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# A CANONICAL AND THEOLOGICAL RECONSIDERATION OF THE DOCUMENT "THE IMPORTANCE OF FASTING AND ITS OBSERVANCE TODAY" OF THE HOLY AND GREAT COUNCIL OF CRETE

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**ABSTRACT.** In this paper I tried to examine the first four paragraphs of the document "The Importance of Fasting and Its Observance Today" of the Holy and Great Council of Crete (2016) from canonical and theological point of view by taking into consideration its development, the pre-conciliar debates, and its final form. Having in mind this vast period of time needed for the final form of the text of the Holy and Great Council, we can assert the total victory of the theologians and circles with conservative theological visions, because the idea of changing and adapting fasting periods to current social circumstances was totally removed from the inter-Orthodox debate. The official document of the Holy and Great Council is an attempt of theological argumentation of the practice of fasting, highlighting, with several biblical and patristic quotations, the general importance of the institution of fasting, but without any practical clarification. The text contains more than 26 biblical, patristic and liturgical quotations. Almost 40% of the text of the document is represented by quotes and different references, showing a lack of originality and actuality. Despite that, the documents emphasizes that fasting in the Orthodox Church has many dimensions: *historical-theological* (fasting as divine commandment given in Paradise); *ascetic-spiritual* (fasting as great spiritual endeavor and the foremost expression of the Orthodox ascetic ideal); *canonical* (the foundation of fasting are the apostolic precepts, the synodal canons, and the patristic tradition as a whole); *soteriological* (the great significance of fasting for our spiritual life and salvation); and *liturgical* (fasting is according to the liturgical Tradition of the Orthodox Church, culminating with the Holy Eucharist).

**Keywords***:* Holy and Great Council, Fasting, Canon Law, canons, Tradition, postmodern society

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## The importance of fasting for the Orthodox Church. From the pre-conciliar draft Documents to the Holy and Great Council of Crete (2016)

The theological importance of fasting was debated for the first time in a pre-conciliar inter-Orthodox or pan-Orthodox meeting at the so-called Pan-Orthodox Congress[1], that met in Constantinople[2] from May 10th to June 8th, 1923, under the chairmanship of the Ecumenical Patriarch Meletios (Metaxakis) IV (1921-1923) [3], a very controversial person.

[1] On February 3rd, 1923, The Ecumenical Patriarch Meletios Metaxakis sent an invitation letter to the Autocephalous Orthodox Churches of Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, Serbia, Cyprus, Greece, and Romania in order to convene the Pan-Orthodox Congress at Constantinople in the same year. For this letter, see Anastasios Kallis, *Auf dem Weg zu einem Heiligen und Großen Konzil: ein Quellen- und Arbeitsbuch zur orthodoxen Ekklesiologie*, (Münster: Theophano-Verlag, 2013), 101-102. The participants in this Congress were, *from the Ecumenical Patriarchate*: Meletios IV, Ecumenical Patriarch, Basil of Cyzec, Basil Antoniadis (Professor of Theology), archimandrite Germanos (Congress Secretary); *from the Russian Orthodox Church*: Anastasius of Kishinev and Chotin, Alexander of North America; *from the Church of Serbia*: Metropolitan Gavrilo of Montenegro and Parathalassia, Milutin Milanković (Professor of Mathematics and Mechanics at the University of Belgrade); *from the Church of Cyprus*, Bishop Basil of Nicaea; *from the Greek Orthodox Church*: Bishop Jacob of Dyrrachion*; from the Romanian Orthodox Church*, archimandrite Iuliu Scriban and Senator Petre Drăghici. A. Kallis, *Auf dem Weg zu einem Heiligen und Großen Konzil*, 102-103.

[2] The acts and decisions of the 1923 Pan-Orthodox Congress were published during the same year in *Πρακτικά καὶ Ἀποφάσεις τοῦ ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει Πανορθοδόξου Συνεδρίου (10 Μαΐου - 8 Ἰουνίου 1923)*, (Ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει: ἐκ τοῦ Πατριαρχικοῦ Τυπογραφείου, 1923). This Congress did not enjoy a vast reception, and its decisions were contested in the Orthodox Church, especially by those who opposed the reformation of the Orthodox calendar. The English translation was published just in 2006 by Patrick Viscuso, *A Quest For Reform of the Orthodox Church: The 1923 Pan-Orthodox Congress, An Analysis and Translation of Its Acts and Decisions*, (Berkeley, Calif: InterOrthodox Press, 2006). For a review of this book, see John A Jillions, "Review essay: A quest for reform in the Orthodox Church; the 1923 Pan-Orthodox Congress," *Studia Canonica* 41, no. 2 (2007): 507-514.

[3] For a very critical overview of the context and debates of the 1923 Pan-Orthodox Congress of Constantinople and its subsequent reception, see Photii Bishop of Triaditza, "The 70th Anniversary of the Pan-Orthodox Congress in Constantinople: A Major Step on the Path Towards Apostasy," *Orthodox Life* 44, no. 2 (March 1994): 36-48. The author considers this Congress to be responsible for all the failures of the Orthodox Church in the 20th century, including the "heresy of ecumenism," the reform of the calendar, and the apostasy of the Church. For a more balanced introduction, see Demetrios Constantelos, "Preface," in P. Viscuso, *A Quest For Reform of the Orthodox Church*, IX-XII; Anne Jensen, *Die Zukunft der Orthodoxie: Konzilspläne und Kirchenstrukturen* (Zürich: Benziger, 1986), 25-26.



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In the final decision of the Congress issued on June 5th, 1923, signed by the members of the delegations of the Orthodox Autocephalous Churches[4], in Chapter V.8 was stated:

> "Regarding the question of fasting, each Church authority is able to be guided by the sixty-ninth Apostolic Canon which prescribes, 'If any bishop of presbyter or deacon or subdeacon or reader or chanter does not fast during Forty Days of Pascha, or Wednesday or Friday, let him be defrocked except if he were prevented on account of bodily illness, but if a layman let him be excommunicated.' On account of individual needs for occasional economy let Balsamon's commentary on the same canon be used as a guide, which states: 'Note from the present canon that there is primarily one fast, the forty days, that of Pascha. For if there were others, the canon would have also made mention of them. Except during other Lents, i.e., of the Holy Apostles, Theotokos, and Birth of Christ, when fasting we are not ashamed.'"[5]

As it can be seen from Balsamon's commentary on this canon[6], the Byzantine canonist is very strict regarding the application of Church economy and the length of the fasting periods. But the strict application of the letter of the 69th Apostolic Canon in the current pastoral context would lead to the defrocking and excommunication of many members of the Orthodox Churches, clergy and laymen as well.

Regarding fasting, the decision of the 1923 Pan-Orthodox Congress highlights two important aspects: the regulation of fasting periods and the practice of fasting are established by the Autocephalous Orthodox Churches and the principles of *oikonomia* and *akribeia* must be used for the practice of fasting in each local Church, so that, by using *oikonomia,* fasting will not be legally and ritually imposed on the faithful, and by using *akribeia*, the practice of fasting will not be disregarded and abolished in the Orthodox Church. As we will see further, these two ideas will also be found in the final document of the Holy and Great Council of Crete (2016).

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[4] The document was signed by: The Ecumenical Patriarch Meletios Metaxakis, Bishop Kalinic of Kyzic, Archbishop Alexander Nemolovskii of North America, Metropolitan Gavrilo of Montenegro and Parathalassia, Bishop Basil of Nicaea, Bishop Jacob of Dyrrachion, archimandrite Iuliu Scriban, B. Antoniadis, M. Milanković, archimandrite Gherman. P. Viscuso, *A Quest For Reform of the Orthodox Church*, 193.

[5] P. Viscuso, *A Quest For Reform of the Orthodox Church*, 193; Viorel Ioniță, *Hotărârile întrunirilor panortodoxe din 1923 până în 2009: spre Sfântul și Marele Sinod al Bisericii Ortodoxe*, (București: Basilica, 2013), 143; A. Kallis, *Auf dem Weg zu einem Heiligen und Großen Konzil*, 109-110.

[6] Georgios A. Rhalles, Michael Potles (eds.), *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱερῶν κανόνων*, volume 2, (Atena, 1852), 88-89.



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On July 8th, 1926, the Romanian Orthodox Church sent to the Ecumenical Patriarchate a list of nine themes that could represent the main subjects on the agenda of a future Pan-Orthodox Council. The fifth theme in this list was: "A re-evaluation of fasting according to the climate, hygiene of the human organism and their moral influence on the soul."[7] At the Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission gathered in 1930 at the Monastery of Vatopedi on Mount Athos, under the presidency of the Ecumenical Patriarch Photius II and with the participation of all Orthodox Autocephalous Churches, except Russia, Bulgaria and Albania, the latter not being invited at all, the theme of fasting was proposed for further debate by the delegations of the Patriarchates of Alexandria and Jerusalem[8].

At the First Congress of Orthodox Theology in Athens, that met from November 29th to December 6th, 1936, the theme of fasting was debated only partially, being mentioned and discussed in some papers[9].

The theme of fasting was retaken into consideration only at the first Pan-Orthodox Conference[10], that met in Rhodes, from September 24th to October 1st, 1961, where a long list of topics, classified according to eight categories was adopted[11]. In the third group, called "Administration and Church Order," the fifth subject was entitled: "The adaptation of the rules of fasting to contemporary conditions."[12]

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[7] Fr. Gheorghe Soare, "De la Vatopedi la Rhodos (From Vatopedi to Rhodos)," *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* LXXIX, no. 9-10 (1961): 844.

[8] A. Kallis, *Auf dem Weg zu einem Heiligen und Großen Konzil*, 127-128.

[9] Hamilkar Alivisatos, "Wie verständigen sich die verschiedenen orthodoxen Kirchen über allgemeine und eilige fragen (Kalenderreform, Ehe der Geistlichen, fasten etc.) im Falle eines Aufschubs des ökumenischen Konzils?," in *Procès-verbaux du Premier Congrès de Théologie Orthodoxe: à Athènes; 29 Novembre – 6 Décembre 1936*, ed. Hamilkar Alivisatos (Athènes: Pyrsos, 1939), 297-298. For further discussion, see Veniamin Goreanu, "The Settlement of Canonic Tradition in the Document "The Importance of Fasting and Its Observance Today," *Studia Universitatis Babes-Bolyai Theologia Orthodoxa*, 62, no. 1 (27 june 2017): 89-91.

[10] A. Jensen, *Die Zukunft der Orthodoxie*, 28-31; Fr. Liviu Stan, "Soborul panortodox de la Rhodos," *Mitropolia Olteniei*, no. 10-12 (1961): 732-733; Gr. Marcu, "Expunerea Prea Sfinţitului Episcop Dr. Nicolae Corneanu al Aradului despre Conferinţa de la Rhodos," *Mitropolia Ardealului*, no. 11-12 (1961): 841; Nicolae Chiţescu, "Note şi impresii de la Conferinţa Panortodoxă de la Rhodos," *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, no. 9-10 (1961): 887.

[11] The eight categories of theological topics were: 1) Faith and dogma; 2) Divine Worship; 3) Administration and Church order; 4) Relations between the Orthodox Churches; 5) Relations of the Orthodox Churches with the rest of the Christian world; 6) Orthodoxy and the World; 7) theological topics (including the question of the *economy* and *akribeia*, the relationship of the Orthodox Church with other religions, euthanasia, and cremation); 8) Social issues (such as the family, youth, discrimination).

[12] V. Ioniţă, *Hotărârile întrunirilor panortodoxe din 1923 până în 2009*, 164; A. Kallis, *Auf dem Weg zu einem Heiligen und Großen Konzil*, 257.



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At the Fourth Pan-Orthodox Conference (Chambésy, June 8-16, 1968) the issue of fasting was assigned for further research to the Serbian Orthodox Church[13].

At the first Preparatory Inter-Orthodox Commission, that met in Chambésy, on July 28th, 1971, a text regarding the adaptation of the rules of fasting based on the detailed research and theological contributions of the Serbian Orthodox Church was proposed in order to be discussed by the future pre-conciliar Conferences[14]. The draft document began with the cultural and religious perspectives on fasting in different religions of the world, focusing on the practice of fasting in the Old and the New Testament[15]. The text of the Preparatory Inter-Orthodox Commission emphasized the historical development of the practice of fasting in Patristic Theology. What is very important, the text highlights the strong influence that Orthodox monasticism had on the practice of fasting in history. If the Nativity Fast and the Fast of the Holy Apostles were obligatory just for monastics, they were later imposed upon laity as well[16]. The commission also acknowledged that "the majority of faithful today do not observe all the prescriptions of fasting, whether due to faint-heartedness or their living conditions, whatever these may be."[17] This phrase can be found even in the final document of the Holy and Great Council of Crete, without considering the reasons why the majority of faithful do not fast anymore. Therefore, the Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission proposed an adaptation of the rules of fasting by shortening its periods, saying that this is not in contradiction with the principle of fasting. It was decided that the future Pan-Orthodox Council has the authority of shortening the periods of fasting. The document of the Inter-Orthodox Commission ended with ten important conclusions that proposed serious reforms of the Orthodox practice of fasting[18].

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[13] Ioniță, *Hotărârile întrunirilor panortodoxe din 1923 până în 2009*, 77.

[14] Kallis, *Auf dem Weg zu einem Heiligen und Großen Konzil*, 378-383.

[15] This text represents the draft form of the document subjected to debate at the Third Pre-conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference (1986), from which a lot of biblical and patristic arguments were taken, as we will see, even in the final document of the Council of Crete, such as those from: *Didache 8, 1*, St. Irenaeus of Lyons cited in the *Church History 5.24* by Eusebius, Dionysius of Alexandria, or the quotes from St. Basil the Great.

[16] Kallis, *Auf dem Weg zu einem Heiligen und Großen Konzil*, 381.

[17] Kallis, 382.

[18] "All the ordinances on fasting in force today shall be observed fully by monastics and by as many of the clergy and devout laity who wish and can do so. For other Christians, who have difficulty in observing the strict ordinances on fasting in force today, because of special circumstances applying to each of them, whether these are because of climate, way of life, difficulties of diet or in finding suitable food for the fast and so on, and, moreover, so that the holy institution of fasting should not be abandoned by the people of God, we propose the following: The Orthodox Church may allow a partial dispensation for cooked food to facilitate Christians, and this dispensation should be understood as a gradual easing, depending on the circumstances, as tolerance or a



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As it can be seen from these conclusions, the Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission proposed a massive reduction of the periods of fasting for those lay people who, under certain conditions, could not observe the rules of fasting. The text did not represent a relativization and a possible abolishment of the practice of fasting, but the application of Church *economy* in time and space, the text stressing as well the importance of fasting and its observance. At the first Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference held at Chambésy from 21st to 28th November, 1976, this theme, entitled "Re-adapting the Church provisions regarding fasting"[19], was on the final list of ten subjects of the future Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church. The theme was subjected to debate at the second Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference, that met from 3rd to 12th September, 1982, at Chambésy[20].

milder form of fasting. It is proposed that Wednesday and Friday fasts be observed throughout the year, but with a dispensation for oil and fish, except during times of fasting. This ordinance regarding Wednesday and Friday does not apply if the Elevation of the Precious Cross or the Beheading of the Forerunner falls on these days; likewise, the eve of Epiphany, and Wednesdays and Fridays in Great Lent. The ordinances concerning the dispensation from fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays remain in force, as regards the weeks when there is no fasting at all. There is thus no fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays in the period from Thomas Sunday until the Ascension. The length of the Fast of Great Lent should remain as it is, according to the ordinances of the Paschalio and the Typiko. The existing ordinances regarding quantity and kind of nourishment shall be retained in the first week and in Passion Week. On the other days, from the 2nd week of the Fast up to and including Palm Sunday, there should be a dispensation for oil and fish, except on Wednesdays and Fridays (see 4).Regarding the Christmas Fast, the Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission has two proposals to make: a) either it should be shortened by half (three weeks) and begin the day after the feast of Saint Barbara, with fish and oil being allowed except for the last five days or b) it should remain as 40 days, with oil and wine permitted on all days, except the first three and the last three, when a strict fast should be observed. The Apostle's Fast should be restricted to 8 days before the feast if there are more than that number of days between the Sunday of All Saints and the Feast of the Apostles. During this fast, fish and oil are to be allowed. The fast of 15 August shall be retained, as regards the length, but there shall be a dispensation for oil and fish on all days, except Wednesdays and Fridays. Should the feasts of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul and the Dormition of the Mother of God fall on a Wednesday or Friday, there is a dispensation from fasting since there has been a period of fasting leading up to the feast. If the Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission accepts these proposals, the people shall be informed accordingly regarding the alterations." *Πρός τήν Μεγάλην Σύνοδον, Εἰσηγήσεις τῆς Διορθοδόξου Προπαρασκευαστικῆς Ἐπιτροπῆς ἐπί τῶν ἔξ θεμάτων τοῦ πρώτου σταδίου* (Chambésy-Genève: Orthodox Centre of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, 1971), 41-42; Kallis, *Auf dem Weg zu einem Heiligen und Großen Konzil*, 382-383.

[19] Viorel Ioniță, "On the Way to the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church," in *Orthodoxie im Dialog: Historische und aktuelle Perspektiven*, eds. Reinhard Flogaus, Jennifer Wasmuth, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2015), 425.

[20] The Delegation of the Romanian Orthodox Church was represented by: Metropolitan Teoctist of Moldova (the future Patirarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church), Metropolitan Nicolae of Banat, Bishop Vasile Târgovișteanul, Prof. Ion Bria and Dr. Daniel Ciobotea (the future Patriarch



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On the second day of this Conference, the ten conclusions of the Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission were debated in the plenary session[21]. The discussion started with the remark of Metropolitan George Khodr of Mount Lebanon, that the text of the Inter-Orthodox Commission did not sufficiently emphasize the spiritual value of fasting. Metropolitan Calinic of Vatsa, a member of the delegation of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, stated that the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Church submitted the text of the Commission for further debate in 1974 and 1982, concluding that the text expresses the basic principles regarding fasting and that the Church of Bulgaria fully agreed with the following conclusions: 1, 3, 4, 5, 8 and 10, but some amendments or improvements to conclusions 2, 6, 7 and 9 were considered as needed and further aspects must be discussed and analysed by the Committee of the Conference[22].

However, Metropolitan Juvenal of Kroutitsky and Kolomna, a delegate of the Russian Orthodox Church, expressed his concerns regarding the third conclusion and regarding the fact that the final phrases of the text are called "conclusions"[23]. In response to the remarks of other bishops, Bishop Vasile of Târgovişte[24] affirmed the official position of the Romanian Orthodox Church, stating that:

> "la délégation de l'Eglise de Roumanie a étudié tous les documents des Eglises sur ce thème qu'elle a reçus et a abouti à la conclusion que le jeûne a une grande importance pour la vie des fidèles. Il s'agit d'un moyen spirituel d'atteindre à la sanctification; c'est pourquoi nous considérons que les jeûne fixés par l'Eglise doivent rester immuables tant pour la durée que pour la sévérité. D'ailleurs les canons s'y rapportant se montrent très larges envers ceux qui pour diverses raisons ne peuvent pas observer de jeûne sévère. En supprimant certains jeûnes, je crains que nous ne privions l'Eglise d'un moyen de vie spirituelle en Christ. Je

of the Romanian Orthodox Church), see: Secrétariat pour la préparation du Saint et Grand Concile de L'Église Orthodoxe (ed.), *IIe Conférence panorthodoxe préconciliaire. Actes (3-12 septembre 1982)*, vol. VIII, (Chambésy-Genève: Centre orthodoxe du Patriarcat Œcuménique, 1994), 8. For more details about the official Romanian delegation, see Dan-Ilie Ciobotea, "Spre Sfântul şi Marele Sinod al Ortodoxiei," *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, no. 11-12 (1982): 942-945.

[21] Secrétariat pour la préparation du Saint et Grand Concile de L'Église Orthodoxe (ed.), *IIe Conférence panorthodoxe préconciliaire. Actes (3-12 septembre 1982)*, vol. VIII, 96-98.

[22] Secrétariat pour la préparation du Saint et Grand Concile de L'Église Orthodoxe (ed.), *IIe Conférence panorthodoxe préconciliaire. Actes (3-12 septembre 1982)*, vol. VIII, 99.

[23] To these two remarks, Metropolitan Chrisostomos of Myra, the chairman of the Preparatory Inter-Orthodox Commission responsible for the elaboration of the text, responded in detail, indicating the procedure for reaching these formulations.

[24] For a general perspective of the importance of fasting in that period in the Romanian Orthodox Church see: Constantin Pavel, "Posturile rânduite de Biserica Ortodoxă în condiţiile de viaţă actuale ale credincioşilor," *Studii Teologice*, no. 5-8 (1977): 421-435; Nicolae Necula, "Învăţătura despre post în Biserica Ortodoxă," *Studii Teologice*, no. 7-8 (1984): 514-520.



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> crois que la question du jeûne peut être résolue localement par chaque Eglise orthodoxe dans la mesure où on lui donne plus de liberté pour cela."[25]

Following the declaration of the Romanian bishop, Metropolitan Filaret of Kiev[26] has drawn attention to the inappropriate title and message of the text that was referring to the "adaptation" of fasting to the conditions of a "secular society," and proposed a change of the title, "not to distract and shock the faithful people of God." After these discussions, the text was sent to further elaboration, completion, and improvement to the working Commission, with representatives from each delegation, under the coordination of Metropolitan John of Helsinki, a member of the delegation of the Church of Finland, having Metropolitan Melitios of Nicopolis and Preveza as secretary of the Commission. On behalf of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Bishop Vasile Târgovişteanul and Dr. Dan-Ilie Ciobotea were members of this Commission. On September 10th, 1982, the Committee finalized the report on the topic of fasting and submitted it to the plenary session for debate[27]. The main ideas of this report were the following: fasting is referring simultaneously to body and soul, implying all their forces; fasting is not a hygienic, social or religious invention, but a divine commandment[28] that would have led man to deification from the beginning; the practice of fasting is found in the Old Testament, in the books of Moses, in the books and lives of the prophets, in the New Testament (where fasting is seen as a means of abstinence, spiritual improvement, and penance), and in the post-apostolic writings[29]; no other Church rule offers as much freedom as fasting, because it is a free act of sacrifice for the spiritual life; the non-Orthodox world disregarded fasting, creating serious problems of ecclesial consciousness; fasting is related to Eucharist; Christians do not observe all the prescriptions of fasting, so these cases must be treated with pastoral care. The report read in the plenary of the Conference concluded:

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[25] Secrétariat pour la préparation du Saint et Grand Concile de L'Église Orthodoxe (ed.), *IIe Conférence panorthodoxe préconciliaire. Actes (3-12 septembre 1982)*, vol. VIII, 101.

[26] For a broader analysis of Metropolitan Filaret of Kiev on the topic of fasting in accordance with Pan-Orthodox decisions until the second Pre-conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference, see Kallis, *Auf dem Weg zu einem Heiligen und Großen Konzil*, 458-461.

[27] Secrétariat pour la préparation du Saint et Grand Concile de L'Église Orthodoxe (ed.), *IIe Conférence panorthodoxe préconciliaire. Actes (3-12 septembre 1982)*, vol. VIII, 152-156.

[28] Here appears, for the first time, this idea according to which fasting was imposed in Heaven by the command of God (Genesis 2: 16-17). The argument is taken from the homily of St. Basil the Great *On fasting* 1.3.

[29] The majority of quotes found in the text of the 1971 Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission are taken in this document. They will be used as arguments for the practice of fasting in the post-apostolic period even in the final document of the Council of Crete.



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> "a) de conserver telles quelles sans altération, les prescriptions de l'Eglise sur le jeûne actuellement en vigueur; b) de n'introduire aucune modification dans le sens, le caractère et l'application du jeûne; c) que le saint et grand Concile pour ce qui est des chrétiens éprouvant des difficultés à respecter les prescriptions actuelles sur le jeûne — soit pour cause de maladie, soit à cause de certaines conditions particulières d'ordre climatique, soit en raison d'une impossibilité de se procurer des aliments convenant au jeûne, soit à cause du contexte social — et pourvu que soit respecté tout ce qui a été dit plus haut dans ce texte et afin de ne pas affaiblir l'institution du jeûne, laisse au discernement spirituel des Eglises orthodoxes locales le soin de définir conformément aux dispositions existantes, la mesure de l'économie avec laquelle les hiérarques responsables et les pères spirituels mandates par eux feront face aux situations particulières (d'ordre général ou individuel), rendant ainsi plus douce l'âcreté des saints jeûnes."[30]

Therefore, the Committee's report drops out all the adaptations of the Church rules regarding fasting, keeping in the text of the Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission from 1971 only the biblical and patristic quotations and the spiritual role of fasting, that was further developed by the Conference[31]. In other words, the report asserts that fasting is a divine commandment, this is the reason why it cannot be changed, adapted or reconsidered in the contemporary world, but the so-called "secular society" has to re-adapt to this divine institution of fasting. Despite this beautiful sermon for the importance of fasting which emphasized its spiritual role, the text of the commission, as bishop Gregory of Kerynia, a member of the delegation of the Church of Cyprus, said does not answer a fundamental question: "why Christians in contemporary society no longer observe the rules of fasting?." The text of the Commission received many criticisms from the Orthodox bishops. Metropolitan Partenios of Carthage considered this text as unsatisfactory, and Metropolitan Chrysostom of Myra emphasized that the text does not address some fundamental questions, such as the possibility or the impossibility of any evolution of fasting and does not take into consideration special cases where fasting can be suppressed. Furthermore, the provision that the local Autocephalous Churches should regulate the practice of fasting was considered as a possible context for creating a large number of particular practices of fasting, which could have a devastating effect on the Orthodox diaspora. The idea of Metropolitan Chrysostom is also supported by Professor Vlassios Phidas, who stated that the canonical Tradition of the Church

[30] Secrétariat pour la préparation du Saint et Grand Concile de L'Église Orthodoxe (ed.), *IIe Conférence panorthodoxe préconciliaire. Actes (3-12 septembre 1982)*, vol. VIII, 156.

[31] Μαρίνα Κολοβοπούλου, "«Ἡ σπουδαιότης τῆς νηστείας καὶ ἡ τήρησις αὐτῆς σήμερον." Δρώμενα ἀπὸ τὴν πορεία πρὸς τὴν Ἁγία καὶ Μεγάλη Σύνοδο τῆς Ὀρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας," *Θεολογία* 87, no. 1 (2016): 198-200.



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regulated just the Wednesday and Friday fast and the Great Lent. The other practices of fasting were imposed on laity after the 12th century under the influence of monasticism, but they were not regulated by the canonical Tradition of the Church[32]. Metropolitan Nicolae of Banat emphasized the fact that the text of the Commission can be improved, especially regarding its refractory attitude towards contemporary "secular" society (Article 7), underlining that the text should also highlight the medical and therapeutic aspects of fasting, as well as the social understanding of fasting (Article 8). Some of the delegations of the Orthodox Churches were supporting the unchangeability of fasting and its practice, others were still talking about the re-adaptation of the rules of fasting to the contemporary society, despite the fact that the draft text rejected this idea. The lack of consensus on this theme led to its postponement for a future Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference. In the final decision of the Second Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference of 1982 it was stated:

> "Concerning the topic: *Re-adjusting the Church regulations concerning fasting according to the contemporary requirements*- While debating on this topic with all attention and concern: Considering however as insufficient the preparation made until now and not allowing Orthodoxy to express itself unanimously on this point; In order to avoid a hasty decision and to offer the local Orthodox Churches the opportunity to prepare faithfully to carry on the tradition of the people of God, the Second Pan-Orthodox Conference: 1. invites the local Orthodox Churches to send to the Secretariat for the preparation of the Holy and Great Synod their observations on this subject on the basis of the file already constituted. 2. postpones the problem under scrutiny for the next Pro-conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference after a preliminary examination by the Preparatory Inter-Orthodox Commission; 3. declares that the traditional practice should remain in force until the Holy and Great Synod will examine the problem on the basis of the proposals by a Pre-conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference appointed to study it."[33]

As a result, although the Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission from 1971 demanded some adaptation of the rules of fasting to the contemporary realities of the Church, they were largely rejected by the second Pan-Orthodox Pre-conciliar Conference from 1982. This Conference did not issue a new text

[32] Secrétariat pour la préparation du Saint et Grand Concile de L'Église Orthodoxe (ed.), *IIe Conférence panorthodoxe préconciliaire. Actes (3-12 septembre 1982)*, vol. VIII, 158-159.

[33] Viorel Ioniță (ed.), *Towards the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church: The Decisions of the Pan-Orthodox Meetings since 1923 until 2009*, (Freiburg, Base: Reinhardt, Friedrich, 2014), 155; Secrétariat pour la préparation du Saint et Grand Concile de L'Église Orthodoxe (ed.), *IIe Conférence panorthodoxe préconciliaire. Actes (3-12 septembre 1982)*, vol. VIII, 182; V. Ioniță, *Hotărârile întrunirilor panortodoxe din 1923 până în 2009: spre Sfântul și Marele Sinod al Bisericii Ortodoxe*, 199-200.



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regarding fasting. The draft text of the Second Conference was taken into consideration at the Third Pre-conciliar Pan-orthodox Conference[34] (Chambésy, October 28th – November 6th, 1986), but without any possibility of re-writing the text or proposing a new one[35]. The text of the third Pan-orthodox Pre-conciliar Conference is an attempt of theological argumentation of the practice of fasting, highlighting, with several biblical and patristic quotations[36], the general importance of the institution of fasting, but without any practical clarification[37]. At the beginning of the same year 1986 at the Preparatory Inter-Orthodox Conference at Chambésy, Metropolitan Damaskinos of Switzerland, the President of the Secretariat for the Preparation of the Holy and Great Council, presented the theme of fasting and the "new results" of the second Pan-Orthodox Pre-conciliar Conference, as well as the suggestions received from the Autocephalous Orthodox Churches, especially from the Greek Orthodox Church, which stated that the theme of fasting was subjected to debate at an inopportune period of time and could lead to division among Greek Orthodox believers, and the Greek Church disagrees with any amendments of the canonical provisions regarding fasting, while Local Churches can apply ecclesial *economy* if necessary[38]. The

[34] The Secretariat for the Preparation of the Holy and Great Council decided that, for the further debate, Orthodox studies and papers must be submitted to the Secretariat, and canonists, bishops and theologians from the Autocephalous Orthodox Churches should research and study this issue. This task was entrusted to Metropolitan Pantelimon of Corinth, Professor Atanasije Jevtic, from the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Belgrade, Professor Konstantinos Mouratidis from the Faculty of Theology in Athens, and Professor Vlasios Phidas from the same Faculty.

[35] For the French translation see *Episkepsis*, no. 369 (1986): 2-28; for the German translation see: "3. Vorkonziliare Panorthodox Konferenz," *Una Sancta* 42 (1987): 14-28 and Anastasios Kallis, *Auf dem Weg zu einem Heiligen und Großen Konzil*, 501-553.

[36] The text contains more than 26 biblical, patristic and liturgical quotations. Almost 40% of the text of the document is represented by quotations and different references, showing a lack of originality and actuality. The quotes often represent arguments of authority taken from different Patristic works.

[37] These concerns were expressed by the participants in the Conference: "Finalement, une remarque pratique. On nous promet de parler des prescriptions ecclésiastiques concernant le jeûne, mais on ne fait que parler des différents jeûnes de l'année. Aucune prescription. On ne dit pas de quoi on s'abstient, ce qu'on mange et ce qu'on ne mange pas. Dans les pays méditerranéens, nous mangeons les fruits de mer: quand cela est-il entré dans la pratique? Les Russes mangent du poisson : cela est-il conforme aux règles de l'abstinence? Un autre problème est celui du mariage. Il est un temps où il est interdit de célébrer des mariages. Nous connaissons les fondements anciens de cela, l'abstinence étant complète pendant la quarantaine du Carême. Qu'est-ce que nous gardons de cela? Est-ce que nous sommes très stricts là dessus? Si nous parlons de «prescriptions ecclésiastiques concernant le jeûne», parlons de tout cela en détail, ne disons pas seulement les principes." Secrétariat pour la préparation du Saint et Grand Concile de L'Église Orthodoxe (ed.), *IIIe Conférence panorthodoxe préconciliaire. Actes (28 octobre – 9 novembre 1986)*, *Synodika* X, (Chambésy-Genève: Centre orthodoxe du Patriarcat Œcuménique, 2014), 79.

[38] Kallis, *Auf dem Weg zu einem Heiligen und Großen Konzil*, 474.



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Greek Orthodox Church tried to ensure its position for the third Pan-Orthodox Conference and to ensure the monastic circles that no adaptation of the rules of fasting will be made. This opposition of some local Churches, shaped under the pressure of some conservative monastic circles and presented as an opposition of the Orthodox laity and as a possible revolt of the believers in case of shortening the periods of fasting, although the inobservance of all canonical provisions regarding fasting is expressed by the official texts of the Conference—as well by the Council of Crete, led to a very cautious and conservative formulation of the text. This general fear of a possible rebellion of the Orthodox laity led to the excessive delimitation of the principle of ecclesial economy applied to the practice of fasting. In the same presentation of Metropolitan Damaskinos, the following limits were imposed on the application of economy by the Autocephalous Orthodox Churches:

> "1. Beim Fasten der Großen Woche hat keine Änderung der bestehenden Ordnung *kat'Oikonomian* Platz. 2. Beim Fasten der Quadragesima kann *kat'Oikonomian* keine Verkürzung der zeitlichen Dauer eingeführt werden, während aus Menschenliebe während der Nichtfastentage das Essen von Fisch eingeführt werden kann. 3. Bei dem von den Aposteln Überlieferten Fasten am Mittwoch und Freitag kann keine Änderung der bestehenden Ordnung zugelassen werden. 4. Bei den Fasten vor Weihnachten (Kleine Quadragesima), der heiligen Apostel und der Entschlafung der Gottesmutter kann aus Menschenliebe von der kirchlichen Oikonomia sowohl in der zeitlichen Dauer wie auch in der Zusammensetzung der Fastenspeisen Gebrauch gemacht werden, wobei aber auf jeden Fall das Fasten der letzten Woche vor dem Fest streng einzuhalten ist.5. Bei den festgesetzten Fastenterminen der Kreuzeserhöhung, des Vorabends der Theophanie und der Enthauptung Johannes des Vorläufers ist keine Oikonomia erlaubt."[39]

In other words, the excessive limitation of the principle of economy transforms it into the principle of exactness (*akribeia*). If all the cases and the entire context of the application of Church economy is specified then economy loses any canonical value, being entirely circumscribed by Church law[40]. At the

[39] Kallis, *Auf dem Weg zu einem Heiligen und Großen Konzil*, 476-477.

[40] For the principle of economy in the Canonical Tradition of the Orthodox Church, see J. Erickson, "Oikonomia in Byzantine Canon Law," in *Law, Church, and Society. Essays in Honor of Stephan Kuttner,* eds. Kenneth Pennington, Robert Somerville (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977), 225-236; Hans Thurn, *Oikonomia von der frühbyzantinischen Zeit bis zum Bilderstreit: Semasiologische Untersuchung einer Wortfamilie*, (München, 1961); Gerhard Richter, *Oikonomia. Der Gebrauch des Wortes Oikonomia im Neuen Testament, bei den Kirchenvätern und in der theologischen Literatur bis ins 20. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005); Florian Schuppe,



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end of this Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission, a text was proposed which, as we shall see, is not much different from the final document of the Holy and Great Council of Crete (2016).

At the end of that year, 1986, at the third Pan-Orthodox Pre-conciliar Conference, Metropolitan Damaskinos of Switzerland, the President of the Commission, presented a comprehensive report on the topic of fasting[41]. The main points highlighted by him were: 1) the inadequacy of the title with the text of the Commission, given the fact that any adaptation of the practice of fasting was rejected, and the proposal of a new title: "The importance of fasting and its observance today"; 2) the institution of fasting, and not its practice, is unchangeable (ἀμετάβλητος); 3) as an ascetic ideal, fasting refers not only to abstinence, but it is a spiritual and moral edification towards perfection and a way of penance, an idea elaborated by the delegates of the Patriarchates of Alexandria, Antioch, and Romania; 4) fasting is a spiritual struggle; 5) fasting has to be understood from the Christocentric point of view as obedience to Christ; 6) the sixth article of the proposed text enumerates all the fasting periods in the Church without any difference, deciding to keep them all by taking into account the spiritual nature of the institution of fasting and the possible "rebellion" of believers against any reduction of the periods of fasting; 7) the possibility of applying the principle of economy in special circumstances; 8) the importance of socio-cultural and geographical conditions regarding fasting, supported by the delegates of the Russian Orthodox Church; 9) fasting is closely linked to the Holy Sacraments, especially to the Eucharist.

After this extensive report of Metropolitan Damaskinos, the draft text of the Commission was debated by the delegates of the Orthodox Autocephalous Churches. At the proposal of Metropolitan Antonie of Transylvania[42], the delegates debated the possibility of changing the title of the document on the grounds that the term "re-adaptation" may scandalize the Orthodox communities and the previous title is no longer in accordance with the actual content of the text. After this ample debate on the title, a first concrete proposal was made for: "The importance of the institution of fasting and its observance today (or in the present world)"[43]. Some of the members of the official delegations were arguing that the

*Die pastorale Herausforderung – orthodoxes Leben zwischen Akribeia und Oikonomia: theologische Grundlagen, Praxis und ökumenische Perspektiven* (Würyburg: Augustinus-Verlag, 2006).

41 Secrétariat pour la préparation du Saint et Grand Concile de L'Église Orthodoxe (ed.), *IIIe Conférence panorthodoxe préconciliaire. Actes (28 octobre – 9 novembre 1986)*, 56-63; Kallis, *Auf dem Weg zu einem Heiligen und Großen Konzil*, 519-523.

42 Antonie Plămădeală, "A treia Conferinţă Panortodoxă Preconciliară," *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, no. 9-10 (1986): 40.

43 Secrétariat pour la préparation du Saint et Grand Concile de L'Église Orthodoxe (ed.), *IIIe Conférence panorthodoxe préconciliaire. Actes (28 octobre – 9 novembre 1986)*, 77.



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text highlights the spiritual value of fasting, but others considered that fasting does not refer only to a spiritual reality, and the text needs a broader perspective, by taking into consideration the entire existence of the human person. This second idea of the incompleteness of the text regarding the importance of fasting in the Orthodox Church was shared by several bishops by raising arguments against the drafted text[44]. Despite these arguments, the conclusion of the plenary session before sending the text for further debate to the Commission was that the text is a balanced one from the theological point of view, but it could be improved. What were the changes operated by the Commission[45] of the Third Pan-Orthodox Pre-conciliar Conference to the proposed text? If we compare carefully the text of the Commission with the previous text we can observe the following: the title of the document was changed to: "The importance of fasting and its observance today"; the word "immutable (ἀμετάβλητος) " was taken out from the first article of the text and instead of this it was stated that fasting is "a divine commandment"; several quotations from the Old and New Testaments were added to the second and third article; no reference was made to monastics in the fifth article, although this matter was discussed in the plenary session of the Conference; the content of the sixth article was abbreviated; little changes have been made to articles 8 and 9. The rest of the text remained unchanged, being the same with the text of the Inter-Orthodox Conference from the beginning of 1986[46].

After several comments and insignificant amendments to the text of the Commission, the third Pan-Orthodox Pre-conciliar Conference from 1986 voted the final text.

The debate on this text was resumed only 30 years later at the 5th Pan-Orthodox Pre-conciliar Conference (Chambésy, October 10-17, 2015). This Conference focused in particular on Article 9 of the text and the relationship between the Eucharist and fasting, at the proposal of Prof. Theodoros Giangou[47]. After some amendments and reformulations, the text was sent for approval at the Synaxis of the Primates of the Orthodox Autocephalous Church from January 2016[48] and sent, as a final draft text, to the Holy and Great Council.

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[44] See the remarks of Metropolitan George Khodr, Metropolitan Chysostom of Pafos or Jeremiah of Wroclaw in Secrétariat pour la préparation (ed.), *IIIe Conférence panorthodoxe préconciliaire,* 84-86.

[45] The delegates of the Romanian Orthodox Church that were part of the Commission were the patriarchal bishop Nifon Ploieşteanu and the Fr. Prof. Dumitru Popescu, as counsellor.

[46] Secrétariat pour la préparation du Saint et Grand Concile de L'Église Orthodoxe (ed.), *IIIe Conférence panorthodoxe préconciliaire. Actes (28 octobre – 9 novembre 1986)*, 198-201.

[47] Secrétariat pour la préparation du Saint et Grand Concile de L'Église Orthodoxe (ed.), *Ε' Προσυνοδική Πανορθόδοξος Διάσκεψις, Σαμπεζύ Γενεύης, 10-17 Όκτωβρίου 2015*, coll. *Synodika* XIII, (Chambésy-Genève: Centre orthodoxe du Patriarcat Œcuménique, 2016), 274.

[48] After the Synaxis of the Primates of the Orthodox Autocephalous Churches, the text received several positive remarks from the Local Churches. The text was debated by the Russian Orthodox



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In his report read before the Bishops' Council, on February 2nd-3rd, 2016, Patriarch Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church asserted that: "One of the draft documents is entitled *The Importance of Fasting and Its Observance Today*. It was agreed upon by the participants in the Synaxis of Primates of the Local Orthodox Churches in Chambésy in January 2016, except for representatives of the Churches of Antioch and Georgia"[49].

At the Holy and Great Council, on the afternoon of June 22nd, 2016, the theme "The importance of fasting and its observance today" was introduced for discussion in the plenary session of the Council. As stated in the official press release:

> "During the afternoon session of the same day, the text on 'The importance of fasting and its observance today' was introduced for discussion. The text was considered in general as a complete and comprehensive expression of both letter and spirit of the entire age-long ecclesiastical tradition, and hence it has received only a minimum of modification in the period following its unanimous acceptance by the Third Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference (Chambésy, 1986). During the discussions on the matter, their Beatitudes, the Primates, expressed their full satisfaction, both in regard to the completeness of the text and also in regard to the breadth of its perspectives concerning the pastoral distinction between canonical rigor and ecclesiastical economy in the application of these positions by the various Local Autocephalous Orthodox Churches. Consequently, it was decided that the theological observations articulated did not touch on the substance of the matter, and so the text was unanimously accepted as it stands."[50]

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Church at the Bishops' Council, the supreme body of the Russian Orthodox Church in matters of doctrinal, canonical, liturgical, pastoral, and in maintaining fraternal relations with other Orthodox Churches, summoned on February 2-3, 2016, where 354 bishops were invited from 293 dioceses from Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldavia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Tajikistan. Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Estonia, and "also from far abroad, countries with the dioceses of the Russian Orthodox Church." In his report read before the Bishops' Council, Patriarch Kirill highlighted the fact that "the document gives a detailed description of the Church's generally known and accepted teaching on fasting, reveals its spiritual importance and speaks about its observance today. 'Dispelling the rumours of the forthcoming annulment of fasts or their reduction at the Council, this draft document clearly prescribes to observe all fasts established by the Church, without any exceptions,' the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church said. Moreover, His Holiness noted, the document affirms for the first time on the pan-Orthodox scale the obligatory character of the Nativity, the Apostles' and the Dormition fasts which were not mentioned, unlike Lent, in ancient sacred canons." "A draft document of Pan-Orthodox Council affirms for the first time on pan-Orthodox scale the obligatory character of Nativity, Apostles' and Dormition fasts." For the involvement in the preparation of the Holy and Great Council see Nicolas Kazarian, "Всеправославный собор: формирование новой православной геополитики [The Pan-Orthodox Council: Shaping New Orthodox Geopolitics], *Государство, религия, церковь в России и за рубежом*, 1 (2016): 102–26; Andrei Desnitsky, "Die Russische Orthodoxe Kirche vor dem Panorthodoxen Konzil," *Religion und Gesellschaft in Ost und West* 2 (2016): 7–8.

[49] https://mospat.ru/en/2016/02/02/news127681/.

[50] https://www.holycouncil.org/-/news-bulletin-number-3.



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In other words, the text regarding the importance of fasting in the Orthodox Church was discussed at the Holy and Great Council just a couple of hours on the afternoon of June 22nd, the final text being almost entire the same, with some small and interesting changes, with the text of the third Pan-Orthodox Pre-conciliar Conference. Taking into consideration this vast period of time needed for the final form of the text of the Holy and Great Council, we can assert the total victory of the theologians and circles with conservative theological visions, the idea of changing and adapting fasting periods being removed from the inter-Orthodox debate. Moreover, as we shall see, fasting is considered a divine institution, and therefore any argument for any possible shortening of it is suppressed from the beginning. The remark of Bishop Jeremiah of Wroclaw, the representative of the Polish Orthodox Church at the third Pan-Orthodox Pre-conciliar Conference, is still valid for the final text of the Holy and Great Council: "dans ce texte tout est correct mais qu'il y manque quelque chose (in this text everything is correct but something is missing)"[51]. We will try to see what is missing from the final text regarding the importance of fasting.

## The Document "The Importance of Fasting and Its Observance Today" of the Holy and Great Council of Crete (2016). A canonical and theological analysis of the first four paragraphs

In this part of the paper, I will try to analyze the first four paragraphs of the final form of the document of the Holy and Great Council of Crete, showing both the positive parts and those that could be improved in a future Holy and Great Council. I will take into consideration the four official translations of the text[52] and I will emphasize some differences of meaning by comparing the four

[51] "dans ce texte tout est correct mais qu'il y manque quelque chose." Secrétariat pour la préparation du Saint et Grand Concile de L'Église Orthodoxe (ed.), *IIIe Conférence panorthodoxe préconciliaire. Actes (28 octobre – 9 novembre 1986)*, 84.

[52] Unfortunately, the final decisions of the Council of Crete are not yet published as official texts and translations of the Local Orthodox Churches, despite the fact that they can be found on the official website of the Holy and Great Council and the websites of some Autocephalous Churches, being translated into several languages. At least we can find some translations and studies, but they are just a few exceptions to this rule. French translation "Textes Officiels Adoptés Par Le Concile," *Contacts* 255, no. 68 (2016), 255–322; English Translation: Alberto Melloni, ed., *The Great Councils of the Orthodox Churches. Crete 2016*, Corpus Christianorum Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Generaliumque Decreta 4.3, (Brespol, 2017). Ukrainian Translation: *Документи Святого і Великого Собору Православної Церкви. Крит, 2016*, trans. Юрій Вестель, Дмитро Каратєєв, Відкритий Православний Університет Святої Софії Премудрості, ДУХ І ЛІТЕРА, 2016, 112 pages. Parts of the documents were published in different Journals: "Message of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church," *The Canadian Journal of Orthodox Christianity* 11, no. 3 (September 2016): 57–70; "Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church: Crete



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versions of the official document. The document regarding the importance of fasting was analyzed by different Orthodox scholars, but often their paper represents just a description of the document[53].

***Paragraph 1: Fasting as a divine commandment.*** By reading the four official translations or versions of the text, we can see a couple of differences regarding the first part of the text. For example, in the English[54] and Russian translations, the passage from St. Basil the Great "On Fasting 1, 3. PG 31, 168A" does not appear as a quotation, as we can find in the Greek and French versions:

2016," *The Ecumenical Review* 68, no. 2–3 (December 2016): 291–304; "Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church," *The Canadian Journal of Orthodox Christianity* 11, no. 3 (September 2016): 71–94; "Autonomy and the Means by Which It Is Proclaimed," *The Canadian Journal of Orthodox Christianity* 11, no. 3 (September 2016), 95–105. For the four official translations, we will use the text found on the official webpage of the Holy and Great Council: https://www.holycouncil.org/.

[53] Rastko Jovic, "The Importance of Fasting and Its Observance for Tomorrow," *Studia Universitatis Babes-Bolyai Theologia Orthodoxa*, 62, no. 1 (28 iunie 2017): 103-114; Athanasios N Papathanasiou, "Christian fasting in postmodern society: considering the criteria," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 60, no. 1-2 (2016): 249-268; Constantine Cavarnos, *Fasting and Science: A Study of the Scientific Support and Patristic Foundation for Fasting in the Orthodox Church*, 2 edition, (Calif: Center for Traditionalist, Etna, 1998); Anne Marie Reijnen, "Fasting-some Protestant remarks: «not by bread alone»: an argument for the contemporary value of Christian fasting," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, 60, no. 1-2 (2016): 269-278; Issa J Khalil, "The Orthodox Fast and the Philosophy of Vegetarianism," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 35, no. 3 (1990): 237-259; Stelyios S Muksuris et alii, "Reflection on the Pre-conciliar Document: *The Importance of Fasting and its observance today*," in: *Toward the Holy and Great Council. Theological Reflections*, Nathanael Symeonides (ed.), (Department of Inter-Orthodox Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations, 2016): 57-61; Μ. Κολοβοπούλου, "«Ἡ σπουδαιότης τῆς νηστείας καὶ ἡ τήρησις αὐτῆς σήμερον»," in *Δρώμενα ἀπὸ τὴν πορεία πρὸς τὴν Ἁγία καὶ Μεγάλη Σύνοδο τῆς Ὀρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας*, 195-206; Παναγιώτης Σκαλτσής, "Ἡ νηστεία κατά τίς Προσυνοδικές Συζητήσεις," *Θεολογία*, 86, 4 (2015): 213-220; Ἀντωνίου Παπαδοπούλου, "Ἡ προετοιμαζομένη Ἁγία καί Μεγάλη Σύνοδος τῆς κατ' Ἀνατολάς Ὀρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας ἔναντι τῶν περί νηστείας Ἐκκλησιαστικῶν Διατάξεων," in *Νηστεία καί πνευματική ζωή (Χρονικόν, είσηγήσεις, πορίσματα Ἱερατικοῦ Συνεδρίου τῆς Ἱερᾶς Μητροπόλεως Δράμας, ἔτους 1989)*, (Δράμα, 1989), 68.

[54] "Article 1. Fasting is a divine commandment (Gen 2:16-17). According to Basil the Great, fasting is as old as humanity itself; it was prescribed in paradise (On Fasting, 1, 3. PG 31, 168A). It is a great spiritual endeavor and the foremost expression of the Orthodox ascetic ideal. The Orthodox Church, in strict conformity with the apostolic precepts, the synodal canons, and the patristic tradition as a whole, has always proclaimed the great significance of fasting for our spiritual life and salvation. The annual liturgical cycle reflects the entire patristic teaching on fasting, the teaching on constant and unceasing watchfulness of the human person, and our participation in spiritual struggles. Accordingly, the Triodion praises fasting as grace that is full of light, as an invincible weapon, the beginning of spiritual struggles, the perfect path of virtues, the nourishment for the soul, the source of all wisdom, life imperishable, an imitation of the angelic life, the mother of all good things and virtues."



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*«συνηλικιῶτίς ἐστι τῆς ἀνθρωπότητος· νηστεία γάρ ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ ἐνομοθετήθη»* (*Περί νηστείας,* 1, 3. PG 31, 168A), *«a le même âge que l'humanité ; car il a été instauré dans le paradis»* (*De jejunio,* 1, 3. PG 31, 168A). The passage: "The Orthodox Church ... has always proclaimed the great significance of fasting for our spiritual life and salvation" contains a simpler and more direct phrase in English "for our spiritual life and salvation" than the Greek or the French translation, where we have: "διά τόν πνευματικόν βίον τοῦ ἀνθρώπου καί τήν σωτηρίαν αύτοῦ" and "pour la vie spirituelle de l'homme et son salut." However, the differences are quite important. If we consider the addressing of the Greek and French translations, then the text shows the importance of fasting for the human being in general and its salvation. On the other hand, the English text, by using the first person "our spiritual life and salvation," is probably referring exclusively to Orthodox Christians. Another difference in translation can be seen between the English and the French version of the phrase: "the annual liturgical cycle," "tout au long de l'année liturgique," and the Greek translation "τόν κύκλον τῆς λατρείας τοῦ ἐνιαυτοῦ τοῦ Κυρίου"[55]. Likewise the Greek, French and Russian translations of the text contain the phrase "πατερική παράδοσις καί διδασκαλία," "la tradition et enseignement patristique" "святоотеческое предание о посте и учение" but in the English version the "tradition" (παράδοσις/la tradition/предание) is missing, and we have just: "the entire patristic teaching on fasting." We can find as well other small differences in the official translations of the first article[56]. Sometimes the French translation of the text is adding words that can not be found in the other official translations[57]. Despite these inconsistencies, let us analyze the text from the theological point of view.

[55] The syntactic structure of this phrase differs in the official translations. If the English text states: "the annual liturgical cycle reflects," the subject of the sentence being the "liturgical cycle" that reflects the Patristic tradition, in the Greek text the verb is used in the passive form: "προβάλλεται" (is shown, is reflected), i.e. "the teaching is reflected," and in the French translation, "elle exalte la traditie," the Orthodox Church "l'Église orthodoxe" is promoting the tradition. Also in the Greek and French texts, we have the wording "tradition and teaching," "tradition and enseignement patristique," while in the English translation there is only "teaching" without the "patristic tradition."

[56] The English version has "human person" for "l'homme" and "τοῦ ἀνθρώπου" in the phrase: "the teaching on constant and unceasing watchfulness of the human person"; The French version does not contain an equivalent for the English and Greek word: "Accordingly/ Διό" as we can see in the phrase: "Accordingly, the Triodion praises fasting as grace that is full of light"; even the syntactic structure of this sentence is different. In the English text "the Triodion praises fasting," the text is using the active voice, but in the Greek and French versions is used the passive voice: "Le jeûne est exalté dans le Triodion," "ὑμνεῖται είς τό Τριῴδιον," the subject of the sentence being the word "fasting."

[57] The English and the Greek versions of the text contain "as grace that is full of light" and "ὡς χάρις πολύφωτος," but the French version is using a more complex phrase: "don divin, grâce pleine de lumière." The English and the Greek versions have: "the nourishment for the soul" and



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This first paragraph of the document, that has not been changed at all since 1986, states that fasting is a divine commandment in accordance with the biblical quote from Genesis 2: 16-17[58]. When we read this Old Testament passage, we see that it represents the commandment of abstinence from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, not the divine institution of fasting or a divine commandment for fasting. This interpretation of the text from *Genesis* belongs to St. Basil the Great (*On Fasting*, 1, 3. PG 31, 168A) and is used by him in his Homily as an argument for the fact that fasting is as old as humanity because it was prescribed in Paradise. In the homily of St. Basil the Great, this argument appears as an interpretation of the passage of Genesis 2, 16-17, whereby the prohibition to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is regarded as the first commandment for fasting[59]. This quote is nothing else than a reception of the interpretation of Saint Basil the Great by a Holy and Great Council of the Church, and not an invention of the Council of Crete, as some stated[60], despite the fact that we can find different interpretations of this passage in the homilies and commentaries of the Holy Father of the Church.

However, despite the fact that fasting is a divine commandment and it was prescribed in Paradise, *the second paragraph* of the document claims, that fasting

"ὡς τροφή ψυχῆς," but the French translation is adding to this "aide accordée par Dieu," that can not be found in the other translations. The phrase "life imperishable, an imitation of the angelic life" is different in all four official translations. The French version contains: "imitation d'une vie impérissable et semblable à celle des anges," and the Greek one "ἀφθάρτου διαγωγῆς καί ίσαγγέλου πολιτείας τό μίμημα."

[58] *Genesis* 2: 16-17: "And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.'"

[59] "Do you think that I am resting the origin of fasting on the Law? Why fasting is even older than the Law. If you wait a little, you will discover the truth of what I have said. Do not suppose that fasting originated with the Day of Atonement, appointed for Israel on the tenth day of the seventh month. No, go back through history and inquire into the ancient origins of fasting. It is not a recent invention; it is an heirloom handed down by our fathers. Everything distinguished by antiquity is venerable. Have respect for the antiquity of fasting. It is as old as humanity itself; it was prescribed in Paradise. It was the first commandment that Adam received: "Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil ye shall not eat." Through the words "ye shall not eat" the law of fasting and abstinence is laid down. If Eve had fasted from the tree, we would not now be in need of this fast. "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." We have been wounded through sin; we are healed through repentance, but repentance without fasting is fruitless." For the English translation see Susan Holman, Mark Delcogliano, *On Fasting and Feasts: Saint Basil the Great*, (Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2013). For the Romanian translation see Sf. Vasile cel Mare, *Scrieri, partea I, Omilii la Hexaemeron, Omilii la Psalmi, Omilii şi cuvântări*, coll. *Părinţi şi scriitori bisericeşti* 17, trans., by Pr. Dumitru Fecioru, (Bucureşti: Editura Institutului Biblic şi de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1986), 348.

[60] Rastko Jovic, "The Importance of Fasting and Its Observance for Tomorrow," *Studia Universitatis Babes-Bolyai Theologia Orthodoxa*, 62, no. 1 (28 iunie 2017): 103-114.



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is "an ancient institution, fasting was mentioned already in the Old Testament" and the quote from the book of *Deuteronomy* 9:18 is given as an argument[61]. If we believe that fasting is a divine commandment than the beginning of the second article or paragraph of the document: "an ancient institution, fasting was mentioned already in the Old Testament" is redundant. The text already said that it was mentioned in Genesis. Let us analyse this possible contradiction. In the discussion of the changeability or unchangeability of fasting (ἀμετάβλητος), it was decided, as we have seen, at the third Pan-Orthodox Pre-conciliar Conference that the institution of fasting is "unchangeable (ἀμετάβλητος)" because it is a divine commandment, according to Saint Basil[62]. In the Commission of the Conference, it was decided that the text can not use the word "unchangeable" (ἀμετάβλητος), but this idea can be expressed by the phrase "fasting is a divine commandment." Therefore, from the beginning of the text, it is stated that fasting belongs to *ius divinum*[63], which means that it can not be altered, changed or abrogated[64]. Relying directly on the divine commandment, the institution of fasting remains unchanged even though the word "unchangeable" (ἀμετάβλητος) is not used in the final text.

On the other hand, the second paragraph identifies the first elements of this institution by historical and religious references after the divine commandment. The question of Rastko Jovic is legitimate, if fasting had been a divine commandment from the beginning, it would not have been normal to find it in the religious practice of humanity from the beginning and especially in the Jewish liturgical and personal life?[65] The two phrases from the two paragraphs are incongruous. If fasting is a divine commandment given by God to men in Paradise, then it originates in the words of God and not in the episode of receiving the Tables of Commandments by Moses, as we can see from the quote from Deuteronomy, given as a biblical argument in the second paragraph of the text. The same mismatch had been reported by Professor Theodoros Zisis at the third

[61] "Then once again I fell prostrate before the Lord for forty days and forty nights; I ate no bread and drank no water, because of all the sin you had committed, doing what was evil in the Lord's sight and so arousing his anger."

[62] *Episkepsis*, no. 368 (1986): 10-11.

[63] For the doctrine of *ius divinum* see Peter Kistner, *Das göttliche Recht und die Kirchenverfassung*, Band 1 (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2009), 36; Karl Rahner, "Über den Begriff des Ius Divinum" im katholischen Verständnis," in *Existenz und Ordnung. Festschrift für Erik Wolf zum 60. Geburtstag,* eds. Thomas Würtenberger, Werner Maihofer, Alexander Hollerbach, (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1962), 62-86; Alexander Hollerbach, "Göttliches und Menschliches in der Ordnung der Kirche," in Alexander Hollerbach (Hrsg.), *Mensch und Recht: Festschrift für Erik Wolf zum 70. Geburtstag* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1972), 212-235.

[64] Avery Dulles, "Jus divinum as an Ecumenical Problem," *Theological Studies* 38 (1977): 681-708; Nicolas Afanasiev, "The Canons of the Church: Changeable or Unchangeable," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 11(1967): 54-68.

[65] Jovic, "The Importance of Fasting and Its Observance for Tomorrow," 105.



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Pan-Orthodox Pre-conciliar Conference[66]. Indeed, the first phrase would have been more compatible with the second article of the text, where we can find a biblical and patristic foundation of the institution of fasting according to the Orthodox Church. The passage from *Genesis* 2, 16-17 and the interpretation that St. Basil the Great offers to this paragraph the value expressed by those apostolic judgments, synodal canons, and patristic tradition, or metaphors found in liturgical hymns, but without being mentioned. This paragraph can represent, at first reading, a heterogeneous amalgam of arguments for fasting. The first article is based on the apostolic precepts, the synodal canons, and the patristic tradition as a whole and the liturgical texts of the Orthodox Tradition. Although in perfect agreement with the Patristic tradition, the last part of the first paragraph contains probably too many metaphorical expressions, which lead to an abstraction of the institution of fasting rather than to its explanation, or definition which would have been very useful especially for the beginning of a text that wants to explain the importance of fasting. Therefore, at first reading of this first paragraph of the document, it can be seen that it is very heterogeneous, comprising arguments from different registers and theological visions.

However, if we read this first article of the text more carefully, we can see that it is an attempt to define not the practice of fasting or the Orthodox fasting itself, in the same manner as the definitions found in some Orthodox handbooks or catechisms, but it tries to define the complex character of fasting. From this perspective, this first paragraph of the text represents the hermeneutical key for understanding the entire document. It is not the text itself, with its consistencies and inconsistencies, that is extremely important for this perspective, but the theological reconsideration of fasting that it emphasizes. Thus, according to the first paragraph of the document, fasting in the Orthodox Church has more dimensions: *historical-theological* (fasting as divine commandment given in Paradise); *ascetic-spiritual* (fasting as great spiritual endeavour and the foremost expression of the Orthodox ascetic ideal); *canonical* (the foundation of fasting are the apostolic precepts, the synodal canons, and the patristic tradition as a whole); *soteriological* (the great significance of fasting for our spiritual life and salvation); and *liturgical* (fasting according to the liturgical Tradition of the Orthodox Church, culminating with the Holy Eucharist). The other paragraphs of this document represent developments of these perspectives found in the first article of the text. Analyzed in this unity, the first paragraph is no longer heterogeneous, but attempts to unite, under the same definition, the holistic meaning of fasting

[66] "Émin. Président, au § 1 figure une référence à la Genèse. Dans la mesure où ce renvoi ne cadre pas entièrement avec le contexte, je propose de le déplacer au § 2, avant la référence au Deutéronome." Secrétariat pour la préparation du Saint et Grand Concile de L'Église Orthodoxe (ed.), *IIIe Conférence panorthodoxe préconciliaire. Actes (28 octobre – 9 novembre 1986)*, 202.



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in the life of the Orthodox Church. However, what we can see in the whole document is the total subordination of the bodily importance of fasting to the spiritual one. The first paragraph of the document is nothing else than a framing under the same definition of the many meanings and understandings of fasting. The document refers to fasting as an Orthodox ascetic ideal. This does not mean that fasting is a purpose for the Christian life, but a means to spiritual uplifting[67].

***Paragraph 2: Biblical and patristic foundation of fasting.*** If we compare the four official versions of the document, we can see that there are some differences of translation in the second paragraph[68] of the document as well. For example, the French, Greek and Russian translations are using the superlative adjective for the institution of fasting: "très ancienne," "ἀρχαιότατος," "древнейшее," but the English version considers fasting just an ancient one, not "the most ancient." The Greek phrase: "ὡς μέσον ἐγκρατείας, μετανοίας καί πνευματικῆς ἀνατάσεως" is best translated: "as a means of self-restraint, repentance, and spiritual uplifting"[69]. According to the English and the Greek versions the Church has proclaimed "the profound importance," "τήν ὑψίστην σημασίαν" of fasting, but in the French translation the adjective is

[67] Alexander Schmemann, *The Great Lent. Journey to the Pascha*, (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974), 14; Stelyios S Muksuris et alii, "Reflection on the Pre-conciliar Document: "The Importance of Fasting and its observance today," in *Toward the Holy and Great Council. Theological Reflections*, Nathanael Symeonides (ed.), Department of Inter-Orthodox Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations, 2016, 60.

[68] "As an ancient institution, fasting was mentioned already in the Old Testament (Deut 9:18; Is 58:4-10; Joel 2:15; Jonah 3:5-7) and affirmed in the New Testament. The Lord Himself fasted for forty days before commencing His public ministry (Lk 4:1-2) and provided instructions on how to practice fasting (Mt 6:16-18). Fasting is generally prescribed in the New Testament as a means of abstinence, repentance, and spiritual edification (Mk 1:6; Acts 13:2; 14:23; Rom 14:21). Since the apostolic times, the Church has proclaimed the profound importance of fasting and established Wednesday and Friday as days of fasting (Didache 8, 1), as well as the fast before Pascha (Irenaeus of Lyons, as cited in Eusebius, Church History 5, 24. PG 20 497B-508AB). In ecclesiastical practice that has existed for centuries, there has always been diversity with regard not only to the length of the fast before Easter (Dionysius of Alexandria, Letter to Basilides, PG 10, 1277), but also the number and content of other periods of fasting which became customary under the influence of various factors, primarily, of the liturgical and monastic traditions, with a view to proper preparation for the great feasts. Thus, the indissoluble link between fasting and worship indicates the extent and purpose of fasting and reveals its spiritual nature. For this reason, all the faithful are invited to respond accordingly, each to the best of his or her strength and ability, while not allowing such liberty to diminish this holy institution: 'See that no one make thee to err from this path of doctrine… If thou art able to bear the whole yoke of the Lord, thou wilt be perfect; but if thou art not able, what thou art able, that do. But concerning meat, bear that which thou art able to do' (Didache 6, 1-3)."

[69] Stelyios S Muksuris et al., "Reflection on the Pre-conciliar Document: 'The Importance of Fasting and its observance today,'" 60.



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missing: "l'Église a proclamé l'importance du jeûne." Very often, the French version of the text contains small differences than the others[70].

Despite these, the second passage of the document of the Holy and Great Council, which has not been changed since the third Pan-orthodox Pre-conciliar Conference, offers historical and theological references regarding the practice of fasting in the Old and New Testaments and the post-apostolic period. If in the first paragraph the quote from *Genesis 2, 16-17* was used according to the interpretation of St. Basil the Great, in this paragraph the quotes are used without a precise patristic or Orthodox interpretation. The Old Testament quotations represent various testimonies about the Jewish practice of fasting. The New Testament quotations from this document are not the common quotations found in Orthodox texts about fasting. Some of them give minimal support to the importance and practice of fasting in the Orthodox Church. For example, the quote from the *Gospel of Mark* 1: 6: "John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts, and wild honey" is not an argument for fasting as "a means of abstinence, repentance, and spiritual edification." It is necessary to interpret the passage so that the reader realizes that the biblical quotation refers to fasting. The same thing can be said about the two quotations from the *Acts of the Apostles*, the word "fasting" being just mentioned in them[71]. As for the quotation of *Romans* 14, 21: "it is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother or sister to fall" is taken out of the context and is not referring to the practice of Orthodox fasting. Also, the work "Letter to Basilides, PG 10, 1277" of St. Dionysius of Alexandria, which represents his first canon, received in the canonical collection of the Orthodox Church, refers to the days before the Passover, not to the Great Lent of forty days, and the phrase "ἄσιτοι διατελοῦντες" [72] from this canon refers to the complete abstinence from food for several days before the Resurrection,

[70] For example: for the English phrase "with a view to proper preparation for the great feasts," the French translation is: "et destinés, entre autres, à la préparation adéquate des fidèles avant les grandes fêtes," the word: "des fidèles" is addend just in the French translation; the French translation for the English version: "Thus, the indissoluble link between fasting and worship indicates the extent and purpose of fasting" is "Ainsi, le jeûne est indissociable du culte. Ce lien intime démontre la mesure et le but du jeûne."

[71] Acts 13: 2: "While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off." Acts 14: 23 "Paul and Barnabas ordained elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust."

[72] "Ἀλλ᾽ οἱ μὲν καὶ πάσας ὑπερτιθέασιν, ἄσιτοι διατελοῦντες, οἱ δὲ δύο, οἱ δὲ τρεῖς, οἱ δὲ τέσσαρας, οἱ δὲ οὐδεμίαν. Καὶ τοῖς μὲν πάνυ διαπονηθεῖσιν ἐν ταῖς ὑπερθέσεσιν, εἶτα ἀποκαμοῦσι καὶ μόνον οὐκ ἐκλείπουσι, συγγνώμη τῆς ταχυτέρας γεύσεως."



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and not to the practice of usual fasting for forty days. Indeed, the document recognizes the diversity with regard to the length, number, and content of the fasting periods in the history of Christianity and the influence that the liturgical and monastic tradition had on the settlement of this tradition even for the laity. The text refers to fasting periods practiced in monasteries, which, after the 12th century, were imposed as obligatory for laymen as well. What is very important to note is the reserved attitude of the document towards the obligation of fasting as a penitentiary discipline. Without diminishing or abolishing the practice of fasting, the document takes into consideration the strength and ability of everyone and invites everyone to discover the practice of fasting especially for worshiping God. By this, the document shows the indissoluble link between fasting and worship and the liturgical character of fasting. Therefore, the second passage of the document brings biblical and patristic arguments for the importance of fasting in the history and Tradition of the Church, but without a precise historical development of the practice of fasting, as can be seen in the document of the Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission of 1971.

***Paragraph 3. The spiritual value of fasting.*** As in the previous paragraphs, the third paragraph[73] of the document contains some differences in translation[74]. Despite these, the beginning of the third paragraph with "the true

[73] "As a spiritual endeavor, the true fast is inseparable from unceasing prayer and genuine repentance. Repentance without fasting is fruitless (Basil the Great, *On Fasting* 1, 3. PG 31, 168A), as fasting without merciful deeds is dead, especially nowadays when the unequal and unjust distribution of goods deprives entire nations of their daily bread. "While fasting physically, brethren, let us also fast spiritually. Let us loose every knot of iniquity; let us tear up every unrighteous bond; let us distribute bread to the hungry, and welcome into our homes those who have no roof over their heads…" (Sticheron at Vespers on Wednesday of the First Week of Lent; cf. Is 58:6-7). Fasting cannot be reduced to simple and formal abstinence from certain foods. "So let us not be selfish as we begin the abstinence from foods that is the noble fast. Let us fast in an acceptable manner, one that is pleasing to God. A true fast is one that is set against evil, it is self-control of the tongue. It is the checking of anger, separation from things like lusts, evil-speaking, lies, and false oaths. Self-denial from these things is a true fast, so fasting from these negative things is good" (Basil the Great, *On Fasting*, 2, 7. PG 31, 196D). Abstinence from certain foods during the fast and temperance, not only with regard to what to eat but also how much to eat, constitutes a visible aspect of this spiritual endeavor. "In the literal sense, fasting is abstinence from food, but food makes us neither more nor less righteous. However, in the spiritual sense, it is clear that, as life comes from food for each of us and the lack of food is a symbol of death, so it is necessary that we fast from worldly things, in order that we might die to the world and after this, having partaken of the divine nourishment, live in God" (Clement of Alexandria, *From the Prophetic Eclogae*. PG 9, 704D-705A). Therefore, the true fast affects the entire life in Christ of the faithful and is crowned by their participation in divine worship, particularly in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist."

[74] The only significant difference that I had noticed in this paragraph is the translation of the phrase: "genuine repentance" with "repentir sincère," and "τήν είλικρινῆ μετάνοιαν." The



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fast," "le véritable jeune," "ἀληθής νηστεία" would imply the existence of another type of fasting, "the untrue fast." This parallelism is excluded in Patristic theology by the existence of a single type of fasting. This is the reason why the word "true" added in the official document can be considered redundant. More than that, as we will see, if the "true fast" is referring only to the spiritual one than we could have a distorted opinion regarding fasting. This paragraph of the document emphasizes the spiritual character of fasting, trying to outline some fundamental elements for the explanation of this "true fast." The three elements for the correct understanding of the Orthodox fasting are *unceasing prayer, genuine repentance, and good deeds.* What is very important in this paragraph, but insufficiently treated, is the link between fasting and social involvement of Christians through charity works. The importance of fasting in the first centuries of Christianity was given exactly by this type of social involvement through fasting, rather than their isolation in the space of private asceticism, totally separated from the needs of their fellowmen. Fasting is the direct expression of the commandment "Love your neighbour as yourself" (*Mark* 12:31). The quote from the Sticheron at Vespers on Wednesday of the First Week of Lent, is emphasizing this: "let us distribute bread to the hungry, and welcome into our homes those who have no roof over their head." Fasting represents, from this perspective, a social attitude towards the one in need. Metropolitan George Khodr of Mount Lebanon proposed at the third Pan-Orthodox Pre-conciliar Conference that the text should emphasize not only the spiritual value of fasting, especially in accordance with the vision of St. Basil the Great but also its social involvement, a perspective found in Christian apologetics and the works of the Fathers. Through this vision of giving and sharing, fasting does not represent a personal ascetic egocentric ideal, but it takes care of the poor or the one in need[75]. Although it includes the social involvement of Christians as a fundamental element of fasting, the document does not explore this idea, but merely contends with its incipient assertion and with a liturgical quotation.

The following arguments try to emphasize the link between bodily fasting and spiritual fasting. In this sense, bodily fasting (or the abstinence from certain foods) is totally subordinated to spiritual fasting. Despite the fact that the document is speaking about abstinence from food (bodily fasting) and spiritual fasting, the connection between them is not developed and the interdependence between them is overlooked. Although correct in its meaning, the statement: "Fasting cannot be reduced to simple and formal abstinence from certain foods" can lead to the disregard of the practice of fasting which begins with this

phrase "τοῦ ἐπιουσίου ἄρτου" found in the prayer is translated by "daily bread." The word " ἐπιουσίου" does not mean just "daily," see Eugen Munteanu, *Lexicologie biblică românească* (Bucureşti: Humanitas, 2008), 407-448.

[75] Secrétariat pour la préparation (ed.), *IIIe Conférence panorthodoxe préconciliaire,* 84-86.



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abstinence from certain foods, not because they are pure or impure, but because "fasting seeks to assist us in reprioritizing our allegiances from an addictive dependence upon worldly goods to an intimate relationship with God and neighbour"[76]. In a world in which food represents much more than in the ancient, pre-modern or modern societies, implying, due to economic and cultural development, a true "religion of thinness" [77], having vegan, raw-vegan trends and countless diets and food plans, that are present daily in the lives of people, the assertion that the bodily understanding of fasting is not so important, and the relation between abstinence from food and abstinence from sins is not emphasized leads to the impoverishment of the full meaning of fasting in the Orthodox Church. If the spiritual value of fasting is the only one that matters, then we have a *docetist* vision on fasting. Focusing only on the spiritual value of fasting is nothing else than a spiritual elitism that does not take into account the first steps of fasting, namely the abstinence from certain foods, especially in a society of consumption, that tempts the simple believers with smells, sensations, and irresistible culinary offers. Without reducing fasting to diet or food plan, and without idealizing or misinterpreting the importance of fasting, the document should have highlighted the psychological and physical importance of fasting and the indissoluble link with spiritual fasting. How can a believer be compelled to consume only vegan products more than 150 days a year without explaining him the reasons? Despite the fact that the document affirms that many faithful today do not observe all the prescriptions of fasting, or do not fast at all, the text shades the importance of food fasting and its social involvement. In a world marked by consumerism, land exploitation, resource depletion, global warming, social inequality, diseases caused by deviations of nutritional behaviors, abstinence from food can be a solution for all of these problems. The problem of the document is that the idea of true fasting is focused just on spiritual fasting: "A true fast is one that is set against evil, it is self-control of the tongue. It is the checking of anger, separation from things like lusts, evil-speaking, lies, and false oaths. Self-denial from these things is a true fast, so fasting from these negative things is good." The documents need to emphasize fasting from the Chalcedon definition of faith, where human and divine coexist "unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably," as we can see in the interpretation of Fr. Alexander Schmemann[78].

[76] S.S. Muksuris et al., "Reflection on the Pre-conciliar Document: "The Importance of Fasting and its observance today," 57.

[77] Athanasios N. Papathanasiou, "Christian fasting in postmodern society: considering the criteria," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 60, no. 1-2 (2016): 249-256.

[78] "In the long and difficult effort of spiritual recovery, the Church does not separate the soul from the body. The whole man has fallen away from God; the whole man is to be restored, the whole man is to return. The catastrophe of sin lies precisely in the victory of the flesh—the animal, the



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On the other part, the abstinence from food without abstinence from sin can led us to a "chemical theology," as Athanasios N Papathanasiou called it, which devotionally and passionately observes just the components of foods [79]. In this sense, fasting should have biological, psychological, social and spiritual value. The physical or bodily importance of fasting is underlined by several Church Fathers. In accordance with them, modern medicine can provide evidence that underlines the benefits and medical importance of Orthodox Christian fasting for the health of the body[80]. As a psychological practice, current medicine and nutrition refer to the concept of "compulsive overeating," a deviation of nutritional behavior based on a psychological disorder, being an addiction to food. Fasting can be a solution to this problem[81]. As a social practice, as we have seen, fasting can have countless implications. Metropolitan George Khodr emphasized as well at the Third Pan-Orthodox Pre-conciliar Conference the fact that fasting can restore the theological vision of Adam's existence in Heaven, who, through fasting was taking care of nature and animals. This vision would contribute to the understanding of fasting as a non-violence practice towards nature and animals, which can be found in many ecological debates today. The document of the Council states, indeed, the necessity of fasting from food, in which "temperance, not only with regard to what to eat but also how much to eat" is very important, but all this bodily value of fasting is immediately circumscribed by a quote from the third century: "food makes us neither more nor less righteous." The question is, can I behave according to the Gospel, even without abstinence from food?

irrational, the lust in us—over the spiritual and the divine. But the body is glorious; the body is holy, so holy that God Himself "became flesh." Salvation and repentance then are not contempt for the body or neglect of it, but restoration of the body to its real function as the expression and the life of the spirit, as the temple of the priceless human soul. Christian asceticism is a fight, not against but for the body. For this reason, the whole man—soul and body—repents. The body participates in the prayer of the soul just as the soul prays through and in the body. Prostrations, the 'psycho-somatic' sign of repentance and humility, of adoration and obedience, are thus the lenten rite *par excellence*." Alexander Schmemann, *The Great Lent. Journey to the Pascha*, 37-38.

[79] Papathanasiou, "Christian fasting in postmodern society," 259.

[80] Katerina O. Sarri, et al. "Effects of Greek Orthodox Christian Church fasting on serum lipids and obesity," *BMC Public Health* 3, (January 2003): 16-8; A. Papadaki et al*., "*Differences in nutrient intake during a Greek Orthodox Christian fasting and non-fasting week, as assessed by a food composition database and chemical analyses of 7-day weighed food samples," *Journal Of Food Composition & Analysis* 24, no. 1 (February 2011): 22-28; A. Papadaki et al. "Calcium, nutrient and food intake of Greek Orthodox Christian monks during a fasting and non-fasting week," *Public Health Nutrition* 11, no. 10 (October 2008): 1022-1029; Constantine Cavarnos, *Fasting and Science: A Study of the Scientific Support and Patristic Foundation for Fasting in the Orthodox Church*, 2 edition, (Etna, Calif: Center for Traditionalist, 1998).

[81] For an Orthodox perspective on this topic see: Rita Madden, *Food, Faith, and Fasting: A Sacred Journey to Better Health* (Ancient Faith Publishing, 2015).



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***Paragraph 4. Christocentric understanding of fasting.*** If we compare the four official versions of the text of this fourth paragraph[82], we can observe the following differences. The English version contains the phrase: "exemplifies fasting," but in the French and Greek versions we find: "est devenu l'exemple," "κατέστη ὑπόδειγμα." The French translation of the word: "for the faithful" "τῶν πιστῶν" is "de celui que doivent pratiquer les fidèles." The French text is different than the English and Greek translations by saying that: "Il rend active leur participation à l'obéissance du Seigneur, afin que, *par le jeûne*." The word *"par le jeûne*" can be found just in the French translation, the English and the Greek ones are referring to "the obedience in the Lord" ("that through it," "ἵνα δι' αὐτῆς"), and not to fasting.

This paragraph, without being modified in any way since the Third Pan-Orthodox Pre-conciliar Conference in 1986, emphasizes the Christological character of fasting, given that Christ Himself fasted. In this sense, the Christian fasting is an imitation of Christ and obedience to his salvific activity. At the third Third Pan-Orthodox Pre-conciliar Conference, Metropolitan Christodoulos of Dimitrias considered the use of the passage from the work of St. Gregory Palamas as inappropriate because it requires that fasting is an absolutely necessary condition for salvation, being, by this argument, more important than baptism[83]. However, the quote is referring to fasting as a practice of self-sacrifice in relation to the sacrifice of Christ and cannot be considered as a necessary condition for salvation.

## Conclusions

The first four paragraphs of the text represent an attempt of defining not the practice of fasting or the Orthodox fasting itself, in the same manner as the definitions found in some Orthodox handbooks or catechisms, but the complex

[82] "The forty-day fast of the Lord exemplifies fasting for the faithful, initiating their participation in the obedience in the Lord, that through it 'we might recover by its observance that which we have lost by not observing it' (Gregory the Theologian, Homily 45, On Holy Pascha, 28. PG 36, 661C). The Christocentric understanding of the spiritual dimension of fasting—in particular the fast of Great Lent—is a general rule in the entire patristic tradition and is characteristically epitomized by St Gregory Palamas: 'When you fast like this you not only suffer with Christ and are dead with Him, but you are also risen with Him and reign with Him forever and ever. If through such a fast you have been planted together in the likeness of His death, you shall also share in His resurrection and inherit life in Him' (Homily 13, On the Fifth Sunday of Lent, PG 151, 161AB)."

[83] Secrétariat pour la préparation du Saint et Grand Concile de L'Église Orthodoxe (ed.), *IIIe Conférence panorthodoxe préconciliaire. Actes (28 octobre – 9 novembre 1986)*, 78. Secrétariat pour la préparation (ed.), *IIIe Conférence panorthodoxe préconciliaire*, 81-82.



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character of fasting. Thus, the first paragraph represents the hermeneutical key for understanding the entire document. It is not the text itself, with its consistencies and inconsistencies, that is extremely important for this perspective, but the theological reconsideration of fasting that it emphasizes.

Without diminishing or abolishing the practice of fasting, the document takes into consideration the strength and ability of everyone and invites everyone to discover the practice of fasting especially for worshiping God. By this, the document shows the indissoluble link between fasting and worship and the liturgical character of fasting. Therefore, the second passage of the document brings biblical and patristic arguments for the importance of fasting in the history and Tradition of the Church, but without a precise historical development of the practice of fasting.

Taking into consideration this vast period of time needed for the final form of the text of the Holy and Great Council, we can assert the total victory of the theologians and circles with conservative theological visions, the idea of changing and adapting fasting periods being removed from the inter-Orthodox debate. More, as we shall see, fasting is considered a divine institution, and therefore any argument for any possible shortening of is suppressed from the beginning.

Fasting should have biological, psychological, social and spiritual value. The physical or bodily importance of fasting is underlined by several Church Fathers. In accordance with them, as we saw, modern medicine can provide evidence that underlines the benefits and medical importance of Orthodox Christian fasting for the health of the body. As a psychological practice, fasting can be a solution to different addictions to food. As a social practice, fasting can have countless implications. This vision would contribute to the understanding of fasting as a non-violence practice towards nature and animals, which can be found in many ecological debates today.

Also, in a world where the exploitation of animals in miserable conditions, the use of countless hormones, chemicals, additives, preservatives, and other toxic materials for the human body, the millions of tons of discarded food are present daily in our post-modern society, the practice of fasting would come precisely as a message against the exploitation of God's creation for economic profit or for the satisfaction of our culinary desires and appetites, and focusing on the one in need.



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