

Scholars' Meeting at the Phanar

4-5 January, 2016

*Report prepared by
Dr Philip Kariatlis*

At the initiative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, a scholars' meeting was held at the Venerable Centre of the Phanar on the 4 – 5 January, 2016. Present at that meeting were men and women from different teaching institutions around the world, including the United States of America and Europe, as well as Asia and Australia. More specifically, participants included: heads and teachers of Orthodox seminaries and institutes, professors of non-Orthodox universities, theologians serving in mission, religious education and publishing, together with scholars from other disciplines interested in the dialogue between their respective fields of expertise (including the social sciences, human rights and social justice) and theology. At that meeting, St Andrew's Greek Orthodox Theological College was represented by Dr Philip Kariatlis, Academic Director and Senior Lecturer in Theology. Participants were also invited to the Epiphany day celebrations on the 6 January where, following the Divine Liturgy presided over by His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, a procession followed to the banks of the Golden Horn inlet where the cross was released and retrieved by a body of swimmers.



First on the agenda of the scholars' meeting was the welcome by the Revd Dr John Chryssavgis (Archdeacon of the Ecumenical Patriarchate serving as theological advisor to the Ecumenical

Patriarch) who addressed the participants of the meeting and went on to outline the purpose and aims of the scholars' meeting. The purpose of the scholars' meeting was two-fold: firstly it gave the Ecumenical Patriarchate an opportunity to share first hand some of the issues relating to the convocation of the forthcoming Holy and Great Synod scheduled to take place in 2016 at Hagia Irene (the first church built in Constantinople by St Constantine where the 2nd Ecumenical Council took place in 381AD). In this regard, His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew addressed the gathering highlighting the importance of dialogue and synodality as a means of "co-ordinat[ing] greater unity and cooperation" amongst the sister Orthodox Churches. His All-Holiness continued by pointing out that dialogue and synodality allowed the Orthodox Churches "to deliberate with one mind on issues that the Church has confronted in more recent times." Senior Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon also addressed the gathering and generously gave of his time to hear questions from the participants of the meeting. The group was unanimous in its resolve to assist the Church in whatever way possible. Secondly, the meeting provided an opportunity for the participants to deliberate on some of the challenges involved in their teaching ministry as they strive to give a faithful witness of Orthodoxy in a complex world. In this regard, the participants of the meeting were divided into five groups where each had the opportunity to present its report to His All-Holiness. Equally importantly, the scholars' meeting also allowed for participants to share with one another not only their current projects and areas of research but future endeavours as well.



Overall, the scholars' meeting was a success and all present expressed their hope that future such gatherings will continue. If the church is defined by 'communion' [κοινωνία], then this was precisely what was experienced at this meeting of scholars. I will have especially valued the forging of new friendships.

At this point, I would especially like to express my sincerest gratitude to Fr John Chryssavgis, who went out of his way whilst I was in Istanbul, to spend much time with me (even though he had an extremely hectic schedule), to take me out to during the evenings and to show me some of the most beautiful parts of the city (the formerly Greek precinct around the tower of Galata being one such place) and of course organise an audience with His All-Holiness. For me, it was an opportunity to relive again my student years where we had the honour of having Fr John – then Founding Sub-Dean of St Andrew's – as our lecturer in Patristics. For all this, I remain humbly indebted.



Below is the Press Release which appears on the website of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, followed by the Address of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to the scholars' meeting.

Press Release

Scholars' Meeting at the Phanar

The Ecumenical Patriarchate hosted a meeting of thirty scholars on January 4-5, 2016. The purpose of the encounter was to establish connections with theologians and academics working in various disciplines and ministries throughout the world in order to become better acquainted with their interests and aspirations for the church, especially in light of the Holy and Great Council.

In his address, His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew noted: “We have invited you because we consider you as a small representative group of a much larger segment of our Church, a symbol of our loving concern for all those ministering to the Word of God in manifold ways throughout the world. You comprise theologians and historians, scholars and teachers, women and men from the United States and Europe, as well as from Asia and Australia.” “In this way,” he added, “we can strengthen the bonds between hierarchal ministry and lay *diakonia* for the benefit of the Body of Christ.”

The scholars in attendance presented their reflections and responses in their various fields and capacities: as heads of Orthodox seminaries and institutes; as professors in non-Orthodox academic institutions; as theologians serving in mission, religious education and publishing; and as scholar-practitioners in the natural and social sciences, as well as human rights and social justice.

The afternoon of January 5th was dedicated to an open discussion on preparations for the Holy and Great Council. His Eminence Senior Metropolitan John of Pergamon chaired two extensive sessions and addressed participants, engaging in wide-ranging discussions with the scholars about goals, challenges and opportunities of the Council.

The presentations will be made available.

Participants included:

- His Eminence Senior Metropolitan John of Pergamon
- His Eminence Metropolitan Gennadios of Sassima
- His Eminence Metropolitan Elpidophoros of Bursa
- His Eminence Metropolitan Maximos of Sylevria
- Very Reverend Patriarchal Deacon Theodore Meimaris
- Nikolaos Asproulis, Volos Academy for Theological Studies (Greece)
- Fr. John Behr, St Vladimir's Seminary (USA)
- Fr. John Chryssavgis, Ecumenical Patriarchate
- Will Cohen, Scranton University (USA)
- Konstantinos Delikostantis, Athens University (Greece)
- George Demacopoulos, Fordham University (USA)
- Brandon Gallaher, Exeter University (England)
- Fr. Paul Gavrilyuk, St. Thomas University (USA)
- Tamara Grdzeldze, Vatican City (Italy)

- Perry Hamalis, North Central College (USA)
- Nathan Hoppe, Resurrection Seminary (Albania)
- Pantelis Kalaitzidis, Volos Academy (Greece)
- Philip Kariatlis, St. Andrew's Theological College (Australia)
- Fr. Nicolas Kazarian, Sorbonne University (France)
- Elizabeta Kitanovic, European Conference of Churches (Belgium)
- John Klentos, Patriarch Athenagoras Orthodox Institute (USA)
- Fr. Panteleimon Manoussakis, Holy Cross College (USA)
- Sotiris Mitralaxis, Istanbul University (Turkey)
- Fr. Chrysostomos Nassis, University of Thessaloniki (Greece)
- Aristotle Papanikolaou, Fordham University (USA)
- Athanasios N. Papathanasiou, Hellenic Open University, editor: Synaxis (Greece)
- Elizabeth Prodromou, Tufts University (USA)
- Fr. Alexander Rentel, St Vladimir's Seminary (USA)
- James Skedros, Holy Cross School of Theology (USA)
- Dionysios Skliris, Sorbonne University (France)
- Fr. Nathanael Symeonidis, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America (USA)
- Alexis Torrance, Notre Dame University (USA)
- Athanasios Vletsis, Munich University (Germany)
- Anton Vrame, Department of Religious Education (USA)
- Stavros Yangazoglou, editor: *Theologia* (Greece)
- Gayle Woloschak, Northwestern University (USA)



ADDRESS

By His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew
To the Scholars' Meeting at the Phanar
(January 5, 2016)

Beloved and distinguished scholars,

We warmly welcome you all to the Ecumenical Patriarchate, to the Church of Constantinople, the Church of St. Andrew “the first-called of the Apostles” and his disciple, St. Stachys of “the Seventy Apostles,” an institution with a history spanning seventeen centuries, during which it has retained its administrative offices in this very city through times of majesty and times of martyrdom.

As you all know very well and appreciate through your studies, this extraordinary region is filled with significance for our Church. It is here that St. John (the Apostle of love) wrote his Gospel; it is here that St. Paul (the Apostle to the nations) addressed the earliest Apostolic communities; it is here – in Asia Minor, not in Greece or Italy – that all of the earliest councils of the Church that defined and shaped the Christian doctrine were convened; and it is here that the spiritual treasures of Byzantium – its profound theological, spiritual and cultural legacy – have been faithfully maintained to this day.

Nevertheless, as you are also aware and as you surely understand, Orthodoxy is a faith at once rooted in the past, yet at the same time a Church looking toward the future. It is characterized by a profound sense of continuity with the times and teachings of the Apostolic Church and the Church of the Fathers; but it is also a Church that draws from its rich heritage in order to respond to modern challenges and dilemmas. It is precisely this dual nature that permits Orthodoxy to speak boldly about critical contemporary issues – precisely because it is a “living tradition.”

Dear friends, you are here at a critical time, a complex time, a challenging time – both for our Orthodox Church but also for the entire world. We have invited you for this personal encounter and exchange at the Phanar because we consider you as a small representative group of a much larger segment of our Church, a symbol of our loving concern for all those ministering to the Word of God in manifold ways throughout the world. You comprise theologians and historians, scholars and teachers, women and men from the United States and Europe, as well as from Asia and Australia. You educate and work with a wide range of people – Orthodox and non-Orthodox, Christian and non-Christian, academic and ecumenical – translating the fundamental principles of our faith in response to the vital challenges of our time.

Permit us, therefore, to suggest to you that open and honest dialogue is the way of the Church and of theology. God spoke in dialogue when the world was created, when Adam and

Eve were fashioned. God spoke in dialogue through the law and the prophets. God spoke in dialogue when the divine Word assumed flesh and dwelt among us. God always spoke in dialogue through the martyrs and saints through the centuries and in our own day. Indeed, God is only comprehended and apprehended in dialogue – in the interpretation of scripture as in the Church councils. In the pithy, yet profound statement of St. John: “In the beginning was the Word . . . and the Word was God.” (John 1.1)

This is why we invited you here: so that we may talk and listen to one another – “look at each other in the eyes,” as the late Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras liked to say. You are undoubtedly informed about the dialogues with which our Ecumenical Patriarchate is engaged:

- with our sister Orthodox Churches, in an effort to coordinate greater unity and cooperation;

- with other Christian confessions and other faith communities, in our desire to promote reconciliation and understanding;

- and with the scientific community, for an informed response to environmental degradation and bioethical questions

However, there is another dialogue that is of paramount importance in the life and ministry of the Church, namely our dialogue with the world. We are called to hear and discern God’s voice – sometimes “like the rush of a mighty wind” (Acts 2.2), at other times “like a gentle breeze” (Isaiah 55.12) – in every circumstance and in every corner of our planet. We are to hear and speak God’s voice:

- in the persecution of Christian minorities all over the world, particularly in the Middle East, where Christianity emerged;

- in the humanitarian crisis of our brothers and sisters forced to leave their homes and seek refuge throughout the world;

- in the injustices inflicted on the vulnerable and marginalized members of contemporary societies;

- but also in the use and abuse of religion for political interests and other secular purposes.

This is precisely why – with the grace of God, the prayers of our faithful, and the support of theologians and scholars such as you – we will convene the Holy and Great Council this year on the Feast of Pentecost, bringing together all of the Orthodox Autocephalous Churches in order to meet in the same place (in the Church of Haghia Irene, where the Second Ecumenical Council was held in 381) and to deliberate with one mind on issues that the Church has confronted in more recent times. We will address internal issues on the unity and administration of the Church, but also matters such as relations with other churches and faiths, in order to present a unified voice and credible witness for the life of the world.

In this regard, we invite the support of pious Orthodox scholars, who are concerned about the unity of our Church and its role in the public square, where there are so many competing opinions and where the word of Orthodoxy can contribute positively and constructively through dialogue. Our faith should not be regarded as stagnant or even obsolete. It must not be conveyed as verbose or perhaps artificial. And it cannot be dismissed as merely cerebral or uninspired. Our word must express the hope and joy, the light and life of the risen Lord. It must be renewed and renewing, reviving and refreshing.

That is how the Holy and Great Council must speak to the whole world. That is how we are all called to minister, each of us from his or her own position in the Church and in society, even after the Great Council takes place. And this is how the Church would like to support and advance your own work in seminaries, universities, as well as in ecumenical and other circles. In this way, we can strengthen the bonds between hierarchal ministry and lay *diakonia* for the benefit of the Body of Christ and the glory of our living God.

With these few paternal reflections, we welcome you once again and look forward to hearing your response and reaction. We hope that your brief stay in this remarkable city is enjoyable and rewarding.

Visit to the Theological School of Halki

8-10 January, 2016

After the scholars' meeting, I had the opportunity to visit the Theological School of Halki (in Turkish, Heybeliada), established in 1844 as the primary seminary of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople up until its closure in 1971. It was here that our Archbishop and Dean, along with many of today's hierarchs of the Ecumenical Throne, including His All-Holiness, undertook their undergraduate studies. Its purpose, like the purpose of St Andrew's here in Sydney, was to meet the educational needs of the Ecumenical Patriarchate by primarily preparing men for the ordained ministry along with teachers and lay theologians. The school also housed the chapel of the Holy Trinity, whose origins can be traced back to the Byzantine period where a monastery was established there by St Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople in the ninth century. The present day facilities were built in the early nineteenth century thanks to a generous donation by Pavlos Stefanovick; the architect was Periklis Fotiadis. The school was closed by the Turkish authorities who prohibited the operation of privately run schools of higher education. The school remains closed to this day.





Today, the monastery continues to operate. The present day abbot is Metropolitan Elpidophoros (Lambriniadis) of Bursa, a relatively young man with much enthusiasm and great vision. He gave me a very warm welcome and organised for someone to show me around the grounds, including the library (which is closed to the public). He gave of his time generously, giving me the opportunity to ask him many of the questions that I had regarding the school and the Ecumenical Patriarchate more generally. Since his appointment as abbot of the monastery approximately five years ago, Metropolitan Elpidophoros has initiated many new projects for the school, one of which is the digitalisation of the library. He hopes one day to have all books – including rare manuscripts – scanned and therefore made available to all interested persons around the world. Even though not operational today as a school, the facilities at Halki are maintained on a daily basis so much so that should the Turkish authorities one day allow the school to operate, they would be ready to do so the very next day.

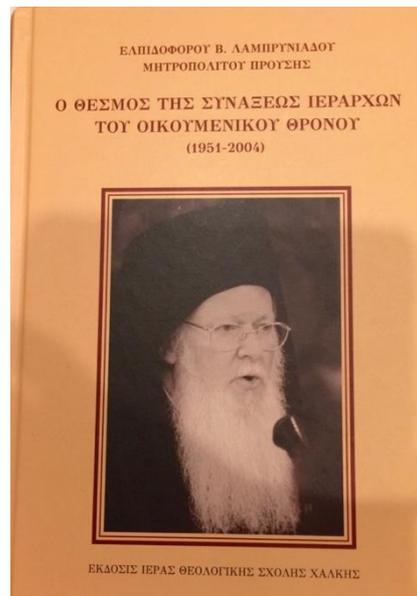


Metropolitan Elpidophoros gave me his latest publication, his post-doctoral dissertation which he submitted to the University of Thessalonika – a requirement of the University to allow him to lecture at the School of Theology. It is a work nearly 1000 pages long entitled *The Institution of the Synaxis of Hierarchs of the Ecumenical Throne*. As I had much free time during my three days at the monastery, I began to read it (I found it so fascinating and important that I could not put it down).

Below is a book review written on this work upon my return to Australia.

Book Review

Metropolitan Elpiophoros (Lambriniadis) of Bursa, *The Institution of the Synaxis of Hierarchs of the Ecumenical Throne* [in Greek]. Np: Holy Theological School of Halki publication, 2015.



Even though ecclesiology as a separate branch of theology is a relatively new phenomenon in systematics, one could, nevertheless, quite readily detect a certain pre-eminence given to the notion of *koinonia* within Orthodox writings on the church. That being the case, at its deepest ontological level the church is more often than not presented as a graced communion between God and the entire created realm, or, put another way, as God’s miraculous presence on earth, in existence for the salvation of the world and the glorification of God.¹ More particularly, basing itself on this communal framework, theological reflection upon the church in Orthodox ecclesiology highlights that all structures and ministries within the church also have to be communally conditioned. Accordingly, a basic criterion of all forms of authority and governance within the life of the church is their inherently communal character. As can already be seen from the Apostolic Council in Jerusalem – as recorded in the book of Acts (Acts 15:6-29) – it can safely be argued that from the very beginning of its historical life here on earth, the New Testament church came together ‘in council’ to deliberate together on

¹ Cf. Stylianos Harkianakis, *The Infallibility of the Church in Orthodox Theology*, trans. Philip Kariatlis (ATF Press: Adelaide & St Andrew’s Orthodox Press, Sydney, 2008), 28.

issues, to reach ‘one mind’ and only then to make decisions affecting the church. It is precisely within this context, that the present work under review can be understood and properly appreciated.

The comprehensive study by Metropolitan Elpidophoros (Lambriniadis) of Bursa, assistant Professor of Orthodox Symbolics, Inter-Orthodox Relations and the Ecumenical Movement at the Theological School of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, entitled *The Institution of the Synaxis of Hierarchs of the Ecumenical Throne* [Ὁ Θεσμός τῆς Συνάξεως τοῦ Οἰκουμενικοῦ Θρόνου (1951-2004)] is primarily concerned with tracing the historical trajectory that led to the current synodical structure of the church as exercised within the Ecumenical Patriarchate today. It is a book which is nearly 1000 pages long and is divided into two parts: the first tracing the origins of the Hierarchical Synaxis (Meetings of Hierarchs), and the second providing a written record of the minutes of both the local and general assemblies of bishops, together with written transcripts of what was said and by whom, especially important being those which took place in the 90s. Up until this publication, such details of the Meetings of Hierarchs had never been made available.

The important contribution of this work lies in its exhaustive exploration of this aforementioned fundamental aspect of the church – namely, its inherently communal, or in this case, conciliar nature as evidenced in the Meeting of Hierarchs. Already, in 1965, Archbishop Stylianos of Australia had written, “if at any time the church were to reject, from its life, even for a moment, the idea of the synodical system, it would cease automatically to be church.”² One important aspect of conciliarity or synodality is the Meeting of Bishops in synod where issues can be deliberated upon and decisions made together. However, such a gathering of all bishops from all around the world in synod, which could make decisions together, did not take place for hierarchs belonging to the Ecumenical Patriarchate in the earlier part of the twentieth century. According to this study, this was due to prohibitions imposed by the Turkish government which precluded hierarchs outside of Turkey participating in the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate. In an attempt to contain this anomaly – and thus to retrieve to some extent the synodical being of the church – in his book, Metropolitan Elpidophoros argued that in the 90s – namely, at the very beginning of his tenure as Ecumenical Patriarch – His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew attempted to establish a regular convocation of all hierarchs belonging to the Ecumenical Throne – meeting biennially (meeting five times between 1992 and 2002). Thus, the Ecumenical Patriarchate came to see

² S. Harkianakis, *The Infallibility of the Church*, 129.

the institution of the Meeting of Hierarch (Σύναξις Ἱεραρχῶν) as a regular event in the life of the church. Before that, such meetings were rare occurrences in the life of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

The book outlines the factors which led to this important decision by the Ecumenical Patriarch to hold these Meetings of Hierarchs. In this regard, the work analyses, for the very first time and at great length, a significant report that Archbishop Stylianos of Australia had already submitted to the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate in 1987 entitled “Report on the more Canonical and Appropriate Regulation of Hierarchs belonging to the Venerable Ecumenical Throne.” After referring to some of the well-known reasons which had precluded the greater number of the hierarchs from being part of a synod, the work notes that Archbishop had warned that due to reducing numbers of faithful remaining within the precincts of the Venerable See, “the matter of regathering all the power of all our hierarchy is a most urgent matter” – indeed, going so far as to highlight that any delay would not only see catastrophic effects, but was – doctrinally speaking – totally incomprehensible. Metropolitan Elpidophoros’ extensive analysis, in this case, is significant not only because of the fact that this 1987 report was largely unknown up to this point, but more importantly because it brought to the fore those voices that led the Patriarchate at that time to reflect seriously as to how it might put in place a more genuine exercise of synodality.

As already noted above, beyond the Patriarchate’s survival, the Meeting of Hierarchs, according to Archbishop Stylianos, was demanded by ecclesiological and pastoral principals. For this reason, he unhesitatingly urged the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate to establish, as a first step, these regular Meetings of Hierarchs. In this influential report – made apparent by the work’s repeated reference to this document – the Archbishop had already clarified the aims of these Meetings of Hierarchs: firstly, they would provide an opportunity for all hierarchs to inform each other first hand of issues confronting their eparchies; secondly, they would enable an exchange of ideas and a unanimous way towards the solution of some of the challenges facing the different local churches, and thirdly, provide mutual support and spiritual strengthening in the face of increasing challenges in ecclesial administration.³ The book notes that this report was never put on the agenda of the Holy Synod for discussion and neither did its author ever receive a reply. Acknowledgement of receipt came two years later, and only after Archbishop Stylianos had written a second time asking for a response to his report. In 1994, the book notes that once again Archbishop Stylianos took the pioneering step proposing that the Meeting of Hierarchs become a proper synod authorised to make binding

³ Cf. Elpidophoros Lambriniadis, *The Institution of the Synaxis of Hierarchs of the Ecumenical Throne* (Holy Theological School of Halki publication: np, 2015), 99.

decisions since the former were only advisory in nature. Indeed, Metropolitan Elpidophoros argues that the Meeting of Hierarchs were always understood “as temporary institutions according to the application of ecclesiastical *oikonomia* in order to manipulate the difficulty of a historical confine imposed by the authorities and other external forces upon the Ecumenical Patriarchate.”⁴ According to the book, year later, other subsequent hierarchs would take the arguments firstly proposed in Archbishop Stylianos’ report and develop these further as a way of making some concrete progress towards restoring the synodical mode of the church’s existence.

The work goes on to analyse two reports that were submitted to the Holy Synod in 2002 – the first by Metropolitan Panteleimon of Tyroloes and Serentiou and the second by Metropolitan John of Pergamon – arguing for the elevation of the Meeting of Hierarchs to a synod which could make decisions that were binding for the whole church. After much thought, in 2004, the book notes that Patriarch Bartholomew took the “audacious step” and opened up the synod to hierarchs living abroad. This had never been the case, since hitherto the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate was always made up of certain Hierarchs belonging to the immediate precincts of the Venerable Centre. The minutes of Holy Synod of the Patriarchate that took place on the 18 February, 2004 note the Patriarch proposing the following: “after much thought and prayer... [we propose] an invitation to our hierarchs living abroad to become synodical members of the Holy and Sacred Synod made up of 12 members since they too constitute a unified and undivided part of the hierarchy of the Mother Church of Constantinople.”⁵ Even though the idea of the plenary Meeting of Hierarch constituting a synod – as proposed by Archbishop Stylianos and some other hierarchs – was not adopted (and has not been adopted to this day), a first positive step had been taken, according to the book, towards retrieving a better model of synodality within the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

From reading the book, it would in no way be an exaggeration to conclude that all that Archbishop Stylianos had envisioned and suggested in his 1987 report and in his subsequent proposals submitted for consideration at the Meetings of Hierarchs which he attended in the 1990s – and whose verbatim discussions the book painstakingly records – were, to a great extent, adopted. It is for this reason that one could refer to Archbishop Stylianos as “an inspiration and visionary of the synodality of the institution of the Meeting of Hierarchs.” The second part of the book which actually records verbatim what was said and by whom at these Meetings of Hierarchs brings these to life and records once and for all, for the sake of posterity all the challenges suffered in order to restore, in a more canonical and precise manner, the church’s synodical mode of existence.

⁴ Ibid, 146.

⁵ Ibid, 135.

It is for this reason that this book is indispensable and a highly significant one for any student of ecclesiology, but indeed for all faithful who care for the genuine well-being of the church. For this, it is commended without reserve.