

**+ Bartholomaios, by the grace of God Archbishop of Constantinople, New Rome,
and Ecumenical Patriarch**

Your Eminence Jeremy, metropolitan of Switzerland, exarch of Europe, beloved brother and concelebrant with our humble person in the Holy Spirit, director of the orthodox Centre of the Ecumenical patriarchate in Chambésy: grace and peace of God be with you.

On 6 November we have received with great joy the letter of your Eminence in which you inform us about the organisation of an international colloquium on the topic of “Synodality and its practice – a theological topos for the Churches in the Orient and in the West”, which takes place from 16 to 18 November in Fribourg, with the collaboration of our Institute for higher studies in orthodox theology and the Institute for Ecumenical Studies of the theological faculty of the University of Fribourg.

Synodality constitutes a central axis of the life of the Church. According to the orthodox ecclesiology the Church is “in principle synodal”. Its sacramental and ritual life, its internal structure, its organisation, its preaching, its pastoral service and more general the witness of the Church in the world constitute different aspects and expressions of its ancient synodality. Only if we take in account this ecclesiological aspect of the synodal nature of the Church we can understand the functioning of the synods within the Church.

Synodality is the fundamental expression and the guarantee of the unity of the Church. The synodal institution is a visible link of the unity and the communion between the autocephalous orthodox churches. Without synodality and its functioning according to the canons, the unity of the Church is disturbed and even broken with the very negative consequences for its life and witness.

There is an essential link between synodality and the Divine Eucharist. If the orthodox Church lives in the Eucharist and through the Eucharist, the whole life of the Church is fed thanks to this link, which implies also in principle the synodality. This close link of the synodal institution with the eucharistic synaxis becomes evident in the reception and the acceptance of the synodal decisions by the members of the Church. The synodal decisions are only accomplished when they become a part of the life of the eucharistic community.

In this sense, the Saint and Great Synod of the orthodox Church convoked in Crete in June 2016 said: “The divine Eucharist is the core element of the conciliar functioning of the ecclesial body as well as the assurance of the orthodoxy of the faith of the Church, as Saint Irenaeus of Lyons affirms: For us , our way of thinking (=teaching) accords with the Eucharist , and the Eucharist in return confirms our way of thinking” (Adversus haereses, IV, 18, PG7, 1028).

The Saint and Great Synod expresses with its decisions the unwavering synodal awareness and the great synodal experience of the orthodox Church. Its decisions refer to the canonical structure, to the liturgical life and spirituality, to the relations with the rest of the Christian world and to the mission and the witness of the Church in the contemporaneous world. The Saint and Great Synod has expressed at the right moment the self-awareness of the Orthodox Church, its faithfulness over the years to the living tradition and to the truth and it has confirmed that, for all ecclesial questions, is in force the authority of the synodal decisions. In

the same way, it has given rise to a renewed interest among Christians for the principles of synodality and the synodal institution. The Saint and Great Synod is a crucial event for the presence and the way of the orthodox Church in our days which concerns also in a direct way the identity of the Church, the dialogues among Christians and its encounter with the contemporaneous world.

We are glad about this event, because your colloquium which will treat the questions of the Saint and Great Synod will also reconsider the canonical and ecclesiological aspects of synodality, the different forms of the synodal functioning and the synodal institutions in the framework of the orthodox churches and the roman catholic Church, the ecumenical importance of synodality and its contribution for the original, philanthropic witness which has the assent of God, in spite of the difficulties of our times.

Even more, we express our recognition for the rich harvest of the harmonious collaboration of the Institute of higher studies in orthodox theology in Chambésy with the faculty of theology of the University of Fribourg. We also congratulate those who have taken this initiative and we wish you good success for the international colloquium, relevant discussions and a rich harvest which pleases God for the glory of His generosity, for the good of the dialogue of love and of truth of our Churches.

13th November 2017

Your beloved brother in Christ