

THE EVOLUTION, REVISION AND ADAPTATION OF CULT, FROM AN ORTHODOX PERSPECTIVE, AS REFLECTED IN THE DOCUMENTS OF THE COUNCIL IN CRETE (16-26 JUNE 2016)

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Abstract

The main interest of nowadays Christian churches and confessions is searching for the Christian unity, to which another major issue has been added, which torments the Christian world, namely, the need to adapt the practices of religious life to the conditions and the evolution status of contemporary society. The pace in which this adjustment to present reality is prepared, as well as the means being used differ, without a shred of doubt, among churches and confessions. For instance, the Roman-Catholic Church, tributary to its unifying and centralizing spirit and organization, has dealt with the fundamental principles of this "aggiornamento" in the decrees and "constitutions" of the Second Vatican Council, which the following regional synods intended to put into practice, according to the local conditions of every national Church.

The Orthodox Churches were supposed to prepare for a fairly long period of time a Pan-Orthodox synod already known as the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church held in Crete between 16-26 June 2016. There were six approved documents: The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World; The Orthodox Diaspora; Autonomy and the Means by which it is Proclaimed; The Sacrament of Marriage and its Impediments; The Importance of Fasting and its Observance Today; Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World. All denominations in which Christianity is currently divided consider some action should be taken in order to prevent and bridge in some cases the increasing gap between the traditional forms of religious Christian life on the one hand and the goals, forms of life and aspects of today's world on the other hand. In light of these general needs and trends to renew Christianity, to move with the times, the idea of "modernizing" the Orthodox cult has also been contemplated. It has been questioned, in a justified manner within the Ecumenical movement, whether the Orthodox cult and its traditional forms, approved by practice and governed by the regulations of ritual still corresponds to the religious needs of the human soul on the background of the circumstances and possibilities of today's social life.

Keywords: cult, Church, synod/council, contemporary world.

1 INTRODUCTION

The need to adapt Orthodoxy to contemporary lifestyle, especially after the government changes that took place in the former socialist concentration camp, when the Christians of the respective Orthodox Churches

migrated in search of jobs, to study or merely relocating, has constituted for Orthodoxy a major issue concerning the adjusting of the cult according to the current possibilities and needs of religious life of Christians. Also, on the Crete 2016 council's list of topics, the list which were published after the inter-Orthodox conventions from Rhodos, some of the problems and aspects of Orthodox cult life had been stipulated, thus awaiting their solution from the supreme level of canonical authority, the Pan-Orthodox Council. Among these, we can mention:

- The uniformization of the church calendar and setting the date for the Holy Easter
- The validity of old church customs regarding fasting and full fasting
- Finding different means of promoting an effective participation of the laity to the sacramental life of the Church
- Preserving the traditional forms in church architecture and arts, namely the building and adorning of a church
- The issue raised by mixed marriages, which had been solved according to the Pauline principle; however, the previously mentioned issues stringently reappeared following the amendments we have mentioned;

To all these, one can add the new documents proposed by the Council in Crete: The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World; The Orthodox Diaspora; Autonomy and the Means by which it is Proclaimed; Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World.

Nowadays, this type of problems are raised in an acute manner and are dealt mainly by the Orthodox theologians from the Orthodox Western diaspora where "Orthodoxy, transplanted into a new environment which is completely different from its original one, both from an ethnic and religious perspective, had to go through a natural adapting process, just like a plant which was forced to grow in a different soil and in completely different weather from what it was used to" (Branîşte, 2013, p. 321). The meeting, confrontation and cohabitation with the way of life and the means of religious life of the Christians belonging to the other Christian denominations – Catholics, all forms of Protestants, Anglicans and Neo-protestants with various names and doctrinaire conceptions – with whom the orthodox migrants get into contact "have made some of them to question the spiritual value and efficacy, the contemporary aspect and the opportunity of preserving some of the Orthodox cult forms, which especially because of their old age seem obsolete and stuck in the past, if they are approached from a modern perspective" (Branîşte, 2013, p. 322).

2 RELIGIOUS CULT: ITS ESSENCE OR BEING

The word *cult* - of Latin origin - derives from the participle form of the verb *colo,-ere*, and it means to cultivate, to nurture, to respect, to worship. "During religious antiquity, cult – *Deos colere* – meant the worship gods would receive, both the fear and respect granted to gods as well as the religious ceremonies through which they were worshipped or venerated and through which worshippers believed they were getting into contact with the respective deities" (Branîşte, 1993, p. 45). From a Christian perspective, "cult generally means any religious form or act meant to connect man with God, expressing on the one hand the veneration and respect towards God, and on the other hand the enabling man's sanctification or sharing of divine grace" (Branîşte, 1993, p. 45).

From a subjective or human perspective, cult is that feeling of finding ourselves in front of God and of getting into contact with Him through summoning His name, through prayer or other means. This term is integrated in the very notion or concept of religion, thus existing within the human being the tendency or the natural drive towards worshipping those superior in life, general knowledge and power, etc. – of thanking those who have done us good, to whom we owe gratitude. The foundation and root of cult is primarily translated "under the form of the consciousness which we have regarding God's majestic nature, unlimited power and infinite superiority and perfection, in contrast to our imperfection and weaknesses, all these being the origin or seed of the being of cult, according to its subjective side" (Branîşte, 1993, p. 46). If our attitude of homage, reverence or worship towards divinity remains hidden in our souls, thus being translated merely in interior forms – such as piety, moral virtues, religious contemplation or meditation, this is called internal cult, which is subjective or theological. Under this form, cult remains unseen, having an individual and to a certain extent spiritual character – immaterial. It cannot remain for too long in this embryonal, invisible and interior state; it needs to be exteriorized, to express itself outwardly through visible forms, which are perceptible, inevitably becoming external cult. By means of its essence, cult is the ritual in its incipient form, the internal cult becoming external, which means visible or phenomenal. "Between the background or essence of cult and between its external forms, namely between its idea or religious feeling which lies at the foundation of cult on

the one hand and between the rituals and religious acts thorough which this interior back is expressed on the other hand, there should be a tight connection, an uninterrupted unity and continuity, just like between the roots of a tree and its branches, leaves, flowers and fruit. The internal cult which is devoid of external forms of manifestation cannot exist.” (Branişte, 1993, p. 46).

If, according to its essence, cult can be internal or internalized and external or exteriorized in seen forms, in accordance with the subject or people that practise it, it can be:

- a) Individual, particular or personal, practised by each and every individual, irrespective of the religious society he/she belongs to;
- b) Public, social or collective, when it is practised by entire groups of people who are united or integrated in the same religious collective group, by means of their identical conceptions or religious feelings and through that of their cult representations. Actually, this needs to be the official cult of the Church, or the public divine cult or the church cult.

2.1 Religion - Cult

The notional sphere of religion is much more encompassing than the one of the cult. To the sphere of religion belong all the representations it can possess; both the dogma and religious doctrine (the conception and idea we have about God and our rapport with Him), the religious moral and discipline (rules of living and organizing of the religious society, derived from the respective dogma), as well as religious cult (the forms through which the group of people expresses or intends to create their connection with divinity). Cult is encompassed within religion; it is an integral part of it. Even though the spheres of these notions do not overlap, in between there is an organic and indestructible connection, in a similar manner to the connection between the part and the whole. Within religious life, cult plays a special part, since the former is made alive and manifests itself by means of the cult forms, which are characteristic and defining for the respective religion. Cult derives from religion and it is inspired and determined by it. At the foundation of every cult form there is always a religious idea or a religious feeling through which it is derived and which is exteriorized. In any cult form we need to see, on the one hand the manifestation of an affective state or disposition, namely a feeling or religious sentiment, and on the other hand, a conception, a certain theoretical idea about divinity or a certain way of imagining it. The cult of every religion and Christian confession bears the mark of religious doctrine which lies at its foundation. There is a strong psychological connection between the two, which is expressed by means of the different ceremonies and cult rituals offered to us by the history of religions: “This diversity comes from the different ideas which people have had about divinity for centuries, ideas which are expressed in ritual manifestations which range from crimes to heroism, from immorality and debauchery to unstained purity, from merciless human sacrifices to self-sacrifice” (Branişte, 1993, p. 49).

The images of the worshipped gods under the form of statues or idols used to transmit fear, fright, horror by means of their monstrous faces, as was the case with Phoenician deities and of the old Slav; or the blood-thirsty gods, as was Baal in Phoenicia and Cartagena, which could be worshipped only by means of cultic ceremonies which showed both cruelty and madness, due to the custom of throwing children into the reddened womb of the metal statue representing the god. Anthropomorphic religions in which divinized men were worshipped or gods who had human origins – as in the case of the Greeks and Romans – as well as the naturalist mysteries which worshipped the elements and the stars – as in the case of Germanic peoples – have shaped into immoral and noisy cult form which hailed prostitution and debauchery as ritualistic obligations towards the respective divinity; such was the case with the cult of the Babylonian goddess Ishtar, Aphrodite of Corinth, Dionysus in Ancient Greece, Mithras with Old Persians and later on with the Romans, especially with military orders.

More than that, within the boundaries of the same religion, as is the case with Christianity, every confession has its characteristic cult forms, its own *modus orandi*, which is appropriate for the respective dogma and spirit it inspires. This natural relationship between religion and cult can be found in common speech, where the term “cult” is used in order to render in current speech the wider notion of religion, confessions or religious association. For instance, we refer to the Mosaic cult, but we understand the Mosaic religion; we mention the Protestant cult instead of its respective Protestant religion, etc.

Nowhere else can the organic relationship between cult and religion be better perceived, than in Orthodoxy? The Orthodox dogma has found admirable formulae of cult, especially in Byzantine hymn writing (canons, doxologies, kontakion, stichera), which is a genuine and diversified encyclopaedia, popularized under the form of hymns and hymn poetry. The Western church was able to answer the Protestant wave which was attacking the Catholic laying foundation and cult, using as weapons, the ‘Oriental liturgical texts which are full of old and venerable confessions at the expense of transubstantiation, of the reasons behind the Holy

sacraments in religious life, and the meaning of the Holy Sacraments in religious life, and of so many other grounds which were attacked by reformers' (Branîște, 1993, p. 50).

The cult of the Orthodox Church, constitutes a vital part or form of the Holy Tradition. Within Orthodoxy, the practice of the Church, the Liturgy and its mystical life, where the very heart of the Church has its pulse, and where a more direct form of language is spoken and especially rendered through symbols, one can discover a form of genuine tradition which is authoritative" (Branîște, 1993, p. 50).

2.2 The Cult's Renewal: Theological Opinions, Attitudes and Perspectives

Some theologians have made the reviewing of the cult possible both by renewing it, as well as by returning to some cultic forms from the Original/Primary Church. This return requires, on the one hand the conservation and revival of old cultic forms of practice, and on the other hand removing all and any subsequent additions which have lengthened and burdened the practice of religious ceremonies and services. The revival of tradition within the cult would also mean activating the genuine participation of the faithful/church-goers in performing within the cult.

2.2.1 Opinions; Attitudes

The former archbishop Ieronymos of Athens, in his work *Project for the reorganization of the Greek Church*, Athens, 1967, page 67, agreed on the necessity of "a proper revision of divine cult so as it also became more appealing for the faithful/church-goers and abler to convince and sanctify them" (Bouwen, 1969, fasc. 1, p. 2).

The Greek theologian Constantin Papaghianni used to say that the revision of cult was neither meant to sacrifice the essence and being of cult, nor the betrayal of faith, but "an adjustment of the permanent and foundational background of faith to the moral necessities which are predominant in every single epoch" (Papaghianni, 1968, p. 345). Understanding by revision the actual modernization of cult, Papaghianni refers to the shortened and concise form of cult: "lengthy and endless religious services are a thing of the past. In this fast-paced society and perpetual trepidation, we are no longer able to keep church-goers for hours in churches. For instance, a three-hour Sunday religious service comprised by the Matins, the Liturgy and the sermon is more than enough; however, one could spend less than three hours, on condition that prayer reading and hymn intoning is not performed in a hasty manner" (Papaghianni, 1968, p. 347).

Regarding the shortening of the duration for religious services, one could also mention some far-fetched opinions. By means of a memoir addressed to the Council of the Greek Church, the teachers from the Superior Church Seminary in Tinos, in May 1968, published under the title *For a Liturgical Rebirth*, issued in the *Anaplasis* journal, predicted: "It is impossible to understand that in this fast-paced century when people are mentally and physically exhausted, we should still perform liturgic services that last two or three hours. What is more, it is impossible for the majority of people to stay focussed on what they are being told for so many hours. We are the ones sending the faithful away, if we ask them to come in the morning and allow them to leave at noon. This process is not only anachronic, but also antipedagogic and anti-evangelic. It is against the fundamental liturgic principles of the New Testament. Long services are not meant for the constant bread-winners, money-driven or debt-driven people. The services are for those who are entirely dedicated to serving God and have as their main duty ongoing praying. A cult that lies in the Spirit for the twentieth century man should not be long" (Bouwen, 1969, fasc. 1, p. 8).

Referring to the revival of tradition, cult-wise, theologians emphasize especially the re-inserting of the Liturgy (The Holy Eucharist) in the main role of the divine cult, as it used to be from the very beginning. "The Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist should be repositioned at the heart of cult. It is incomprehensible why the Matins and the Catechumens' Liturgy take most of the Sunday religious service, while the Liturgy as such – eucharistic, namely the performance of the Holy Sacrament is compressed to a minimum time slot. Under no condition should people be given the impression that the main part of a religious celebration lies in the Lity or the procession of an Icon and one should not miss the real purpose of the whole Liturgy: namely the Holy Eucharist" (Bouwen, 1969, fasc. 1, p. 7).

Repositioning the Holy Eucharist at the centre of the Liturgy will definitely lead to an increased number of participants to the holy Sacraments. "Regularly partaking in the Holy Eucharist, which was a common tradition within the Church, meant also its power and glory" (Bouwen, 1969, fasc. 1, p. 8).

The necessity to adapt cult to the stringent requirements of modern life has also risen the issue of performing the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts on the previous evening or several times within 24 hours, some representatives of the Greek Church proposing that one should also take into consideration the possibility of

performing two Liturgies on the same day – like in the Roman-Catholic Church – out of which one in the evening for those who are unable to attend the morning service.

These issues were approached during the Council of the Russian Orthodox Church, the Moscow Patriarchate in 1968. Discussing the issues from the Orthodox Diaspora, the archbishop Anthony, exarch of the Moscow Patriarchate for the Western Europe, raises the question of the necessity of putting into practice the Typikon of the Church which stipulates that during the Great Lent, the performance of the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts in the evening in order to cater for the desire to attend the Holy Liturgy of those church-goers who, due to reasons they are unable to be changed cannot attend the morning service. The Archbishop's report concludes that "he himself has on various occasions performed the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts in the evening, which brought about the people's satisfaction; due to this fact they were able to participate in higher numbers" (*Jurnal Moskovskoi Patriarhii*, 1969, p. 4). The same problem was addressed by Jonatan, the Patriarch of New York and the Aleutian Islands, the exarch of the Moscow Patriarchate for North and South American, making the same proposal for the same reasons: "the status-quo of the local life within the jurisdiction I have been entrusted has urgently led to my becoming aware of the necessity of transferring the performance of the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, during the Great Lent in the evening, during the Vespers" (*Jurnal Moskovskoi Patriarhii*, 1969, p. 5). The Russian Archbishop Basil of Brussels and Belgium would say that the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts should be introduced at Vespers time "in a cautious manner, tightly linked to the local conditions and number of the faithful" (*Jurnal Moskovskoi Patriarhii*, 1969, p. 5).

In response to the discussions, proposals and analysis of the materials submitted by the aforementioned on this topic, the Council of the Russian Church in Moscow, 1968, decreed:

- a) Within the church of the Moscow Patriarchate the blessing (permission) is granted to perform the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts in the evening, in those dioceses where the archbishops find it useful;
- b) In order to perform the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts at Vespers time the abstinence from eating and drinking for those who will partake in the Eucharist should not last less than 6 hours; however, abstinence before partaking in the Eucharist starting on the midnight before the day of the Eucharist is praiseworthy – laudable and can be observed by those who are physically fit for it" (*Jurnal Moskovskoi Patriarhii*, 1969, p. 5-7).

In the end it is mentioned that the respective decrees are valid only in the churches of the Moscow Patriarchate, the problem being solved only locally; unfortunately, it has remained a problem ever since in the rest of the Orthodox Churches.

All the interventions regarding the renewal, revision, adaptation of the cult of the Orthodox Church point at the Typikon, thus asking for a clear-cut separation between the Typikon for monasteries and the one for parishes. "Regarding this problem, we should seriously take into consideration the fact that the Typikon for monks consists of many phrases and dispositions that appear in the Horologion and not only, which are suitable for the environment of a monastery. They are not valid for parish churches and cannot be applied by the laity" (Bouwen, 1969, fasc. 1, p. 10).

2.2.2 Theological Perspectives

All the questions which have been raised by the Orthodox theologians merely address (from a contemporary perspective) an old process which dates back to the beginning of the Christian Church. For a better understanding of this process one should consider the following: the external forms of cult, namely the rites and ceremonies, as well as the prayers, songs/hymns and readings which make up the common practice (Typikon) of the liturgical services and rites – all these not being immutable dogma. However, this does not allow us to state that all and every single external form of cult, without exception, can be changed or altered. It is common knowledge that between the dogma or the doctrinaire system of a religion, on the one hand and its forms of cult, on the other hand, there is, as a general rule, a strong and obvious connection to continuity, a genetical rapport based on the general principle *lex credenda, lex orandi*. As an answer to the basic question whether the cult forms should or should not be submitted to change and alteration, the Orthodox Church, makes a clear-cut distinction which should be taken into consideration. It divides the cult forms into two main categories:

- a) Forms of the cult which cannot be amended or modified
 - b) Forms of the cult which might be changed or amended/modified
- a) The fundamental forms of cult are stable and are not to be amended or modified, namely the one related

to the foundational and intimate nature of the Christian religion itself, having been instituted by our Redeemer and the Holy Apostles, practised by the Church of the first three-four Christian centuries and transmitted as such in the cultic patrimony of the whole Christendom before the Great Schism. From this category one can mention, for instance: the ordination or the transferring of the Charisma by laying on of the hands of the Bishops; the material elements of the Eucharistic sacrifice: bread, wine and water; performing the Baptism by means of the triple immersion, etc.

- b) In the same category can go the cult forms that are expressions of certain dogma or faith teachings, whose amendment or abandonment would affect the Orthodox dogma itself. For instance: old prayers and hymns which have been integral part of divine services since the first five-six centuries, in which the Church would enunciate both in a laconic manner as well as in a straightforward one the true doctrine, thus combating the teachings of heretics. For example: the hymn (*Gladsome Light*) from the Vespers, 2nd-3rd century, *The Doxology* from the Matins, the hymn *Only Begotten Son, The Creed, O, Heavenly King*, generally considered as having appeared in the 4th or 5th centuries, the oldest form of the cult dedicated to Virgin Mary, as well as the Marian feast days.
- c) Fundamental and unchangeable are also considered those cult forms that belong to the essence of the Byzantine liturgical cult and constitute the confessional specificity of this rite. "We can assign to this category first of all the general Typikon for the divine services, namely, the order, succession and the traditional train of rites, prayers, readings and main hymns within the holy services which we inherited from the cult tradition of the Old Church" (Branîște, 1969, p. 201).
- d) Also, one cannot change, replace or eliminate some rites and hymns which do not belong to the first centuries, but, even though they were developed later, are an integral part to the Orthodox cult, since they have contributed to the individualization of its confessional specificity, to the increase in its beauty and solemnity or to emphasizing some teachings of faith. For example: the two processions within the practice of the Holy Liturgy (the entrance and carrying of the Book of Gospel and the entrance and carrying of the Holy Gifts), the procession with the Holy Epitaph around the church and the Vigil on Good Friday (Apostol, 1961, p. 112).

All these, as well as other similar ones, are "governed by the principle of stability and uniformity in the cult, which does not allow their modification or suppression, according to the whims and personal tastes of liturgy practitioners or some local churches" (Vintilescu, 1940, p. 215). They are common property of the entire Orthodox Christendom, having been consecrated and having become venerable and intangible "either due to their age, or due to uninterrupted and general use along the centuries in all Orthodox Churches" (Branîște, 1969, p. 203).

In hindsight, the evolutionary process the forms of cult have been through, we will notice that their current way of being performed and practised is the result of the conflict between two main laws, which all cult forms abide by, laws with opposite effects: 1. "The law of organic development or of growth and 2. The law of backward movement, return, or decrease" (Baumstark, 1934, p. 23-29; Vintilescu, 1943, p. 125). Except for the action of the two laws with opposite effects, the religious services held in churches have been through another type of changes named – metathesis – which are displacing or moving some constitutive forms from their initial place. After all, "cult is the language of religious life, and the language of a country is an integral part of its ethnic being and individuality; it is born, it is shaped and dies at the same time with the people or country that use it and only in this living language viable literary masterpieces can be written" (Branîște 1969, p. 214).

3 THE COUNCIL IN CRETE (16-26 JUNE 2016)

The meeting in Crete, Greece during the period 16-26 June of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church has justly been one of the most important events of the church in the last few years. "The Council has represented the sealing of a long journey which for several decades has been taken through intensive theological advisory meetings, agreements and disagreements. It was the vision of our enlightened and charismatic predecessors, who prayed for the day of this meeting." (the Alexandria Patriarchate in its message on the 16th of November 2016, addressed to the faithful). In the synaxis of Church leaders, from March 2014 and January 2016, all autocephalous churches announced their participation to the Holy and Great Council; afterwards, they received invitations from the Ecumenic Patriarchate. For different reasons, some time before the reunion of the Orthodox Bishops in Crete, four autocephalous churches (Antioch, Russia, Georgia and Bulgaria) announced that they would not be able to attend the Crete Council mainly because the lack of resolution for the dispute between the Antioch Patriarchate and the Jerusalem Patriarchate. Therefore, the event represented an opportunity for the meeting and communion of the

delegated bishops from ten autocephalous churches, which led to the confirmation of the self-awareness of the Church of Christ, one and only, saint, catholic, and apostolic.

“The Holy and Great Council of Crete did not formulate dogma or new canonical laws and did not bring alterations to liturgical life. The Hierarchs who participated to the Council have debated some current topics and looked for solution to the problems contemporary people face” (About the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church held in Crete 16-26 June 2016: Questions and answers 2017, p. 3). Emphasizing the importance of the respective event within the life of the Orthodox Church, in his speech within the inaugural session of the Holy and Great Council, Daniel, the Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church said: “The Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church is both a rare event and the beginning of normality, since synodality is a canonical rule in the life of the local Church in order to express the unity of the orthodox faith, of sacramental life and of the canonical the one and only Church, holy, catholic and apostolic. If synodality is a canonical norm on a local scale, it should also be a norm on a pan orthodox or a universal scale. Synodality is achieved in the mutual sacramental celebration of the Holy Eucharist, in order to simultaneously express the unity of the Orthodox faith and the sacrament of communion between the Church and the Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church. The autocephalous character of the Orthodox Church expresses its administrative and pastoral freedom, while the Eucharistic and pan Orthodox mutual celebration and the pan Orthodox synodality express the unity of the entire Orthodox world” (About the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church held in Crete 16-26 June 2016: Questions and answers 2017, p. 4).

Therefore, the Council neither formulated dogma or new canons, nor brought new changes with liturgical life; moreover, due to the lack of attendance of the four autocephalous Churches, they could not place current questions on the agenda such as: the amendment of the calendar and the setting of the date for Holy Easter; it is general knowledge that from the perspective of the church calendar and implicitly of the date for the Easter feast, Christendom is split into three main groups:

- a) Orthodox churches which still use the old style or the unamended Julian calendar
- b) The western churches – Catholic and protestant which use the new style or the amended Gregorian calendar
- c) Orthodox churches which adopted the amended calendar according to the recommendations of the inter-orthodox congress from Constantinople – 1923, one of them being also the Romanian Orthodox Church; these churches use a mixed calendar, namely the new style for the feasts with a fixed date and the old style and the dates for Easter according to the old style for the feasts with mobile date, as a concession made to the Orthodox churches that had adopted the old style.

3.1 The Documents Approved by the Council in Crete

The six synodal documents as well as *The Message* and *The Encyclical* were translated from Greek, and in the case of nuances the official translations in English, French and Russian were used; they have resorted to the technique of the interlinguistic comparison. Some of the documents from the Council in Crete will be able to be “explained, nuanced or developed within a future Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, since it is known that there have been instances of unrest and separation of some of the members of clergy with their church-goers from within the Orthodox Churches which attended the council. Accordingly, the Church of Greece in *Message to the people* shows that “the texts make the object of having a deeper insight into the field and of ongoing study,” and the faithful are urged not to mind the words coming from those that instigate them to drift away from the Church, with the purpose of constituting separate groups, outside the Pleroma church (About the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church held in Crete 16-26 June 2016: Questions and answers, 2017, p. 54).”

The documents made reference to: The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today’s World; The Orthodox Diaspora; Autonomy and the Means by which it is Proclaimed; The Sacrament of Marriage and its Impediments; The Importance of Fasting and its Observance Today; Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World.

3.2 Aspects Regarding Cult as Reflected in the Council’s Documents

3.2.1 The place and role of the Holy Liturgy – the Divine Eucharist in the life of the Orthodox Church

A recurrent idea (from the message of the Holy and Great Council to the last approved document) is emphasized, namely the place and role of the Holy Liturgy – the Divine Eucharist in the life of the Orthodox

Church. In the Council's message, in the first article it is mentioned: "The major priority of the Holy and Great Council has been the proclamation of the unity of the Orthodox Church. Based on the Divine Eucharist and the apostolic succession of bishops, this unity should be strengthened in order to be productive. The One, Holy, Universal and Apostolic Church is the divine-human communion, pre-tasting and experience of the future in the Holy Eucharist" (The Message of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church). If we analyse the tradition of the Orthodox Church, "we will notice that the Divine Eucharist has from the very beginning been considered as a sacrament-mystery, by excellence, by the Church, constituting the centre of the entire Christian life" (Milošević, 2012, p. 7). The same idea can be found in the Council's Encyclic. Partaking in the Holy Eucharist and raising a common prayer within the holy gatherings, we are called to continue – the Liturgy after the Liturgy (The Encyclic of the Holy and Great Council, II.6).

The Council can only state and emphasize "the fact that from the very beginning the centre of the Christian cult has been the Divine Eucharist on God's day which represents the centre of sacramental life and of the entire lives of the members of the Church" (Milošević, 2012, p. 9).

3.2.2 The Sacrament of Marriage and its Impediments

The Church has always shown a constant pastoral care towards the Christian family who is nowadays exposed to innumerable attacks from the secularized world. In the article I.4-5 of the document it is stipulated: "The union of man and woman in Christ constitutes "a small church" or an icon of the Church. Protecting the sacredness of marriage has always been crucially important for the preservation of the family, which reflects the communion of the persons yoked together both in the Church and in society at large. Therefore, communion achieved through the sacrament of marriage does not merely serve as an example of a typical natural relationship, but also as an essential and creative spiritual force in the sacred institution of the family. It alone ensures the safety and formation of children, both for the spiritual mission of the Church as well as in the life of society" (The Sacrament of Marriage and its Impediments, I.4-5).

In the same document it has been firmly stated the position regarding civil partnerships. "The Church does not allow for her members to contract same-sex unions or any other form of cohabitation apart from marriage" (The Sacrament of Marriage and its Impediments, I.10).

Regarding „mixed marriages," it should be stipulated the fact that this question has existed from the beginnings of Christianity. The environment where the Church developed was overly pagan and Judaic, which would generate questions referring to marriages between Christian and non-Christian. Mixed marriages have often taken place along the centuries, and the Church has addressed them by applying the principle of the *oikonomia* (applying the rule with leniency or exemption), which was signalled in the writings of Saint Photios, the Patriarch of Constantinople (810-895), who mentions that the Church had to accept such mixed marriages which had already been acknowledged by means of the Code of the Emperor Justinian (the 6th century). The mixed marriages between two Christian people of opposite sex out of which one was Christian Orthodox and the other one was from another Christian religion (catholic, Anglican, protestant, etc.) present no novelty for the Romanian Orthodox Church either, which since 1881 in "The Regulations for the church relationships of the Romanian Orthodox clergy with heterodox Christians or from another rite and with the non-believers that live in the Romanian kingdom" stated: "the mixed marriage between orthodox people and heterodox people or from another Christian rite is consecrated by the Orthodox Church in keeping with the so far established use, according to which the children to be born within these marriages should become members of the Orthodox Church" (About the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church held in Crete 16-26 June 2016: Questions and answers, 2017, p. 25).

Even though the Orthodox Church does not recommend mixed marriages, it has been confronted with this reality, and therefore adopted a pastoral attitude which is established on the principle of *oikonomia* in order to keep its spiritual sons and daughters within the Orthodox Church. "Despite all canonical interdictions, there were still mixed marriages in the past. In our pluralist society in which the orthodox represents only a minority, these marriages have an increasing percentage among the consecrated marriages in our churches. Unfortunately, there is also a surge in the marriages outside Orthodoxy. We all know that some of them lead to the setting up of happy families... Actually, some of these marriages might be more long-lasting and happier than those between some of the Orthodox who have never had the chance to learn about the meaning of Christian marriage and who have never accepted personally or responsibly any real Christian commitment". In the article II.5.ii from the document referring to the practice of *oikonomia*, it is established: "the possibility of the exercise of ecclesiastical *oikonomia* in relation to the impediments to marriage must be considered by the Holy Synod of each autocephalous Orthodox Church according to the principles of the holy canons and in a spirit of pastoral discernment" (The Sacrament of Marriage and its Impediments, II.5.ii). In the case of a mixed Christian family, *oikonomia* refers to the Christian orthodox person, and not to the

heterodox person. "However, it would be desirable that the practice of *oikonomia* should not be in a manner that seems systematic and extremely strict (namely the fact the Church is against the marriage of an orthodox to a heterodox) should be constantly reminded" (Larchet, 2015, p. 396). As far as the possibility of sealing a marriage between orthodox and non-Christians, the final document excludes this possibility and disposes the following: "Marriage between Orthodox and non-Christians is categorically forbidden in accordance with canonical *akribeia*" (The Sacrament of Marriage and its Impediments, II.5.ii).

"It should be crystal clear that an Orthodox priest can never bless a marriage between an orthodox and a non-Christian. Obviously, it would be inappropriate invoking Jesus Christ's name in a marriage ceremony for someone who does not acknowledge Him as His Lord. Actually, such an invocation would be disrespectful not only in relation to our Lord, but also in relation to this person and his/her beliefs – or his/her lack of these beliefs" (Meyendorff, 2012, p. 67).

3.2.3 *The Importance of Fasting and its Observance Today*

According to the teachings of the Orthodox Church, one of the means for the consecrating and blessing of the lives of the faithful and of moral perfectibility is fasting. "Religious fasting is generally understood as total or partial abstinence from certain foods and drinks for a longer or shorter period, in accordance with the church regulations. This abstinence from food and drinks should be accompanied by abstinence from thoughts, cravings, addictions and evil deeds, which means that physical fasting should be accompanied by spiritual fasting" (Missionary Counsels, 1996, p. 738). Fasting is one of the ways in which one can nurture and perfect his/her soul, being inseparable from other virtues or Christian acts such as praying, penance, charity, submission, etc., differently put, interior fasting is replenished by external fasting or "food fasting is accomplished through sin fasting accompanied by prayers" (Orthodox Moral Theology, vol. II, p. 55-56).

In what the document *The Importance of Fasting and Its Observance Today* is concerned, the spiritual importance of fasting has been emphasized. It is a fact that many faithful today do not observe all the prescriptions of fasting, whether due to faint-heartedness or their living conditions, whatever these may be. However, all these instances where the sacred prescriptions of fasting are loosened, either in general or in particular instances, should be treated by the Church with pastoral care, "for God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Ezek 33:11), without, however, ignoring the value of the fast (The Importance of Fasting and Its Observance Today, 8).

The participants to the Council in Crete have made no intervention to the fasting periods instituted by the Church, have not reduced them, but they granted the permission for every autocephalous Church to apply the canonical principle of *oikonomia* in what fasting is concerned. "The Church, however, has also established, with pastoral discernment, boundaries of philanthropic dispensation (*oikonomia*) concerning the rules of fasting. In this regard, the Church has considered physical infirmity, extreme necessity, and difficult times where she has ordained the application of the principle of ecclesiastical *oikonomia*, through the responsible discernment and pastoral care of the body of bishops in the local Churches" (The Importance of Fasting and Its Observance Today, 7).

The Romanian Orthodox Church has implemented this *oikonomia* principle, adjusting the disciplinary-moral norms to the necessities of contemporary world. During the assembly of the Romanian Orthodox Church on the 27th of February 1956 the following downgraded practices in observance with the circumstances of the times and of today:

- a) Children, before turning 7 are exempted from fasting, being able to eat throughout the year any types of food;
- b) The children aged 7-12 and all the faithful irrespective of age, who might be weak or suffer from various illnesses, are supposed to fast on the following days:
 - On Wednesdays and Fridays throughout the year, except for those on which one is allowed to eat fish
 - The first and the last week from the Great Lent, as well as from the Christmas Fast
 - Between the 24th and 29th of July, representing Saint Apostles Peter and Paul's Fast
 - Between the 1st and 15th of August, representing the two-week fasting period dedicated to the Assumption
 - Christmas Eve, Epiphany Eve, 29th of August and 14th of September.
- c) For the rest of the days and weeks during the great church fasts, the children aged 7-12 and the faithful irrespective of age, who might be weak or suffer from various illnesses, should be allowed to eat fish, fish eggs, milk and cheese (Branişte, 1993, p. 262).

4 CONCLUSIONS

In light of the above we can conclude the following: the Byzantine rite represents a common treasure of the entire Orthodoxy and, at the same time, one of the forms in which its religious unity manifests itself. The church has never imposed a strict uniformity regarding the non-essential forms of cult; alternatively, when the forms that aim at its fundamental structure, the essence and unity of the liturgical cult itself, or the teachings rendered through them, have been approached, the Church does not allow individual decisions to be made by the rest of the churches; they should be made together for all of them. For this reason, the presence to the following Pan-orthodox Synod – which we think might take place sooner than we expect – ought to be mandatory for all autocephalous churches, leaving aside any kind of dispute they might face. Reunited around the same Holy Table, during the Holy Liturgy, all Orthodox Bishops ought to understand that obstacles will be overcome if they acknowledge Jesus Christ, the Son of God that Rose again, the Saviour and Redeemer of this world, as Protos, on the Holy Table.

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