

Date: March 18, 2016

ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE

Prot. No.: 314

**PATRIARCHAL AND SYNODICAL ENCYCLICAL
ON THE CONVOCATION OF THE HOLY AND GREAT COUNCIL
OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH**

† **BARTHOLOMEW**

**BY THE MERCY OF GOD ARCHBISHOP OF CONSTANTINOPLE,
NEW-ROME, AND ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH
TO THE PLENITUDE OF THE CHURCH,
GRACE AND PEACE FROM GOD**

Our holy Orthodox Church, *adorned in purple and fine linen* by the blood of her martyrs, the tears of her Saints, and the struggles and sacrifices of her confessors of faith, celebrates today her nameday. Following a century-long struggle, this day was appropriately identified as the *Sunday of Orthodoxy*, marking the day in which truth shone and triumphed over falsehood through the veneration of holy icons as the bearers of the personal presence and divine grace of the incarnate Son and Logos of God and of His saints. In this way, it was acknowledged and proclaimed for all time that *the Word became flesh and dwelt among us* (John 1:14), honouring and sanctifying material creation and our body in order to render them *partakers of the divine nature* (2 Peter, 1:4), partakers in divine grace and life.

On the way to this great and salvific truth—which was attacked by those who refused to venerate holy icons—the triumph of truth over falsehood treaded along the same path followed by the Church from the beginning of her history, namely the truth of conciliarity. The distinction between truth and falsehood—orthodoxy and heresy—is not always easily discernible. Even heretics believed, and continue to believe, that they possessed the truth; moreover, there will always be some who shall consider those who do not agree with their position as “heretics.” The Orthodox Church, in this case, recognizes only one authority: **The Council of her canonical hierarchs**. Beyond a conciliar decision, the distinction between orthodoxy and heresy is not possible. The Church’s dogmas and holy canons bear the seal of conciliarity. Orthodoxy is the conciliar Church.

The Orthodox Church has always emphasized this ecclesiological authority, and implements it faithfully on the local level. For centuries, this has also occurred on an ecumenical or pan-orthodox level; however, for historical circumstances, it has been interrupted for quite some time. Today, we find ourselves in a position to officially announce from our ecumenical throne that, by the grace of God, and with the consent of all the Primates of the Holy Orthodox Churches,

that we will realize a decision taken more than fifty years ago and convene the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church on the island of Crete on June 18-27, 2016. The Council shall begin its work with a pan-Orthodox celebration of the Divine Liturgy in the Holy Church of Saint Menas, Heraklion, Crete, on the great and auspicious Feast of Pentecost. Deliberations shall proceed at the Orthodox Academy in Kolymbari, Chania. Our Modesty shall preside over the Holy and Great Council, with the other Primates of Orthodox Churches at our side; other hierarchs shall participate as members of the Council through the official delegation of these Churches.

The foremost and most important goal of this Pan-Orthodox Council shall be to teach that the Orthodox Church is the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, united in the Sacraments—especially in the Holy Eucharist, in the Orthodox faith, but also in conciliarity. To this end, ongoing planning for the Council has occurred through a series of Preparatory Committees and Pre-Conciliar Conferences, ensuring the unanimous spirit of the Council’s decisions and that her message is conveyed in *one voice and in one heart*.

The issues—already delineated on a pan-orthodox level by the time the convocation of the Council was decided—that shall be reviewed by the Holy and Great Council primarily focus on matters relating to the internal operation and life of the Orthodox Church; for this reason, they must be immediately resolved. Moreover, there are issues pertaining to the relations of Orthodoxy with the rest of the Christian world, as well as the mission of the Church in our time. We certainly recognize that the world awaits to hear the voice of the Orthodox Church on many pressing problems that humanity faces today. However, it was deemed necessary that the Orthodox Church should first settle internal matters before speaking to or addressing the world, which is still considered her obligation. The fact that Orthodoxy will express its conciliarity on a global level after the passing of so many centuries constitutes a first and most decisive step that, by the grace of God, is expected to lead to the convening of further Pan-Orthodox Councils, soon thereafter.

Beloved brethren and children in the Lord,

Great historic events are guided by the grace of God, Who, ultimately, is the Lord of History. We might sow and labor; however, only God multiplies (1 Cor. 3:8). The Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church indeed constitutes a historic event and we therefore place our hope in God for its realization. We call upon the Orthodox faithful in the world—clergy and laity—to pray to the Triune God that He may crown this event with His blessings, fortifying His Church to the glory of His name. We live in critical times and the unity of the Church must serve as the example of unity for a humanity torn apart by divisions and conflicts. The success of the Holy and Great Council concerns every member of the Church, who are invited to share their interests thereon. The texts that have been agreed upon on a pan-orthodox level and which have been submitted to the Holy and Great Council have already been made publicly available to every faithful of good will. These texts are not only intended to inform and update the faithful, but to also elicit their opinions and expectations of the Holy and Great Council.

Having announced this to the plenitude of the Orthodox Church throughout the world on this auspicious day, we pray that the lord God bestow upon His Church and all of you His abundant grace and blessing, and to the world *peace at all times in all ways* (2 Thes 3:16).

20 March, in the year of our Lord, 2016

† Bartholomew, Archbishop of Constantinople
Your fervent supplicant to God

† Metropolitan John of Pergamon, supplicant in Christ

† Metropolitan Isaiah of Denver, supplicant in Christ

† Metropolitan Alexios of Atlanta, supplicant in Christ

† Metropolitan Iakovos of the Prince Islands, supplicant in Christ

† Metropolitan Joseph of Prikonisos, supplicant in Christ

† Metropolitan Meliton of Philadelphia, supplicant in Christ

† Metropolitan Emmanuel of France, supplicant in Christ

† Metropolitan Nikitas of the Dardanelles, supplicant in Christ

† Metropolitan Nicholas of Detroit, supplicant in Christ

† Metropolitan Gerasimos of San Francisco, supplicant in Christ

† Metropolitan Maximos of Selymbria, supplicant in Christ