

Documents of the Holy and Grand Synod of the Orthodox Church within the Five Pan-Orthodox Preconciliar Conferences

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Abstract:

Preparations of Holy and Great Council of Orthodox Church was started at the beginning of the 20th century and lasted much longer than originally expected. Principal discussions in this period they were related of the themes to be discussed at Holy and Great Council, these been completed, for the most part, during the five Pan-Orthodox Preconciliar Conferences held to Chambésy. In this article I tried to notice the evolution of documents starting with year 1976, when was the first Pan-Orthodox Preconciliar Conference, and ending with year 2015, the year of the last one Pan-Orthodox Preconciliar Conference.

Keywords:

The Holy and Great Council, Pan-Orthodox Preconciliar Conference, documents, Chambésy, themes, delegations

The idea of organizing a general council in the Orthodox Church appeared at the beginning of the 20th century, but its preparation lasted much longer than originally expected. Important moments in this process of preparation were those of 1923 at the Inter-Orthodox Conference in Constantinople, those of 1930 from the Vatopedi Monastery where a Preparatory Inter-Orthodox Commission was convened, those of 1936 at the First Congress of the Faculties of Theology in Athens, those at the Moscow Orthodox Conference in 1948 and the four Pan-Orthodox Conferences, the first three in Rhodes in 1961, 1963, 1964 and the fourth in Chambésy in 1968.

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Following this long period of preparation of the synod and, in particular, of the themes to be discussed in the future council, five Pan-Orthodox Preconciliar Conferences were held in Chambésy in 1976, 1982, 1986, 2009 and 2015, conferences during which were discussed ten topics considered of most importance for the present life of the Orthodox Church.

1. The First Pan-Orthodox Preconciliar Conference in Chambésy in 1976

This conference took place from 21 to 30 November 1976 and thirteen delegations took part, absentees being the Churches of Georgia and Albania. The delegation of the Romanian Orthodox Church was made up of Metropolitan Justin of Moldavia and Suceava, Bishop Antonie of Ploiești and priest Professor Dumitru Popescu.² The Chair of the Conference was Metropolitan Meliton of Chalcedon, the head of the delegation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, and the secretary was Metropolitan Damaskinos of Traupolis.³

The heads of all delegations⁴ had a meeting before the actual start of the conference, a meeting where the items on the agenda were decided:

- “1. Revision of the list of themes for the Holy and Great Synod;
2. Examining the Methods for Preparing the Synod;
3. Evaluation of the dialogues so far with the Christian Churches and the Ecumenical Council of Churches;
4. Studying the Easter celebration at a common date by all Christians.”⁵

² ***, *Sesiunea ordinară a anului 1976 a Sfântului Sinod al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române (Ordinary Session of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church in 1976)*, in *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, no. 1-3/1977, p. 217.

³ Fr. PhD. Viorel Ioniță, *Hotărârile întrunirilor panortodoxe din 1923 până în 2009 – Spre Sfântul și Marele Sinod al Bisericii Ortodoxe (Pan-Orthodox Meetings Decisions between 1923 and 2009 - For the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church)*, Basilica Publishing, Bucharest, 2013, p. 85.

⁴ Metropolitan Meliton of Chalcedon – Ecumenical Patriarchate; Metropolitan Methodius of Axum - Alexandria Patriarchate; Metropolitan Ignatius of Laodicea - Patriarchate of Antioch; Metropolitan Germanos of Petra - Jerusalem Patriarchate; Metropolitan Filaret of Kiev and Galicia - Patriarchate of Moscow; Bishop Stephan of Dalmatia - Patriarchate of Serbia; Metropolitan Justin of Moldavia and Suceava - Romanian Patriarchate; Metropolitan Nicodim of Sliven - Patriarchate of Bulgaria; Metropolitan Chrysostom of Paphos - Church of Cyprus; Metropolitan Alexandros of Peristerion - Church of Greece; Egumen Simion Roumantcheuk - Church of Poland; Metropolitan Dorotheum of Prague - Church of the Czech Republic and Slovakia; Archbishop Paul of Finland - Church of Finland.

⁵ ***, *Sesiunea ordinară a anului 1976... (Ordinary Session of the Holy Synod of...)*, p. 217.

After accepting these items on the agenda, three working committees were formed. The first commission, chaired by Metropolitan Justin of Moldova and Suceava, was given the mission to study and propose solutions for the first two items on the agenda, these being the most complicated. The second committee dealt with item number 3 on the agenda and the third working committee dealt with item 4 of the agenda.⁶

When the discussions in the first working commission entered a slight impasse because each Church wanted the theme proposed by it to be included on the agenda, Metropolitan Justin of Moldova and Suceava proposed to select ten themes, and the selection would be among the themes that appeared most often on the lists of all Churches. Thus the discussions continued and were approved the following topics:

1. Orthodox Diaspora;
2. Autocephaly and the way it has to be proclaimed;
3. Autonomy and the way it has to be proclaimed;
4. The diptychs;
5. The issue of the new calendar;
6. Impediments to marriage;
7. Readjusting church prescriptions on fasting;
8. Relations of Orthodox Churches with the rest of the Christian world;
9. Orthodoxy and the Ecumenical Movement;
10. The contribution of local Orthodox Churches to achieving the Christian ideals of peace, freedom, fraternity, and love among peoples and suppression of racial discrimination.⁷

All these topics were to be divided into the study of the local Orthodox Churches as established at the Fourth Pan-Orthodox Conference, but this rule was little nuanced at the first Pan-Orthodox Preconciliar Conference, in the sense that the results of some Churches on some topics were approved by the synods of the local Churches only after they had been discussed in the Preparatory Commission and the Pan-Orthodox Preconciliar Conferences. This was added to the rule established in 1968 because when the representatives of the local Churches came to the Pan-Orthodox meetings with papers approved by the local synods, they could no longer accept their change because they had the value of synodal judgments.⁸

⁶ †Antonie Plămădeală, *Opinii asupra pregătirii Sfântului și Marelui Sinod al Bisericii Ortodoxe (Opinions on the Preparation of the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church)*, in *Ortodoxia*, no. 2/1977, p. 247.

⁷ †Antonie Plămădeală, *Opinii asupra pregătirii... (Opinions on the Preparation...)*, p. 248.

⁸ Fr. Prof. PhD. Viorel Ioniță, *Hotărârile întrunirilor... (Pan-Orthodox Meetings Decisions...)*, p. 93.

Applying the rule mentioned above, the Romanian Orthodox Church was assigned to study the first three topics of the day's agenda: Orthodox Diaspora, Autocephaly and the way it has to be proclaimed and Autonomy and the way it has to be proclaimed.⁹

The second working committee, in the report presented, emphasized that theological dialogues with Anglicans, Old Catholics and Old-Eastern Churches should continue, and in connection with the dialogue between the Orthodox and the Lutherans, the commission recommended that it should advance from the level of the local Orthodox Churches where much progress has been made in this respect. The commission's report also recommended starting the inter-Orthodox dialogue commission with the Roman-Catholics, a committee that had been already established.¹⁰

In the report of the third commission, the problem of celebrating Easter on the same date by all Christians was posed, and in this sense it was proposed in the same report the organisation of a committee of specialists to prepare an informed study on this issue.¹¹

The First Pan-Orthodox Preconciliar Conference ended in a very optimistic atmosphere, first of all because the ten themes to be prepared before the Holy and Grand Synod of the Orthodox Church were debated and approved. Also, this Conference was a good example of inter-Orthodox collaboration and a manifestation of synodality within the Orthodox Church.¹²

2. The Second Pan-Orthodox Preconciliar Conference in Chambésy in 1982

After these preparations, the chosen themes were to be discussed, and this work began at the second Pan-Orthodox Preconciliar Conference convened between 3-12 September 1982 in Chambésy. There were delegates of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, whose leader, Metropolitan Meliton of Chalcedon, was the chairperson of the conference sessions, of the Patriarchates of Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, Moscow, Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria and delegates of the Churches of Cyprus, Greece, Georgia, the Czech Republic and Slovakia and Finland.¹³

⁹ ***, *Sesiunea ordinară a anului 1976... (Ordinary Session of the Holy Synod of...)*, p. 218.

¹⁰ †Antonie Plămădeală, *Opinii asupra pregătirii... (Opinions on the Preparation...)*, p. 251.

¹¹ Fr. Prof. PhD. Viorel Ioniță, *Hotărârile întrunirilor... (Pan-Orthodox Meetings Decisions...)*, p. 95.

¹² *Ibidem*, pp. 98-99.

¹³ Synodica, VIII, *II^e Conférence Panorthodoxe Préconciliaire (Chambésy, 3-12 septembre 1982)*, les édition du centre orthodoxe Chambésy, Geneve, 1994, pp. 7-8

The themes that were put on the agenda are the following:

1. Impediments to marriage;
2. Readjusting church prescriptions on fasting, as required by current era;
3. The issue of the calendar and the common celebration of Easter by all Christians;
4. The possibility for rasophone monks to become bishops (a problem raised by the Bulgarian Orthodox Church)¹⁴.

On September 4, 1982, a meeting was held with the heads of delegations where the program of this conference was established, and on September 5, the official opening took place after the Divine Liturgy in the Chambésy Orthodox Church.¹⁵

In order to elaborate the texts of the draft decisions, four working committees were organized, in each of which being a representative of the Romanian Orthodox Church. Lector PhD. Dan-Ilie Ciobotea, the current Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, was assigned as a member of the working committee that dealt with the issue of norms concerning the bishop's ordination.¹⁶

Concerning the first item on the agenda, it was established that the marriage between Orthodox and non-Orthodox may be carried out, this issue being present especially in the Orthodox Diaspora, provided that the children of a family of this kind are baptized in the Orthodox faith. Marriages between Orthodox and non-Christians were forbidden according to the Canon of the Church, but each local Orthodox Church was given the freedom to decide, through iconony, on some specific situations and taking into account local pastoral needs.¹⁷

The discussion on the second item on the agenda was postponed to a third Pan-Orthodox Preconciliar Conference because the approaches on fasting were varied from one Church to another and a hasty decision in this respect was not desirable, decision which might have led to much disorder among faithful.¹⁸

In addition to the problem of impediments to marriage, another text that was finalized at the second Pan-Orthodox Preconciliar Conference was the one related to the calendar and the celebration of Easter on the same date by all Christians. The

http://www.apostoliki-diakonia.gr/gr_main/dialogos/ SYNODHIKA_8.pdf (accessed on November 20, 2018).

¹⁴ Lect. PhD. Dan-Ilie Ciobotea, *Spre Sfântul și Marele Sinod al Ortodoxiei (For the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church)*, in *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, no. 11-12/1982, p. 942.

¹⁵ *Synodica, VIII, II^e Conférence Panorthodoxe...*, pp. 9-15.

¹⁶ Fr. Prof. PhD. Viorel Ioniță, *Hotărârile întrunirilor... (Pan-Orthodox Meetings Decisions...)*, p. 106.

¹⁷ Lect. PhD. Dan-Ilie Ciobotea, *Spre Sfântul și Marele Sinod... (For the Holy and Great Council...)*, p. 942.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 943.

delegates present at the conference appreciated the efforts of the Secretariat for the preparation of the Holy and Great Synod regarding the issue of the celebration of Easter on the same date by all Christians and efforts were made to establish a scientifically determined date by specialists in this respect. Moreover, the celebration of Easter by all Orthodox at the same time was appreciated, being a sign of unity and communion. Concerning the celebration of Easter at the same date with all other Christians, the general view was that at that time believers were not prepared for such a change, but that an important information campaign was much needed. Nevertheless, the decision of the First Ecumenical Council on this celebration should have not in any way be abandoned.¹⁹

Regarding the last issue on the agenda, the conference decided that both the monks and the rasophors could be ordained as bishops. In addition to the topics on the agenda, the second Pan-Orthodox Preconciliar Conference also established the themes to be discussed at the third conference, as follows:

- “1. Readjusting church prescriptions on fasting;
2. The relations of Orthodox Churches with the rest of the Christian world;
3. The Orthodoxy and the Ecumenical Movement;
4. The contribution of local Orthodox Churches to achieving the ideals of peace, freedom, fraternity, and love among peoples and suppression of racial discrimination.”²⁰

The preparatory commission was also commissioned to draw up a regulation of the Pan-Orthodox Preconciliar Conferences. At this point, the discussion became a little controversial about the language or languages used in the Conferences discussions and those in which documents are to be drawn up. The Metropolitan of Kiev proposed that if the Russian language was decided to be used along with the Greek language, documents should be drawn up in that language also, and Metropolitan George of the Lebanon Mountain proposed the usage of one of the languages of international circulation, such as French. These proposals were submitted to the Preparatory Commission and, over time, the official languages of the Preconciliar Pan-Orthodox Conferences have become Greek, Russian and French.²¹

3. The Third Pan-Orthodox Preconciliar Conference in Chambésy in 1986

The second meeting of the Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission, held between 15-22 February, 1986, prepared the convening and holding of the third Pan-

¹⁹ *Ibidem.*

²⁰ Fr. Prof. PhD. Viorel Ioniță, *Hotărârile întrunirilor... (Pan-Orthodox Meetings Decisions...)*, p. 109.

²¹ Fr. Prof. PhD. Viorel Ioniță, *Hotărârile întrunirilor... (Pan-Orthodox Meetings Decisions...)*, pp. 110-111.

Orthodox Preconciliar Conference, which also took place in Chambésy between 28 October and 6 November, 1986. The agenda proposed at the end of the second Pan-Orthodox Preconciliar Conference was preserved, and the participating delegations represented fourteen local Orthodox Churches, without the Orthodox Church of Albania. The chair of the Conference was Metropolitan Chrysostom of Myra, the leader of the Ecumenical Patriarchate delegation.²²

This Conference began with the approval of the Regulation of the Pan-Orthodox Preconciliar Conferences drafted in 1982 during the second meeting of the Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission. The Regulation had 19 articles divided into several sections as follows:

- Introduction (art. 1)
- Convening (art. 2 and 3)
- Themes (art. 4)
- Composition - the chair - the secretary (art. 5-9)
- The works of the conference (art. 10-12)
- The Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission (art. 13-15)
- Approval of texts, decision making, character of decisions (art. 16-19)²³

After the approval of the Regulation, the topics on the agenda were discussed in general, and after this discussion, working committees were set up for each subject. During the general discussions, the head of the delegation of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Antonie Plămădeală of Transylvania, drew attention to the fact that the formulation of the first item on the agenda risked to scandalize the believers, who might understand the term “readjusting” as that the fasting teaching would change, which was not the case. In this context, Metropolitan Antonie proposed speaking about the importance of fasting in the life of believers.²⁴

After the reports of all the working commissions were presented, the texts of the four items on the agenda were approved, these texts having only an indicative value for the local Orthodox Churches until they were approved by the Holy Synod and received by each local Church.²⁵

²² Synodica, X, *III^e Conférence Panorthodoxe Préconciliaire (Chambésy, 28 octobre-6 novembre 1986)*, les édition du centre orthodoxe Chambésy, Geneve, 2014, p. 9 http://www.apostoliki-diakonia.gr/gr_main/dialogos/SYNODHIKA_10.pdf (accessed on November 21, 2018).

²³ Fr. Prof. PhD. Viorel Ioniță, *A 4-a Conferință Panortodoxă Presinodală, Chambésy/Geneva, Elveția, 6-12 iunie 2009 (The 4th Pan-Orthodox Preconciliar Conference, Chambésy/ Geneva, Switzerland, June 6-12, 2009)*, in *Studii Teologice*, no. 2/2009, p. 237.

²⁴ †Antonie Plămădeală, *A treia Conferință Panortodoxă Preconciliară (The Third Preconciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference)*, in *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, no. 9-10/1986, p. 38.

²⁵ Fr. Prof. PhD. Viorel Ioniță, *Hotărârile întrunirilor... (Pan-Orthodox Meetings Decisions...)*, pp. 118-119.

In addition to these discussed and approved themes, it was recommended that during the Fourth Pan-Orthodox Preconciliar Conference to be discussed the four remaining themes of those approved at the first Conference in 1976. These were:

1. Orthodox Diaspora;
2. Autocephaly and the way it has to be proclaimed;
3. Autonomy and the way it has to be proclaimed;
4. The diptychs.²⁶

In addition to setting out the themes of the forthcoming Conference, recommendations were also made on the procedure to be followed up until the Fourth Conference. Thus, it was necessary to receive the reports from the Greek Church for the first three themes and from the Church of Cyprus for the last theme, then they were to be sent to all local Churches together with all the themes approved by then. The Secretary responsible with the preparation of the Synod had to wait for responses and opinions on the four themes not discussed up to that point in a Pan-Orthodox Preconciliar Conference, then to prepare the materials for the preparatory inter-Orthodox Commissions. It was recommended the meeting of several inter-Orthodox Commissions according to the identified needs, given the complexity of the themes to be addressed and the difficulties that were already known in relation to them.²⁷

4. The Fourth Pan-Orthodox Preconciliar Conference in Chambésy in 2009

The Recommendation of the Third Preconciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference on the convocation of several inter-Orthodox preparatory commissions was followed, so that the issue of the Orthodox Diaspora was discussed in the years 1990 and 1993 within the Committees and in 1995 at an inter-Orthodox Congress of canonists where a Regulation of Orthodox episcopal conferences in the diaspora was drafted.²⁸ In this context, the Orthodox Diaspora document was prepared to be discussed at a Pan-Orthodox Preconciliar Conference, but the other three were not prepared, as was the recommendation of the Third Conference. This situation was prolonged until 2008, when Sinaxa of the Primates of the Autocephalous Orthodox Churches in Istanbul took place, Sinaxa in which it was decided to be organized a Pan-Orthodox Conference for the discussion of the Orthodox Diaspora, this conference coming to

²⁶ *Idem, A 4-a Conferință...*, p. 238.

²⁷ Fr. Prof. PhD. Viorel Ioniță, *Hotărârile întrunirilor... (Pan-Orthodox Meetings Decisions...)*, pp. 235-236.

²⁸ Synodica, XII, *IV^e Conférence Panorthodoxe Préconciliaire du Saint et Grande Concile (Chambésy, 6-13 juin 2009)*, les édition du centre orthodoxe du Patriarcat Œcuménique, Chambésy, Geneve, 2015, p. 9 http://www.apostoliki-diakonia.gr/gr_main/dialogos/SYNODHIKA_12.pdf (accessed on November 21, 2018).

prove the progress made by the Orthodox Church in the preparation of the Holy and Great Council²⁹.

After a long time since the Third Pan-Orthodox Preconciliar Conference, between 6-13 of June, 2009, Chambésy held its fourth Pan-Orthodox Preconciliar Conference, attended by representatives of all fourteen Orthodox Autocephalous Churches. The participation only of autocephalous churches was decided at the Sinaxa of the Primates in March, 2009.³⁰

During the discussions on the theme of the Orthodox Diaspora a very important role was played by the members of the delegation of the Romanian Orthodox Church. Bishop Ciprian of Câmpina pointed out that he did not consider the reference to canons as appropriate because these texts were adopted by the local Churches and no other change is needed. On the other hand, Archbishop Hilarion of Volokolamsk proposed two other changes. The first related to the advisory character of the episcopal conferences, which was also accepted through the support of the Romanian Orthodox Church, and the second one concerning the chair of these assemblies who, according to the proposal, would have to be chosen from among those present. This second proposal was not accepted, the chair of the episcopal assemblies being the representatives of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, and, in their absence, those who followed according to the diptychs. Moreover, the Russian Orthodox Church, with the support of the Romanian Orthodox Church, proposed that in these episcopal assemblies decisions should be taken unanimously, a proposal which was accepted.³¹

The two previously mentioned Churches also called for a modification of the text from 1993 that provided for the banning on the establishment of other diaspora dioceses. This decision could not remain valid due to the strong development of the diaspora, especially for the Churches of former Communist states.

Following this Pan-Orthodox Preconciliar Conference, new regions were added to the list of episcopal assemblies. So the final list contained the following regions:

1. North America and Central America;
2. South America;
3. Australia, New Zealand and Oceania;
4. Great Britain and Ireland;
5. France;
6. Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg;
7. Austria;

²⁹ <http://ziarullumina.ro/mesajul-Intaistatorilor-bisericilor-ortodoxe-care-s-au-intru-nit-in-sinaxa-la-constan-tinopol-52222.html> (accessed on November 22, 2018).

³⁰ Fr. Prof. PhD. Viorel Ioniță, *Hotărârile întrunirilor... (Pan-Orthodox Meetings Decisions...)*, p. 122.

³¹ Fr. Prof. PhD. Viorel Ioniță, *A 4-a Conferință...*, pp. 242-243.

8. Italy and Malta;
9. Switzerland and Liechtenstein;
10. Germany;
11. Scandinavian countries (excluding Finland);
12. Spain and Portugal.³²

In the period that followed, several Orthodox Episcopal Conferences or Orthodox Assemblies have been formed in some of the areas mentioned above, which has once again demonstrated the value of these inter-Orthodox meetings and the fact that their continuation is necessary to solve the problems within the Orthodox Church in a Pan-Orthodox way.³³

5. The Fifth Pan-Orthodox Preconciliar Conference in Chambésy in 2015

The Sinaxa of the Primate of the Autocephalous Orthodox Churches met in Sinaxa in 2014 and decided to set up a Special Inter-Orthodox Commission for the Preparation of the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church. This committee had three meetings in which some of the ten themes proposed in 1976 were discussed. Once these topics were dealt with, it was considered opportune to convene the Fifth Pan-Orthodox Preconciliar Conference. In this context, this Fifth Conference took place in Chambésy between 10 and 17 October 2015, with the participation of the delegations of all Autocephalous Orthodox Churches.³⁴

The Chair of the Conference was Metropolitan John of Pergam, who, because of medical problems, withdrew from this dignity, being replaced by Metropolitan Emmanuel of France. The themes that were intended to be adopted by consensus at this Conference were:

1. Autonomy and the way it has to be proclaimed;
2. The importance of fasting and its observance today;
3. The Orthodox Church and the rest of the Christian world;
4. The contribution of the Orthodox Church to the triumph of peace, justice, freedom, fraternity, and love among peoples, and the abolition of racial and other discrimination.³⁵

³² Synodica, XII, IV^e *Conférence Panorthodoxe Préconciliaire...*, p. 258 http://www.apostoliki-diakonia.gr/gr_main/dialogos/SYNODHIKA_12.pdf (accessed on November 21, 2018).

³³ Fr. Prof. PhD. Viorel Ioniță, *Hotărârile întrunirilor... (Pan-Orthodox Meetings Decisions...)*, p. 127.

³⁴ http://www.apostoliki-diakonia.gr/gr_main/dialogos/SYNODHIKA_13.pdf (accessed on November 22, 2018).

³⁵ Fr. Prof. PhD. Viorel Ioniță, *Sfântul și Marele Sinod al Bisericii Ortodoxe – documente pregătitoare (The Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church - Preparatory Documents)*, Basilica Publishing, Bucharest, 2016, p. 54.

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At the proposal of the delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church, the last theme received another title: “Mission of the Orthodox Church in the Contemporary World”. Because the other amendments proposed by this delegation were not accepted on this document at the end of the Conference, therefore, not during the meeting in which the subject was discussed, the leader of the delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk³⁶, did not want to sign this document, being followed by members of the delegation of the Georgian Orthodox Church³⁷.

Thus, this Fifth Pan-Orthodox Preconciliar Conference approved the first three documents on the agenda, and the fourth document and the finalization of all the other, as well as the drawing up of a Regulation for the Holy and Great Synod, remained the task of the Sinaxa of the Primates, which was held in 2016.³⁸

³⁶ <https://mospat.ru/en/2015/10/17/news123750> (accessed on November 22, 2018).

³⁷ Fr. Prof. PhD. Viorel Ioniță, *Sfântul și Marele Sinod... (The Holy and Great Synod...)*, p. 61.

³⁸ *Ibidem*.