

THE 1848 ENCYCLICAL OF EASTERN ORTHODOX PATRIARCHS AS A STILL RELEVANT POSITION ON CATHOLIC THEOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates whether the Eastern Orthodox Church has articulated a common and official position toward the Catholic Church. A dynamic and contextual framework is applied, treating conciliar acts, patriarchal encyclicals, and synodal letters as an open corpus ordered by representativeness and reception. The method combines qualitative and quantitative approaches: qualitative analysis assesses clarity, coherence, diachronic continuity, and theological significance, while quantitative indicators – signatures, translations, and the absence or presence of opposition – serve as positive and negative signs of acceptance. Among nineteenth-century encyclicals (1836, 1838, 1848, 1895, 1902/1904), the 1848 Encyclical (E48) emerges as the most representative. Signed by four patriarchs and 33 hierarchs, it directly responded to a papal appeal, achieved wide acceptance, and has never been formally opposed. Though not the outcome of an ecumenical council, E48 demonstrates the strongest contextual authority. E48 stands as the most viable candidate for further study as a potential expression of a common EOC official position vis-à-vis the Catholic church, while highlighting the need for continued interdisciplinary analysis of doctrinal texts.

Keywords

Ecumenism; Interchurch dialogue; Papal primacy; Autocephaly; Ecumenical council; Orthodox-Catholic relations; Orthodoxy in the modern world; Council of Crete

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The anniversary of the First Council of Nicaea highlights the deep and persistent division between the Catholic Church (hereafter CC) and the Eastern Orthodox Church (hereafter EOC). Since

the present theological dialogue affirms communication¹ but not *communio*.²

To evaluate the progress or regression in the dialogue, it is necessary to compare the current statements and positions of the CC on the one hand and of the EOC on the other. It is easier to find the official position of the CC towards the EOC than *vice versa*³ due to the CC's centralisation.⁴ 'It is not uncommon today to hear Orthodox theologians and clerics teach that Roman Catholicism and Protestantism have never been formally declared by the Church.'⁵

The current situation, in which there exists both a *horizontal*⁶ and a *vertical*⁷ schism presents a highly fragmented image of the EOC. This fragmentation is reflected in the varied approaches of local EOC

¹ This dialogue has produced various declarations: Munich (1982), Balamand (1993), Ravenna (2007), Chieti (2016) and Alexandria (2023). (See: 'Dialogue documents,' *Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity. Roma*, Acc. Aug. 21, 2025. <https://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-orientale/chiese-ortodosse-di-tradizione-bizantina/commissione-mista-internazionale-per-il-dialogo-teologico-tra-la/documenti-di-dialogo.html>.)

² Cf. Vatican Council II. *Unitatis Redintegratio (Decree on Ecumenism)*. Vatican City: Vatican Press, 1964, §15–18, John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint (On Commitment to Ecumenism)*. Vatican City: Vatican Press, 1995, §58 CCEO: can. 35 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), §838, https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P29.HTM#-143.

³ Cf. 'Synodality and Primacy in the Second Millennium and Today,' Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church. Alexandria, June 7, 2023. Acc. Mar. 11, 2025. <https://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-orientale/chiese-ortodosse-di-tradizione-bizantina/commissione-mista-internazionale-per-il-dialogo-teologico-tra-la/documenti-di-dialogo/document-d-alexandrie---synodalite-et-primaute-au-deuxieme-mille.html>. §1.

⁴ Cf. e.g. CCEO: can. 41–48.

⁵ Patrick Barnes, *The Non-Orthodox: The Orthodox Teaching on Christians Outside of the Church* (Salisbury, MA: Regina Orthodox Press, 2004), 16.

⁶ E.g. Between Moscow and Constantinople. (Cf. 'On the Invalidity of Episcopal Ordinations of Ukrainian Schismatics and Non-canonically of the "Orthodox Church of Ukraine",' Department for External Church Relations of the Russian Orthodox Church – Secretariat of the Synodal Biblical-Theological Commission, October 9, 2019. Acc. Mar. 11, 2025. <https://mospat.ru/en/news/46039>.)

⁷ The phenomenon involves various groups, which exist within nearly every autocephalous church. (Cf. 'Communiqué – Paderborn 2024,' Saint Irenaeus Joint Orthodox-Catholic Working Group, Johann-Adam-Möhler-Institut für Ökumenik, September 29, 2024. Acc. Mar. 11, 2025. https://moehlerinstitut.de/wp-content/uploads/sites/75/2024/10/Communiqu_e_Paderborn-2024_EN.pdf. § 9–11.)

See A. V. Slesarev, *Starostilnyj raskol v istorii Pravoslavnoj Cerkvi (1924–2008)* (Moskva: Izd. Krutickogo podvor'á Obšestvo lûbitelej cerkovnoj istorii, 2009), 520.

churches towards the CC, which may differ across levels of organisation.⁸ Such discrepancies indicate disagreement on many crucial issues and reinforce the biased perception that there is no consensus within the EOC. The lack of clarity regarding when, where, and how the schism took hold further complicates the matter.⁹ ‘While there exists a substantial body of “anti-Latin” polemical literature within the Eastern Orthodox Church, official documents remain few.’¹⁰

Is it possible to identify a common EOC position from which to evaluate the variations in opinion, including actual statements issued by local church authorities?

1. Identifying the most recent common official position of the Eastern Orthodox Church

A useful starting point in the search for the official position is to turn to doctrinal documents. These documents have been systematised into a *corpus* of symbolic monuments/documents (*symbolikā mnēmēina*). At present, however, there is no consensus on which documents truly belong to this *corpus*,¹¹ For this reason, the term *symbolic texts* will not be employed further. Nevertheless, the existing collections of symbolic texts¹² may serve as an initial body of material from which we shall select sources for further consideration. The systematisation of doctrinal texts according to their binding authority, which is characteristic

⁸ For instance, certain parishes have accepted and declared the possibility of admitting members of the CC to communion without requiring baptism, whereas others within various local EOC do not. See: Matthew D. Brown, *Rebaptism: A Study in Orthodox Ecclesiology*. Master’s thesis (South Canaan, Pennsylvania: St. Tikhon’s Theological Seminary, 2013).

⁹ Cf. Kallistos T. Ware, ‘Orthodox and catholics in the seventeenth century: schism or intercommunion?’, *Studies in Church History* 9 (1972): 259–276.

¹⁰ Valentin Asmus, ‘Poslanie Vostočnyh Patriarhov,’ in *Pravoslavnaâ ênciklopediâ*, vol. 57, ed. Patriarh Moskovskij i vseâ Rusi Kirill (Moscow: Cerkovno-naučnyj centr «Pravoslavnaâ Ênciklopediâ», 2024), 568–573. <https://www.pravenc.ru/text/2581226.html>. All translations from original languages are by the author unless otherwise stated.

¹¹ Should only confessions of faith be included, or should other texts, such as letters, also be considered? Similarly, the question of whether later documents should be accorded the same significance as ancient ones depends on the chosen interpretative paradigm. (Cf. Vasilij Krivošein, ‘Simvoličeskie teksty v Pravoslavnoj Cerkvi,’ in *Bogoslovskie trudy*, ed. Aleksandr Musin (Nižnij Novgorod: Hristianskaâ biblioteka, 2011), 450–481, https://azbyka.org/otechnik/Vasilij_Krivoshein/simvolicheskie-teksty-v-pravoslavnoj-tserkvi_§.IV)

¹² E.g. Ioánnis N. Karmírīs, *Ta dogmatiká kai symvoliká mnīmēta tis orthódodoxoy katholikēs Ekklistias*, 2nd ed. (Graz: Akademische Druck, 1968).

of the CC, is not fully justified in the EOC.¹⁵ Instead of rigidly establishing criteria, we propose a dynamic approach. First is the ordering of the material, in which each record is assigned a place according to its representativeness, that is, the significance attributed to it by the EOC itself. We are not dependent on heuristic methods but may proceed systematically: from context to content. Quantitative analysis must always be preceded by the qualitative selection. Subsequently, quantitative findings are interpreted within qualitative methods,¹⁴ and quantitative methods could be reapplied, in the form of a hermeneutical circle.

The first step entails qualitative content analysis of the documents. If an explicit mention of the CC is present, the document is placed before those that mention it only implicitly, which in turn precede those that do not mention it at all.

The next step of selection focuses on the external indicators of reception. This can be negatively expressed as the ratio between the strength of propagation of a given position and the explicit opposition to it.¹⁵ The character of eventual opposition, as a qualitative aspect, is evaluated only in the subsequent step. Primacy is given to well-known documents without explicit opposition. Another indicator is explicit positive acceptance, the most concrete sign of which is the attachment of signatures (*scriptio/hypographē*) by specific ecclesiastical representatives.¹⁶

A thorough and rigorous systematic undertaking, the outcome of which would be the unequivocal determination of what constitutes the representative view of the EOC, far exceeds the scope of a single article. Here, therefore, we shall provide only a narrative review offering a basic selection of the most representative material on the basis of contextual analysis.

¹⁵ Cf. Krivošein, 'Simboličeskie teksty,' §. VII

¹⁴ Cf. Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, 'From quantitative to qualitative and back again. The interplay between structure and culture and the analysis of networks in pre-modern societies,' in *Multiplying Middle Ages. New methods and approaches for the study of the multiplicity of the Middle Ages in a global perspective*, eds. E. Mitsiou et al. (Vienna: 2014), 1.

¹⁵ Cf. David Vopřada, 'Autorita koncilů starověké církve [Authority of the Councils of the Ancient Church],' *Salve* 23, no. 4 (2013): 23.

¹⁶ Cf. Thomas Graumann, *The Acts of the Early Church Councils, Production and Character* (Oxford University Press, 2021), 156.

2. The search for a representative council: evaluating contextual signs

The common official position of the EOC on the CC ought to be formulated as the conclusion of a council possessing the highest level of authority – namely, an ecumenical or universal council.¹⁷ The CC and the EOC are in agreement on nearly all the necessary conditions for such a Universal Council.

Seventh Ecumenical Council (Nicaea II, 787) gave a detailed description of the criteria as then understood: the agreement (*symphonia*) of the heads of the churches, the cooperation (*synergeia*) of the bishop of Rome, and the agreement of the other patriarchs (*symphronountes*). An ecumenical council must have its own proper number in the sequence of ecumenical councils, and its teaching must accord with that of previous councils. Reception by the Church as a whole has always been the ultimate criterion for the ecumenicity of a council.¹⁸

The last council that fulfilled the above criteria could be the Eighth Ecumenical Council. However, the CC and EOC recognise the different councils as an eighth ecumenical council.¹⁹ The CC accepts the Fourth Council of Constantinople, which finished in 870, and the EOC accepts the council held in the same city, and which finished in 880 (to be discussed later). Moreover, those two councils are in mutual opposition in their conclusions about dogmatic issues, which constitutes the theological aspect of the Great Schism.²⁰ Therefore, we cannot proceed in

¹⁷ Cf. Joseph Wilhelm, 'General Councils,' in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 4 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04423f.htm>.

Cf. N. V. Kvlividze, 'Vselenskij Sobor,' in *Pravoslavnaâ ênciklopediâ*, vol. 9, ed. Patriarh Moskovskij i vseâ Rusi Kirill (Moscow: Cerkovno-naučnyj centr «Pravoslavnaâ Ênciklopediâ», 2005), 566–571. <https://www.pravenc.ru/text/155488.html>.

¹⁸ Cf. 'Chieti Document: Synodality and Primacy During the First Millennium – Towards a Common Understanding in Service to the Unity of the Church,' Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, Chieti, September 21, 2016. Acc. Mar. 11, 2025. <https://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-orientale/chiese-ortodosse-di-tradizione-bizantina/commissione-mista-internazionale-per-il-dialogo-teologico-tra-la/documenti-di-dialogo/testo-in-inglese1.html>.

¹⁹ Cf. V. Laurent, 'Constantinople IV, Council of,' in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*. Acc. Mar. 11, 2025. <https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/constantinople-iv-council>.

²⁰ Concepts such as papal plenitudo potestatis and the Filioque emerged, becoming critical theological issues for the subsequent millennium. This occasion marked the first time these matters were discussed at the level of the universal Church. Cf. George

our search from the past towards the present but must work from the present towards the past.

Since the papacy constitutes a crucial formal-theological-pastoral issue between the CC and the EOC,²¹ the papal cooperation as a criterion must be set aside for now; the matter will be addressed later. The remaining essential criteria are the synods and the reception by the whole Church.

An example of the lack of universal acceptance is the *Pan-Orthodox* Council of Crete in 2016 (hereafter C2016). In addition to the absence of recognition by the EOC, the organisers diverged from a well proven and established methodology of traditional Councils.²² The first issue relates to other councils or meetings of the 20th century, almost all of which served as precursors to C2016.²³ Finally, the documents of the C2016 do not contain any statements explicitly addressed to the CC.²⁴

A specific form of the EOC's official position may be seen in its participation in the World Council of Churches (hereafter WCC). However, several problems arise. Firstly, participation has fluctuated over time.²⁵

Dion Dragas, 'The Eighth Ecumenical Council (879-880) and the Condemnation of the Filioque,' *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 44, no. 1-4 (1999): part b.)

²¹ Cf. *Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacramental Nature of the Church: Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity and Authority*, (Ravenna, 15 October 2007), § 45.

²² 'There has never been a council in church history in which only the heads of autocephalous churches could vote.' See: Doru Marcu, 'Orthodoxy and Ecumenical Dialogue after Crete Synod (2016) and Social Ethos Document (2020): History, Critical Positions and Reception,' *Religions* 14, no. 7 (2023): 936. DOI: 10.3390/rel14070936, 5. D. I. Tseleggidīs, *Ἐπιστολὴ τοῦ Καθιγίτου Δ. Τσελεγγίδι γιὰ τὸν Διμερῆ Θεολογικὸ Διάλογο Ὁρθόδοξων καὶ Ρωμαϊκοκαθολικῶν στὸ Ἀμμὼν τῆς Ἰορδανίας (15.-19. 9. 2014)* (Thessaloníkī: Ἀριστοτελεῖο Πανεπιστήμιο Θεσσαλονίκης, Θεολογικὴ Σχολὴ Τμῆμα Θεολογίας Τομέας Δογματικῆς Θεολογίας, 2014), <https://www.imoph.org/pdfs/2014/11/20/20141120aEpistoliTsellegidi-PanorthodoxoSynodo2016.pdf>.

Brandon Gallaher, 'The Orthodox Moment: The Holy and Great Council in Crete and Orthodoxy's Encounter with the West: On Learning to Love the Church,' *Sobornost incorporating Eastern Churches Review* 39, no. 2 (2017): 26-71, 67.

²³ Cf. Tadeusz Kałużny, 'Prawosławie i ekumenizm. Kontrowersyjny dokument Soboru na Krecie (2016),' *Studia Oecumenica* 18 (2018): 147-160. DOI: 10.25167/Soe/18/2018/147-160, 148-149.

²⁴ Only general statements in: 'Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World,' *Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church*, 2016, acc. Mar. 11, 2025. <https://www.holycouncil.org/rest-of-christian-world>.

²⁵ Between 1982 and 1997, all autocephalous churches were members of WCC (Cf. 'Member Churches,' *World Council of Churches*, acc. Mar. 11, 2025. https://www.oikoumene.org/member-churches?search_api_fulltext=&location_filter_2=All&field_wcc_n_church_family_single=2028&glossaryaz_title). On the other hand, the Russian Orthodox Church outside Russia (ROCOR) anathematised ecumenism as a heresy

Secondly, the WCC does not issue explicit and comprehensive dogmatic statements addressing the full range of theological controversies.²⁶ In general, even if all local EOCs were members of the WCC, it would remain impossible to draw a specific dogmatic conclusion regarding the CC.

The Council of Constantinople of 1872, which addressed the issue of phyletism, is the most recent EOC council to have received broad acceptance within the EOC.²⁷

It was signed by the Patriarch of Constantinople, Anthimus VI; the Patriarch of Alexandria, Sophronius IV; the Patriarch of Antioch, Hierotheos; the Archbishop of Cyprus, Sophronios III; and the twenty-seven other metropolitans and bishops. Cyril II, Patriarch of Jerusalem, concerned by the Russian government's reaction, deserted the Council after the first session, where the 'Bulgarian schism' was condemned.²⁸

However, although the topics of this Council continue to exert significant influence within the EOC; there is no specific position regarding the CC.

(Cf. Archbishop Vitaly of Montreal, 'The ROCOR's Anathema Against Ecumenism (1983),' *Orthodox Observer*, no. 58 (1984). Also available at http://orthodoxinfo.com/ecumenism/ecum_anath.aspx.) It regarded itself as a canonical part of the Russian Orthodox Church and was reunified with the Moscow patriarchate in 2007 without revoking this anathema (B. Knorre and A. Zas'ad'ko, 'Pravoslavnyj antiëkumenizm 2.0: mobilizacionnaâ model', sek'ûritizaciâ i revanšizm,' *Gosudarstvo, religiâ, cerkov' v Rossii i za rubežom* 39, no. 2 (2021): 277–317.). The Georgian Church withdrew the WCC in 1997 ('Country Profile: Georgia,' *World Council of Churches*, acc. Mar. 11, 2025. <https://oikoumene.org/resources/documents/country-profile-georgia>.) and the Bulgarian Church followed in 1998. ('The Bulgarian Orthodox Church and the World Council of Churches,' *Orthodox Research Institute*, acc. Mar. 11, 2025. http://www.orthodoxresearchinstitute.org/articles/ecumenical/wcc_bulgarian_church.html.)

²⁶ 'The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the scriptures and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.' ('Constitution and Rules of the WCC,' *World Council of Churches*, June 2022, <https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2023-01/Constitution-and-Rules-of-the-WCC-June-2022.pdf>.)

²⁷ Cf. Stéphane Bigham, 'The 1872 Council of Constantinople and Phyletism,' *Orthodox Christian Laily*, (February 23, 2012), acc. Mar. 11, 2025. <https://ocl.org/the-1872-council-of-constantinople-and-phyletism>, § IV.

²⁸ Cf. Alberto Melloni and Davide Dainese, eds. *Conciliorum oecumenicorum generaliumque decreta: editio critica. IV/1, The great councils of the Orthodox churches: decisions and synodika: from Constantinople 861 to Constantinople 1872* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2017), 365.

A different situation arises in the case of the so-called *Constantinople Synod of 1755*,²⁹ which addressed the issue of sacramental validity among heterodox Christians, namely Catholics. A decree from 1756, signed by the three Patriarchs – Cyril V of Constantinople, Matthew of Alexandria, and Parthenius of Jerusalem – was not the result of a synod.³⁰

The existence of a document signed by the patriarchs led us to change the inclusion criteria to account for a case (document) that is not a product of a council but was signed by a Patriarchs. Rather than evaluating councils and their legitimacy as a basis for assessing their outcomes, we shift our focus to the outcomes themselves – statements and documents – regardless of the process that produced them.

3. Tracing the representative dogmatic statements of the Eastern Orthodox Church

The most recent official statements addressing dogmatic issues are the outputs of a mixed theological commission for inter-church dialogue. These cannot be included here, as they are themselves subject to evaluation by other statements, not interpretive frameworks. A second reason is their character: ‘the texts produced by ecumenical dialogues do not constitute official teaching documents of the churches involved.’³¹

Finally the most contextually quantitative representative statement, the *Ravenna document* (2007), was drawn up in an assembly in Belgrade attended by a delegation of all EOC churches.³²

²⁹ Cf. ‘Synod of Constantinople, Turkey [1755],’ in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Acc. Mar. 11, 2025. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Synod-of-Constantinople>.

³⁰ Cf. Melloni and Dainese, eds. *Conciliorum oecumenicorum generaliumque decreta*, 350.

³¹ Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *The Bishop and Christian Unity: An Ecumenical Vademecum* (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 2020), 27. <https://www.christianunity.va/content/dam/unitacristiani/Documentazione%20generale/2020Vademecum/Vademecum-EN-GARAMOND.pdf>.

³² This was the only meeting attended by delegations from all autocephalous churches, with the exception of ROCOR. Cf. Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, ‘Ninth Plenary Session, Belgrade, Serbia, 18–25 September 2006,’ *Information Service* 122, no. 2 (2006): 69–71. <https://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-orientale/chiese-ortodosse-di-tradizione-bizantina/commissione-mista-internazionale-per-il-dialogo-teologico-tra-la/sessioni-plenarie/2006-Sessione-Plenaria.html>.

All of them (except the Bulgarian and Moscow patriarchates)⁵³ attended the meeting in Ravenna, where the document was promulgated. The document's self-referential preamble claims: 'The document represents the outcome of the work of a Commission and should not be understood as an official declaration of the Church's teaching,'⁵⁴ but 'after it has now been referred to the Churches themselves for assessment and criticism. It must be "received"; and this process of reception, in the case of the Orthodox Church at any rate, may take considerable time.'⁵⁵

Documents from the 20th century – framed by the C2016 and the paradigmatic shift in encyclical letters from the beginning of the 20th century, particularly that of Germanus V in 1920⁵⁶ – must be treated as objects rather than subjects of evaluation.

Numerous issues are associated with the preparation of these documents: the expansion of modern autocephalous practice with its accompanying controversies and the resulting uncertainty regarding the representativeness of individual church leaders;⁵⁷ the strong ideological influence of the state, marked by rapid and turbulent transitions between markedly different ideological regimes within Orthodox countries; and the still unresolved debate concerning the nature of the

⁵³ Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, 'Tenth Plenary Session, Ravenna, Italy, 8–14 October 2007,' *Information Service* 125, no. 5 (2007): 109. <https://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-orientale/chiese-ortodosse-di-tradizione-bizantina/commissione-mista-internazionale-per-il-dialogo-teologico-tra-la/sessioni-plenarie/2007-Sessione-Plenaria.html>.

⁵⁴ Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, *Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacramental Nature of the Church: Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity and Authority (Ravenna Document, Ravenna, 13 October 2007)*. <https://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-orientale/chiese-ortodosse-di-tradizione-bizantina/commissione-mista-internazionale-per-il-dialogo-teologico-tra-la/documenti-di-dialogo/testo-in-inglese.html>.

⁵⁵ Kallistos Ware, 'The Ravenna Document and the Future of Orthodox-Catholic Dialogue,' *The Jurist: Studies in Church Law and Ministry* 69, no. 2 (2009): 787. DOI: 10.1353/jur.2009.0034.

⁵⁶ Cf. Jiří Ján, *Journey to the 'Holy and Great Synod': An Unceasing Estrangement from Genuine Patristic Orthodoxy* (Athens: Church of the Genuine Orthodox Christians of Greece, Holy Metropolis of Oropos and Phyle, 2015), 11, <https://dep.church/downloads/JourneyGreatSynod.pdf>.

⁵⁷ Cf. Andrzej Borkowski, 'Autocephaly in the Light of the Preparations to the Pan-Orthodox Council,' *Elpis* 18 (2016): 165–170. DOI: 10.15290/elpis.2016.18.23.

EOC's participation in the ecumenical movement.³⁸ Finally, these documents constitute the corpus of materials related to the preparatory process of the C2016,³⁹ the reception of which remains in process.⁴⁰

Thus, in seeking a more profound EOC consensus statement about CC teaching, we must return to the 19th-century, when the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople (hereafter EP) issued four encyclicals concerning Christians outside EOC *communio*. These documents were generally the outcome of local councils in Constantinople, attended by patriarchs of other sees or, at the very least, incorporating their submitted comments. At that time, this form of expression was typical.

*The Admonition to All Orthodox Christians Worldwide to Avoid the Spread of Foreign Doctrines*⁴¹ (hereinafter E36) resulted from a council convened in Constantinople in December 1836.⁴² It was signed by EP Gregory VI, 17 members of the EP Synod, and Jerusalem Patriarch Athanasius V. The document, structured into 12 chapters, denounces the teachings of Protestant reformers (Luther, Calvin, Zwingli) and Unitarians (Socinians), which were being spread to EOC believers through Western missionaries. E36 was intended for both the clergy and the laity.

*The Patriarchal and Synodal Circular Letter, an Admonition to All Orthodox Christians Worldwide, and Especially to Those in Egypt, Syria, and Palestine, to Avoid the Growing 'Papist Delusion'*⁴³ (hereinafter E39), was the outcome of a council convened in Constantinople

³⁸ See Theodoros A. Meimaris, *The Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church & the Ecumenical Movement* (Thessaloniki: Ant. Stamoulis Publications, 2013): 123–143.

³⁹ Cf. Tadeusz Kaluźny, 'The History and the Present Stage of the Preparations for the Pan-Orthodox Council,' *Studia Oecumenica* 12 (2012): 153–160. <https://theo-logos.pl/server/api/core/bitstreams/2374fd21-5544-4c10-aead-03c553f00357/content>.

⁴⁰ Răzvan Perşa, 'The Canonical Tradition of the Orthodox Church and the Holy and Great Council: Between Reception and Rejection,' *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai. Theologia Orthodoxa* 62, no. 1 (2017): 39–72. DOI: 10.24193/subbto.2017.1.04.

⁴¹ *Egkyklios ekklesiastikē kai synodikē epistolē: Parainetikē pros toys apantachoy Ortododoxoy, eis apofygēn tōn epipolazoysōn eterodidaskaliōn* (Kōnstantinoypōlos: A. Argyrāmmos, 1836), <https://anemi.lib.uoc.gr/metadata/9/f/7/metadata-39-0000220.tkl>.

⁴² Cf. Philippe Labbe and Gabriel Cossart, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio. Tomus 40*, ed. Gian Domenico Mansi, with contributions by Jean-Baptiste Martin, and Louis Petit (Paris: H. Welter, 1909), 245. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k51627x/f154.item.zoom>.

⁴³ *Patriarchikē kai synodikē egkyklios epistolē, parainetikē pros toys apantachoy Orthododoxoy, kai pollō plēon pros toys en Aigýptō, Syría te kai Palaistinē, pros apofygēn tīs epipolazoysīs Pappikēs Plánis* (Kōnstantinoypōlos: A. Argyrāmmos, 1839). <https://anemi.lib.uoc.gr/metadata/7/5/8/metadata-39-0000164.tkl>.

in September 1838.⁴⁴ It was signed by EP Gregory VI, Patriarch Hierotheus I of Alexandria, Patriarch Methodius of Antioch, Patriarch Athanasius V of Jerusalem, and 11 members of the Constantinopolitan Synod. Additionally, the Churches of Antioch and Alexandria participated in its preparation through correspondence. The intended recipients were all Eastern Orthodox Christians, particularly clergy and believers in the Middle East. E39, which was to be translated into Arabic,⁴⁵ systematically refutes CC teachings on the papacy and other elements of Latin theology,⁴⁶ arguing from the standpoint of EOC tradition.

*The Circular Letter of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church to All Orthodox Christians Worldwide*⁴⁷ (hereinafter E48) was signed on 5 May 1848, as a direct response to Pope Pius IX's call for union, issued in *In suprema apostoli Petri sede* on 6 January 1848.⁴⁸ E48 addressed to all 'Orthodox Christians,' provides a comprehensive discussion of doctrinal disagreements with the CC, particularly regarding papal primacy and the *Filioque*. 'Unfortunately, there is limited historical information concerning the 1848 Synod of Constantinople, which approved the text drafted by Stephanos Karatheodoris.'⁴⁹ However, E48 was signed by Patriarch Anthimus VI of Constantinople, Patriarch Hierotheus I of Alexandria, Patriarch Methodius of Antioch, and Patriarch Cyril II of Jerusalem, along with members of their respective synods – 18 from Constantinople, seven from Antioch, and four from Jerusalem, totalling 33 hierarchs.

⁴⁴ Cf. È. P. B., 'Konstantinopol'skie sobory: Sobor 1838 g.,' in *Pravoslavnaâ ènciklopediâ*, vol. 37 (2019), 299–343, accessed March 11, 2025. https://www.pravenc.ru/text/2057126.html#part_74.

⁴⁵ Kallínikos Delikanês, *Ta en tois kódimi toy Patriarchikoy Archeiofylakeioy sōzόμεna epísima ekklesiastiká éggrafa*, vol. 2. (Kōnstantinoypólos: Patriarchiké Typografia, 1902), 71. <https://anemi.lib.uoc.gr/metadata/9/7/c/metadata-240-0000075.tkl>.

⁴⁶ *Filioque* (α'), baptism by infusion or aspersion (β'), liturgical use of unleavened bread (γ'), consumption of strangled animals (δ' Πνεκτά), fasting on Saturdays (ε' Νηστεία τὸ Σάββατον), priest celibacy (στ' Ἀγαμία), purgatory (ζ' Καθάρτηρον πῦρ), papal primacy and infallibility (η' Πρωτεῖον καὶ ἀλάθητον), and indulgences (θ' Συγχωροχάρτια).

⁴⁷ *Egkýklios tis mías Agías Katholikēs kai Apostolikēs Ekklesiás epistolē pros toys apantachoy Orthodóxoys* (Kōnstantinoypólos: Patriarchiké toy Génoys Typografia, 1848). <https://anemi.lib.uoc.gr/metadata/7/l/e/metadata-585-0000020.tkl>.

⁴⁸ Pius IX, 'In Suprema Petri Apostoli Sede: Litterae ad Orientales,' in *Pii IX Pontificis Maximii Acta 1* (Roma: Typographia Bonarum Artium, 1854), 78–91. <https://archive.org/details/atti-del-sommo-pontefice-pio-ix-feliceme/page/77/mode/2up>.

⁴⁹ Nikoloz Gkongkantzé, 'É egkýklios epistolē toy pápa Píoy Th' pros tin Anatolē kai i synodiké apantitiké egkýklios epistolē tōn Patriarchōn tis Anatolēs (1848)' (Diplōmatiké ergasia, Ethnikó kai Kapodistriakó Panepistémio Athinōn, 2021), 66. <https://pergamos.lib.uoa.gr/uoa/dl/object/2973207/file.pdf>.

*The Patriarchal and Synodal Circular Letter to the Most Reverend and Blessed Brothers in Christ – Metropolitans and Bishops, to Their Sacred Clergy; and All Orthodox Believers*⁵⁰ (hereinafter E95), was issued in August 1895 as a direct response to Pope Leo XIII's call for union, formulated in the apostolic letter *Praeclara gratulationis publicae* on 20 June 1894.⁵¹ It was signed only by EP Anthimus VII and 12 members of his synod. The document expands upon themes already addressed in E48 while also engaging with new dogmatic statements issued in the latter half of the 19th century.

In 1904, a series of documents were issued under the collective title *The Patriarchal and Synodal Encyclical of 1902 on Relations with Schismatics and Other General Ecclesiastical Issues*, along with the Responses of Five Autocephalous Orthodox Churches and the Subsequent Reply of the Ecumenical Patriarchate⁵² (hereinafter E04). This collection of correspondence was initiated in 1902 by the EP, inviting other EOC to respond to issues such as the possibility and means of reunification with Christian denominations (especially Old Catholics and Anglicans), proselytism by Catholics and Protestants, calendar reform, and the need for strengthened communication and cooperation among autocephalous EOC. These texts provide evidence of the EOC's official (or at least representative) theological and pastoral stance toward *Western Christianity*. They illustrate the process of drafting and approving documents that, while not produced at a single 'ecumenical' council, attained a degree of general (or broad) authority within the EOC community. Although E04 chronologically belongs to the 20th century, it thematically continues the concerns of earlier encyclicals. At the same time, it reflects the first signs of a paradigmatic shift in the EOC's

⁵⁰ *Egklyklios patriarchikē kai synodikē epistolē pros toys Ierōtatoys kai Theofilestatoys en Christō adelfoys mitropolitās kai episkōpōys kai ton perī aytoys ierōn kai eyagē klēron kai āpan to eysevēs kai orthōdoxon plērōma toy agiōtātōy apostolikōy kai patriarchikōy thrōnoy Kōnstantinoypōleōs* (Kōnstantinoypōlos: Patriarchikē toy Gēnoys Typografia, 1895). <https://anemi.lib.uoc.gr/metadata/6/8/9/metadata-181-0000285.tkl>.

⁵¹ Leo XIII, 'Epistola Apostolica Ssmi D. N. Leonis XIII Ad Principes Populosque Universos, Occasione Sui Iubilaei Episcopalis,' *Acta Apostolica Sedis* 26, (1893–94): 705–717. https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/1a/apost_letters/documents/hf_1-xiii_apl_18940620_praeclara-gratulationis.html.

⁵² *Epistolē tis toy Christoy M. Ekkliasis pros toys makariōtatoys patriarchas Alexandrias kai Ierosolymōn kai toys panierōtatoys proēdroys tōn panagiōtātōn ekklesiōn Kyprou, Rōssias, Ellados, Roymantas, Servias kai Mayrovoyniōy perī tōn en Anatolikē Rōmyliā kai Vōylgaria tolmithētōn kat' orthodōxōn*. (Kōnstantinoypōlos: Patriarchikē toy Gēnoys Typografia, 1906). Available also: <https://anemi.lib.uoc.gr/metadata/e/f/b/metadata-451-0000002.tkl>.

attitude toward other Christians.⁵³ This period can be seen as the end of the EOC's 'era of encyclicals.'⁵⁴

4. Encyclical and the question of ecclesial consensus: signatures, doctrinal weight, and reception

Basil Krivochéine wrote about those documents:

All these messages, accepted at best by four Eastern patriarchs – even with the participation of their synods, as was the case in 1848, and by the Church of Constantinople alone in most cases – without the participation of the Russian Church and other autocephalous Churches, do not possess in themselves a general church authority, as precise and complete expositions of Orthodox doctrine, but enjoy general respect as historical monuments of a dogmatic nature.⁵⁵

E48 and E95 respond directly to appeals from Roman Popes, thereby acquiring a formal dimension of equal communication within the former Pentarchy. The absence of univocal output from this *synergy* of Eastern patriarchates and the Roman Popes is rooted primarily in the issue of papal doctrines.⁵⁶

The more ancient official documents – responses to proposals from the Roman Pope, signed by multiple Eastern Orthodox patriarchs – are known only from the period in which the EOC rejected the Gregorian calendar reform, particularly through synods held at the end of the 16th century.⁵⁷

From those documents only E39 and E48 were signed by the so-called Tetrarchy.⁵⁸ The more recent document which 'has been

⁵³ Cf. Ján, *Journey to the 'Holy and Great Synod,'* 7.

⁵⁴ Cf. Teodor M. Popescu, 'Studiu introductiv la fel de actual la Enciclica Patriarhilor Ortodocși de la 184,' adapted from *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* 53, no. 11–12 (1935): 545–623. https://theodosie.ro/2019/06/14/teodor-popescu-studiu-introductiv-enciclica-patriarhilor-1848/#_ftn229.

⁵⁵ Krivošein, 'Simboličeskie teksty,' §. IV.

⁵⁶ Popescu, 'Studiu introductiv'.

⁵⁷ M. M. Bernackij, 'Konstantinopolskie sobory: Sobor 1583 g.,' in *Pravoslavná enciklopediá*, vol. 37 (2019), 299–343, acc. Mar. 11, 2025. https://www.pravenc.ru/text/2057126.html#part_61.

⁵⁸ Patriarchate of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem.

ratified by all of the autocephalous Churches.⁵⁹ from an earlier era is, for example, the *Confessio Dosithei*.⁶⁰ Likewise, certain other texts – though not always endorsed by the full Tetrarchy – are considered official statements.

In the case of E95 and E48, one may observe a form of synergy, and in the case of E48, even *symphtonountes*. By contrast, patriarchs appointed by Rome – both Latin and Eastern Catholic – were subordinated to papal jurisdiction.⁶¹ They could never assume a counterpart role in dialogue with the Pope, the kind we know from the ethos of the ancient councils. This may be viewed as a manifestation of the conflict between the principles of *conciliarism* and *papal centralism*. Here, one encounters a clear limitation in defining an ecumenical council as one recognized by the Roman Pontiff.

E39 was primarily directed to EOC believers in the Middle East, constituting a more regional focus. In contrast, E48 achieved widespread dissemination and was received across the EOC. For this reason, E48, which directly and explicitly responds to the papal appeal, can be considered the most official and binding EOC statement of its time.

Nevertheless, E48 was drafted with the participation of all synods of the autocephalous Churches, except Alexandria, which lacked a functioning synod at that time.⁶² However, the Patriarch of Alexandria personally signed it.

What of the other autocephalous Churches? This remains a problematic issue as even today, a specialist may remark: ‘What’s still missing is the notion of what an Autocephalous Church is.’⁶⁵ At the

⁵⁹ ‘The Confession of Patriarch Dositheos of Jerusalem (1672),’ *Ubi Petrus Ibi Ecclesia*, June 21, 2022. Acc. Mar. 11, 2025. <https://web.archive.org/web/20220714013144/https://ubipetrusibiecclesia.com/2022/06/21/the-confession-of-patriarch-dositheos-of-jerusalem-1672>.

⁶⁰ ‘Dogmaticeskie poslanija pravoslavnyh ierarhov XVII–XIX vekov o pravoslavnoj vere,’ *Azbuka very*. Acc. Mar. 11, 2025. <https://azbyka.ru/otechnik/bogoslovie/dogmaticeskie-poslanija-pravoslavnyh-ierarhov-17-19-vekov-o-pravoslavnoj-vere/1>.

⁶¹ Cf. Edward Farrugia, ‘The Patriarchate at Vatican II,’ *Analecta of the UCU: Theology* 8 (2021): 227–242. DOI: 10.47632/2075-4817-2021-227-242, 228.

⁶² Cf. Chrysóstomos Papadópylos, *Istoria tés E’kklísias tés A’lexandrias*, (Athína: [s.n.], 1985) 819, cited from Gkongkantze, ‘Ī egkýklios epistolē toy pápa Píoý Th,’ 65.

⁶⁵ Konstantinos G. Pitsakés, ‘Autocephalie et autonomie: à propos du développement historique de deux catégories principales dans la structure actuelle de l’Église orthodoxe,’ *Kanon* 21 (2010): 21–42, 41, cited from: Gabriel Frédéric, ‘Difficiles autocéphalies: entre politique et ecclésiologie,’ in *Autocéphalies: L’exercice de l’indépendance dans les Églises slaves orientales (IX^e–XX^e siècle)* (Rome: École française de Rome, 2021), 1–19, Accessed March 11, 2025. <https://books.openedition.org/efr/11557>, note 5.

time, St Nikodim Milaš identified five autocephalous EOCs outside the Tetrarchy.⁶⁴

Unquestionably autocephalous was the Church of Cyprus (*Εκκλησία τῆς Κύπρου*), which does not bear a patriarchal title. Its autocephaly is guaranteed by the 3rd Ecumenical Council.⁶⁵ The bishop of Cyprus played a significant role in earlier councils, and their signatures appear in the results of the 4th⁶⁶ and 7th⁶⁷ Ecumenical Councils. It is confirmed that the Church of Cyprus was made aware of the contents of E48 during its preparation. On 19 January 1848, EP Anthimos VI sent a letter to Patriarch Cyril II of Jerusalem.⁶⁸ He sent six copies of I. Tantalidis' polemical books,⁶⁹ written in the context of a dispute with Western missionaries. Tantalidis is a possible co-author of E48.⁷⁰

The most significant in terms of numbers is the Russian Orthodox Church (*Русская православная церковь*), which, at the time, lacked a patriarch and was subordinate to the absolutist imperial government.⁷¹ Therefore, acquiring the patriarch's signature in such circumstances was impossible. Signatures by bishops in the manner of E04, could have been achieved, but this was not the case.

A more complex situation existed in the region of the present-day Serbian Orthodox Church (*Српска православна црква*). Autocephaly was acquired in 1219 but abandoned in 1788, then fully re-established

⁶⁴ 1. Constantinople, 2. Alexandria, 3. Antioch, 4. Jerusalem, 5. Cyprus, 6. Russia, 7. Karlovci, 8. Sinai, 9. Montenegro and 10. Church in the Kingdom of Greece. (Nikodim Milaš, *Pravoslavno crkveno pravo* (Beograd-Šibenik: [s.n.], 2004; Mostar: Izdavačka knjižarnica Pahera i Kisidja, 1902), 139 or §20.)

⁶⁵ Cf. Richard Price, *The Council of Ephesus of 431: Documents and Proceedings* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020), 524–531.

⁶⁶ See: Richard Price and Michael Gaddis, trans. *The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), 334.

⁶⁷ See: Richard Price, *The Acts of the Second Council of Nicaea (787)* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020), 360.

⁶⁸ Ανθίμου του ΣΤ' τῷ Ἱεροσολύμων Κυρίλλῳ – στί τῶν πολεμίῳν τῆς Ὀρθοδόξιας ἀντιδανοσίουσάντων βιβλίον κατὰ τῆς Ἐπιστολιμαίας Διατριβῆς (, Πλ. Τανταλίδου), ὁ αὐτός ἐξεδωκεν εἰς ἀπάντησιν ἐπίμετρον, οὐ δεκα ἀντίτυπα ἀποστέλλονται. „Ὁμοιοὶ τῷ Ἀλεξανδρείας μετὰ οκτῶ ἀντίτυπων, τῷ Ἀντοχείας μετὰ εἰς καὶ τῷ Κύπρου μετὰ ἰσαριθμῶν, αἰμη' Ἰανουαρ. 1848. Κώδιξ ΚΣΤ'. 188.' (Kallinikos Delikanēs, *Ta en tois kōdixi toy Patriarchikoy Archeiofylakeioy sōzōmena epísima ekklesiastiká éggrafa*, vol. 2. (Kōnstantinoypólos: Patriarchiké Typografía, 1904), 531. <https://anemi.lib.uoc.gr/metadata/9/7/c/metadata-240-0000075.tkl>.)

⁶⁹ Ἰλίας Τανταλίδης, *Epímetron eis tīn Epíkrisin* (Kōnstantinoypólos: Týpos I. Lazarídy, 1847), <https://anemi.lib.uoc.gr/metadata/1/9/1/metadata-291-0000001.tkl>.

⁷⁰ Gkongkantz, 'Ἡ ἐγκύκλιος ἐπιστολὴ τοῦ πάπα Πίῳ Th,' 64.

⁷¹ James Cracraft, *The Church Reform of Peter the Great* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1971), 225.

in 1879.⁷² ‘The tradition of the Peć “patriarchate” was, however, claimed in the Military Confines of Croatia by the metropolis of Karlowitz (Sremski Karlovci), which proclaimed itself a “patriarchate”⁷³ during the Assembly (Majсka скупштина) held on 1–3 May 1848.⁷⁴ For this reason, this church could not participate in or sign E48 as an autocephalous subject.

In the 19th century, an independent Montenegrin Church (Μητρόπολη Μαυροβουνίου) existed. Although its later status led to schism, in the 19th century it was recognised as autocephalous.⁷⁵ The Montenegrin Archbishop did not sign E48. Both of the aforementioned churches were incorporated into the Serbian Orthodox Church in the 20th century.⁷⁶

The Bulgarian Orthodox Church, which had acquired autocephaly, as *Archbishopric of Ohrid (Ohridska arhiepiskopiā)* in the medieval era – was under the jurisdiction of the EP at the time.⁷⁷ However, as a member of the EP Synod, the Metropolitan of Sofia, Paisios, signed E48.⁷⁸

The Church of Sinai (*Αυτόνομος Αρχιεπισκοπή Σινά, Φαράν και Ραϊθώ/ Ορθόδοξη Εκκλησία του Όρους Σινά*) ‘is sometimes reckoned as autocephalous, but is more correctly classified as autonomous.’⁷⁹ Its head in 1848

⁷² ‘Serbian Orthodox Church,’ in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, May 19, 2024, Acc. Mar. 11, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Serbian-Orthodox-Church>.

⁷³ Philippe Gelez, ‘La négociation politique du statut canonique de l’Église orthodoxe en Bosnie-Herzégovine, 1878–1918,’ in *Autocéphalies: L’exercice de l’indépendance dans les Églises slaves orientales (IX^e–XX^e siècle)* (Rome: École française de Rome, 2021): 373–389. <https://books.openedition.org/efr/12078>, 373.

⁷⁴ Vladimir Dedijer and Ivan Božić and Sima M. Ćirković, *History of Yugoslavia* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1974), 314.

⁷⁵ The Montenegrin constitution of 1905 still referred to the Montenegrin OC as an autocephalous. See: *Ustav za Knjaževinu Crnu Goru od 1905 godine* (Cetinje: K. C. Državna štamparija: 1907), 12.

⁷⁶ By ‘Tomoš Vaselenskog patrijarha Melentija IV i Svetog Sinoda Vaselenske patrijaršije u Carigradu od 19. februara 1922. godine,’ (no. prot. 1148.), <https://web.archive.org/web/20220808102054/https://www.cpc.org.me>.

⁷⁷ The autocephaly of the Ohrid Archbishopric was abolished in 1767. (D. Češme-džiev, ‘Ohridskaā arhiepiskopiā,’ in *Pravoslavnaā ēnciklopediā*, vol. 53 (2025), 600–607. Acc. Mar. 11, 2025, <https://pravenc.ru/text/2581773.html>.)

V. I. Kosik and Hr. Temelski and A. A. Turilov, ‘Bolgarskaā Pravoslavnaā Cerkov’,’ in *Pravoslavnaā ēnciklopediā*, vol. 5 (2009), 615–643, Acc. Mar. 11 2025, <https://pravenc.ru/text/149675.html>.

⁷⁸ ‘O Panierōtatos Mitropolitīs prōin Efēsoy kyrōs Pāisios,’ *Diokītikē diārthrōsī tīs Orthōdoxīs Ekklisias ī Orthōdoxos Ekklisia to ētos 1848*, last mod. Sep. 18, 2023, Arch. July 23, 2024. Acc. Mar. 11, 2025. https://web.archive.org/web/20240723231851/https://users.sch.gr/markmarkou/1871_1900/1877/koim/paisios_efesou.htm.

⁷⁹ Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church, reprinted* (London: Penguin books, 1997), 286–287. ‘The monastery was recognized as autocephalous by a Synod at

was the former EP Constantius I,⁸⁰ who is mentioned as a possible co-author of E48.⁸¹

An Orthodox church in Georgia, was under the jurisdiction of the Russian Church (as *‘Грузинский экзархат Святейшего Правительствующего Синода Православной Российской Церкви’*, *‘საქართველოსა და იმერეთის ეგზარქოსო’*) and, for that reason, could not operate as an independent ecclesiastical body.⁸²

Finally, the Church of Greece (*Εκκλησία της Ελλάδος*), Romania (*Biserica Ortodoxă Română*),⁸³ Poland (*Polski Autokefaliczny Kościół Prawosławny*),⁸⁴ the Czech Lands and Slovakia (*Pravoslávna cirkev v českých krajinách a na Slovensku*),⁸⁵ and Albania (*Kisha Ortodokse Autoqefale e Shqipërisë*)⁸⁶ did not yet exist at the time, although the Bishop of Dreinopolis (now part of Albania) was present as a member of the EP Synod.⁸⁷

Constantinople in 1575, and by the four Eastern Patriarchs in 1782.’ (Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (Harmondsworth: Penguin books, 1963), 151.). Tomos: Gavriël toŷ D’, ‘Sigíllion perì tôn pronomíōn kai tēs dioikēseōs toŷ Siná (1782),’ *Sinaitika analekta*, <https://www.sinaimonastery.com>.

⁸⁰ ‘Ī Aytoŷ Theiotáti Panagiōtīs o Archiepískopos prōin Kōnstantinoupóleōs kai Próedros Sinaioŷ kyrós Kōnstantíos o A. (1770–1859),’ Dioikītikē diárthrosī tīs Orthódox-īs Ekklesiās Ī Orthódoxos Ekklesiá to étos 1848, last modified September 18, 2023. https://web.archive.org/web/20241215073617/https://users.sch.gr/markmarkou/1853_1870/1859/koim/konstantios_konstantinoupoleos.htm.

⁸¹ Gkongkante, ‘Ī egkýklios epistolē toŷ pápa Pfoŷ Th,’ 65.

⁸² From 1811. Cf. Carsten-Michael Walbinger, ‘Die Beziehungen zwischen dem griechisch-orthodoxen Patriarchat von Antiochia und der Kirche von Georgien vom 14. bis zum 18. Jahrhundert,’ *Le Muséon* 114, no. 3 (2001): 437–455, 455.

⁸³ The Romanian Patriarchate was established in 1925. (‘Romanian Orthodox Church,’ in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Apr. 29, 2024, Acc. Mar. 29, 2025. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Romanian-Orthodox-Church>.)

⁸⁴ In 1924, the EP issued a tomos granting autocephaly to the Polish Orthodox Church, followed by a tomos from the MP in 1948. Cf. A. V. Mironovič, ‘Polskaā Avtokefalnaā Pravoslavnaā Cerkov’, in *Pravoslavnaā enciklopediā*, vol. 57 (2024), 273–279, Acc. 11 Mar. 2025. <https://www.pravenc.ru/text/2581064.html>.

⁸⁵ In 1951, the MP issued a tomos granting autocephaly to the Orthodox Church of Czechoslovakia, followed by a tomos from the EP in 1998. Cf. Zdeněk Vojtíšek, ‘Pravoslavná církev,’ in *Religionistická encyklopedie*, ed. Zdeněk R. Nešpor (Sociologický ústav AV ČR), acc. Mar. 11, 2025. https://rg-encyklopedie.soc.cas.cz/index.php/Pravoslavna%C3%A1_c%C3%ADrkev.

⁸⁶ In 1957, the EP issued a tomos granting autocephaly to the Albanian Orthodox Church. Cf. K. E. Skurat, ‘Albanskaā Pravoslavnaā Cerkov’, in *Pravoslavnaā enciklopediā*, vol. 1, (2007), 465–470, acc. Mar. 11 2025. <https://www.pravenc.ru/text/64036.html>.

⁸⁷ ‘Panteleēmōn Dryinoupóleōs,’ Dioikītikē diárthrosī tīs Orthódoxīs Ekklesiās Ī Orthódoxos Ekklesiá to étos 1848, last modified Oct. 12, 2021, acc. Mar. 11 2025. https://web.archive.org/web/20241203213413/https://users.sch.gr/markmarkou/1871_1900

In contrast to E48, the Russian, Montenegrin, Serbian and The Church of Cyprus contributed to E04, on which we conclude that they operated in an autocephalous manner. If the EP sought their signatures for E04 to confer official authority, it stands to reason that the same would have been necessary for E48 to attain such authority.

The Council from which E48 emerged commands the strongest qualitative and quantitative attention among all previous and subsequent gatherings within our scope of interest. Quantitatively, with 33 signatures from the hierarchy – including four patriarchs – it surpasses the Council of 1872 (29 signatures),⁸⁸ the Council of E39 (with only one full synod present), and the decree of 1756 (signed by only three autocephalous hierarchies). By contrast, C2016, although attended by more hierarchies (162),⁸⁹ explicitly does not mention the CC in its decrees, and voting rights were restricted to the heads of autocephalous Churches (10 were present).⁹⁰

Qualitatively, E48 was the output of a council (unlike the decree of 1756), similar to E39, but with stronger hierarchical support. Of course, we have to take into account, ‘the number of bishops participating in ecumenical councils is not a true criterion of their ecumenicity. Some local councils have gathered more bishops than those recognized as ecumenical councils.’⁹¹

Based on the foregoing evidence, we may conclude that E48 is the most representative document among those previously discussed, although the others must not be omitted.

/1875/koim/panteleimon_drynoupoleos.htm. Signature in Egkýklios tis mías Agías Katholikés kai Apostolikés Ekklesiás, 50 or v.

⁸⁸ Cf. Philippe Labbe and Gabriel Cossart, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio. Tomus 45*, ed. Joannes Dominicus Mansi (Parisiis: H. Welter, 1911), 535. <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb37252744r>.

⁸⁹ E.g. ‘Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, Crete 2016,’ *official website of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church*, (2016), Acc. Sep 2, 2025. <https://www.holycouncil.org/encyclical-holy-council>.

⁹⁰ Cf. Peter Heers, ‘The “Council” of Crete and the New Emerging Ecclesiology: An Orthodox Examination,’ (2017), Acc. June 28, 2023. https://www.academia.edu/52142808/The_Council_of_Crete_and_the_New_Emerging_Ecclesiology_An_Orthodox_Examination_2.

⁹¹ Tadeusz Kałużny, ‘Pravoslavie na raspúte. Problemy prinátia Svätogo i Velikogo Sobora Pravoslavnoj Cerkvi na Krite (2016),’ *Symposium 2* (2016): 151–172, 162.

5. Reception of the Encyclical letter of the Eastern Patriarchs of 1848

Contextual analysis has previously been offered in two extensive studies.⁹² The authors examine the political context of E48, situating it within a period of profound ecclesiastical and political transformation.⁹³ This context was shaped by the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the concurrent rise of Russian power, as Pius IX exploited the precarious position of both the Turks and the Orthodox to expand Roman influence. Sultan Abdülmecid I's concessions and the first official papal-Ottoman contact in 1847 inaugurated a new phase in diplomatic relations.⁹⁴ Rome's aspirations for a protectorate over Ottoman Christians intersected with Russian pan-Slavic and pan-Orthodox ambitions under Nicholas I, provoking Anglo-French opposition and culminating in the Crimean War – framed in contemporary Eastern Orthodox rhetoric as a Latin-Protestant-Muslim coalition against Eastern Orthodoxy.⁹⁵ Against this backdrop of papal centralism, unionist projects, and rivalry with Protestant missions, Pius IX issued the 1848 encyclical *Ad Orientales* as part of a broader proselytising programme.⁹⁶

The response reportedly took Pope Pius IX by surprise⁹⁷ and intensified subsequent theological disputes.⁹⁸ It also played a significant role

⁹² Popescu, 'Studiul introductiv' and Gkongkantzé, 'Ἰ ἐγκύκλιος ἐπιστολὴ τοῦ πάπα Πίου Θ'.

⁹³ Cf. Popescu, 'Studiul introductiv'.

⁹⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ It should be noted that further responses were given by the Orthodox to the papal encyclical, such as by the: Constantius I of Sinai: 'pántisis tês 'Orthodoxoy 'Anatolikês E'kklísias ei's tèn a'rtíōs pemftheisan pròs toÿs 'Anatolikoÿs e'gkÿklion e'pistolèn toÿ Megáloy Pápa tês Rhôm̄is Píoy toÿ Th,' (Constantinople: Patriarchal Press of the Nation, 1848), republished also in his own *Biography and Minor Writings*, p. 209ff.), and likewise in French: *Réponse de l'Église Grecque Orthodoxe d'Orient à l'encyclique de Pie IX adressée aux Orientaux en Janvier 1848. Traduite du grec par M.A.P.* (Paris: 1850). *Apántisis pròs tèn «pròs toÿs 'Anatolikoÿs» e'pistolèn toÿ Megáloy Píoy Th', òpò tinòs klirikoy' orthodoxoy* (Smyrna: 1848). G. Markoranos, *E'pistolimaia a'pántisis ei's tèn «pròs toÿs 'Anatolikoÿs» e'pistolèn toÿ Pápa (Constantinople: 1848) in Greek and Italian. Apókrisis ei's tèn e'gkÿklion, ñn ó E'nátos Píos tês Rhôm̄is pròs tà 'Orthodoxa tékna diekinopolÿse katà tòn Panoyáron toÿ 1848 (Corfu: 1848) in Greek and Italian* (Karmír̄is, *Tà dogmatiká*, 984.)

⁹⁷ 'In Apostolicae Sedis Fastigio: Pio IX e la Cura per le Chiese d'Oriente,' *Radio Spada*, December 2021, Acc. Mar. 11, 2025. <https://web.archive.org/web/20220828160939/https://www.radiospada.org/2021/12/in-apostolicae-sedis-fastigio-pio-ix-e-la-cura-per-le-chiese-doriente>.

⁹⁸ E.g. Matteo Liberatore, *Confutazione di Antimo patriarca scismatico costantinopolitano* (Parisiis: Tipografia della Civiltà Cattolica, 1854), 'to which A. Móschos,

in communications between Rome and the EOC during the preparatory phase of the First Vatican Council. Consequently, the Patriarch of Constantinople, Gregory VI, declined the invitation to participate, because the Pope remained committed to the principles articulated in 1848.⁹⁹

Subsequent developments, such as the First Vatican Council's confirmation of papal primacy at the highest doctrinal level¹⁰⁰ and the dogmatic definition of the Immaculate Conception, further reinforced the doctrinal divide. 'The dogmatic definition of that doctrine by the Pope had indubitably as its purpose to prepare for the definition of papal infallibility itself,'¹⁰¹ confirming that the alienation between the CC and the EOC continued to deepen.¹⁰²

Of particular importance is the acceptance of E48 across the EOC. Although the Russian Orthodox Church did not participate in its drafting it fully accepted the document,¹⁰³ recognising it as a symbolic text by officially translating and publishing it¹⁰⁴ through the Russian Synod.¹⁰⁵ Given 'the strict spiritual and general censorship in place at the time,

countered with 'O Koyrialistēs e'n palinōdiā, ἤτοι Ἀπάντισις εἰς τὸν κατὰ τῆς εἰσῆλθούσης τοῦ Ἀνθίμου Πατριάρχου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως γράψαντα μεταίωσχολον Ἰτᾶλόν (Athēnai: 1859).' (Karmírīs, *Ta dogmatiká*, 984.)

⁹⁹ Cf. Karmírīs, *Ta dogmatiká*, 1008.

¹⁰⁰ See: Dogmatic constitution 'Pastor Aeternus'.

¹⁰¹ Gerard Mitchell, 'The Definition of the Immaculate Conception,' *Irish Theological Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (1954): 1–15, 8.

¹⁰² Expressed by EOC in E95.

¹⁰³ 'It was likely accepted before its promulgation by Saint Metropolitan Philaret Drozdov of Moscow,' (Henryk Paprocki, 'Zarys prawosławnej nauki o Duchu Świętym,' *Elpis* 14 (2012): 14. https://repozytorium.uwb.edu.pl/jspui/bitstream/11320/211/1/2012_02_-_Elpis_-_Paprocki.pdf). The eminent Russian theologian Khomyakov described this document as expressing the voice of the entire Church. (Aleksej Stepanovič Homákov, 'Pis'ma A.S. Homákova k A.I. Košelevu,' in *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij b 8-i tomah*, vol. 8 (Moskva: Universitetskáá tipografiá, 1900), 480. https://azbyka.ru/otechnik/Aleksej_Homyakov/polnoe-sobranie-sochinenij-tom-8/11#note159_return. Letter from 1854. More about his view in the commentary in vol. 8, 9 and vol. 10, no. 2 of Aleksej Stepanovič Homákov, *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij i pism v 12 tomah*, ed. A. P. Dmitrev (Sankt-Peterburg: Rostok, 2021). It has been recognised as a source in official Orthodox theology, see e.g.: Nikolaj Malinovskij, 'Vvedenie. Učenie o Boge edinom v sušestve i troičnom v lich,' in *Pravoslavnoe dogmatičeskoe bogoslovie*, vol. 1 (Sergiev Posad: Tip. Sv.-Tr. Sergievoj Lavry, 1910). https://azbyka.ru/otechnik/Nikolaj_Malinovskij/pravoslavnoe-dogmaticheskoe-bogoslovie-tom-1/1_§_4.I.

¹⁰⁴ 'Poslanie vostočnyh patriarhov 1848 g.,' *Hristianskoe čtenie* 2 (1849): 163–202.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Aleksandr Ivancov-Platonov, 'Očerok istorii razdeleniá cerkvej, i otnošeníá zapadnoj cerkvi k vostočnym cerkvam posle razdeleniá,' in *O rimskom katolicizme i ego otnošeníáh k Pravoslaviú*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Pečatná S.P. Ákovleva, 1869), § VII. note 8. https://azbyka.ru/otechnik/Aleksandr_Ivancov_Platonov/o-rimskom-katolitsizme-i-ego-otnoshenijah-k-pravoslaviyu/1.

this constituted unconditional approval by the Synod.¹⁰⁶ The objection that E48 was not included in the *Synodikon* of the Russian Orthodox Church is not persuasive; in the 19th century, the *Synodikon* was more often abbreviated than expanded.¹⁰⁷

There is a lack of information regarding the reception of the document in other autocephalous EOCs at the time of its issuance, although it is known to have been sent to Serbia.¹⁰⁸ The text was translated into the languages of predominantly Eastern Orthodox nations: Romanian,¹⁰⁹ Bulgarian,¹¹⁰ and Serbian.¹¹¹ Full-text translations also exist in English,¹¹² French,¹¹³ Italian,¹¹⁴ Spanish¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁶ Valentin Asmus, 'Poslanie Vostočnyh Patriarhov,' in *Pravoslavnaâ ênciklopediâ*, vol. 57, ed. Patriarh Moskovskij i vseâ Rusi Kirill (Moscow: Cerkovno-naučnyj centr «Pravoslavnaâ Ênciklopediâ», 2024), 568–573. <https://wwwpravenc.ru/text/2581226.html>.

¹⁰⁷ 'Sinodik,' *Azbyka*, very. Acc. Mar. 11, 2025. https://azbyka.ru/sinodik#ch_0_2.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Σεργίας Πέτροφ: ὅτι τῶ στέλλονται ἀντίτυπα τῆς ἄρτι ἐκδοθείσης ἀπαντήσεως πρὸς τὸν πάπαν Πιον Θ' ἐχ μέρους τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἀνατολικῆς Εκκλησίας πρὸς διανομὴν παρὰ τῶ ποιμνίῳ του. αὐμη. Ἰουλίου ζ'. ΚΣΤ'. 337. (Kallinikos Delikanēs, *Ta en tois kōdixi toy Patriarchikoy Archeiofylakeioy sōzomena episima ekkliasiastiká êggrafa*, vol. 3. (Kōnstantinoypólos: Patriarchiké Typografia, 1905), 761.)

¹⁰⁹ Teodor Popescu (tran.), 'Epistolă enciclică a Bisericii una, sfinte, catolice și apostolice către ortodocșii de pretutindenii (1848),' *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* 53, nos. 11–12 (1935), 649–684. Online: Acc. Sep. 2, 2025, <https://theodosie.ro/2019/06/25/epistola-enciclica-a-bisericii-una-sfinte-catolice-si-apostolice-catre-ortodocsii-de-pretutindenii>.

¹¹⁰ Okračno poslanie na Ednata, Svata, Saborna i Apostolska Carkva do vsički pravoslavni hristiâni *Poslanie na Iztočnite patriarsi ot 1848 g.* (Sofia: Sajt 'Vsemirnoto pravoslavie,' n.d.), 44.

¹¹¹ 'Okružna poslanica pravoslavnih iskopnika patrijaraha protiv poslanice pape pija IX upućene istočnim hrišćanima 6. januara 1848. godine,' in Srpski Wikisource, Acc. Sep. 2, 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20241006020723/https://sr.wikisource.org>.

¹¹² 'Encyclical of the Eastern Patriarchs, a Reply to the Epistle of Pope Pius IX "To the Easterns," May 1848,' *Internet Modern History Sourcebook*, ed. Paul Halsall (Fordham University), Acc. September 6, 2025, https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/1848_orthodoxencyclical.asp.

¹¹³ *Lettre encyclique de S. S. le Pape Pie IX aux Orientaux, et réponse des Patriarches et des Synodes de l'Eglise d'Orient. Traduites du grec par le docteur Dem. Oeconomus. (Paris: 1850).* 'Encyclique des patriarches orientaux, en réponse à une lettre encyclique du pape Pie IX aux chrétiens d'Orient,' *Pravoslavie.fr*, Acc. Sep. 2 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250115191012/https://www.pravoslavie.fr/blog/41/encyclique-des-patriarches-orthodoxes>.

¹¹⁴ Giorgio Marcoran (tr.), *Enciclica dell'una Santa, Cattolica ed Apostolica Chiesa agli Ortodossi di ogni regione* (Constantinople: Nazionale Tipografia del Patriarcato, 1848).

¹¹⁵ P.A.B (tr.) 'Encíclica de la Iglesia Una, Santa Católica y Apostólica, a todos los cristianos ortodoxos (1848),' *Sacra Arquidiocèse Ortodoxa de Buenos Aires – Exarcado Da America Do Sul – Patriarcado Ecumênico* (2016), Acc. Sep. 2, 2025, https://web.archive.org/web/20170428201104/http://www.ecclesia.com.br:80/biblioteca/documentos_da_igreja/enciclica-1848.html.

and Polish.¹¹⁶ However, in Georgian,¹¹⁷ and in Portuguese,¹¹⁸ only fragments are available; no complete translation exists in Slovak or Czech.

The *diachronic continuity* of E48 may be demonstrated by examining the legal outputs of subsequent synods addressing similar topics, and by tracing the incorporation of full or partial positions from E48 into local EOC legislative frameworks. Although E48 explicitly affirmed the authority of the Fourth Council of Constantinople (879),¹¹⁹ no subsequent universal council formally confirmed E48. The Council of Constantinople in 1872 could have done so, but did not – primarily due to its distinct thematic focus. Only E95 reaffirmed the same doctrinal position as E48. Of course, E95 was recognised as accepted *ex silencio*, with a dubious exception in the form of subsequent explicit support.¹²⁰ Further qualitative research in this area is warranted.

Moreover, no hierarchical or lay opposition to E48 has emerged to date. This constitutes a significant supporting argument – particularly in light of the strong tradition of rejecting, annulling,¹²¹ and revising

¹¹⁶ Henryk Paprocki (tr.), ‘Encyklika czterech Patriarchów z 1848 roku (tomos). List okrężny jedyne go świętego katolickiego i apostoł skiego Kościoła do wszystkich prawosław nych chrześcija n, *Wiadomości Polskiego Autokefalicznego Kościoła Prawosław nego*,’ no. 1–2 (1981): 3–24.

¹¹⁷ ‘mrgvliivosavleli epistole ert’i, cmida, saqovell’ao da samoc’ik’ulo eklesiisa qve-la mart’lmadidebel k’ristean’tadmi (1848 c.) [Circular Encyclical of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church to All Orthodox Christians (1848)],’ sak’art’velos jvelmar’tlmadidebluri eklesia op’ic’ialuri saiti, Acc. Sep. 2, 2025. https://web.archive.org/web/20250515160749/https://oldorthodox.ge/natloba_konstantinopolis_sapatriarqos_epistole_1848.html.

¹¹⁸ Rebeca Pereira (tr.), ‘Encíclica da Santa Igreja, una, católica e apostólica aos cristãos ortodoxos de todos os países,’ *Igreja Ortodoxa Russa na Europa Ocidental, Vicariato de Portugal*, (July 4, 2019), Acc. Sep. 6, 2025. <https://web.archive.org/web/20250715230743/https://www.ortodoxia.pt/a-enciclica-patriarcal-de-1848>.

¹¹⁹ See E48: § 5. XI. and § 6.

¹²⁰ Issued at the Conference convened in Moscow in 1948, the documents aimed to reinforce the position of the Russian Orthodox Church of Moscow patriarchate amid prevailing political circumstances and motivations, under the supervision of the Soviet government. They were signed by representatives of all seven autocephalous churches from the Eastern Bloc, as well as delegates from the Patriarchates of Alexandria and Antioch. (See: Karmírīs, *Ta dogmatiká*, 1044–1048.)

¹²¹ For example, the Second Council of Ephesus (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, ‘councils of Ephesus,’ in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 25 Jul. 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/event/councils-of-Ephesus>. Accessed 12 March 2025.), the Council of Hieria (L. V. Luhovickij, ‘Ierijskij sobor,’ in *Pravoslavnaâ ênciklopediâ*, vol. 21 (2014), 301–304, Acc. Mar. 11, 2025. <https://www.pravenc.ru/text/293668.html>), and the Councils of Lyon and Florence (M. M. Bernackij, ‘Konstantinopolskie sobory: Sobor 1484 g.’ in *Pravoslavnaâ ênciklopediâ*, vol. 37 (2019), 299–345, Acc. Mar. 11, 2025. https://www.pravenc.ru/text/2057126.html#part_60).

councils (*emendatio concilium*).¹²² For example, local Churches did not accept the 1923 Synod (Congress) of Constantinople, which sought to introduce reforms.¹²³ Similarly, C2016 faced explicit rejection from high-ranking authorities of several autocephalous Churches.¹²⁴ Even documents with considerable inter-church impact – such as the aforementioned decree of 1756 – were not universally accepted and were subject to criticism.¹²⁵ In contrast, the absence of rejection of E36, E39, and E95, together with the various signs of acceptance of E48, supports the conclusion that E48 should be included among the leading candidate documents for further examination as a potential expression of the common EOC official position.

6. Draft of qualitative content analysis of E48

We have discussed the contextual attributes that support the significance of E48. The content we now need to analyse is equally significant.

¹²² Cf. Vopřada, 'Authority of the Councils,' 25.

¹²³ At this Synod the decisions of the 1923 Congress were to be ratified at a truly pan-Orthodox level, since it was only representatives of the Patriarchates of Constantinople, Serbia, and Romania that took part in the 1923 Congress, the Churches of Greece and Cyprus having authorized those already in attendance to represent them. It should be noted that the 1923 Congress began its proceedings as a 'Commission of Orthodox Churches'; only subsequently, at its third session on May 18, 1923, did it proclaim itself to be a 'Pan-Orthodox Congress.' (Ján, *Journey to the 'Holy and Great Synod'*, 11.) I. Z. Ākimčuk, 'Vsepravoslavnyj kongress,' in *Pravoslavnā ěnciklopediā*, vol. 9 (2010), 680–685, Acc. Mar. 11, 2025, <https://www.pravenc.ru/text/155528.html>.

¹²⁴ 'cmida sinodis sxdomis ok'mi 22 [Protocol of the Holy Synod Meeting 22],' *Patriarchate of Georgia*. Arch. June 11, 2018. Acc. Mar. 11, 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20180611021949/http://patriarchate.ge/geo/wmida-sinodis-sxdomis-oqmi-22>. 'Statement of the Secretariat of the Antiochian Holy Synod on the 6th of June 2016,' *Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East*. Arch. Nov. 8, 2017. Acc. Mar. 11, 2025. <https://web.archive.org/web/20171108093844/http://antiochpatriarchate.org/en/page/statement-of-the-secretariat-of-the-antiochian-holy-synod-on-the-6th-of-june-2016/1436>.

'Stanoviše na Sv. Sinod odnosno Sābora v Krit (2016) i teksta 'Otošeniāta na Pravoslavna Cārkva s ostanaliā hristiānski svāt' [Position of the Holy Synod Regarding the Council of Crete (2016) and the Text 'Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World'],' *Bulgarian Patriarchate*. Acc. Mar. 11, 2025. <https://bg-patriarshia.bg/news/stanovishte-na-sv-sinod-otnosno-sabora-v-krit-2016-i-teksta>.

'Arhierejskij Sobor Russkoj Pravoslavnoj Cerkvi vyskažet otnošenje k dokumentam prošedšego na Krite Sobora [The Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church Will Express Its Position on the Documents of the Council of Crete],' *Department for External Church Relations of the Russian Orthodox Church*, Published June 2016. Acc. Mar. 11, 2025. <https://mospat.ru/ru/news/47947>.

¹²⁵ Melloni and Dainese, eds. *Conciliarum oecumenicorum generaliumque decreta*, 351.

The letter of the Eastern Patriarchs represents the full triumph of the historical approach to dogmatic controversy ... References are made not only to the Dogmatic Fathers but also to Church archaeology and historical liturgies. This, of course, does not imply that all historical arguments presented in the letter are flawless or infallible. Numerous errors, as well as conscious, pastorally motivated distortions and exaggerations, are present. Nevertheless, the general trajectory and methodological framework – still foundational to comparative and polemical theology – are correctly identified.¹²⁶

For example, the cases of Pope Honorius,¹²⁷ Pope Leo III, John VIII, and the Moravian Archbishop Methodius,¹²⁸ are all interpreted within E48. The ghostwriter of E48¹²⁹ uses these interpretations as a basis for formulating narrative that supports the contemporary position, which the synod endorsed with its authority. An examination of these interpretations, grounded in factual evidence and current scholarship, in the context of CC responses to E48 and E95, could yield insights into the accuracy of the factual claims and, conversely, allow for an evaluation of the interpretation of those facts.

While we have not conducted a detailed theological analysis of the E48, certain topics are salient. E48 summarises dogmatic statements concerning both new and long-standing issues discussed in previous eras.¹⁵⁰ The terminology follows traditional ecclesiological exclusivism and non-EOC Christians are called communities (christianikās koinónias)¹⁵¹ rather than churches. The originator of heresy is identified as the devil, while heretics are portrayed as his victims rather than as individuals of bad will.¹⁵²

The absence of mentions of the year 1054 is unsurprising.¹⁵³ The inception of the Great Schism is situated in the era of *saeculum*

¹²⁶ Asmus, ‘*Poslanie Vostočnyh Patriarhov*’. Translated by the author.

¹²⁷ E48: § 11.

¹²⁸ E48: § 6.

¹²⁹ The main ghostwriter was probably Stephanos Karatheodoros. (Cf. Gkongkantez, ‘*Ī egkýklios epistolē toy pápa Pfoy Th*,’ 65.)

¹⁵⁰ Popescu, ‘*Studiu introductiv*’ and Gkongkantez, ‘*Ī egkýklios epistolē toy pápa Pfoy Th*’.

¹⁵¹ E48: § 5.XIV and § 9.

¹⁵² E48: § 1.

¹⁵³ See: Nick Kamas, ‘*Why 1054? Dating the Schism for the Church of Constantinople*,’ *Medieval Studies Research Blog: Meet us at the Crossroads of Everything*, University of Notre Dame, Cr. Oct. 18, 2023. Acc. Mar. 11, 2025. <https://sites.nd.edu/manuscript-studies/2023/10/18/why-1054-dating-the-schism-for-the-church-of-constantinople>.

obscurum. The culminating point is a refutation of the Cyrilomethodian mission and the last Orthodox Pope John VIII, alongside Leo III, both referred to as *beatitudo*.¹⁵⁴ The pontificate of John VIII is linked to the *Photian Schism* and the Fourth Council of Constantinople in 879. This Council is counted as the eighth ecumenical council,¹⁵⁵ in contrast to the prevailing view.¹⁵⁶

However, papal honour in the sense of *primus inter partes* is accepted,¹⁵⁷ but the papal *plenitudo potestatis* concept is refuted,¹⁵⁸ and associated with Babylon from the Revelation to John.¹⁵⁹ The papal throne is described as vacant, as are other Western episcopal sees.¹⁴⁰ The document also explains why the EOC never attempted to occupy these vacant seats or appoint an *EOC Pope of ancient Rome*. Rather than citing historical reasons, the theological rationale is a posture of waiting for repentance and the return of the entire CC to Orthodoxy,¹⁴¹ with an expression of hope that Pope Pius IX will lead this process.¹⁴²

Moreover, E48 offers conditions and suggestions that may be interpreted as a brief programme for reunification.¹⁴⁵ No positive demands are made for the CC to accept new doctrines or perform additional acts. The essential requirements for this process include the abandonment of proselytism¹⁴⁴ and a thorough examination of CC history by papal

¹⁵⁴ E48: § 8. Although it is not a proclamation of sainthood (the title *makarios* is also attributed to the living pope), it could serve as a basis for canonisation due to its clear affirmation of their steadfast adherence to Orthodox positions.

¹⁵⁵ E48: § 5. XI. and § 6.

¹⁵⁶ E.g.: Hanuš Nykl, *Náboženství v ruské kultuře* (Červený Kostelec: Pavel Mervart, 2013), 27. ‘The Eastern church for the most part denied its ecumenicity and continues to recognize *only* the first seven ecumenical councils.’ (‘Fourth Council of Constantinople,’ in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Nov. 23, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Fourth-Council-of-Constantinople-869-870>. Accessed 28 January 2025.) ‘Today Roman Catholics accept twenty ecumenical councils; the Orthodox and some Protestants *only* seven.’ (Leo Donald Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils (325–787): Their History and Theology*. (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1983. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1990), chap. 9. (Italics added by the author of this study.)

¹⁵⁷ E48: §12.

¹⁵⁸ E48: §4 and §7 and §17.

¹⁵⁹ E48: §4.

¹⁴⁰ E48: §16.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² E48: §12.

¹⁴⁵ There are significant overlap between the Catholic approach to true reform and the perspectives articulated by Saint Irenaeus Joint Orthodox-Catholic Working Group in ‘Communiqué,’ §13.

¹⁴⁴ The EOC anathematised CC missionaries, identifying them with the wolves referenced in Holy Scripture (E48: §18 and § 21).

theologians¹⁴⁵ to identify the point of deviation from Orthodoxy.¹⁴⁶ Upon doing so, the Pope will recognise that the *Filioque* and other mentioned doctrines are *innovations* that should be removed.¹⁴⁷ This will restore *diachronic unity* with his predecessors. As a result, *synchronous unity* with the EOC will be achieved, and in this renewed unity, the Eastern Patriarchs will recognise the Pope as *primus inter pares*.¹⁴⁸

7. Discussion

The official position of the EOC must be authentic in matters of faith.¹⁴⁹ In academic theology, however, the capacity to test such authenticity is limited, and there remain doubts regarding the adequacy of rational, *dianoia*-based methodologies in reaching definitive theological judgments.¹⁵⁰ Nonetheless, truthfulness remains a constitutive attribute of official theological statements.¹⁵¹ The epistemological authority of the Church, as an expression of its teaching role, uncovers theological truth but does not establish it.¹⁵² Through the methodologies of the humanities (on a natural level), this quality is only partially accessible.

There is no scope here to describe, analyse, or interpret all the potential inaccuracies in E48, nor to evaluate their impact on its

¹⁴⁵ Their abundance in the West is described as a work of Providence (E48: §12).

¹⁴⁶ E48: §16.

¹⁴⁷ The *Filioque* is described as a blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and is regarded as the source of various ‘Western innovations’, including the adoption of baptism by infusion or aspersion as the ordinary form, the withholding of the Lord’s blood from the laity, the denial of the sacraments of the Eucharist and Confirmation to children, the omission of the epiclesis from the liturgy, and the enforcement of mandatory priestly celibacy (E48: § 5. XII).

¹⁴⁸ E48: §15.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Alexandru Roșu, ‘Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae’s View on Laymen’s Participation in the Infallibility of the Church,’ *Review of Ecumenical Studies* 6, no. 1 (2014): 28–46. DOI: 10.2478/ress-2014-0103.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Metallinos, George, *Faith and Science in Orthodox Gnosiology and Methodology*, University of Athens, Department of Theology. Acc. Mar. 11, 2025. <https://www.romanity.org/mir/me01en.htm>.

Cf. John S. Romanides, ‘Empirical Theology versus Speculative Theology,’ in Franks, Romans, *Feudalism and Doctrine*, romanity.org, https://www.romanity.org/html/rom.03.en.franks_romans_feudalism_and_doctrine.02.htm Acc. Sep. 2, 2025. part 2.

¹⁵¹ Cf. Davit Akelyan, ‘Epistemological and Methodological Aspects and Problems of Conceptual Debate of Fallibilism and Infallibilism,’ *Region i Mir*, no. 6 (2023): 74–83. DOI: 10.58587/18292437-2023.6-74, 76.

¹⁵² Cf. Irina Deretić, ‘The Question of Authority in the Eastern Orthodox Church: Aspects, Perspectives and Problems,’ in *Incarnating Authority: A Critical Account of Authority in the Church*, eds. Paul Avis et al. (Munich: utzverlag GmbH, 2019).

theological veracity. This paper merely proposes directions for future research, which should be conducted under specific thematic categories – rhetorical, logical, philosophical, sociocultural, historical, and anthropological. A qualitative content analysis should first identify the statements themselves, assessing their clarity, intelligibility, testability, and internal logical consistency. These aspects are prerequisites for any subsequent quantitative content analysis, which may include evaluating the ratio of information to misinformation and disinformation, as well as the forms of narrative employed. Such analysis should consider whether the document accurately interprets the position of the *other side*, whether it describes it correctly, and whether its proposed solutions remain consistent with EOC teaching.

If E48 misinterprets historical or anthropological aspects, such errors may be overlooked, as the Church does not claim authority in these domains. However, misinterpretation of the theological significance of historical events or erroneous exposition of the theological conclusions of its opponents would constitute a serious challenge to the document's truthfulness.

A more profound theological analysis is therefore required, one that integrates insights from the humanities and proceeds systematically across the major theological disciplines. Such an approach would begin with biblical theology, assessing the accuracy of E48's use of Scripture to support its claims. It would then consider canonical law, evaluating the document both as an object and a subject of canon law, including its interpretation of ancient canons and judicatures. Spiritual theology would offer a lens through which to examine the spirituality and *theoria* underpinning the document within its historical and ecclesial context. Eschatological reflection would be necessary to analyse the predictions made in E48 and E95.¹⁵⁵ Finally, dogmatic theology would investigate the doctrinal coherence of the document and its consistency with Orthodox teaching.

¹⁵⁵ E48 also contains prophetic statements that merit exegetical and eschatological examination, such as predictions regarding the future of Eastern Orthodoxy and the decline of the papacy (E48: § 2 and § 4).

Conclusion

We have identified promising candidate texts that may reflect the EOC official position towards the CC, based on contextual qualitative indicators. At the level of this initial research, E48 emerges as the most prominent and potentially still valid expression of a common EOC position, followed – according to the degree of explicit contextual support – by E39, E95, E36, and E04. The main gap at this stage concerns the explicit forms of contemporary reception within local churches, with particular attention to the Churches of Cyprus and Serbia. A secondary gap is the absence of the conciliar acts that led to E48, which are now considered lost.

Preliminary content analysis suggests that E48 summarises the core themes of previous EOC–CC polemics and articulates them at a more academically rigorous level. There appear to be no EOC objections to the theological diachronic unity expressed in E48. Nonetheless, qualitative and quantitative content analysis should be employed to examine this claim with greater precision and certainty.

Should future research confirm which of these candidate texts may be considered the official EOC position towards the CC, it would represent a valuable contribution to the ongoing theological dialogue – particularly in assessing the degree of consensus achieved within that dialogue.

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