

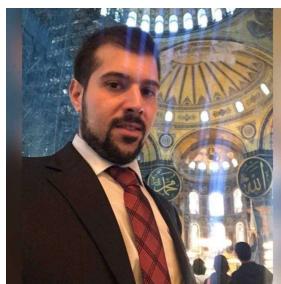


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# The Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Church of Georgia during the preparation for the convocation of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church (1923-2016)

## Abstract

The Ecumenical Patriarchate desired the participation of all Orthodox Churches in the Holy and Great Council, a goal that seemed unattainable when the decision was made in 1923. Among other issues, there were significant canonical problems concerning the participation of the Church of Georgia, which had been deprived of its historical privileges in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Its historical independence was restored in 1917, but its exact status remained undefined, leading to confusion over whether it should be invited as an autonomous or autocephalous local Church. Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I, upon the dynamic resumption of the



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Council's preparatory work, recognized the need to gather the Orthodox Churches and the fact that the difficulties in convening the Council required time to be resolved. Thus, he conceived the idea of forming a preparatory body. Consequently, in 1961, he decided to convene the First Pan-Orthodox Conference and determined that the autonomous Churches, including the Church of Georgia, should participate with voting rights. Over the next 55 years, the Church of Georgia actively participated and constructively contributed to the Council's preparations. Despite its decision to withdraw at the last minute, the Church of Georgia played a significant role in preparing and shaping the Council's documents, responding positively to all invitations from the Ecumenical Patriarchate. This article will present the relationship between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Church of Georgia during the preparation of the Holy and Great Council and attempt an evaluation of their interactions.

### Keywords

Ecumenical Patriarchate, Patriarchate of Georgia, Holy and Great Council, Ecclesiastical history, Inter-Orthodox relations

## 1 Introduction

On February 3, 1923, Ecumenical Patriarch Meletios IV (1871-1935) sent Patriarchal Letters No. Prot. 872 to the Churches of Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, Serbia, Cyprus, Greece, and Romania. In these letters, he proposed the formation of a committee that would convene in Constantinople immediately after Easter to thoroughly examine the 'calendar issue' and any

other urgent Pan-Orthodox matters.<sup>1</sup> According to the agenda, the representatives of the Orthodox Churches would also review the ecclesiastical situation in Russia, including the status of the Church of Georgia.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, the Pan-Orthodox Congress was convened from May 10 to June 8, 1923, and recommended to the Ecumenical Patriarchate the festive celebration of the 1600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the convocation of the First Ecumenical Council through a Council of the Orthodox Churches. Following the acceptance of the proposal by the Pan-Orthodox Congress, the Church of Constantinople, marking the official beginning of the pre-conciliar period, deemed it necessary to prepare systematically. Concurrently, on May 27, 1924, Ecumenical Patriarch Gregory VII invited the Orthodox Churches to participate in the first 'General Pan-Orthodox and/or Ecumenical Council' to be held in Jerusalem on Pentecost 1925.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Regarding the preparation and the procedures of convening the Holy and Great Council, see: I. Ladas, *The Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church 2016: Preparation – Procedures*, Athens: Papazisis Publications & the Halki Theological School, Athens. Patriarchal Letter to the Holy Orthodox Churches of Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, Serbia, Cyprus, Greece, and Romania No. Prot. 872 and dated February 3, 1923: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

<sup>2</sup> Report of the Inter-Orthodox Committee "Arrangement of Topics for the Inter-Orthodox Committee" No. Prot. 2240 and dated May 3, 1923: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate B' 70: 233-234, §2. Session of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, May 3, 1923: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate B' 70: 234, §2.

<sup>3</sup> Regarding the Pan-Orthodox Congress, see: I. Ladas, "Διορθόδοξη συνεννόηση και συνεργασία: Έπετειος έκαπονταετηρίδος άπό τη σύγκληση των Πανορθοδόξων Συνεδρίουν και την άπόφαση συγκλήσεως Συνόδου των Ορθοδόξων Εκκλησιῶν (Inter-Orthodox Understanding and Cooperation: The Centennial Anniversary of the Convening of the Pan-Orthodox Congress and the Decision to Convene a Council of the Orthodox Churches)," *Dodekanisos* 30 (2023): 389-419. Report of Metropolitan

Following the unsuccessful convocation of the Council in 1925, the Church of Constantinople revisited its decision the following year regarding the disadvantage of further postponement<sup>4</sup> and, considering the opinion of the Orthodox Churches, decided that a Preliminary Conference, which would take the title and role of a Pre-Council, should precede the Ecumenical Council. However, in October 1929, under the guidance of the newly elected Patriarch Photios II (1874-1935), it was decided to convene a Pan-Orthodox Committee before the Pre-Council. The task of this Committee was to define the jurisdiction of the forthcoming Pre-Council, whose convocation was scheduled for 1932 but was subsequently postponed due to adverse conditions.<sup>5</sup>

In the aforementioned pre-conciliar bodies, the Church of Georgia, which had enjoyed full ecclesiastical independence since the 5<sup>th</sup> century, was not invited. Its autocephaly was abolished in 1811 by the then Emperor of Russia, and only in 1917 was the restoration of its historical independence possible. Despite this, its status as either an autocephalous or autonomous local Church was not defined, creating confusion both about whether it should be invited and under what status it should be invited to the Council of Orthodox Churches.<sup>6</sup>

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Nicholas of Nubia without Prot. Number and dated January 14, 1927: YDIA, Central Service Archive 1927/62.2.1.

<sup>4</sup> Patriarchal Letters to the primates of the Autocephalous Churches No. Prot. 2957 and dated December 10, 1925: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

<sup>5</sup> Note from the Chief Secretariat of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, dated October 28, 1929: YDIA, Central Service Archive B 1930/B/35/VI B/35.

<sup>6</sup> See also: I. Bakkas, "Οι πολιτικο-έκκλησιαστικές έξελίξεις στή Γεωργία τήν περίοδο 1918-1921 καὶ ἡ ἀποστολὴ τοῦ Τραπεζοῦντος Χρυσάνθου (The Political-Ecclesiastical Developments in Georgia During the Period 1918-1921 and the Mission of Chrysanthos of Trebizond)," Komotini: *Proceedings of the Scientific Conference: Archbishop of Athens Chrysanthos Philippides of Trebizond*, 2018: 331-347.

## **2 The invitation and participation of the Church of Georgia in the process of convening the Holy and Great Council**

Eighteen years after the postponement of the Pre-Council, Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras (1886-1972) dynamically resumed the procedures.<sup>7</sup> Considering that the difficulties involved in convening it required significant time to be resolved, he conceived the idea of forming a preparatory body for the forthcoming Pre-Council, similar to the Preliminary Committee of the Orthodox Churches convened in 1930.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, he decided to convene a Pan-Orthodox Conference in Rhodes in 1960.

Among other matters, the Pan-Orthodox Conference needed to ensure the participation of all Orthodox Churches, a goal that appeared unfeasible due to significant canonical issues involving five particular Churches, including the Church of Georgia. The Committee on Pan-Orthodox Issues examined the issue of convening the Conference and addressed which Churches would be invited, concluding that all Autocephalous Orthodox Churches should be invited, including the ancient Patriarchates of Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem, the newer Patriarchates of Moscow, Romania, and Serbia, and the Autocephalous Churches of Cyprus, Greece, Bulgaria, Poland, and Albania. Nevertheless, the issue of whether to invite the Church of Georgia to the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate was raised, noting that while there were canonical relations with the Church

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<sup>7</sup> Encyclical Patriarchal Letters to the primates of the Local Orthodox Churches No. Prot. 108 and dated February 12, 1951: Archive of Archbishop Elpidophoros of America.

<sup>8</sup> Patriarchal Letters to the primates of the Orthodox Churches No. Prot. 632 and dated October 19, 1959: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

of Georgia, its status had not been officially defined as either autonomous or autocephalous.<sup>9</sup> The invitation to the Church of Georgia was also raised by the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Benedict (1892-1980), who, prior to the convening of the Pan-Orthodox Conference, wished to be informed about the actions and steps of the Ecumenical Patriarchate regarding the invitation of the Church of Georgia and primarily whether the issue would be resolved before or during the Conference. According to him, it would be desirable to resolve it before the convening of the Conference so that the Church of Georgia could participate.<sup>10</sup> The Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate appeared willing to set aside the canonical discussions concerning the participation of the Church of Georgia in the Conference, as it did not wish to be seen as erroneously based or as causing the disruption of ecclesiastical unity. Moreover, as is evident from the spirit of the relevant report, the Church of Constantinople desired as broad participation as possible from the Orthodox Churches at the Conference. Therefore, with the best interests of the Orthodox Church in mind, it assigned the Canonical Committee, in cooperation with the Committee on Pan-Orthodox Councils and on Pan-Christian Issues, to study the status of the Church of Georgia, aiming to ultimately enable its invitation and representation at the Pan-Orthodox Conference.<sup>11</sup> Thus, on August 24, 1961, a special synodal Committee convened

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<sup>9</sup> Report of the Committee on Pan-Orthodox Issues No. Prot. 296 and dated May 23, 1960: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

<sup>10</sup> Response of Patriarch Benedict of Jerusalem to the Letter of Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras No. Prot. 342 and dated June 8, 1960, No. Prot. 604, dated June 21, 1960: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

<sup>11</sup> Report of the Committees on Canonical Issues, Pan-Orthodox Councils, and Pan-Christian Issues dated November 4, 1959: Archive of Archbishop Elpidophoros of America.

and, after reviewing the findings of the Canonical Committee, which had classified the Church of Georgia among the Autonomous Churches, recommended its invitation to the Conference as an Autonomous Church with voting rights.<sup>12</sup>

The Orthodox Churches that were in canonical communion with the Ecumenical Patriarchate and through it with the other Orthodox Churches were thoroughly informed about the preparation of the Pan-Orthodox Conference on May 4, when it was determined that its convocation was feasible to be held in 1961.<sup>13</sup> Conversely, the Church of Georgia received the Patriarchal Letters of invitation on August 31, after the canonical reasons that hindered its participation were resolved and the participation of the Autonomous Churches was decided.<sup>14</sup>

The First Pan-Orthodox Conference was a particularly significant event in the history of modern Orthodox Christianity, as it marked the first time in centuries that the Orthodox Churches convened in a conference to discuss the major problems presented by the modern era.<sup>15</sup> However, the Church of Georgia was unable to send representatives due to lack of time. Catholicos Ephraim of Georgia (1896-1972), who authorized the Russian Church's delegation to represent him, wished 'rich gifts of the Holy Spirit' upon the Conference and expressed hope that he would be invited in due time by the Ecumenical Patriarch to a

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<sup>12</sup> Session dated August 24, 1961: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

<sup>13</sup> Patriarchal Letters to the primates of the Orthodox Churches concerning the convocation of the Pan-Orthodox Conference No. Prot. 310 and dated May 4, 1961: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

<sup>14</sup> Patriarchal Letters to the primates of the Churches of Georgia and Finland concerning the Convocation of the Pan-Orthodox Conference No. Prot. 568 and dated August 31, 1961: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

<sup>15</sup> Πατριαρχικὴ Ἀπόδεξις ἐπὶ τοῖς Χριστουγέννοις (Patriarchal Message for Christmas 1961), *Orthodoxia* (1961): 335-338.

future Council, where the Church of Georgia could be represented with its own delegation. Furthermore, he requested Patriarch Athenagoras to send him the Proceedings of the Conference.<sup>16</sup>

During the preparations for the Pre-Council, two additional Pan-Orthodox Conferences were convened, primarily addressing issues related to inter-Christian relations, in which the Church of Georgia participated. Notably, at the third Pan-Orthodox Conference in 1964, the Church of Georgia was represented by bishop Ilia of Batumi, later Bishop of Sukhumi and now Patriarch of Georgia.<sup>17</sup> His greeting to the Conference members on behalf of the Church of Georgia and Catholicos Ephraim was particularly significant. Bishop Ilia noted that all were invisibly united in mutual fraternal love, aiming to demonstrate to the world the strength of Orthodoxy, 'which lies in the unity of views and mutual love.' 'Among us,' he continued, 'we see representatives from the ancient Apostolic Sees, as well as representatives of the subsequently established local Churches.' 'All of us,' he emphasized, 'are united by the invisibly present Head of the Church, our Lord Jesus Christ.' In this context, bishop Ilia concluded his greeting by stating that the Church of Georgia 'has preserved the purity of Orthodoxy for 17 centuries, and presents it unchanged to this day,' noting that it participated in all the Ecumenical Councils after the second one, always demonstrating loyalty and devotion to Orthodoxy.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Response of Catholicos Ephraim of Georgia to the Letter of Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras No. Prot. 568 and dated August 31, 1961, No. Prot. 741 and dated September 16, 1961: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

<sup>17</sup> Response of Catholicos Ephraim of Georgia dated October 26, 1964: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

<sup>18</sup> Address of bishop Ilia at the opening of the Third Pan-Orthodox Conference: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate proposed that the Fourth Pan-Orthodox Conference be held in 1968. The Church of Georgia accepted this proposal and appointed bishop Ilia of Sukhumi as its representative. Simultaneously, it requested that its delegation not be given a position of distinction similar to the one it held at the previous Pan-Orthodox Conference. Notably, the Catholicos of Georgia pointed out that 'the Patriarchate of Georgia should occupy the appropriate sixth position among the sister Orthodox Churches.'<sup>19</sup>

The Fourth Pan-Orthodox Conference was the second significant milestone in the preparations for the Holy and Great Council,<sup>20</sup> as it delineated the gradual progress towards the Holy and Great Council and simultaneously defined a common Pan-Orthodox direction and agenda in the relationships of the Orthodox Churches with the heterodox churches.<sup>21</sup> The Church of Georgia was ultimately not represented, as its delegate, bishop Ilia of Sukhumi, fell ill unexpectedly and was unable to travel to Geneva. The Ecumenical Patriarch expressed his sympathy for bishop Ilia's illness and wished for his swift recovery.<sup>22</sup> The Conference decided to establish a Pan-Orthodox Secretariat, and all Churches were called to appoint a representative. However, despite repeated reminders, the Church of Georgia did not respond. Consequently, the Ecumenical Patriarchate declared

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<sup>19</sup> Response of the Catholicos of Georgia, dated May 20, 1968: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

<sup>20</sup> V. Feidas (Ed.), "Fourth Pan-Orthodox Conference," *Synodika IV*, Orthodox Center of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Chambéry 1982: 7.

<sup>21</sup> Patriarchal Letters to the primates of the Orthodox Churches No. Prot. 884 and dated September 16, 1968: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

<sup>22</sup> Telegram from Catholicos Ephraim of Georgia to the Ecumenical Patriarch dated June 6, 1968: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Response of the Ecumenical Patriarch to the telegram of Catholicos Ephraim of Georgia No. Prot. 586 and dated June 12, 1968: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

the Committee 'constituted' and announced its composition to the heads of the Orthodox Churches.<sup>23</sup>

On April 6, 1976, Ecumenical Patriarch Demetrios (1914-1991) informed the heads of the Orthodox Churches that the issue of convening the Holy and Great Council had undergone various stages of trial preparation and had reached a point where new Pan-Orthodox decisions needed to be made and new guidelines established. For the purpose of inter-Orthodox consultation, he expressed his desire to send metropolitan Meliton of Chalcedon (1913-1989), Chairman of the Committee on Inter-Orthodox Issues and Chairman of the Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Committee, as the representative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate to the Orthodox Churches.<sup>24</sup>

The Church of Georgia accepted with satisfaction the proposal of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and agreed on the need to advance the issue of convening the Council.<sup>25</sup> In this context, the patriarchal delegate traveled to Tbilisi in early May 1976. During his visit, Catholicos David of Georgia (1903-1977), after thanking him for the detailed information, gave the floor to metropolitan Ilia of Sukhumi,<sup>26</sup> who stated that the views of the Church of Georgia were aligned with those of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Additionally, metropolitan Ilia noted that the Church of Georgia had studied the 1961 Catalog and determined that it could not

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<sup>23</sup> Report of the Committee on Inter-Orthodox Issues No. Prot. 826, dated October 13, 1969: Archive of Archbishop Elpidophoros of America.

<sup>24</sup> Patriarchal Letters to the primates of the Orthodox Churches No. Prot. 217 and dated April 6, 1976: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

<sup>25</sup> Patriarchal Letters (Pittakia) to the metropolitan of Chalcedon, the metropolitan of Tranoupolis Damaskinos, and the Grand Protopresbyter George Tssetsis No. Prot. 217 and dated April 12, 1976: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

<sup>26</sup> Bishop Ilia of Sukhumi was promoted to metropolitan on May 17, 1969.

be a subject of the Council. Consequently, he advocated for limiting the topics on the agenda.<sup>27</sup>

Based on the positive outcomes of metropolitan of Chalcedon's contacts, Ecumenical Patriarch Demetrios convened the First Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference at the Patriarchal Center in Chambésy from November 21 to 30, 1976.<sup>28</sup> The Church of Georgia expressed its joy and declared its participation in it. At the same time, it requested some clarifications and asked for the relevant materials to be sent, as it wished to prepare in advance.<sup>29</sup> However, due to delays in sending information regarding the conference date and the dispatch of the official invitation, the Georgian delegation was unable to travel to Geneva.<sup>30</sup> During the First Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference, the Orthodox Churches took on one or more issues for examination. However, the Church of Georgia, to which the Secretariat submitted the conference proceedings and repeatedly requested to declare which topics it would undertake, did not undertake any work for examination.

Due to delays in the processing of topics by the Churches that had undertaken them, the Ecumenical Patriarchate appointed metropolitan Damaskinos of Switzerland (1936-2011) to visit the autocephalous and autonomous Orthodox Churches after

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<sup>27</sup> Report of metropolitan Meliton of Chalcedon No. Prot. 678 and dated October 11, 1976: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

<sup>28</sup> Telegram from Ecumenical Patriarch Demetrios to the primates of the Orthodox Churches without Prot. Number and dated October 14, 1976: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

<sup>29</sup> Telegram - Response of the Catholicos of Georgia, without Prot. Number and dated October 30, 1976: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

<sup>30</sup> Response of the Catholicos of Georgia to the Ecumenical Patriarch without Prot. Number and dated November 15, 1976: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

Easter of 1985.<sup>31</sup> Metropolitan of Switzerland visited the Church of Georgia immediately after visiting the Church of Russia, accompanied by the Archon of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Petros Perdikis.<sup>32</sup>

The three-day stay of the Patriarchal Delegation included four main opportunities for contacts and discussions:

1. On the afternoon of June 12<sup>th</sup> at the birthplace of Catholicos Ilia of Georgia, where a luncheon was held, providing the first opportunity for an exchange of thoughts and views. At the luncheon, Patriarch Nicholas of Alexandria (1915-1986), who was visiting Georgia at that time, was present along with metropolitan Ioakeim of Leontopolis (1924-1987), bishop Titus of Tamiathis (1931-2000), later metropolitan of Khartoum, and metropolitan Sergios of Odessa (1924-1990).

At his toast 'for the health of the Ecumenical Patriarch and the Church of Constantinople', Catholicos Ilia of Georgia initially referred to the consciousness of the Church of Georgia and its community regarding the position held by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in the Orthodox Church. He fondly recalled his visit to the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which contributed to the advancement of relations between the two Churches and

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<sup>31</sup> Patriarchal Letters to Metropolitan Damaskinos of Switzerland No. Prot. 274 and dated April 8, 1985: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Patriarchal Letters to the primates of the Orthodox Churches No. Prot. 274 and dated April 8, 1985: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Patriarchal Letters to metropolitan Damaskinos of Switzerland No. Prot. 274 and dated April 10, 1985: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Patriarchal Letters to metropolitan Damaskinos of Switzerland No. Prot. 729 and dated October 17, 1985: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Patriarchal Letters to metropolitan Damaskinos of Switzerland No. Prot. 770 and dated October 25, 1985: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

<sup>32</sup> A warm reception was accorded to the representative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Tbilisi.

specifically praised the Ecumenical Patriarch as a 'man of holiness and prayer'. Subsequently, he proposed a toast 'for the health of the patriarchal representative, his 'friend and brother' as he noted, whom he particularly described as a 'bridge' between the Churches. 'This bridge,' he explained, 'is a great cross, and the Lord who grants and allows this cross simultaneously provides the strength to lift it and overcome its difficulties.' Furthermore, Catholicos Ilia of Georgia made a toast for Patriarch Nicholas of Alexandria and the representative of the Church of Russia. From his side, the metropolitan of Switzerland conveyed the warm fraternal greetings of the Ecumenical Patriarch and the Church of Constantinople and thanked Catholicos Ilia, expressing his profound emotion for the manifestation of fraternal feelings. He also noted that it was indeed a blessed opportunity for the representatives of four Churches to meet in the hospitable place of Catholicos Ilia's birthplace and discussed the purpose of his mission, analyzing the issues concerning that pre-conciliar period.

2. In the afternoon of the same day, at the official reception hosted by Catholicos Ilia of Georgia in honor of the patriarchal representative, attended by metropolitan David of Sukhumi (1926-1992), head of the Department of External Relations, and metropolitan Gregory of Alaverdi (1910-1991), bishops Vakhtang of Chkondidi and Ambrose of Nikortsminda (1942-2008), father Elisbar Oniani, and Boris Gania, secretary of the Department of External Relations. During this event, Catholicos Ilia discussed the position of the Church of Georgia in the Diptychs, which he supported based on the antiquity and spirituality of his Church and also on the recognition of its independence and patriarchal stature by the contemporary autocephalous Churches.

3. At the meeting held on June 13<sup>th</sup> with the head of the Department of External Relations, metropolitan David of Sukhumi, during which the metropolitan of Switzerland provided informational updates on the preparatory work for the

Council. During this meeting, metropolitan David expressed the full willingness of the Church of Georgia to actively participate in the preparatory work for the Council and requested for technical reasons that invitations to various meetings be sent early.

4. At the luncheon held on the same day at the resort of the Catholicos of Georgia, near the Tbilisi airport, which was also attended by the Patriarch of Alexandria. At this event, the metropolitan of Switzerland summarized the pending issues and discussed the next preparatory bodies.<sup>33</sup>

In 1988, prior to the convening of the Third Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Committee and the Fourth Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference, the Ecumenical Patriarchate decided to send a patriarchal delegation to the Orthodox Churches, consisting of metropolitan Chrysostomos of Myra (1921-2006), metropolitan Damaskinos of Switzerland, and archimandrite Meliton Karas, now Metropolitan of Philadelphia, following existing precedents. In the Patriarchal Letters numbered Prot. 52 dated March 16<sup>th</sup>, the purpose of this mission was set to mutually inform about the preparatory issues of the Council and to find common points, in order to avoid undesirable issues that could detrimentally affect the unity of Orthodoxy.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Report of Metropolitan Damaskinos of Switzerland No. Prot. 729 and dated September 20, 1985: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

<sup>34</sup> Patriarchal Letters (Pittakia) for metropolitan Chrysostomos of Myra No. Prot. 52 and dated January 25, 1988: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Patriarchal Letters (Pittakia) for metropolitan Damaskinos of Switzerland No. Prot. 52 and dated January 25, 1988: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Patriarchal Letters (Pittakia) for archimandrite Meliton Karas, Chief Secretary of the Holy and Sacred Synod, No. Prot. 52 and dated January 25, 1988: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Telegram from Ecumenical Patriarch Demetrios to metropolitan Damaskinos of Switzerland No. Prot. 727 and dated March 1, 1988: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Patriarchal Letters to the primates of the Orthodox Churches No. Prot. 52 and dated

The patriarchal delegation visited the Church of Georgia from April 27 to 29, 1988.<sup>35</sup> The discussions took place in Tbilisi under the presidency of the Catholicos of Georgia, in the presence of members of the Holy Synod and a government representative, who had been invited specifically for this purpose. Regarding the substance of the issues, the Catholicos of Georgia noted that the Church of Georgia was studying the documents from other Churches that had been sent by the Secretariat for the preparation of the Holy and Great Council, but had not yet reached definitive positions or conclusions. Nevertheless, after hearing the head of the patriarchal delegation, the Catholicos of Georgia stated that the Church of Georgia agreed with the Ecumenical Patriarchate on the issue of the Diaspora as well as more broadly. The discussion then shifted to the well-known issue of autocephalon, patriarchal status, and the Church of Georgia's position in the Diptychs.<sup>36</sup>

In 1994, metropolitan Damaskinos of Switzerland visited the Church of Georgia once again to inform it about the outcomes and prospects of the Theological Dialogue with the Ancient Oriental Churches. At the same time, on the occasion of presenting the volume of the proceedings of the Fourth Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Committee (1993), he also discussed important issues concerning the process and content of the preparation for the Holy and Great Council. During his reception of the patriarchal representative, the Patriarch of Georgia delivered cordial remarks regarding metropolitan Damaskinos' person and ministry at the Orthodox Center, highlighting his contribution to the Ecumenical Patriarchate's resolution of 'two

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March 16, 1988: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

<sup>35</sup> Memorandum No. 20 and dated March 7, 1988: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

<sup>36</sup> Report of the Patriarchal Delegation No. Prot. 63 and dated January 19, 1989: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

of the three major issues of the Church of Georgia,<sup>37</sup> namely, its autocephaly and patriarchal status. He also expressed hope for the resolution of the third major issue—the Church of Georgia's position in the Diptychs. For his part, metropolitan Damaskinos referred to the indissoluble historical and spiritual ties between the Mother Church and the Church of Georgia and to the Ecumenical Throne's maternal care 'throughout all periods of its historical life.' During discussions with bishop David of Alaverdi, head of the Department of Inter-Orthodox Relations of the Patriarchate of Georgia, the issue of convening the next Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Committee was addressed, particularly regarding the participation of the Church of Georgia. Bishop David described the various financial and other difficulties faced by the Church of Georgia, which had prevented it from sending a delegation to the Inter-Orthodox Committee in 1993. Metropolitan Damaskinos, in turn, systematically briefed the Georgian side on the work of the last two sessions (1990, 1993) of the Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Committee concerning the issues of the Orthodox Diaspora and Autocephalon. In a second meeting on July 14, he provided a summary briefing to Patriarch Ilia in the presence of the Synodal hierarchs, outlining the mission of the upcoming Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Committee. The Patriarch of Georgia expressed his satisfaction with the progress of the preparatory work and emphasized that the Church of Georgia would always stand by the Ecumenical Patriarchate on all inter-Orthodox and inter-Church issues.<sup>37</sup> In 1997, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, once again aiming to advance the convening of the Council, decided to send

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<sup>37</sup> Report of metropolitan Damaskinos of Switzerland No. Prot. 1085 and dated August 5, 1994: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Report of Metropolitan Damaskinos of Switzerland No. Prot. 1625 and dated December 14, 1994: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

metropolitan Damaskinos of Switzerland to the Orthodox Churches for the fourth time to ascertain their positions regarding: 1. the continuation of the processes for convening the Fifth Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Committee, 2. the prospect of convening the Council in light of the Jubilee of 2000, 3. the issue of a common celebration of Easter by all Christians, based on the findings of the Symposium held in Aleppo.<sup>38</sup> The hierarch of the Ecumenical Throne visited the Church of Georgia from October 6 to 8. At Tbilisi Airport, he was cordially received by archbishop Abraham of Sagarejo, President of the Synodal Committee for External Relations of the Church of Georgia and Rector of the Theological Academy and Ecclesiastical Seminary of Tbilisi.

The meeting with the Patriarch of Georgia took place at the headquarters of the Georgian Patriarchate on the morning of October 7 and continued during a working luncheon. Representing the Church of Georgia at the meeting were archbishop Abraham of Sagarejo and bishops Nicholas of Akhaltsikhe and Dimitrios of Batumi. During the meeting, metropolitan Damaskinos of Switzerland provided a detailed presentation on the preparation of the Holy and Great Council. Additionally, he presented the Catholicos of Georgia with the relevant report from the Secretariat regarding the converging and diverging views expressed by the contributions of the various local Orthodox Churches on the last four documents of the agenda. The discussions were conducted in a constructive manner, both in terms of clarifying and further analyzing the decisions of the Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Committee (1990, 1993) and in relation to the remaining agenda items, particularly

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<sup>38</sup> Patriarchal Letters to metropolitan Damaskinos of Switzerland No. Prot. 329 and dated April 23, 1997: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

the completion of discussions on the signing of the Patriarchal Tomos for the proclamation of Autocephalon.<sup>39</sup>

Overall, the meetings of metropolitan Damaskinos of Switzerland with the heads of the Orthodox Churches were highly constructive. The convening of the Holy and Great Council at the turn of the millennium was assessed as an 'event of exceptional and timeless significance' and was unanimously regarded as a shared aspiration and common hope among all the local Orthodox Churches.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, significant divergences were identified on certain issues, and a pan-Orthodox pre-agreement was not achieved, a development that could potentially pose serious challenges to the unity of Orthodoxy.<sup>41</sup> Among other disagreements, no consensus was reached regarding the issue of the Diptychs. However, concerning the ranking of the Church of Georgia, there was broad agreement among the local Orthodox Churches that it should be assigned the sixth position, immediately after the Church of Russia. Additionally, some Churches proposed that the Church of Georgia be ranked ahead of the Church of Russia. These proposals were not dismissed by metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk, now Patriarch of Moscow, but neither were they

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<sup>39</sup> Report of metropolitan Damaskinos of Switzerland to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew No. Prot. 1149 and dated November 5, 1997: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

<sup>40</sup> Report of metropolitan Damaskinos of Switzerland to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew No. Prot. 1005 and dated September 29, 1997: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Report of metropolitan Damaskinos of Switzerland to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew No. Prot. 67 and dated January 9, 1998: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

<sup>41</sup> Report of Metropolitan Damaskinos of Switzerland to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew No. Prot. 68 and dated January 9, 1998: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

formally adopted as claims by Patriarch Ilia of Georgia, 'out of oikonomia' (economy of the Church).<sup>42</sup>

### **3 The Church of Georgia in the Final Stage of the Convening of the Holy and Great Council**

In 2011, the Ecumenical Patriarchate convened the Sixth Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Committee to examine the issue of Autocephalon at a third level and the issue of the Diptychs at a first level. The Church of Georgia sent as a member of its delegation metropolitan Gerasimos of Zugdidi and Tsaishi, along with bishop Theodore of Akhaltsikhe and protopresbyter George Zviadadze as advisors. Regarding the issue of the Diptychs, the Committee unanimously expressed the view that it was imperative to establish unified Diptychs in the Orthodox Church in the future, as a true expression of its unity. Furthermore, the Committee outlined the criteria for the inscription and ranking of a Church in the Diptychs. Within this framework, the Committee examined the request of the Church of Georgia for its elevation to the sixth position in the Diptychs of all Churches.<sup>43</sup> Unfortunately, the outcomes of the proceedings of the Sixth Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Committee did not inspire optimism regarding the future of the pre-conciliar process. In an effort to overcome the impasse, the Ecumenical Patriarchate proposed that the Holy and Great Council be convened with a limited agenda, namely the eight documents that had already been prepared, along with the addition of a Message of broader

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<sup>42</sup> Report of metropolitan Damaskinos of Switzerland to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew No. Prot. 1149 and dated November 5, 1997: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

<sup>43</sup> Announcement of the Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Committee, Chambésy, February 21-26, 2011: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

content addressing contemporary issues of concern to modern society.<sup>44</sup> In response, the Church of Georgia, in its Patriarchal Letters numbered Prot. 329 and dated April 16, 2011, deemed it necessary that all documents on the agenda be fully prepared before the convening of the Holy and Great Council. Patriarch Ilia specifically argued that the Pre-Conciliar Conferences should be extended to ensure that 'final agreements are reached on all issues.' He stated: 'As is well known, the Ecumenical Councils were convened to protect the Church from various heresies and schisms. At the same time, the Ecumenical Councils served as a testimony to the unity and love of the Church before the world. This demonstration of the unity and love of the Orthodox Churches holds particular significance in the modern world. For this reason, we must convene the Council only after the preparatory work on the major documents, such as the Diptychs and the granting of Autocephalon and Autonomy, has been completed.'<sup>45</sup>

Under these circumstances, the Ecumenical Patriarchate saw the convocation of a Synaxis of Primates as the only viable solution to guide the Orthodox Church towards the Holy and Great Council, as its 'authority' would either resolve or overcome all obstacles.<sup>46</sup> This Synaxis took place in Constantinople from March 6 to 9, 2014, and is considered a milestone in the process of convening a Council of the Orthodox Churches. During this meeting, it was decided that the Holy and Great Council would be

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<sup>44</sup> Patriarchal Letters to the Primates of the Orthodox Churches No. Prot. 329 and dated April 16, 2011: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

<sup>45</sup> Response of the Patriarch of Georgia to the Patriarchal Letters No. Prot. 329 and dated April 16, 2011, Patriarchal Letters, No. Prot. 54 and dated August 10, 2012: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

<sup>46</sup> Session of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, dated September 27, 2012: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

held, following an invitation from the Ecumenical Patriarch, two years later.

Nevertheless, on September 30, 2015, the Patriarch of Georgia submitted in writing a series of issues that effectively called for the entire preparatory process of the Council to restart from the beginning—an impossible task given the minimal time remaining.<sup>47</sup> Prior to this, a similar letter had been sent by the Patriarch of Moscow,<sup>48</sup> which was lengthy and highly structured, both in terms of its arguments and the prerequisites it set for the continuation of the pan-Orthodox process toward the convening of the Holy and Great Council. The letter from the Patriarch of Georgia followed the same framework but lacked specific arguments. In general, it merely reiterated the same requests, albeit in a different order and with certain modifications and additions of new issues. Besides raising concerns about the issue of Qatar, the recognition of the primate of the Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia, the principle of unanimity in decision-making, and the unresolved agenda items, the Patriarch of Georgia additionally put forth: a) The issue of Orthodox ecclesiology, specifically the necessity for the Holy and Great Council to affirm that only the Orthodox Church is the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, along with an explicit declaration regarding the impossibility of any division in the ontological nature and unity of the Church. b) The necessity of highlighting the Orthodox Church's teachings on the sanctity of the family and defining its positions on contemporary bioethical issues.

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<sup>47</sup> Letter of the Patriarch of Georgia to the Ecumenical Patriarch No. Prot. 107 and dated September 30, 2015: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

<sup>48</sup> Letter of Patriarch Kirill of Moscow to the Ecumenical Patriarch without Prot. Number and dated March 6, 2015: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Letter of Patriarch Kirill of Moscow to the Ecumenical Patriarch No. Prot. 5235 and dated September 14, 2015: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

Furthermore, the Patriarch of Georgia maintained that the documents concerning the agenda topics should be published well in advance to allow the Church's faithful sufficient time to study them and express their opinions, thereby preventing rumors and unrest among the flock. Nevertheless, despite these objections, which in essence constituted obstacles to the process, the head of the Church of Georgia ultimately emphasized: 'All problems will be overcome, and the Holy and Great Council will be conducted "with dignity".'<sup>49</sup>

The Ecumenical Patriarch responded to the Patriarch of Georgia on all the issues raised as follows:

1. Regarding the relations between the Churches of Antioch and Jerusalem, Patriarch Bartholomew noted that the Ecumenical Patriarchate was making efforts to achieve a positive resolution to the issue concerning Qatar. Furthermore, he clarified that, regardless of this matter, the continued participation of the Churches of Antioch and Jerusalem in the proceedings of: the Special Inter-Orthodox Committee, the Synaxis of Primates, and the Holy and Great Council 'remains a duty.'
2. Regarding the situation in the Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia, the Ecumenical Patriarch stated that the recognition of metropolitan Rastislav as the primate of the Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia was under review, and the relevant dossier was being evaluated to ensure a canonical resolution of the matter. At the same time, he expressed the hope that these efforts would be successful, restoring canonical order and thereby enabling this Church to participate in the designated preparatory stages.

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<sup>49</sup> Letter of the Patriarch of Georgia to the Ecumenical Patriarch No. Prot. 107 and dated September 30, 2015: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

3. Regarding the principle of unanimity in decision-making in relation to the participation of all Orthodox Churches in the Holy and Great Council, the Ecumenical Patriarch observed that the decision of the 2014 Synaxis was clear: 'All decisions, both of the Council and of the preparatory bodies, are made by consensus,' without specifying the undesirable scenario of a Church's non-participation or clarifying the meaning of unanimity 'in the event of the absence of a Church for any reason.' Consequently, the principle of unanimity applied only to the Churches that were present, not to those that were absent, since a Church that is absent has neither a voice nor a vote. Therefore, Patriarch Bartholomew stated that 'the absence of an Autocephalous Church from the pre-conciliar and conciliar proceedings does not pose a problem for the implementation of the established principle of unanimity, although the participation of all Churches is certainly desirable and preferable.'
4. Regarding the examination of the issues of "Autocephalon" and the "Diptychs", the Ecumenical Patriarch recalled the existing pan-Orthodox agreement to convene the Council with a limited agenda. "Certainly," he added, "during the 2014 Synaxis, it was deemed 'desirable' to further discuss these issues through an Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Committee; however, given the limited time and, more importantly, the existing differences, it was not permissible for the Ecumenical Patriarch—bearing the responsibility of safeguarding pan-Orthodox unity—to risk the agreed-upon convocation of the Council by initiating a new process, which would be uncertain or even counterproductive."
5. Regarding the issue of the "Diaspora", Patriarch Bartholomew made it clear that the study and elaboration of this matter were "concluded." Therefore, the Holy and Great Council would make a final decision on the matter, "as

modifications to a recently drafted text were not permissible due to pan-Orthodox commitments."

6. Regarding the issues of: "Common Calendar," "The Sacrament of Marriage and its Impediments," and "The Importance of Fasting and Its Observance Today," the Ecumenical Patriarch reminded that the Synaxis of Primates had decided on the "review" of the "adopted documents," "if necessary." However, strong disagreements arose regarding the extent of the Committee's authority, as some Churches sought to revise documents that had already been unanimously approved. Specifically, concerning "Marriage Impediments," he clarified that the issue referred to impediments affecting the sacramental celebration of marriage and not contemporary challenges related to the institution of the family. The Ecumenical Patriarchate, however, acknowledged the concerns raised and proposed that the Orthodox Church's teaching on "the sanctity of the family" and "contemporary bioethical issues" be included in the Message of the Holy and Great Council, which would have a broader impact.
7. Regarding the issue of Orthodox ecclesiology, the Ecumenical Patriarch stated unequivocally and categorically that the drafted texts fully expressed the faith, ethos, and mindset of the Creed, in which the entire mystery of the Church is contained.
8. Regarding the publication of the documents, the Ecumenical Patriarch informed the Patriarch of Georgia that he had no objection to the publication of the pan-Orthodox-approved documents. However, he simultaneously questioned whether this action might lead to the expression of diverse opinions, potentially causing division among the faithful.

Such a development, he noted, could delay the convocation of the Council, which needed to assess all relevant factors.<sup>50</sup> In light of the emerging obstacles, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew decided to convene a new Synaxis of Primates from January 21 to 27, 2016, at the Orthodox Center of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Chambésy, Geneva, in which Patriarch Ilia of Georgia personally participated. The sixth and most recent Synaxis of Primates confirmed the previous decision to convene the Holy and Great Council from June 18 to 27 at the Orthodox Academy of Crete. For this purpose, the Primates invoked the grace and blessing of the God and requested the prayers of the Church's faithful.<sup>51</sup>

## Conclusions

In February 2016, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew announced to the Orthodox Churches the completion of the pan-Orthodox-approved pre-conciliar preparations. In his capacity as president of the Council, he invited the heads of the Orthodox Churches to participate in its proceedings, with a maximum of

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<sup>50</sup> Response of the Ecumenical Patriarch to the Letter of the Patriarch of Georgia No. Prot. 107 and dated September 30, 2015, No. Prot. 1190 and dated December 14, 2015: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Response of the Ecumenical Patriarch to the letter of the Patriarch of Bulgaria No. Prot. 795 and dated October 9, 2015, No. Prot. 1189 and dated December 14, 2015: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Response of the Ecumenical Patriarch to the Letter of the Patriarch of Moscow No. Prot. 5235 and dated September 14, 2015, No. Prot. 1189 and dated December 14, 2015: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

<sup>51</sup> Announcement of the Chief Secretariat of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, dated January 27, 2016: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Announcement of the Holy Synaxis of the primates dated January 27, 2016: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

twenty-four hierarchs, and to appoint their representatives to the Pan-Orthodox Secretariat and the special Inter-Orthodox Committee for drafting the Message.<sup>52</sup> Immediately, the Church of Georgia appointed metropolitan Andrew of Gori to the Pan-Orthodox Secretariat and protopresbyter George Zviadadze to the Inter-Orthodox Committee for the Message.<sup>53</sup> At the same time, the Patriarch of Georgia expressed his conviction that 'through the common prayers and efforts of the Most Holy Church of Constantinople together with all the Most Holy Churches, the Holy and Great Council will be conducted with dignity'.<sup>54</sup>

Furthermore, on May 25, 2016, the Holy Synod of the Church of Georgia convened. Although it did not accept either of the two alternative proposals of the Ecumenical Patriarchate regarding the conciliar document *The Sacrament of Marriage and its Impediments*, it appointed its delegation to the Holy and Great Council without raising any objections or proposing a postponement of the Council's convocation. Consequently, it did not present this issue as a reason for not convening the Council. However, on June 10, the Holy Synod of the Church of Georgia reviewed the 'existing problems' and requested the postponement of the Council, including the aforementioned issue among the reasons for which it urged the Ecumenical Patriarch to defer the Council's convocation. In his letter to the Ecumenical Patriarch, Patriarch Ilia noted that this decision 'primarily stems from the desire' of the Church of Georgia to

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<sup>52</sup> Patriarchal Letters No. Prot. 142 and dated February 2, 2016: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

<sup>53</sup> Response of the Patriarch of Georgia to the Patriarchal Letters No. Prot. 142 and dated February 2, 2016, Response No. Prot. 24, dated February 23, 2016: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

prevent 'even in part, the exacerbation of problems related to various emerging issues within the Church.'<sup>55</sup>

In this context, the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate convened in an extraordinary session on Monday, June 6, 2016, and 'with surprise and astonishment' was informed of the positions and views expressed by certain Orthodox Churches. After evaluating them, it determined that there was no institutional framework for revising 'the already initiated conciliar process,' especially just a few days before the scheduled and officially announced commencement of the Holy and Great Council's proceedings.<sup>56</sup>

In conclusion, the convocation of the Holy and Great Council, nearly a century after the first related efforts, was undoubtedly the most significant ecclesiastical event of recent centuries. For the first time in a millennium, representatives of the various Autocephalous Orthodox Churches convened, engaged in discussions, and collectively made decisions, following decades of accumulated internal challenges that directly affected the visible unity of Orthodoxy. Undeniably, the Church of Georgia played a crucial role in the great success of both the convocation and the remarkable completion of this truly extraordinary and complex endeavor that was the Holy and Great Council. Throughout the entire period of preparation, the Church of Georgia participated in the conciliar function of a hierarchically structured Orthodox body and found a sacred place where its voice was transformed into a responsible inter-Orthodox dialogue. From the time of the First Pan-Orthodox Conference onward, the Church of Georgia sought the recognition of its

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<sup>55</sup> Letter of the Patriarch of Georgia to the Ecumenical Patriarch No. Prot. 79 and dated June 13, 2016: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

<sup>56</sup> Announcement of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate dated June 6, 2016: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

autocephalon and patriarchal status. However, adhering to the framework set by the sacred canons, it awaited the examination of the matter by the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which, in 1990, granted it autocephalon status and conferred upon it patriarchal rank and honor.

The Church of Georgia appeared to maintain an ambivalent stance, as on the one hand, it unequivocally stated that the convocation of the Holy and Great Council was necessary, while on the other, it directly linked the successful completion of the preparatory process to the resolution of issues of minor significance. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that since 1961, the Church of Georgia has responded positively to all invitations from the Ecumenical Patriarchate and has participated constructively in all preparatory bodies of the Holy and Great Council. This is particularly significant given that the Georgian Primates, from Catholicos David of Georgia to the current Patriarch Ilia—who is, in fact, the longest-serving participant in the preparatory bodies, having first taken part in the Third Pan-Orthodox Conference in 1964 as bishop of Batumi—have demonstrated a strong conciliar spirit and actively worked toward the unity of the Orthodox Church.

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61. Response of the Patriarch of Georgia to the Patriarchal Letters No. Prot. 329 and dated April 16, 2011, Patriarchal Letters, No. Prot. 54 and dated August 10, 2012: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.
62. Response of the Patriarch of Georgia to the Patriarchal Letters No. Prot. 142 and dated February 2, 2016, Response No. Prot. 24, dated February 23, 2016: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.
63. Telegram - Response of the Catholicos of Georgia, without Prot. Number and dated October 30, 1976: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.
64. Telegram from Catholicos Ephraim of Georgia to the Ecumenical Patriarch dated June 6, 1968: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.
65. Telegram from Ecumenical Patriarch Demetrios to metropolitan Damaskinos of Switzerland No. Prot. 727 and dated March 1, 1988: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.
66. Telegram from Ecumenical Patriarch Demetrios to the primates of the Orthodox Churches without Prot. Number and dated October 14, 1976: Archive of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.