

Summary of Press Briefing 6-21

Q: Archbishop Job, you said that, at the synaxis in Chambesy, a decision was made unanimously to convoke and hold the Holy and Great Council. Given the fact that the Antioch Church has not participated in this decision, how would you comment on that situation?

A: (Archbishop Job of Telmessos): The Holy Church of Antioch has participated in the synaxis of the Primates of the Holy Orthodox Churches in Chambesy. They are not here as a sign of protest because the issue over the Qatar was not resolved yet. Nevertheless, in January 2016 at the synaxis about convening the Holy and Great Council, the Church of Antioch had expressed no disagreement and this is in the minutes of the synaxis. It's very clear that the Holy Church of Antioch did not have any opposition or any disagreements concerning the Holy and Great Council. Furthermore, the Church of Antioch, after the synaxis, continued to participate in the preparatory meetings. They requested that Arabic should be included and be put on the official website. We did so. They sent a complete list of their delegation to the council. If you request that Arabic should be included in the book, if you send a complete list of the delegation, how can you say in January 2016 that you have't signed the decisions in January 2016?

Q: Yesterday, if I understood correctly His Beatitude of Albania said it might be necessary to consider leaving the consensus model of decision-making to go back to — or go over to — a majority vote. The World Council of Churches took very seriously a consensus mode of decision. They worked on that very hard. It was a question that took some serious sacrifices but they have gone through it. If the Holy and Great Council were to say that consensus did not work, I'm afraid that partner churches will be, at the very least, surprised. May we have a comment?

A: (Archbishop Job of Telmessos): The proposal of the Archbishop of Albania has not been discussed in the council since we are following the regulations that have been agreed upon unanimously. This proposal would perhaps be discussed at a future synaxis, perhaps regarding a future Holy and Great Council. Therefore here the decisions are the present Holy and Great Council are based on consensus.

A: (Father John Chrysavgis): Very briefly I just want to remind you that the whole principle of consensus was adopted very specifically to try to encourage smaller churches to feel that they have value, an equal vote, an equal voice with the larger churches or more historic churches.

Q: We have the ongoing discussions on the topic of the diaspora. It is a burning issue and having read the address made by Demetrius of America at the Synaxis in Chambesy, I got the idea that it's a rather bleak picture out there. Have we had any constructive proposals tabled? Do we see a glimmer of hope? Is there some progress being achieved?

A: (Archbishop Job of Telmessos): Of course you have to remember that the sessions of the Holy and Great Council are closed sessions and we are still discussing this topic. There are a lot of of very interesting discussions going on. A lot of bishops want to express themselves. At the moment, discussions are going on. I cannot tell you more.

A: (Father John Chryssavgis): The issue of diaspora is very essential and close to my heart, and also close to our churches because of the numerous people we have in churches outside the established Orthodox mother lands. His Eminence Demetrios is my own archbishop in America, and I can say that he believes very firmly in the assembly of bishops. One small additional perspective: the notion of a bleak outlook was certainly leading up to a crescendo as we approached the Holy and Great Council. As an Orthodox theologian, however, the symbol of life is the cross, but that was a pretty bleak symbol at the time.

Q: Could we have some background information on the question of the Orthodox diaspora and the bishop's assemblies, because we are not living in that kind of domain where the problem arises, so we don't know what you are referring to.

A: (Father John Chryssavgis): We have different, diverse churches among the 14 Orthodox churches. The Church of Greece, the Church of Russia, and so on. There are some churches that have become more missionary, like the Church of Alexandria. There are other Orthodox faithful who have migrated to the U.S., to western Europe, to Asia. There's only one Orthodox Church in Greece, there's only one Orthodox Church in Poland. Where you have the different Orthodox churches, where all 14 of the Orthodox churches are in one region or even city, that's where these bishops' assemblies have been established in order to encourage greater discussion about more unified action and process for the churches in these countries.

A: ((His Eminence Metropolitan Alexander of Nigeria, spokesperson for the Patriarchate of Alexandria and all Africa): First, I agree with what Father John has said. The churches are faced with a dilemma in our modern times as to where they draw their identity from. We need to go back to our ecclesial roots and once that is done it will be quite easy to find a way out of this impasse.

Q: I want to go back to the text that was approved yesterday that speaks of the problems faced by contemporary humanity. We the electronic mass media would like to have something much more, some commentary on the importance of the text. One example: it speaks against discrimination? Some sort of sound bites to do more with poverty, with refugees, such that can be broadcast to the world at large, not long theological discourse.

A: (Father John Chryssavgis): This is part of the excitement of the process of the Holy and Great Council. There have been so many developments, so many changes over many hundreds of years — political developments, social developments, even scientific developments. The church can no longer stay outside these discussions. Instead, it must transform these discussions, drawing from its very ancient and rich spiritual tradition but articulating new answers, rather than repeating the same answers. Climate change — I imagine everyone in this room by now believes in climate change — and human rights or bioethics. These issues need to be taken seriously and embraced by the church.

A: (His Eminence Metropolitan Alexander of Nigeria, spokesperson for the Patriarchate of Alexandria and all Africa): Once this text is complete and adopted it might perhaps lack in courage slightly — we might desire a more dynamic approach — but it will spark off discussions on the role of the international economy and the role of new liberalism. We need to point to where the evil lies in the church of Africa, to show how economy and AIDS are interrelated, AIDS being a factor of poverty. Ostensibly, African nations began to win their independence

stating in 1960 but they still remain in a condition of tutelage. It is colonialism by a different name. What does climate change cost to the United States of America and what does it cost to India? Africa? What need to be done to put things right?

A: (Dr Ionut Mavrichi, spokesperson of the Patriarchate of Romania): Thank you very much of this question. It is a very good question. It is the main question: what is the importance? Within a family, there is no difference between a smaller brother and a bigger brother. The discussions among the bishops are full of emotion and empathy, and the discussions range from metaphysics to the problem of poverty. This is the beginning. As Christians we can look to scripture: we are all in one. Therefore, the main agreement against discrimination is to be found in scripture. The tradition of our church can be a very rich resource for answering the problem of modernity.

A: (His Grace Bishop Gregory of Messaoria, spokesperson for the Holy Church of Cyprus): It is true that this council is a major event and it is a gift from God. It is not at all a new thing. It is something that dates from the appearance of the perfect God and the perfect man who is Jesus Christ. The truth that, on occasion may cause some confusion. It is up to us — I mean the Orthodox Church in its guise of clergy and the people — the church is charged with spreading the word of truth throughout the world. It's the experience of being present in humility, in simplicity, in a spirit of love and charity for all. If we cannot show ourselves being united, then we cannot say we are united with the Church of God. We need to address that amongst ourselves first of all. Wherever man is, there you find disorder. There you find difficulty. I just want to remind everybody of the need of courage and vigilance and the need to gaze at one another eye-to-eye and impart the message of love and truth. This council is not a copy of councils having been held in the past. It is something that has spanned the centuries to come here and now, not only now but in the future too. It seems very likely there will be forthcoming councils. Whatever decisions are to be taken, it will require the efforts of both sides — your side as the mass media to carry the answers forth and spread it throughout the world.