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Welcome address to the Conference

International Conference

«Politics, Society and Culture in Orthodox theology in a global age»

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

Distinguished Fathers,

Mr. Dean of the Faculty of Evangelical Theology, of Münster University,

Rev. Director of the Huffington Ecumenical Institute in California,

Colleagues and Friends of the Volos Academy for Theological Studies,

We are delighted to welcome you to the city of Volos, the Holy Metropolis of Demetrias and the Volos Academy for Theological Studies, on the occasion of the International Conference on «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).

Let me first convey to you the wishes and blessings of His Eminence Metropolitan of Demetrias Ignatios, who is absent on an extraordinary visit, because he accompanies His All- Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to an interfaith dialogue meeting in Abu Dhabi. His Eminence considers this conference a very important event, where he will attend and greet on Saturday. Also, for reasons related to the arrivals of their flights, the President of the European Academy of Religion, Professor of Religious Sciences Herman J. Selderhuis and the Director of the California Huffington Ecumenical Institute, Rev. Professor Cyril Hovorun, will address the conference not at the beginning but at the end of this opening session.

The Volos Academy for Theological Studies, already in its 20th year of operation and having been recognized as a Research Center by the Ministry of Education, Research and Religions since 2014, functions as an open forum of reflection and dialogue between the Church, the intellectual and society, organizing annual thematic courses, international seminars, conferences and publications, and cooperating to this end with a variety of academic and scientific bodies, ecumenical and religious organizations, associations of the society of citizens, publishing houses and journals, making Volos and the Metropolis of Demetrias a place of encounter and dialogue.

Part of the Volos Academy's dialogical agenda is also the critical discussion of the relationship between Orthodoxy and Modernity, Orthodoxy and the modern / postmodern world, Orthodoxy and Nationalism, Orthodoxy and Politics, Orthodoxy and Human Rights, as well as the discussion of Orthodoxy and , the honest, in other

words, confrontation with aspects of Orthodox tradition, far from any anhistorical or mythical approach, and the reception of the results of the relative scientific research, and the historical in particular, from which theology has nothing to fear.

In this perspective, the organization of this conference, which through critical study and discussion aims to raise the issue of the relationship between Orthodoxy and Democracy is also included. It is generally accepted that the Orthodox Church is a Church of tradition whose identity was shaped in the pre-modern era, but the challenges posed by post-modernity, secularization and globalization call for an urgent reflection. In this context the question arises whether the Orthodox Church and its theology are compatible with modern democratic principles and values of our time, and whether liberal democracy, with its human rights sensitivity or with its divisive agenda of a separation between state and church could be accepted by the Church. Often Orthodoxy treats such questions with skepticism, if not ambiguity, by failing to address the challenges of postmodernity, while liberal intellectuals and intellectuals of the secular era are almost ignorant of theology. Starting with the theological conditions and historical components of its morality, the Church's discourse needs to be embodied and embedded within the present context, dominated by the democratic way of organizing human life and the liberal spirit. In this perspective, this conference will attempt to critically examine from the perspective of theology, history and political science the various historical aspects of the issue (Byzantine "symphonia", the tsarist system, Orthodoxy under persecution, etc.), current issues and challenges (Orthodoxy and human rights, pluralistic societies, individual examples of the relationship between Orthodoxy and democracy, etc.) but also the theological parameters of a possible convergence.

With these thoughts in mind, I greet this conference wishing you a fruitful and creative reflection, fruitful work, and a pleasant stay for our guests in the city of Volos, and with the hope that such initiatives will multiply. Before concluding this brief greeting, let me also thank warmly all those who contributed to the preparation and implementation of this conference:

First of all, the Metropolitan of Demetrias of Almyros Ignatius for the continuous support to the work of the Volos Academy and for his full contribution in the realization of this conference. The Professor and Dean of the Faculty of Evangelical Theology of Münster University, Director of the Seminar of Systematic Theology and Director of the Institute for Ecumenical Theology of his Faculty Dr. Hans-Peter Grosshans, for his excellent co-operation, his confidence in the Volos Academy, and for the fact that he had the idea and initiative of the conference, and the necessary resources from the University's Project of Excellence "Religion and Politics". Rev. Cyril Hovorun, Director of the Huffington Ecumenical Institute, California, and Assist. Professor at Marymount Loyola University in California, for the excellent cooperation and financial contribution of the Institute towards the realization of this conference. The Professor and Rector of Appeldorn Theological University in The Netherlands, Herman J. Selderhuis, President of the European Academy of Religion (EuARE), who honors the conference with his presence and confirms his strong links with Volos, an organization with which our Academy has been working closely since its establishment in December 2016. The Director of the Conference of the Christian Churches of Bavaria and

Academic Associate of the Volos Academy, Mr. George Vlantis for his contribution to the birth of the idea of this conference, as well as for his important assistance in preparing the conference program. Rev. Kallinikos Georgakopoulos, Head of the Church of St. Constantine Volos, for the variety of facilities he provided for the better organization of this special event. The associates of the Volos Academy for Theological Studies, Nikolaos Asproulis, Claire Nikolaou, Valila Giannoutaki, Filoktimon Stamopoulos-Samaras, Panagiotis Theodossiou and Costis Drygianakis, for their tireless efforts towards the best preparation of the conference. Also, the staff of the Thessalia Conference Center, in particular Mr. Elias Katoikos, for the technical and other support. The drivers for their important assistance in the transportation in and out of the city. The translator/interpreter Mr Paraskevi Arapoglou for her valuable help in overcoming language barriers in communicating the conference presentations, discussions and the conference proceedings. And last, but not the least, the moderators of the sessions and in particular the conference speakers for accepting our invitation despite the sometimes difficult travels, and contributing new, crucial, reflection on the topic, and for their fruitful and open dialogue.

Good luck!