

**Relations between the [eastern] Orthodox Church and other Christian Churches, on the Basis of Pan-Orthodox Decisions** – Metropolitan Chrysostomos Savvatos of Messinia, Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Greece (December 2015) retrieved on June 7, 2016  
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A. After the items in the agenda for the Holy and Great Synod had been given their final form, so that 'it may meet as soon as possible', and 'be of short duration, dealing with a limited number of issues' as the late Metropolitan of Chalcedon, Elder Meliton, declared, the Pre-Synod Meeting in Geneva, in 1976, organized the list of items from the 1<sup>st</sup> Pan-Orthodox Meeting in Rhodes (1961) into ten themes, two of which were: a) 'Relations between the Orthodox Church and the rest of the Christian world', and b) 'Orthodoxy and the Ecumenical Movement'.

Although both these Texts had already been studied and referred unanimously (ad referendum) to the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Catholic Church, as Texts approved by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Pre-Synod Pan-Orthodox Meeting of 1986, (28 Oct.-6 Nov.), the Patriarchate of Moscow, before the convocation of the Conference of Primate in March 2014) (Fanari, 6-9 March), quite rightly expressed the view in writing that these texts and the other ones need to be brought up to date and re-formulated. This view was accepted unanimously by the above Conference of the Primate of the Orthodox Churches, and so it was decided to establish a Special Inter-Orthodox Committee, which, in the first six months of 2015, was to review these two texts. A final, unified draft was signed and approved by the 5<sup>th</sup> Pro-Synod, Pan-Orthodox Meeting, which was held in Chambésy, Geneva, last October. So now the final, comprehensive text, entitled '**Relations between the Orthodox Church and the Rest of the Christian World**' will be sent to the Holy and Great Synod for unanimous approval.

Within the context of the preparation for the Great and Holy Synod<sup>[1]</sup> this coordinated process as described, shows, on the one hand the proper and vigilant concern of the Ecumenical Patriarchate for the most complete demonstration of the uncompromising unity of the Orthodox Church, as regards the communion of the faith and respect for canonical tradition and order; and, on the other, the conscientious and responsible handling of these modern problems by the whole of the Orthodox Church through its exceptional and effective role. Because the study and framing of these two documents mentioned above have to do with important issues which concern the whole of the body of the Orthodox Church and as such claim not only the attention but also complete topicality during the course of the preparations for the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Catholic Church.

B. Before discussing the process of reviewing and updating these texts, it is necessary to present and analyze their content, regarding the relations between the Orthodox Church and the other Christian Churches and Confessions.

a) In the twelve paragraphs of the Text '**The Orthodox Church and the Ecumenical Movement**', the Orthodox ecclesiological principles are set out. On the basis of these, on the one hand, the ecclesiological identity of these is described, and on the other its participation in what is known as the Ecumenical movement is determined.

In particular, the Text emphasizes that the Orthodox Church 'is the bearer of and gives witness to the faith and tradition of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church' (§ 1), while the departures from the tradition of the Original Church which have sometimes occurred have been due to differing concepts concerning the unity and the essential understanding of the substance and nature of the Church (§2a). The present formulations represent a transcendence of the former concepts, both as regards confessional exclusivities as well as ideas which express principles of ecclesiological inclusivity. Unity is not achieved by a cumulative kind of amalgamation of similar or dissimilar concepts, but on the basis of faith and is expressed 'in the mysteries' and is set within the limits of the Apostolic Succession and Patristic tradition as this has been formulated by the Ecumenical Synods (cf. 2b, c).

The ecclesiological composure of the Orthodox Church as described above, has imposed upon it the need to participate in every effort 'for the union of all' and the restoration of the lost unity among Christians, through the achievement of unity in the faith (cf. §2c) as it has done and continues to do, from the time of the appearance of the first heresies in the Original Church until today when it opposes newly-coined, contemporary heretical aberrations and concepts.

The participation of the Orthodox Church in the Ecumenical Movement, as it is known, and especially in its various organs, is determined by the way in which its role and presence are understood in the highest organs, and from an understanding of the identity of this Ecumenical Movement itself. This is particularly the case as regards the prime organization of this Movement, as expressed by the World Council of Churches (WCC), and the Text graphically describes the manner of participation in this supreme Council.

Although the Orthodox Church is one of the founding members of the W.C.C. it has never accepted the notion of 'equality of confessions' and the unity of the Church as some sort of 'inter-confessional adaptation' (§6). The Orthodox Church does not consider that the W.C.C. is or can be the 'Church' or a 'super-Church' (§7). All it recognizes is the opportunity to bring the various Confessions and Traditions into communication with each other and to promote dialogue between them, with the aim of studying and discussing those issues which touch upon Christian unity (§7) and which it considers to be not only matters for theological agreements but also of the convergence of attitudes and views which concern the world and people in every period of history (cf. §6).

Moreover, certain difficulties are noted in the present Text, which arose during the 6<sup>th</sup> General Assembly in Vancouver, Canada (1983) and which were pointed out by certain Orthodox Churches/Members of the W.C.C., and at the same time it is emphasized that it is essential to have 'a meaningful Orthodox witness, as well as its special theological contribution' as 'necessary... conditions, which will provide the Orthodox Churches with the opportunity to act as equals with the other members of the W.C.C., on the basis of their own ecclesiological identity, which is not always the case, because of the structure of the procedural principles governing the running of the W.C.C.'. For this reason, it was decided that: 'new, necessary modifications must be made so that the Orthodox Church will be able to give to the Council its witness and theological contribution, as the W.C.C. expects of it, in accordance with what has already been agreed between the Orthodox/Members) (Sofia desiderata) (§11).

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[1] For a brief but comprehensive presentation of all the preparations for the Synod, see Pan. Nellas, *Ἡ Ἁγία καὶ Μεγάλη Σύνοδος τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας*. Σκέψεις γιὰ μιὰ θεολογικὴ θεώρηση καὶ προετοιμασία τῆς, Thessaloniki 1972; Ant. Papadopoulos, *Ἡ Ἐκκλησία τῆς Ἑλλάδος ἔναντι θεμάτων πανορθόδοξου ἐνδιαφέροντος κατὰ τὸν εἰκοστὸν αἰῶνα*, Thessaloniki 1975; Metropolitan Damaskinos of Switzerland, *Πρὸς τὴν Ἁγίαν καὶ Μεγάλην Σύνοδον*. Προβλήματα καὶ Προοπτικαί, Athens 1990.

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In this progress towards the final application of the above points in the Text, as well as for a creative contribution and witness on the part of the Orthodox Church, it is stated that the W.C.C. as a whole should be run on the basis of the Apostolic Tradition and faith (cf. §12).

Similar efforts have been made for the participation of the Orthodox Church within the framework of the 'Faith and Order' Committee, where the Orthodox Churches have to seek ways to coordinate the efforts of the Orthodox regarding the ecclesiological criteria for participation in the continuing multilateral theological dialogue. In order to achieve all the above, it was decided on a Pan-Orthodox basis, to promote the *Sofia desiderata* (1981) and the texts of the Special Commission (2002), which contain the 'desiderata' of the Orthodox Churches to the W.C.C. and their participation in it[1].

So the *desiderata* of *Sofia* and the Special Commission[2] are necessary updates and additions, positions which, on the one hand have been recognized by all the Orthodox and have unanimous approval, and on the other reflect completely the principles of ecclesiological identity and self-awareness of Orthodoxy, particularly as regards its participation in these inter-confessional, international organizations. As for the present 'desiderata':

a) A re-evaluation was agreed of the institutional framework for the participation of the Orthodox Church in the W.C.C., on the basis of Orthodox proposals regarding decision-making by consensus, particularly on social and ethical issues. There was recognition of the special ecclesiological identity of Orthodoxy in the modern ecumenical dialogue, particularly as regards the theological and ecclesiological differences which set it apart from the various Christian traditions and confessions. It was emphasized that any form of common prayer should be avoided and the manner of the participation of the Orthodox Members in decision-making processes was determined.

b) In the second text, '**Relations between the Orthodox Church and the Rest of the Christian World**' emphasis was placed on the positive attitude of the Orthodox Churches towards the

dialogue on the unity of the Christian world, on the basis of the common tradition of the Ancient Church (§3). Two paragraphs of the Text (6 and 7) describe the general methodological principles on the basis of which bilateral theological discussions might be conducted.

In particular, it was emphasized that in the course of theological discussions, the methodology followed aims at resolving the long-standing theological differences or any new modifications and at seeking the points in common of the Christian faith, with the assumption that the members of the Church will be kept informed of the developments arising in the discussions.

Should it prove impossible to overcome some particular theological difference, the theological dialogue will continue, once the disagreement on the particular issue has been recorded and this disagreement has been made known to all the local Orthodox Churches, so that all is as it should be. It was noted that, should the need arise, because of the nature of specific theological problems in any bilateral discussion, the relevant methodology can be changed. It is clear, then, that in the conduct of the theological discussions, the common aim is the final restoration of unity in the right faith and in love. It is true, however, that the theological and ecclesiological differences which exist allow for a certain order of precedence as to the difficulties involved in achieving this stated aim in Orthodoxy as a whole. The disparity of the problems in each bilateral discussion requires modifications to the methodology being observed, but not any alteration in the aim, since this is one and the same in all the dialogues.

Further to the above two paragraphs, as a sub-unit, there follows a description of the corresponding discussions with the Anglicans, Old Catholics, Ancient Eastern Churches (or Anti-Chalcedonian), Roman Catholics, Lutherans and Reformed and the particular theological problems are emphasized, as are the specific elements which caused the difficulties and problems during the course of the proceedings of each of them.

In the present Text, there is a particularly sensitive appraisal of, on the one hand, the ecclesiastical evaluation of the future course of the dialogues, and, on the other, the prospects for them. The prospects for theological dialogue with the Anglicans have already receded<sup>[3]</sup>, following their decision on the ordination of women as priests and bishops (1977, 2013 and 2014), while the evaluation of the theological work of the dialogue with the Old Catholics has been halted<sup>[4]</sup>, following the ordination of women in some local Old Catholic communities and the adoption of intercommunion without the necessary condition of 'communion in the faith'. The dialogue with the Anti-Chalcedonian Ancient Eastern Churches is at the stage of critical evaluation of the pastoral and liturgical issues<sup>[5]</sup>, while that with the Roman Catholics<sup>[6]</sup> is being overshadowed both by the proselytizing activities of the Uniates, as well as difficulties in understanding the function and application of primacy within the contexts of the Synod and Church structures.

Finally, the dialogues with the Lutherans<sup>[7]</sup> and Reformed churches<sup>[8]</sup> had opened new prospects for a reconsideration of their fundamental theological positions on the Church and sacred Mysteries, but the introduction of the ordination of women to their particular form of holy orders has downgraded the prospects for this particular dialogue, despite the significant theological convergence in the common theological texts, in the light of the Patristic tradition.

From 29 September to 4 October 2014, the 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the Special Inter-Orthodox Commission to Review the Tests of the Pre-Synod Pan-Orthodox Conference was held in the Orthodox Centre of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, in Chambésy, Geneva, and dealt with the revision of the above two Texts.

Within the context of the updating of the views and positions, it was decided that the two Texts would be better merged, and two paragraphs from previous Texts were not included. These dealt with the actions and activities of certain organs, particularly the World Council of Churches and with a description of the course of the various Bilateral Theological Dialogues.

These paragraphs were omitted because it was felt that they were now no more than historical references which offered nothing of importance to the future consideration and evaluation of the new Text by the Orthodox as a whole.

In the new, unified Text, which was approved and signed at the 5<sup>th</sup> Pre-Synod, Pan-Orthodox Conference (10-17 October 2015), the same ecclesiological and theological pre-conditions prevailed, and an effort was made to reflect the whole procedure of the participation of the local Orthodox Churches in the Ecumenical Movement and the Bilateral Theological Dialogues as a unanimous decision and expression of the universal conscience of the Orthodox Church and a manifestation of Pan-Orthodox unity.

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[1] Cf. Saben Todor, *The Sofia Consultation-Orthodox Involvement in the World Council of Churches*, Genova, 1982. Metropolitan Amvrosios of Kalavryta and Aigialeia – G. Galitis, «Ἐκθεσις τοῦ ἐν Γενεύῃ ἀπὸ 26<sup>ης</sup> Αὐγούστου ἕως 3<sup>ης</sup> Σεπτεμβρίου συνελθούσης Συνελεύσεως τῆς Κεντρικῆς Ἐπιτροπῆς τοῦ Παγκοσμίου Συμβουλίου Ἐκκλησιῶν», ἐν *ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ* Π' (2003), pp. 6-10. Protopresbyter Stefanos Avramidis, «Οἱ ἀξιῶσεις (desiderata) τῆς Ὁρθόδοξου Ἐκκλησίας ἐναντι τοῦ Παγκοσμίου Συμβουλίου Ἐκκλησιῶν», ἐν ΠΒ' *ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ* (2005), pp. 302-12. A. Vasileiadou, *Ἡ συμμετοχὴ τῶν Ὁρθόδοξων στὸ ΠΣΕ ὑπὸ τὸ φῶς τῶν Ἀποφάσεων τῆς Εἰδικῆς Ἐπιτροπῆς. Τὸ ἱστορικὸ καὶ ἡ θεματολογία τῆς Εἰδικῆς Ἐπιτροπῆς γιὰ τὴ συμμετοχὴ τῶν Ὁρθόδοξων στὸ ΠΣΕ*, Θεσσαλονικὴ 2005. On the work of the Special Commission, βλ. Great Protopresbyter Georgios Tsetsis, «Εἰσαγωγή στὴ “Special Commission”. Οἱ ἀπαρχές καὶ τὸ ἔργο τῆς Εἰδικῆς Ἐπιτροπῆς γιὰ τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη συμμετοχὴ στὸ Παγκόσμιο Συμβούλιο Ἐκκλησιῶν», ἰν *Θεολογικὲς Σπουδές καὶ Οἰκουμένη, μὲ εἰδικὴ ἀναφορὰ στὴ συμμετοχὴ τῆς Ὁρθόδοξης Ἐκκλησίας στοὺς διαχριστιανικοὺς διαλόγους καὶ τὸ μέλλον τους* (ed. V. Stathokosta), Athens 2003, pp. 63-70. Georgios Laimopolos, «Εἰδικὴ Ἐπιτροπὴ (Special Commission) γιὰ τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη συμμετοχὴ στὸ Παγκόσμιο Συμβούλιο Ἐκκλησιῶν: Μία θεολογικὴ ἐκτίμησις τῶν ἐπιμέρους ζητημάτων τῆς», *ibid.*, pp. 94-107.

[2] For the final text of the Special Commission regarding the participation of the Orthodox in the W.C.C. (in Greek), see *Ὁρθόδοξη Θεολογία καὶ Οἰκουμενικὸς Διάλογος*, ed. P. Vasileiadis, publ. by Apostoliki Diakonia, Athens 2005, pp. 207-70.

[3] See V. Stathokosta, «Ὁ θεολογικὸς διάλογος Ὁρθόδοξων καὶ Ἀγγλικανῶν στὸν 20<sup>ὸ</sup> αἰῶνα. Ἀφορμὴ γιὰ προβληματισμὸ γιὰ τὸ παρὸν καὶ τὸ μέλλον τῶν διμερῶν θεολογικῶν διαλόγων τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας», ἰν *Ἐπιστημονικὴ Ἐπετηρὶς Θεολογικῆς Σχολῆς τοῦ Πανεπιστημίου Ἀθηνῶν ΜΕ'* (2010),

pp. 443-63. Idem, «Relations between the Orthodox and the Anglicans in the Twentieth century : A Reason to Consider the Present and the Future of the Theological Dialogue», in *Ecclesiology* 8 (2012), pp. 350-74.

[4] G. Liantas, *Ὁ διμερής θεολογικός διάλογος Ὁρθοδόξων καὶ Παλαιοκαθολικῶν*, Thessaloniki, 2000.

[5] Cf. Christodoulos Konstantinidis, «Ἀξιολογήσεις καὶ προοπτικαὶ τοῦ διαλόγου μεταξὺ τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας καὶ τῶν Ἀρχαίων Ἀνατολικῶν Ἐκκλησιῶν», in *ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΑ* 51 (1980), pp. 22-48, 222-47; A. Paravasileiou, *Κριτική ἀποτίμηση τοῦ Θεολογικοῦ Διαλόγου μὲ τούς Ἀντιχαλκηδόνιους*, Lefkosia 2015.

[6] G. Konidaris, «Περὶ τὴν Διορθόδοξον Ἐπιτροπὴν τῆς Γενεῦης (1968) καὶ τὰς προϋποθέσεις τοῦ Θεολογικοῦ Διαλόγου τῆς Ἀληθείας μεταξὺ τῆς Καθολικῆς Ὁρθοδόξου καὶ τῆς Ρωμαιοκαθολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας [Ἡ μεθόδευσις τοῦ Θεολογικοῦ Διαλόγου μετ' ἀνεκδότων ἐγγράφων]», in *Ἐπιστημονικὴ Ἐπετηρὶς τῆς Θεολογικῆς Σχολῆς τοῦ Πανεπιστημίου Ἀθηνῶν Κ'* (1975), pp. 329-402. Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Peristeri, *Ὁρθοδοξία καὶ Ρωμαιοκαθολικισμός. Ὁ ἀρξάμενος θεολογικός διάλογος*, Athens 1981. G. Liantas, *Διορθόδοξος Διακονία τοῦ Οἰκουμενικοῦ Πατριαρχείου καὶ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τῆς Ἑλλάδος καὶ ἡ συμβολὴ τῶν δύο Ἐκκλησιῶν στοὺς διμερεῖς θεολογικοὺς διαλόγους μὲ τὴ Ρωμαιοκαθολικὴ Ἐκκλησία καὶ τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν τῶν Παλαιοκαθολικῶν*, Thessaloniki 2005. Metropolitan Chrysostomos (Savvatos) of Messinia, «Θεολογικὴ προσέγγιση τοῦ Κεϊμένου τῆς Ραβέννας», in *ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ ΠΣΤ'* (2009), pp. 544-8. Archimandrite Apostolos Kavaliotis, *Ὁ διμερὴς Οἰκουμενικὸς Διάλογος Ὁρθοδόξων καὶ Ρωμαιοκαθολικῶν ὑπὸ τὴν πραγματικότητα τῶν δυσχερειῶν τῆς οὐνίας καὶ τοῦ πρωτείου*, Athens 2014.

[7] Deacon Theodoros Meïmaris, «Ἀξιολόγησις καὶ προοπτικαὶ τοῦ 30ετοῦς Διεθνoῦς Θεολογικοῦ Διαλόγου Ὁρθοδόξων καὶ Λουθηρανῶν (1981-2011)» in *ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΑ* 83 (2013), pp. 185-222.

[8] Cf. Metropolitan Chrysostomos (Kalaïtzis) of Myra, *Περὶ τὰς διμερεῖς θεολογικὰς συναντήσεις μεταξὺ θεολόγων τοῦ Οἴκ. Πατριαρχείου καὶ τῆς Εὐαγγελικῆς Ἐκκλησίας τῆς Γερμανίας ἐν ὄψει τῆς Ζ' ἀναλόγου συναντήσεως, Ἐν Καβάλα 3-11 Ὀκτωβρίου 1984*, Athens 1986.

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All the positions on the self-awareness of the Orthodox Church are important for its participation in bipartite talks and in the Ecumenical Movement, as it is known. They also form

the theological foundation, while new paragraphs have been adopted which are very important and which confirm Pan-Orthodox positions that were either questioned or ignored in the past.

Thus:

a) Not only was the manner determined in which a local Church might withdraw unilaterally from any particular dialogue, but so also was the possibility of bringing the dialogue to a halt, changing its methodology, or re-evaluating it, should this prove necessary for serious reasons of an ecclesiological, canonical, pastoral or moral nature. This is described as a procedure requiring a Pan-Orthodox decision, starting with an initiative on the part of the Ecumenical Patriarch and then adopted, by 'unanimous consent', by the rest of the Orthodox Churches (§10).

b) The canonical criteria (canons 7 of the Second Ecumenical Synod and 95 of the Quinisext) were stated regarding the prospects of theological dialogues between the Orthodox Church and the other Christian Churches and Confessions (§20). This paragraph defines the limits which apply to the whole of the Orthodox Church in its dealings with the other Christian Churches and Confessions. Their existence was not questioned and, 'by accommodation', the fact and validity of their baptism was recognized, in accordance with the canonical tradition. Thus, the principle of ecclesiastical accommodation was reinforced as the expression of a charitable disposition on behalf of the Orthodox Church towards the other Christian Churches and Confessions and the principle of punctiliousness is weakened.

c) It was emphasized that 'the Orthodox Church considers culpable any fracture of the unity of the Church by individuals or groups, with the excuse of observing or supposedly protecting pure Orthodoxy,' because it is considered that observance of the genuine Orthodox faith is guaranteed only through the synodal system, which, in the Church has always been the final judge responsible for matters of faith (§22). This is a position which derives from the canonical tradition (canon 6 of the Second Ecumenical Synod) and from Patristic teaching (cf. Cyril of Alexandria, Epistles LXXII, PG 77, 344D-345B).

Following the above, it can be confirmed that the relations between the Orthodox Church and the other Christian Churches and Confessions, as these are defined and described in the text of the 5<sup>th</sup> Pre-Synod, Pan-Orthodox Conference (Chambésy, 10-17 October 2015), ratified by all the Orthodox, emphasize, support, cultivate and promote dialogue on the basis on the principles described. These have been stated continually by the tradition of the Original Church, believing that 'when certain people differ and do not engage in dialogue, they think that the difference between them is great; but if they come together in dialogue and each side listens intelligently to what the other has to say, the difference between them will often be found to be small' [\[1\]](#).

We are therefore called upon to answer two questions:

a) Despite any problems there may be, does the future continuation of the bilateral theological dialogues mentioned above serve to further their initial aims?

b) Has anything positive emerged so far from the participation of the Orthodox Church in the contemporary ecumenical dialogue and in the bilateral theological discussions?

We are able give an affirmative answer: a) because of the opportunity offered to facilitate the influence of the Orthodox witness to the rest of the Christian world; and b) by the re-evaluation of many of the traditions of the West in the light of the Patristic tradition and the sacramental experience of the first thousand years of the common, historical life of the Church

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[1] Mark of Ephesus Eugenicus, in Sylvestros Sytopoulos, Ἀπομνημονεύματα, v, 28, publ. by. V. Laurent, Les «mémoires» du Grand Ecclésiarque de l’Eglise de Constantinople Sylvestre Syropoulos sur le Concile de Florence (1438-1439), vol. ix, Rome 1971, p. 282.

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At this point I would like to refer briefly to some of the revisions which have taken place: the acceptance of Cyril’s interpretation and teaching on the general Christological issue in the dialogue with the Pre-Chalcedon Churches; the adoption of Eucharistic ecclesiology as the basis for the theological and ecclesiological understanding of the items in the dialogue with the Roman Catholics (the text of Munich, New Valaam and Ravenna); the recognition on the part of the W.C.C. of Trinitarian and Christological teaching as a requirement for membership of the organization and the adoption of the Nicene/Constantinopolitan Creed, without the *filioque*, as the basis for confessional rapprochement; and, finally, the understanding of the charismatic mysteries and Eucharistic limits of the Church by certain Protestant confessions cannot be considered in a positive light, nor can it go unnoticed.

For the Orthodox Church, dialogue has always been, and remains, an essential and inalienable feature both of its soteriological mission, to the end of achieving the return of the schismatics and heretics to its bosom, and also of its pastoral responsibility, which is why it firmly confesses and declares that it is its self-awareness which makes it the authentic continuation of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church and the ark of salvation for those who are close and those who are far away.

This expression of ecclesiological composure as the main criterion for each and any dialogue also defines, on the one hand, the limits of theological responsibility of the members appointed by the local Orthodox Churches to the Joint Theological Committees and multilateral Theological Dialogues, within the framework of the modern Ecumenical Movement. On the other, it demonstrates the undiminished concern which must be shown by the local Orthodox Churches regarding the monitoring and evaluation of the aforementioned dialogues, indeed, with special critical intent, not only at the level of the synodal organs responsible in each local Church, but also of the Pan-Orthodox Conferences, since the issue of bilateral and multilateral

Theological Dialogues was included in the agenda of the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Catholic Church which is to take place in the future. At this point it should be emphasized that 'Orthodoxy' as an attribute of the Church is not a matter for isolated individuals, nor is it to be placed outside or above the Church, as a regulatory rule for its life and thought. It is, in fact, identical to the Church itself, a constituent part of its identity. This is why it can be experienced only in communion with the Church, which means, in this instance, the complete acceptance of decisions taken on a Pan-Orthodox level on behalf of the Orthodox faithful. Otherwise, the danger of disorder and schism lurks within the Church, and these are capable of mortally wounding its unity. Because of its self-awareness, the Orthodox Church is to be identified with the One, Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church rather than with a notion of institutional or organizational exclusivity or ideological imposition. Because, as Professor Georgios Martzelos has so aptly pointed out, on the basis of the present ecclesiological foundations, those, be they clergy or laity, taking part in the Theological Dialogues and the Ecumenical Movement in the name of the local Orthodox Churches, do so not as individuals, but at the direction of their Churches, expressing, the Church's views, not their own. As regards participation, the Church's views have been and are expressed on the basis of Pan-Orthodox decisions and on the basis of tradition as regards the content of teaching. This is why they update the local orthodox Churches on the progress of the Theological Dialogues and their future prospects, submitting the Common Texts which have been drawn up and agreed by the Joint Committees, within the framework of the Theological Dialogues, to the Synods of the local Churches they represent for ratification. Because these alone are responsible for deciding whether the dialogues should continue or be called off. Without the approval or decision the Synods of the local Orthodox Churches, no theological text and no decision of those taking part in the Theological Dialogues in the name of these Churches has any ecclesiastical validity.

Apart from the problems, difficulties and issues already mentioned in each of the dialogues, the concern and witness, which the Orthodox Church is duty bound to exercise, makes it necessary to point out more recent deviations which further increase the seriousness of the theological differences which already exist between the various Christian traditions and confessions, quite apart from the wounding experiences of their historical relations.

The confessional introversion of many years, in the way inter-Christian relations have been ordered, is expressed by a significant lack of information both to the clergy of all ranks and also to the flock and this has, unfortunately not led to a sober evaluation of the positive consequences of this promotion of the Orthodox tradition to those who are near and far. The aim of this effort has been to right the confessional deviations and aberrations of the various traditions of the Christian world in the West, as well as to confirm of the enduring prestige of the Orthodox tradition. This is why there are occasional protests, objections, suspicions and reactions concerning the proper or improper course of the discussions and even the need for the bilateral Theological Discussion at all.

But even in this sense, the Orthodox Church has not been damaged. Rather, its presence has been strengthened and its contribution recognized, while the timely and untimely, isolated criticism which has been expressed has not, taken as a whole, tarnished the pastoral responsibility of the Church hierarchy nor has it been accepted by the Orthodox ecclesiastical conscience in general. This is why the local Orthodox Churches continue to participate in the activities and events within the sphere of the Ecumenical Movement and in the bipartite

theological talks: because only the Dialogue of Truth, in the context of love, will free us and bring us to the real communion of the Christian Churches and the unity of the Christian world.

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The End

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