

## **Welcome address**

### **International Conference**

#### **“Politics, Society and Culture in Orthodox theology in a global age”**

**February 6-9, 2020, Thessalia Conference Center, Volos**

#### **Metropolitan of Demetrias and Almyros Ignatios**

Dear participants,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to this international conference on the theme " Politics, Society and Culture in Orthodox theology in a global age", organized by the Faculty of Evangelical Theology of Münster University, the Volos Academy for Theological Studies, the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” at the University of Münster, in cooperation with the Huffington Ecumenical Institute (California), with the participation of prominent personalities, researchers, political scientists, sociologists, and theologians from diverse Christian traditions and all around the world.

Already living in the postmodern age, the consolidation in the western, at least, world of liberal democracy with the underlying principles that accompany it, such as church-state separation and the language of human rights, are some of the major challenges, with which Church and theology must confront. In its long history, the Church has always been in a creative encounter with the surrounding world, the ideas and institutions that dominated the specific space-time, attempting more and less successfully to utilize and transform structures and forms of organization of human life through the action of the Holy Spirit. Inspired by the fundamental doctrines of its apostolic and patristic tradition, the Church has once made a significant and creative contribution to the liberation of man and the world from the domination of extravagant natural laws, superstitions, inhumane social structures, contributing to the improvement of its life, promoting the dignity and uniqueness of the human person, as well as often democratizing the organizational structures of society. Sometimes in close association with state power, but also once under its control (both the Byzantine Empire and the Tsarist period in Russia give us some relevant examples), the Church has always maintained the transformation of the world as her primary concern, the peaceful coexistence of humans and the salvation of man. In the course of its history it is true, and we have to admit it without fear, there have been times when the Church has deviated from its purpose, lost the vision of the Kingdom, once identified with unfree regimes (various forms of dictatorship), or tolerated similar situations, which contradicted her dialogical, philanthropic, loving and sacrificial ethos. It is well known that politics in the form of power and authority has been one of the temptations our Lord himself has faced in the desert, highlighting the timeless dynamics of this problematic and the complex relationships it has formed between the Church and the state. In this perspective we should also bear in mind that while the Orthodox Church is often characterized, not unjustly, as the Church of tradition, as the central body of its life and experience comes from the pre-modern times and the corresponding historical

structures and worldview, democracy is essentially a conquest of postmodernity, which makes the encounter between them even more complicated.

With all this in mind, the question arises as to whether or not the Orthodox Church and theology are compatible with modern democratic principles and values, or whether liberal democracy with human rights language, or the separation of state and church, could be accepted. In other words, what are the conditions for such an encounter, dialogue and cooperation, given that the Church is a community that is "out of this world" but is still "in this world"? It is true that because, mainly for historical reasons, Orthodoxy did not participate in the shaping of the mainstream events of modern Western (European) history, it often seems to be skeptical, if not ambiguous, of such questions, thereby failing to articulate its persuasive and soteriological discourse against the challenges posed by post-modernity. At the same time, however, Orthodoxy today is called by being based on her foundational theological conditions (faith in the Holy Trinity, Eucharist, synodical institution) to express a discourse that can be embodied and embedded in the present context, dominated by the democratic way of organizing the human life, and the liberal spirit, offering man a way out and hope in the existential dead ends he is experiencing. Otherwise we risk being displaced by history, failing to find a common place of coexistence and common understanding.

On this occasion, therefore, I welcome you to our beautiful and hospitable city, Volos, a city that has long cultivated the spirit of dialogue and coexistence, the prominent university professors, scientists and researchers who are called to critically evaluate this multilevel phenomenon, presenting your experience and knowledge from different contexts and points of view with a look at the future of the Kingdom and the salvation of the world and man.