



**COVID-19:
A MEANINGFUL STORM FOR RENEWAL IN THE ORTHODOX CHURCH**

Final communiqué of

**AN INTERNATIONAL WEB-SEMINAR ORGANIZED BY CEMES AND IHU ON
“RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES AND CHURCH IN A PERIOD OF PANDEMIC”
(Biblical, Liturgical, Historical, Theological, Ecclesiological,
Ecumenical, Interfaith and Missiological Perspectives)**

The Center of Ecumenical, Missiological, and Environmental Studies (CEMES) and the inter-Orthodox Master Program of the International Hellenic University (IHU) “Orthodox Ecumenical Theology (MOET) organized a week-long (6-11 April, 2020) Web-Seminar on “Religious Communities and Church in a Period of Pandemic,” a crisis that not only endangered public health, but the necessary precautionary measures taken worldwide have also challenged the core of the Church's identity.

CEMES was encouraged in this by courageous statements of illumined hierarchs that “we the clergy – and, we could add, theologians – are responsible for the fact that our faithful people have no idea what the Eucharist really means. The time has come to look at our mistakes and to repent.” It also recalled what half a century ago the late Fr. Alexander Schmemmann said about another crisis, when he spoke of a meaningful storm for ecclesiological renewal in the Orthodox diaspora. Therefore, it envisioned that the COVID-19 pandemic becomes a meaningful and blessed storm for an overall renewal in our Orthodox Church and beyond.

The seminar brought together scholars from all over the world (15 countries from all five continents: USA, Russia, UK, Canada, France, Italy, Germany, Syria, Ukraine, New Zealand, South Africa, Brazil, Turkey, Georgia, Greece), to reflect on the present COVID-19 Pandemic and the way it affected the Churches. It was conducted by the CEMES teaching staff of MOET, and it was supported by the authorities of IHU that provided the electronic facilities, as an open space to reflect in common on the various aspects of the ecclesiastical life throughout the world by sharing information and scholarly views on the subject.

It was attended by over 200 participants, with short statements offered by almost all (17) teaching staff of MOET, renowned scholars from abroad (10) and from other scholarly disciplines (Law, and History), one bishop, 7 academic priests and few younger researchers and Ph.D. and Master holders. All their presentations were discussed and evaluated in the 6th final day by the participants.

Beyond the ways that the present pandemic crisis has endangered the public health, the precautionary measures assumed worldwide have also challenged our ecclesiastical life in two distinct, albeit interrelated areas: the enforced enclosure of the faithful, with consequences not only for the constitutional right of religious freedom, but also for the identity of the Church defined by the Eucharistic event as a community coming together “in the same place.”

That is why the seminar opened with a Biblical and Liturgical session, particularly focused on the need for translated biblical readings, the biblical background for understanding the

theological meaning of the Eucharist, as well as the priesthood of the faithful for a desired liturgical and ecclesiological renewal for a meaningful storm in our Church.

THE DETAILS OF THE SEMINAR

1. The **Biblical and Liturgical** session dealt with the profound nature and the various Christian practices regarding the Sacrament of the Divine Eucharist, as well as the Eucharistic event in the wake of physical (social) distancing. (coordinated by P. Vassiliadis and N. Denysenko, with presentations by M. Konstantinou, P. Vassiliadis, D. Passakos, P. Meyendorff, P. Andriopoulos and E. Venizelos)

2. The **Historical** session covered data and implications of major historical pandemics, both in antiquity (during the Peloponnesian War, etc.), and in particular the early church (during the persecutions) and of late Christian antiquity (the plague of Carthage), and especially the great plague in Justinian's era (in Constantinople, etc.) and the great epidemics of the Middle Ages and modern times (coordinated by N. Kouremenos and G. Demacopoulos, with presentations by G. Dokos, Th. Kyriakidis, D. Stamatopoulos and N. Kosmidis)

3. The **Theological and Ecclesiological** session concentrated on the theological understanding of the mystery of the Church, the Eucharistic and Baptismal Theology and the experience and practices in a period of pandemic (coordinated by P. Panagiotopoulos and C. Hovorun, with presentations by G. Kochetkov, Z. Dashevskaya, St. Muksuris and P. Koumarianos).

4. The **Ecumenical and Interfaith** session covered various historical and theological attitudes of other churches and religions, primarily focusing on the journey toward the unity of humanity, the care for God's creation and the visible unity of the Church (coordinated by J. Chryssavgis and E. Clapsis, assisted by N. Dimitriadis and with presentations by himself, P. Ladouceur, B. Gallaher, S. Boukis, Chr. Stueckenberger and V. Stathokosta). And

5. The **Missiological and Pastoral** session focused on the authentic meaning of witness rendered by the Christian world over the centuries in times of epidemics or pandemics and other similar crises (coordinated by D. Keramidas and Chr. Sonea, with presentations by himself, Bishop Lazar, E. Voulgaraki, V. Xidias, M. Sereti and S. Karekla)

1. The Biblical and Liturgical Session

The first Biblical and Liturgical Session of the seminar started with a very optimistic perspective, and certainly hope, that the current pandemic can become a “meaningful storm” for a liturgical and overall renewal of our Orthodox Church. It was also encouraged by the statement of a hierarch of the Church of Greece that “we the clergy – and of course the theologians too - are responsible that our faithful people have no idea what the Eucharist really means. The time has come to look to our mistakes and repent.”

Coordinated by the President in Honor of CEMES, and Director of the Inter-Orthodox Master Program of IHU “Orthodox Ecumenical Theology (MOET), Prof. Emer. Petros **Vassiliadis**, who was also acting on behalf of the ill Prof. of the University of Valparaiso of USA, and among the perspective teaching staff of MOET, Dn. Nicholas **Denysenko**, the seminar's first session started with one of the founding members of CEMES.

Prof. Emer. Miltiadis **Konstantinou**, former Dean of the Theological School of the University of Thessaloniki, concentrated on the need for translated Bible readings in the Orthodox liturgy, especially during this special period of enforced enclosure, but also after the end of it. He presented the liturgical helps published by the Greek Bible Society, in cooperation with the Church of Greece.

Second speaker was Prof. **Vassiliadis** himself. Having realized how serious problems had emerged for the Orthodox self-consciousness after the preliminary measures imposed concerning the core of the identity of the Church, the Holy Eucharistic, he decided to briefly present the scientific findings of biblical scholarship on the biblical Eucharistic data and the profound theological meaning of Eucharist. He concluded that the starting point for determining the deeper meaning of the Eucharist, is the teaching of Jesus about the *Kingdom of God*, and he underlined the *eschatological* and *covenantal* character of the early common Eucharistic meals. As to the authentic understanding of the Christian sacramental theology, he reminded that in the Bible “*μυστήριον*” is the hidden plan of God for the salvation of the world. The Church, by extension, is considered a “mystery,” as the locus of God’s salvation. And only later the Divine Eucharist was characterized as a “mystery”, *the Mystery par excellence*. Until the 4th century AD, the term “Mystery” and its derivatives were not connected in any way with what later came to be called Sacraments.

Third speaker was Prof. Dimitrios **Passakos** of the Higher Ecclesiastical Academy of Athens, also a biblical scholar, who using a sociological analysis of the Pauline epistles provided a theological interpretation of the Eucharist in the Pauline letters. St. Paul by making the proclamation of Lord's death the locus of the eucharistic gathering, he understood the *mystery par excellence* of the Church as the opposite of "liturgical escapism" from everyday social problems. He did not simply connect the Eucharist with the eschatological event of Jesus' death, but with the *proclamation* of this death he inextricably connected the Eucharist with eschatology and mission.

Next speaker was the Prof. Emer. of Liturgical Theology at St. Vladimir’s Theological Seminary of USA, Paul **Meyendorff**. Making use of the biblical and the liturgical evidence he made a plea for an urgent rediscovery of the priesthood of all the faithful, not only during the present pandemic, but also in the overall ecclesiastical life. He reminded how important for the Church’s mission is the engagement of the entire “royal priesthood”, not jus the clergy, based on a Baptismal theology that will supplement our Eucharistic ecclesiology.

Fifth speaker was the administrator of the semi-official website of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, theologian and musician researcher Panagiotis **Andriopoulos**, who presented his research on the plethora of hymns and prayers composed in and for the present pandemic crisis.

The first session ended with a presentation by the former Deputy Prime Minister of Greece and prof. of Constitutional Law at the University of Thessaloniki, Evangelos **Venizelos** on “Constitutional measures in democratic societies and the Church in a period of pandemic” He stressed that in Greece, as well as in the EU there is neither persecution of the faith, nor loss of religious freedom. The church, as expressed by the synodal decisions of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Church of Greece, the Church of Crete, he said, realized that «the pandemic does not threaten the faith but the faithful». The so-called heroic statements of some who are not afraid of the virus and want to take part in ecclesiastical gatherings of worship, despite the legislative prohibitions on freedom of movement, are deeply irresponsible and selfish. Solidarity and love are at the foundation of society (κοινωνία) but also of communion (κοινωνία).

2. The Historical Session

The second session was dedicated to the historical dimension of the pandemic crises and the Church's over time response to the various challenges associated with them.

The session was moderated by Nikos **Kouremenos**, research fellow at the Foundation for Religious Studies (Fscire) in Bologna, and George **Decamocopoulos**, professor of Orthodox Christian Studies at Fordham University.

First speaker was Mr. George **Dokos**, a theologian and graduate student on Ecclesiastical History at the University of Athens, who referred to the so-called "Justinian's Plague" and its religious and cultural effects. He focused on the critical disposition of several historians and chroniclers of that time to accept the widespread perception that the cause of the pandemic disease was God's wrath for people's sins. At the same time, he presented examples that show the influence of medical terminology on theological treatises and the hymnography of that period. Particular emphasis was also placed on the impact that pandemic diseases exercised in the field of divine worship and popular piety with the spread of the veneration of doctor-saints as well as sacred relics and various types of amulets, the development of miracle collections as a special literary genre, etc. The painful effects of the pandemic, however, he concluded, together with the disappearance of large numbers of population, have weakened the Byzantine Empire and facilitated eventually the spread of Islam.

At this point, the co-chair of the session, Professor George **Demacopoulos**, made a short intervention, referring to the personality of Pope Gregory the Great. This Pope ascended to the papal throne, when his predecessor, Pelagius II, succumbed to the epidemic that plagued Rome during the year 590. One of the first actions taken by the newly elected pontiff was to organize a large procession through the streets of Rome that was completed at the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, dedicated to the Virgin Mary for the protection of the city. It was an innovative move, probably inspired by customs of Constantinople, where Gregory served as pope's legate, as until that time Rome's protection was linked in the local ecclesiastical conscience with St. Peter.

Then, Theodosios **Kyriakidis**, theologian with PhD in Modern History and researcher at the Pontic Studies Center of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, referred to the historical witnesses and the recorded ways of dealing with epidemics in Pontus from the late Middle Ages until the end of the 19th century. Special mention was made regarding the withdrawal of people from urban centers and the role of the historic Monasteries of Pontus in the care and maintenance of people in dire straits. As far as worship services are concerned, the sources do not seem to testify clearly to the practice of suspension, at least regarding the Orthodox Church, in reference also to what happened with the Roman Catholic and Protestant missions operating in the area. Along with the epidemics, however, the veneration of specific saints was also spread, such as that of St. Charalambos as well as sacred relics, and icons in which the plague was personified in the form of a black demon.

The next to take the floor was the professor of Balkan and Late Ottoman History at the University of Macedonia, Dimitris **Stamatopoulos**. Starting with the churches' closure by Ecumenical Patriarch Dionysios V in 1890 in the context of the questioning of the privileges of the Patriarchate in the Late Ottoman Empire, the speaker referred to the broader issue of the Church's relationship with secularization and consequently with the modern state. The question directly related to the above issue has to do with which of the two institutions, the State or the Church, can guarantee the ontological security of the citizens. Already since early modernity, two different types of secularization have emerged: (a) the model of the Church's complete submission to the State according to Thomas Hobbes, and (b) the model of the Church's exit from the State and its integration into Civil Society according to John Locke. According to the latter view, the State has an obligation to restrict the Church when the latter questions civil rights. The modern state has the right to exercise and determine its health policy and the obligation to ensure the maximum life expectancy of its citizens and consequently the responsibility to stop any activity that endangers their ontological security.

Finally, the Secretary General of the CEMES, Nikos **Kosmidis**, first referred to the pandemic of 1348-1353 and the catastrophic consequences for Europe with particular emphasis on religious phenomena that emerged at that time, such as those of messianism, religious fervor, anticipation of the end of the world, *choreomani*, etc. A typical example is

the groups of wandering flagellants and the impact they exercised in late-medieval society. In the second part of his presentation, Mr. Kosmidis referred to the effects of Modernity and Rationalism on the view of death and in fact of the epidemic during the 19th century, such as the apparent decline of the religious and metaphysical dimension and the acceptance of death as a natural end and mourning as a social obligation. Special mention was made of the phenomenon of posthumous photography, which appeared in the second half of the 19th century, with which people tried to keep the memory of their loved ones imprinted and thus alleviate the pain of loss.

3. The Theological and Ecclesiological Session

Wednesday's (8.4.20) session was dedicated to the theological and ecclesiological perspectives and questions raised by the current pandemic of COVID-19, but also to the way ecclesiastical thought and practice in general as well as a period of pandemic.

The session was coordinated by the President of CEMES, Dr. Petros **Panagiotopoulos**, Assist. Professor at Theological School of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and Fr. Cyril **Hovorun**, Assist. Professor at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. All addresses in this session were presented in English.

First speaker was Father Georgy **Kochetkov**, former Rector of the Christian Orthodox Institute "St. Philaret" in Moscow and the spiritual father of the Transfiguration Brotherhood of Russia. He developed the theme "A State of Emergency in the Church of Christ or: A Feast in a Time of Plague?" and referred to the need of expanding ecclesiastical boundaries in a state of emergency, like the present one. "When human lives are at stake, the cost is extremely high, and the canonical boundaries of the church expand," he said. Both he and Ms. Zoya **Dashevskaya**, Subdean of the School of Theology at St. Philaret's Christian Orthodox Institute and PhD candidate in the Department of Church History of the School of History at Moscow State University, pointed to the urgency of reviewing current liturgical practices of our Church. "There have been circumstances when lay men and women, could administer the holy gifts to themselves...It is entirely appropriate to remember the women presbyters and deaconesses of ancient times in this context. Women could also serve in the church in aiding with the celebration of the mysteries."

The next speaker was Fr. Stylianos **Muksuris**, Professor of Liturgical Theology and Languages and Chair in Department of Liturgy, Byzantine Catholic Seminary, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, who spoke on the theme "Back to the Future or Forward to the Past? Covid-19's Positive Effects on Liturgical and Spiritual Renewal." Quoting his Primate, Archbishop Elpidophoros, he suggested supplementing our conventional understanding of holy *κοινωνία* with a refreshingly new perspective of becoming *communion* for our suffering brothers and sisters. The need to donate blood, to check up on the elderly, and to provide for the material wellbeing and safety of the infirm, which is the *horizontal* aspect of the Church's outreach, complements the *vertical* communion with God. He also stressed the importance of finding positive aspects in the current situation and activating the whole ecclesiastical body, especially women are tragically marginalized, to deal with needs that arise. The future needs "a more vibrant Church ready to be resurrected and reclaim its rightful place as the divine-human force to effect transformation of hearts and communities," he said.

The third speaker was Fr. Pavlos **Koumarios**, Doctor of Theology and Teacher at the City University of Athens, who analyzed the concept of death in the Orthodox tradition, making extensive reference to St. Maximos the Confessor.

The last main speaker was expected to be Fr. Ioannis-Panteleimon **Manousakis**, Associate Professor of Philosophy at the College of the Holy Cross, Massachusetts (USA). He was unable to join the session but sent the text of his presentation, the link of which was

distributed to the participants but it was also very briefly summarized in Greek by the President in Honor of CEMES, Emer. Prof. Petros Vassiliadis, pointing out the way in which Fr. P. Manousakis took advantage of narratives and literature from the ancient Greek literature (Oedipus, Thucydides, Plato etc.) and modern philosophers and novelists (A. Camus, Derridas, etc), who dealt with the plague or the semantics of the Eucharist, comparing the accidental coincidence of the imposed Quarantine (referring to 40 days in Italian) to the Christian period of Lent (also of 40 days (*Τεσσαρακοστή*)), and draw conclusions about the current state of emergency and the spiritual way it should be endured.

The session ended with a round-up and interesting short intervention by the co-coordinator, Fr. Cyril **Hovorun**, who referred to the discussion on the Eucharist as it is developed in the time of the coronavirus pandemic by those who believe or don't believe that the Eucharist kills the virus, calling it an Orthodox epiphenomenon of "Cultural War." He opined that it is unhelpful to continue with this sort of culture wars, in a time when the virus, regardless of what we believe about it...will continue taking lives on both sides. Until an Ecumenical Council (and here he mentioned the recommendation at the Holy and Great Council for periodical Pan-orthodox such gatherings) decides which side is right, either view is a theologoumenon, a theological opinion, not a dogma.

4. The Ecumenical and Interfaith Session

On the fourth day of the online seminar on "Religious Communities and the Church in a Pandemic Period," the speakers examined the theme from an ecumenical/ interfaith perspective.

First Fr John **Chryssavgis**, Archdeacon of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, opened his reflection on how the pandemic has affected the way we speak to the world and the way we respond to the world. He identified the global state as a crisis, which is a significant term basically meaning judgement. He observed that the time has arrived to review our priorities and to question ourselves, especially the leaders in all sectors of life (political, religious, etc.) This crisis for Fr John Chryssavgis is an opportunity to move beyond narrow interests, stepping outside of where we feel comfortable. It is a time to start listening to the others, to the experts in every field. He closed his inspirational speech connecting this crisis to the challenge of the ecological crisis.

Fr Emmanuel **Clapsis** from the Theological School of Holy Cross in Boston initially addressed the issue from a contextual and then from an interfaith perspective. He acknowledged that the Covid-19 crisis provides considerable opportunity for humankind to appreciate human solidarity and reassess and correct many of its social, cultural, political and economic practices. However, the virus has uncovered the fragile state of the present world. He also referred to how the World Council of Churches urged people and churches to give the highest priority to doing whatever we can to protect life and underscore the unity and interdependence of humanity. Lastly, he underlined the need for solidarity and care through faith.

Dr. Paul **Ladouceur**, Adjunct Professor of the School of Orthodox Theology at Trinity College in the University of Toronto (Canada), reflected on ecumenical and interfaith initiatives in Canada stimulated by the Covid-19 pandemic. He presented five activities addressed to Church and political leaders: a) a Statement by the President of the Canadian Council of Churches; b) a Joint Letter to the Prime Minister of Canada, Justin Trudeau; c) a Joint Statement from the World Council of Churches and Regional Ecumenical Organizations; d) an interfaith Message to Canadians from Religious Leaders in Canada in Response to the Covid-19 signed by 95 religious leaders entitled "Hope, Gratitude and Solidarity"; and e) a letter to the Prime Minister. He also outlined a project for a joint online

ecumenical service, noting the complexity of organizing such an undertaking in a short period of time, such as the different dates for Pascha in the Eastern and Western calendars.

The next speaker was Dr. Vasiliki **Stathokosta**, Ass. Prof. for Orthodox Theology and the Ecumenical Movement at the University of Athens, who presented an ecumenical approach to the pandemic. She emphasized that the Church exists as the body of Christ, a reality that St. Paul's description helps us to understand. Thus, it is absolutely essential for her being the gathering of the believers, namely her members, at a certain place ("epi to auto" = "ἐπί το αὐτό") as well as the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. As long as the faith in the Triune God according to the Scriptures is the common faith of all the historical Churches that participate in the so-called ecumenical movement, Covid-19 seems to bother us equally. It is a threat to our church communities and to our need to worship our Savior. Prof. V. Stathokosta examined the ways historical Churches reacted to the restrictions of religious acts that Governments imposed because of the pandemic COVID-19, and she introduced several new issues and challenges that came out and enrich our ecumenical debate and our ecclesiological agenda.

The Rev. Dr. Sotiris **Boukis**, ordained minister of the Evangelical Church of Greece and a member of the WCC Faith & Order Commission, spoke on the transformation of the church into an online "synaxis" as a result of the closing of the churches. His paper reflected on the ecclesiological, pastoral and ministerial challenges and opportunities emerging with this new reality, focusing on the example of the Evangelical Church of Greece as a case study. He also reflected on the Eucharist, observing that while usually the ecumenical dialogue focuses on the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, now it is called to focus on the real absence of the believers. Finally, he reflected on the implications of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, underlining that this pandemic is a unique opportunity to cultivate the idea that every Christian is a representative of Christ in the world.

Christoph **Stückelberger**, founder of Globethics.net in Geneva, underlined the importance of ethics needed in the current corona crisis. He connected the pandemic to a new debt crisis arising in the horizon. Then he talked about the question of solidarity and how the pandemic has helped us rediscover virtues, as well as exercise self-discipline and modesty. He mentioned the conspiracy theories that quickly emerged in the pandemic, making reference to the role of media ethics. He also said that we interpret the pandemic through the glasses of a specific worldview. Finally, he concluded by connecting the health crisis to climate change, saying that the pandemic shows that we have far more financial options than previously imagined.

The fourth session ended with an interfaith reflection by the coordinator Dr. Nikos **Dimitriadis**, treasurer of CEMES and Adjunct Professor of World Religions at the American College of Thessaloniki. His argument was that Christians are called upon to take an active part in this global pandemic by now recognizing others who do not share the same beliefs as partners in dialogue in this mission of God and by selflessly offering the vision of a global society of love, overcoming self-centeredness and other such boundaries related to the self. "Interfaith dialogue," Dimitriadis observed, "flourishes when it becomes a living reality in everyday life." He also suggested that we could very easily compare the pandemic to the environmental crisis. His interfaith reflections were presented along with those of his students, most specifically on how the three major monotheistic religions are responding or should respond to the Covid-19.

5. The Missiological and Pastoral Session

The last session of the seminar focused on the missionary and pastoral aspects of the pandemic crisis.

The retired bishop of Ottawa (Canada) of the OCA and leader of the Monastery of All-Saints, **Vladika Lazar Puhalo**, spoke of the need to re-activate the laity, as a "royal priesthood", in all the liturgical and, more generally, pastoral life of the Church. The liturgy, he said, is not a ritual, a "choreography", but the altar through which all the people of God enter into the paradise.

Brandon **Gallaher**, professor of Systematical and Comparative Theology at the University of Exeter (UK), spoke on "Corona as the Apocalypse of Orthodoxy: Judgement and Hope in the Age of Covid-19." He argued that COVID-19 has stripped bare established Orthodox institutions, leaders and theologies (e.g. eucharistic ecclesiology). But any apocalypse also involves hope (Rev. 21:4) and he suggested that we use the present crisis as a God-given sign to recreate notions of community, outreach, holiness, sacramentality, empower the holy laity and force the Orthodox to finally come to terms with social issues they have long ignored, mentioning the newly published text "For the life of the world. The social ethos of the Orthodox Church", under the blessings of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, as a testimony of the concern for the social witness of the Church, a witness and evidence of hope, optimism and not of despair. We are called to be creative as Church and allow this moment to transform us. To be an Orthodox Church in the moment of late modernity, to save creation, to speak the words of Christ to the world as it is now "We won't return to normality, because normality was the problem," he concluded. In other words, about the need for the Orthodox Church to be open to the challenges of the world, without an apologetic attitude.

Fr. Cristian **Sonea**, Professor of Missiology at the University of Cluj (Romania), and co-coordinator of this session, said that today a theological reading of history is necessary, along with an encounter with modernity, an assessment of the human body, a general awareness of the planet and an understanding of our mortality, which should be distanced from any form of fundamentalism and ideas about the "persecution" of Christian faith. How do we understand vulnerability today and what will the consequences be for our system of values in the so called post-COVID era? He asked himself. The destroying and saving of our planet depend on us. And he concluded saying, that the main lesson to be learned by the Churches and us is that of humility.

Lecturer of Missiology at National University of Athens Dr. Evi **Voulgaraki** underlined that in the current circumstance of uncertainties due to the pandemic, there are many questions as to the day after; but there is also the certainty of the Resurrection and the true presence of the Resurrected in our eucharistic meal. This leads to the prophetic responsibility of all Christians to preserve life in its full meaning, to plea for both freedom and love in a dystopian environment and to turn our parishes into a true icon of the Body of Christ, where a variety of charismas will flourish and also shine to the people of our broader community, in particular the most vulnerable, implementing thus Liturgy after the Liturgy and linking *martyria* with *diaconia* and social responsibility.

The theologian Vassilios **Xidias** noted that the crisis brings us in front of the need for a re-evangelization "outwards" but also "within" the Church. The liturgy is - and should be - a model of "celebration" for modern society, even in conditions of pandemic, he noted. He also offered specific examples how the Orthodox could respond to the present state of physical distancing during the period of the Holy Week and of Pascha, and beyond.

Maria **Sereti**, PhD candidate at the Theology Faculty of the University of Thessaloniki, presented the Joint Statements issued by the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and Pope Francis both for the current crisis (joint prayer on March 25), and for the ecological question, but also for the common witness of the two sister Churches. Finally,

Sofia **Karekla**, PhD candidate in Journalism and collaborator of *Orthodoxia.info* spoke about the different tendencies within the Greek ecclesiastical and journalistic circles regarding the restrictive measures decided by the Government against the spread of the

pandemic, by some received as an invitation of adaptation, by others, instead, viewed as a “confessional” resistance.

The last speaker, Dr. Athanasios **Papathanasiou**, director of the Synaxis journal, and currently lecturing at the Open Hellenic University and the Higher Ecclesiastical Academy of Athens, was unable to personally attend the seminar, but sent his contribution for the final publication of its proceedings.

The session and the ensuing discussion were moderated by Dr. Dimitrios **Keramidas**, member of the Executive Committee of CEMES and lecturer at Angelicum University, who opened the session with a short reflection.

6. Closing and evaluation session

The seminar was evaluated in the 6th and final session (Saturday, April 11) by the participants, who unanimously expressed gratitude for their unique experience, requested similar events each month and decided to share the content of the seminar with their Churches and the world at large with a communiqué and an open letter.