

**Ecclesiology and Mission after Crete I:  
Illustration in the Light of the Documents**  
*Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World  
and The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World*

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**Abstract**

There is an internal connection between ecclesiology, the teaching about the Church that we call academic ecclesiology, and mission, which is the inner heart of the Church and becomes visible through different practices. For the Orthodox Church involved in the ecumenical movement, there is a struggle to balance ecclesiology (theology) with ecumenical mission and dialogue (practice) in a divided Christian world. Nevertheless, the recent Synod of Crete (June 2016) addressed some important elements of this struggle. I have in mind, for example, the act to accept the historical name of other non-Orthodox Christian Churches and Confessions that are not in communion with it. Also, this is the first Synod of the Orthodox Churches in modern times at which ecumenical dialogue, especially in the World Council of Churches, is officially affirmed. Because of mission dialogue has to continue, "if we wish never to 'put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ' (1 Cor 9:12)."

The present paper highlights those statements of the Holy and Great Council which have direct relevance for discussing the relation of ecclesiology and mission. I assert that we should understand firstly the document *Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the of the Christian World* and only then reflect upon *The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World* (MOCT). Furthermore, I will make some references to the other texts which were central for this conference: *The Cape Town Commitment* (CTC), *Together Towards Life* (TTL) and *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium* (EG).

I conclude by exposing briefly my reflections after reading these mission documents and by formulating some agenda points for further work in theology of mission.

**Introduction**

The idea of a Pan-orthodox Council or Synod within the Orthodox Church is not a new one. Unfortunately, even if the Church claims to be a synodal Church, she did not express it in a visible way, at least not in the last decades (Ioniță 2014). Before the final decision that the Synod would gather, the Greek theologian Pantelis Kalaitzidis stressed very strongly the idea that he saw "a sign of hope and encouragement in the fact that after so many centuries of motionlessness and inertia, in the middle of a very long period of decline in conciliarism, thanks to the initiative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate which has been working in this direction ever since the beginning of the 1950s, the Orthodox Church is launching itself once more in a conciliar process" (Kalaitzidis 2016: 279). The recent Orthodox Synod held in Crete in June 2016 entitled "The Holy and Great Synod" came to show that this synodality can take a form, but an incomplete one. I affirm this because four autocephalous Churches

were absent at this Synod.<sup>1</sup> When the synod started, even though I knew the pre-conciliar documents, I had in mind a text addressed by the representative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Archbishop Athenagoras, to the participants at the third conference of the Faith and Order movement, which is fundamental for the Orthodox Church: “In the Greek Orthodox Church the individual theological opinions have no value whatsoever in themselves. It is the whole Church, clergy and laity, and above all Her Hierarchy, the totality of her Bishops, not as individuals but in Holy Synods, that express the teaching of her faith” (Tomkins 1953: 125). In spite of the numerous achievements of the Synod, its documents, its process and results challenge missiologists to formulate critical questions and address further issues.

I would like to address some critical questions regarding two of the most important themes of this Synod, namely the ecclesiological self-understanding of the Orthodox Church and the missionary perspective for and of the Church. Also, I will explore and comment in connection with the Orthodox documents on three other mission documents debated during the Conference *Love, Live and Delight: Conversations in Central and Eastern Europe on Present Day Documents and Commitments on Mission*, organised by the Central and Eastern European Association for Mission Studies (CEEAMS). These documents are as follows: *The Cape Town Commitment* (2011), *Together Towards Life* (2012) and *The Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium* (2013).

### **The ecclesiological dilemma**

In matters of theology, the twentieth century was an ecclesiological one par excellence. The question of what is the Church was provoked by the ecumenical dialogue developed in this century. Nevertheless, even if the answers were diverse and did not solve the ecclesiological dilemma, some theologians such as Bishop Kallistos Ware claim that inevitably we have come out from the ecclesiological paradigm even if we did not resolve it and we find ourselves already in the anthropological one (Ware 2012: 25-28; Ware 2012: 105-121).

In these conditions, the document entitled *Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World* of the Synod from Crete brings to the fore some ecclesiological issues. I would say that all the documents of this Synod were written from both ecclesiological and missionary perspectives. In my opinion, to understand the missionary position of the Orthodox Church one should notice its ecclesiological self-understanding.<sup>2</sup> In what follows I will raise some critical questions about the ecclesiological ideas presented and accepted at this Synod, keeping in mind the document *The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World*. A missiological critique will be presented later on.

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<sup>1</sup> The Orthodox Churches which refused to participate at the Holy and Great Synod from Crete are: the Russian, the Bulgarian, the Georgian and the Antiochian.

<sup>2</sup> For the Orthodox understanding, the relationship between ecclesiology and mission is an intrinsic one. Much more, mission is the most important task of the Church and always mission is connected with the Church and never separated. In other words, ecclesiology is what determines the mission. For more about this, you should read: Bria 1996, *Together Towards Life* 2012, Sonea 2016: 199-206.

Firstly, the title of the document gives the impression that there is an Orthodox Church with her Christians and also that there are other Christians who do not belong to the Orthodox Church. Unfortunately, no one can explain how Christians could exist outside the Church. The dilemma raised by this title is very interesting. If the persons are only called and considered Christians just in the Church, in this logic there are no Christians outside the Church. In the Holy Scripture, we read in Acts 11: 26: "And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians." Even more so, to accept that there are Christians not in communion with the Church, one must explain how the Orthodox believers should understand their ecclesiological self-consciousness. In the document the idea related to the "profound ecclesiastical self-consciousness" is very clearly affirmed (*Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World*, § 1). It refers to the Orthodox Church as the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. In other words, the Orthodox Church has the ecclesiastical self-consciousness of being the Church founded by Christ Himself (*Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World*, § 2). But what should we say about other Christians? That they have an ecclesiastical self-consciousness? Without a doubt, the entire text is full of references and expressions that indicate an awareness of the existence of a Christianity outside the communion of the Orthodox Church. There are clear and repeated references to this view presented in a programmatic manner: "to restore the unity of those who believe in Christ," "to restore unity with other Christians," "the Orthodox Church dialogues with other Christians." Here, my attention is drawn to the quality of being a Christian. What makes me or the other a Christian? Perhaps the role of the Mystery of baptism should come into discussion, but unfortunately the document does not mention this sacrament even one time. We should recognize that before clarifying and accepting how to appreciate the baptism not performed by the Orthodox Church into a Pan-Orthodox Synod, we should be more realistic when we continue to be involved in the ecumenical dialogue. Accepting the Mystery of baptism performed outside our Church remains an internal issue. For unknown reasons this theme was clearly avoided in the discussions carried out in Crete. "The mutual recognition of the ecclesial nature of baptism between the Orthodox Church and a separated community would mark an important step and would eliminate a fundamental obstacle in the quest for unity; but this would not manifest total unity of faith - a condition indispensable for the restoration of participation in the Eucharistic cup" (Stavrou 2016: 217; Phidas 2002: 39-47; Erickson 2011: 137-151; Kasper 2000: 526-541).

Secondly, the most commented upon result of this document was related to the following statement: "In accordance with the ontological nature of the Church, her unity can never be perturbed. In spite of this, the Orthodox Church *accepts the historical name of other non-Orthodox Christian Churches and Confession* that are not in communion with her" (*Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World*, § 6). One should observe the important difference with the draft version of this phrase: "According to the Church's ontological nature, her unity can never be shattered. The Orthodox Church *acknowledges the historical existence of other Christian Churches and Confessions* that are not in communion with her" (<https://www.holycouncil.org/-/preconciliar-relations>, January 13, 2017). The main problem, which is intertwined with the mutual acceptance of Baptism, remains the ecclesiastical value of the actions of other Christian Churches and Confession.<sup>3</sup> But we should notice that the document makes a distinction between the Orthodox Church and the non-Orthodox *Churches*. In this way, because of this adding of "non-Orthodox Christian Churches," the

document could be seen as an open one. Much more work should be invested to appreciate what it means to be a *non-Orthodox Church* but still a Church. I suppose that this concept resonates somehow with the well-known appreciation of the Romanian theologian Dumitru Stăniloae that there are “incomplete Churches” not in communion with the Orthodox Church.<sup>4</sup> Of course, we should not understand this perspective as the Catholic shift from *est* to *subsistit* ([http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html#](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html#), February 12, 2017).

Thirdly, the document stressed the inner connection between the self-consciousness of being the Church of Christ and the central role within the ecumenical movement which Orthodoxy has to play. Even if there are not many practical resolutions, this text appreciates the presence of the Orthodox Church within the ecumenical movement, especially in the World Council of Churches and in bilateral dialogues. For this point, we should understand that there is a great tension among Orthodox believers. There are theologians and groups who contest the witness of the Orthodox Church in this dialogue and recommend immediate withdrawal. I think that the Bishops did not have in mind to accept the entire document when they affirmed that “the ecclesiological presuppositions of the 1950 Toronto Statement, *On the Church, the Churches and the World Council of Churches*, are of paramount importance for Orthodox participation in the Council” (*Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World*, § 19.). In other words, we should stress that the

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<sup>3</sup> “The recognition of the Baptism of the non-Orthodox deserves to be discussed during the pan-Orthodox Council, not only because this would put a stop to the practice of re-baptism, but also because this issue additionally involves the question of the ‘ecclesiality’ of non-Orthodox Christians, a crucial question for the ecumenical witness of Orthodoxy” (Kalaitzidis 2016: 290).

<sup>4</sup> “At the same time, the Church, in the sense mentioned above, is the unique Church in the full sense of the word ‘Church.’ For the Christian formations that do not have Christ intimately dwelling within them can be neither the body of Christ nor His Bride. In addition to this, Christ cannot have more than one body organically extended from His personal body, nor more than one bride. Any full union of the faithful with Christ can only mean His intimate, full, and working presence within them. And only this union represents the Church in the full sense of the word. But then the question is raised: What are the various Christian denominations that do not confess such an intimate and working presence in them of the full Christ? We consider that they are incomplete churches, some closer to fullness, others farther away from it” (Stăniloae 2012: 66). Also, see the article of Stylianos Tsompanidis, where he affirms: “the reality that the Orthodox Church understands itself as the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church does not mean that it looks at other Christians as if they were ‘outside the Church’ or outside God’s grace” (Tsompanidis 2012: 151).

document does not officially promulgate the Toronto Statement but accepts just the section quoted in the text.<sup>5</sup>

Fourthly, regarding the word ecumenism I noticed that is not used in the official documents, I presume probably not to be criticized by the anti-ecumenist wave from the Orthodox Church (Ladouceur 2016). Even using the words *inter-Christian cooperation* or *ecumenical dialogue* instead of *ecumenism* is unacceptable to the separatist groups. Contrary to this undiplomatic attitude, Pope Francis uses this term in his Encyclical and appreciates that ecumenism as a Christian dialogue “can be seen as a contribution to the unity of the human family” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, § 245). At the same time, the Orthodox document contains some indications that confirm the understanding of ecumenical unity as a return to the Orthodox Church. Besides simple affirmation such as, “the Orthodox Church...has always cultivated dialogue with those estranged from her” (*Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World*, § 4), or, “the non-Orthodox Churches and Confessions have diverged from the true faith of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church” (*Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World*, § 4), after specifying that the Orthodox Church is the Church founded by Christ Himself, the document mention very directly that the aim of the ecumenical dialogue is for the “Orthodox participation in the movement to restore unity with other Christians in the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church” (*Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World*, § 4). This could be called *ecumenism in return* (De Mey 2016). This position is in tune with a saying that Orthodox ecumenism is to become Orthodox. Nevertheless, we should try to accept and to speak about a *receptive ecumenism* (Murray 2008),<sup>6</sup> which is very similar with the Orthodox concept of *open sobornicity*. This statement belongs to the Romanian theologian Dumitru Stăniloae, and in essence means that the Orthodox Church can be enriched by other Christian tradition, so the ecumenical dialogue has its beneficial role (Stăniloae 1971: 165-180; Coman 2016: 35-43.). Unfortunately, in the Orthodox fundamentalist groups these concepts are clearly misunderstood and avoided.

### **Mission today from the Orthodox perspective**

If someone wants to read the mission document from Crete entitled *The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World*, first he or she has to understand the ecclesiological perspectives from the document discussed above. Ecclesiology and mission are connected (Sauca 2012: 209-219). Even if there are problems regarding the mutual recognition of

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<sup>5</sup>Toronto Statement, § 2: “The purpose of the World Council of Churches is not to negotiate unions between Churches, which can only be done by the Churches themselves acting on their own initiative, but to bring Churches into living contact with each other and to promote the study and discussion of the issues of Church unity. No Church is obliged to change her ecclesiology on her accession to the Council... Moreover, from the fact of its inclusion in the Council, it does not ensue that each Church is obliged to regard other Churches as Churches in the true and full sense of the term”. The full text of Toronto Statement can be found in different places as in: Central Committee of World Council of Churches: Minutes and Reports of the Third Meeting of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, Toronto 1950: 84-90; Visser 't Hooft 1982: 112-120; Michael Kinnamon and Brian E. Cope 1997: 463-468.

<sup>6</sup>The author of this concept is Paul Murray, a Catholic theologian, who stressed the importance of giving and receiving from the act of dialogue. You can see more about it in: Murray 2008: 30-45; Ware 2008: 46-53.

Churches which will not be solved definitively very soon, mission as a common witness should continue. The missionary obligation of the Churches could help them to come into closer contact. For example, the well-known theologian Ion Bria, who worked for many years for the World Council of Churches, had an interesting point of view about recognizing the quality of being a Church in order to avoid the actions of proselytism, considered to be a negative witness of the Gospel of Christ.<sup>7</sup> In his words, “one of the attitudes which generates missionary proselytism is that of radically refusing the status of Church to another Christian Churches, or seeing it exclusively as a heretic or un-churchly community in which its members cannot attain salvation as long as they remain in it. On the contrary, on the basis of the common profession of Jesus as God and Saviour, the Churches need to admit to one another their state as “Churches,” starting also from the assumption that, “*from a missionary point of view, the fact of being a member of another Church is preferably to that of not being a Christian*” (Bria 1970: 1058). Even more, “mutual understanding and cooperation are of fundamental importance if we wish never to ‘put an obstacle’ in the way of the gospel of Christ” (*Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World*, § 7).

The mission document from Crete holds the idea of deification of the human person and the holiness of life as central. Once again the Orthodox Church sustains her liturgical perspective. When the Divine Liturgy is celebrated, the Church brings “*together (I Cor 11:20) the scattered children of God (Jn 11:52) without regard to race, sex, age, social, or any other condition*” (*The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today’s World*). Because the Church cannot remain indifferent to the problems of the world, the text very briefly suggests some critical answers and attitudes towards them. There are many items debated, such as the dignity of the human person and his freedom and responsibility, the peace of the world and justice against war, social activity against discrimination, poverty and ecological crisis, science results, the role of young people and of the family within the Church, and so on. I believe that this was a good text, with the exception of the poor analysis about the Orthodox mission outside its canonical and charismatic borders. Even if the centrality of the commandment of Christ is mentioned, the Bishops refused to acknowledge that the Orthodox Church is put into difficulty when it comes to discuss action to evangelize or to engage in foreign missions.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps our history was against us, but nevertheless today we should be able to explain much better what it means to be a missionary Church and of course much more importantly how to act as a missionary Church. I suppose that if the concept *liturgy after the Liturgy* is not to be found mentioned in this text but in the *Message of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church* and in the *Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church*,

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<sup>7</sup>In the official document is affirmed that the Orthodox Church “believes that this dialogue should always be accompanied by witness to the world through acts expressing mutual understanding and love, which express the ‘ineffable joy’ of the Gospel (1 Pt 1:8), eschewing every act of proselytism, uniaticism, or other provocative act of inter-confessional competition” (*Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World*, § 23).

<sup>8</sup>Bria said in his time that “most Orthodox Churches find it very difficult to speak of foreign missions. It certainly is not a live option for many of the national Orthodox Churches. Their duty remains primarily within the churches and the nations in which they find themselves” (Bria 1986: 62).

Crete 2016, the idea that the Orthodox mission is well expressed first in the Divine liturgy and continued outside as a new liturgy should be understood without any other commentary.<sup>9</sup>

Before critically analyzing the document *The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World* in reference to the other three documents on mission in the next section of this article, I will make another ecclesiological remark. I found the idea that the Orthodox Church is Christ's Church to be very well expressed. But one should observe that in the document *Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World*, even if it is very clearly affirmed that the Orthodox Church was founded by Christ Himself, the text did not retain the expression, the "Church of Christ." Instead, in the document *The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World*, after using the expression the "Orthodox Church" twice in the title and subtitle, the Bishops were in favor of using the expression the "Church of Christ" five times, never the "Orthodox Church of Christ" in this construction. Because of this quality of being indeed the Church of Christ, missionary activity should be a central one for the Orthodox Church.<sup>10</sup>

### Mission documents in dialogue

There are many common ideas within all four mission documents. Nevertheless, I will concentrate my reflections on what separates them. In order to do so, I will analyze only three central points: the focus on the Bible, the centrality of the Lord's Supper for the Churches and the action to evangelize or to do mission, giving an exact statistic for some keywords.

The first point to be discussed is the role of the *Bible* or of the *Holy Scripture* in accordance with these documents. In the Orthodox mission document the term Bible or Holy Scripture does not occur. Instead it is used twice in the document *Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World*, in the following contexts: "The Orthodox Church has the mission and duty to transmit and preach all the truth contained in the *Holy Scripture* and Holy Tradition" and "(WCC) its members may only be those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior in accordance with the *Scriptures*" (*Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World*, § 2; § 19). But the word *Gospel* is used four times in the Orthodox mission document. What I want to express with this statistic is the fact that for the Orthodox Church, the Church itself plays the central role in the mission. The *Holy Scripture* belongs to the Church and not vice versa. I like to say that the Orthodox Church is the Scriptural Church but the relationship between Church and Bible is understood differently. Contrary to this perspective, the Lausanne document is focused on the authority and centrality of the Bible. In this document the word Scripture occurred five times, never in the construction of *Holy Scripture* and very importantly, it uses the word *Bible* 61 times. Also, the word *Gospel* appears 104 times. My first impression when I read *The Cape Town Commitment*

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<sup>9</sup>For more about this concept of Orthodox mission, you can read here: Bria 1978: 86-90; Bria 1993: 317-325; Bria 1996; Marcu 2016: 35-43.

<sup>10</sup>It is very interesting to see the Orthodox approach related to God's Kingdom through the work of the Church. Being in the Church is almost the same as being in the Kingdom, it is something which can be expressed as already and not yet. Perhaps, the well-known concept *missio Dei* can help the Orthodox theologians to express a different approach to missiology which can de-emphasise the Church and place the emphasis on God's Kingdom (Sonea 2017: 70-91).

document was that the Church does not play any role and the *Bible* could be announced without the Church. From this perspective, the principal mission is to preach Christ, telling people the story of the Bible. To have a complete map, in the Pope's Encyclical the word *Bible* is used 7 times and just two times the word *Scripture*. The word *Gospel* is mentioned 141 times. The last document for our attention, *Together Towards Life*, mention the word *Bible* 4 times and never uses the term *Scripture*. The word *Gospel* is used 30 times. At this point it is important to emphasize the place of the Bible in these documents and this will help us to understand the next point, namely the role of the Liturgy within the Church(es).

As I said, the second item which I want to criticize is the centrality of Lord's Supper for the Churches. I already mentioned the important role of the Divine Liturgy for the Orthodox Church. A Church without Liturgy and Sacraments loses its identity. As the Russian theologian Georges Florovsky explained, Christianity is a Liturgical Religion. I had the impression that we could separate the mission from the Liturgy. This is not a positive perspective. The Liturgy belongs to the Holy Scripture, this is mentioned very clearly, so how could one evangelize without it? Here once again the understanding of the mission as the liturgy after the Divine Liturgy should come into discussion. The Eucharist is the Pilgrim Bread for the Christian mission, according to Orthodox theology. If we accept a Bible without a Church it is obvious that the Liturgy is missing. The perspective of Pope Francis is not so far away from the Orthodox one, in which Eucharist remains the Sacrament par excellence for the Church (*Evangelii Gaudium*, § 13, § 24, § 47, § 137, § 138.). Also in the WCC's document the concept *liturgy after the Liturgy* is utilized so this is a more balanced text (*Together Towards Life*, § 17). But remarkably, in the document of the Lausanne movement there is no reference to the Lord's Supper.

For the last point, I would concentrate just on a statistic that is more conclusive than any words. In the Orthodox document on *mission*, which is the small one, the word mission is used 8 times, once even in the title. But we did not find in the text the words *evangelize* or *evangelizer*. In WCC's document the word mission occurs 214 times, the word *missionary* 11 times, the verb to *evangelize* 3 times and the noun *evangelism* 61 times. In the Pope's Encyclical, the statistics on these words are: the word *mission* appears 49 times, the word *missionary* 73 times and the verb to *evangelize* 11 times, without using the word *evangelism*. But the word *evangelization* is used 107 times. In the document *The Cape Town Commitment* we found the word *mission* used 108 times, the word *missionary* 7 times and 18 times the word *evangelism*, without using the verb to *evangelize*, but 8 times the noun *evangelization*.

## Conclusions

The first conclusion has to do with the Orthodox Church's wish to give a response regarding the interpretation of the other non-Orthodox Churches and Communities. For me, as an Orthodox theologian, it was very important to understand that the ecumenical dialogue is not an option for the Orthodoxy, but an imperative. We should not accept the historical and theological divergences as something impassable. Much more, our Christian disunity should be seen as a sin. Further ecclesiological reflections should be done in order to have a consensus within the Orthodox Church about how we should accept the other Churches and Christian communities. If we preach the Gospel of peace, then when will we have real peace between Christians? Our obligations as Orthodox are not to wait for the others to ask for peace, but to be the peacemakers *par excellence*, if we present ourselves as the keepers of Christ's peace.

The second point which I want to emphasize is the unobserved role of the Orthodox Church in what other Christian traditions call external or foreign mission. If we affirm that it is Christ's Church, we should prove it by action. I propose that the Orthodox Church should read over and over the Lord's commandment, where he does not tell us *Preach in the Church*, but *Go therefore*. We must regain our missionary endeavor, forget our unhappy history under Turkish domination, and go to the corners of the streets and roads and preach the Risen Christ with our life and deeds. Simultaneously, this Holy and Great Synod with its documents, especially with the missionary document, are a good sign for the future of the Orthodox Church and theology. We need more discussions about the Orthodox understanding of the relationship between ecclesiology and mission and when we have significant results will I hope put them into practice.

The third point regards the importance of ecumenical dialogue for the Orthodox Church. This Synod did not officially declare an ecumenist direction for the Church, as some groups quickly tried to misinform. Instead, the bishops tried to give some principles which the Orthodox Church as a whole should apply in ecumenical dialogues. I maintain that through ecumenical dialogue the Orthodox Church was forced to present more clearly its characteristics of catholicity and many other teachings. It is very important to recognize that the dialogue has to be continually evaluated.

Theologians belonging to different Churches or denominations are discussing how we should see the future of theology of mission. Even though this was not the central question of my presentation, I want to believe that we will continue our common witness in a de-Christianising Christianity.<sup>11</sup> I maintain that we as Orthodox should learn from the others but at the same time be more visible and express very clearly our understanding of mission. From my perspective, to rethink our theology of mission we should start to rethink our ecclesiological visions. Mission without ecclesiology is not possible. Perhaps future discussions will have a more practical application, not just in the form of agreements but in the life of Christians. And never forget that we as followers of Christ are not the main missionaries but Christ Himself through us.

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<sup>11</sup> The expression "de-Christianising Christianity" is referring to those societies and cultures which in the past were Christians but today have started to lose this Christian identity and to have another religion(s), a non-Christian one. For more details see: Kalaitzidis 2016: 281.

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