivity by the Church so they can understand and appreciate the sacramental value of marriage and the blessings flowing from it. Cohabitation agreements of same or other sex and any other form of cohabitation, is not acceptable. The deviant members in such cohabitation should be helped to understand the true meaning of repentance and the righteousness of the Church of Love. The crisis facing nowadays the institution of marriage is demonstrated by the increase in the number of divorces, abortions and the increasing marital problems. However, the Orthodox Church calls upon its members, and others, and all the people of good will to defend their faith in the holiness of the Family. It is obvious from all the above that the Council of Crete did not set canons in the way that the Church did in the course of the first millennium. The conditions are now completely different just as the modern challenges are also very different from past ones. This discrepancy concerns not only the content of the issues involved, but also the fact that nowadays divergent behaviors are not threatened with penalties. The Orthodox Church seems to understand that the threat of punishment can no longer serve as an inhibitor in modern society. One thing that Orthodoxy is primarily concerned with, is to maintain, to the extent that it is feasible, a clear picture of the Orthodox position in the face of modern challenges. Consequently, the resort to threats and fear toward divergent human behavior cannot be pastorally effective.

A second remark that must be made, is that the modern Church does not ignore the canonical tradition of the first millennium. This is shown by the references made to the ancient canons, in particular regarding marital affairs, while the basic canons concerning the ecclesiastical structure and administration remain intact. Orthodox Christians are also becoming more and more conscious of the fact that contemporary heterodox Christians cannot be

identified with the ancient heretics. Not only does this awareness open up the prospect of a genuine inter-Christian dialogue, but also raises the need for the Christian world to find common means of cooperation in addressing contemporary challenges and promoting or defending fundamental Christian values, such as peace, family, marriage etc. This realization offers the prospect of an ecumenical convergence of all Christian confessions as a sacred and urgent task that concerns us all, clergy and laity, and not just the small Church delegations meeting in our dialogues. There is, of course, no doubt that the path towards unity and our in-between ecclesiastical communion cannot but follow a convergence on the doctrinal issues that divide us. However, we are faced with the danger of the planet being completely laid to waste, including the total loss of our biological and spiritual being, while we are still discussing the Primacy issue, infallibility, the Filioque, the Uniate Churches and all the other issues they sadly divide us. It is obvious that we do not have the luxury of endless discussions. Should we actually become conscious of the dangers threatening humanity, and our duty to offer a meaningful testimony to the afflicted world and to our trouble fellow human beings, then we will meet again in meekness and with a sense of repentance for the mistakes that each one of us made, that led us to fragmentation. For the Orthodox Church, canon law is a system of provisions wholly intertwined with doctrinal teaching, translating into an arrangement of human conduct. Despite our differences, the Orthodox Church treats the Roman Catholic Church as a Church, linked to us by a common code of fundamental values which we must infuse to contemporary human beings. A conscious and sincere meeting in the terrain of these common values and views that connect us, in our common tradition, shall help us overcome the remaining differences hanging between us. This must be attempted, before humankind and the world are completely destroyed.