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VOLOS
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INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Orthodox Christianity between Pre-Modern Commitments,
Modern Challenges, and Post-Modern Relevance

OCTOBER 19–22, 2023

“THESSALIA” CONFERENCE CENTRE
MELISSATIKA, VOLOS, GREECE



CHAIR OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES (ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY),
FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY, UNIVERSITY OF ERFURT (GERMANY)
VOLOS ACADEMY FOR THEOLOGICAL STUDIES (GREECE)

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ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY
BETWEEN PRE-MODERN COMMITMENTS,
MODERN CHALLENGES,
AND POST-MODERN RELEVANCE:
AN INTRODUCTION

How should Orthodox Christianity be characterised and evaluated today? As a pre-modern religious belief system, which – because of its various commitments to a normative past – has not yet managed to develop a constructive relationship with modernity and its challenges? Or, on the contrary, as a religious system that fits very well into the context of post-modernity and has today gained an unexpected international appeal in many respects? In fact, these and other related questions could be answered affirmatively to a certain extent, despite the apparent exclusivity of the two views implied. This is due to the historical, local and contextual diversity of the Orthodox world with its various seeming contradictions and antinomies. The latter have often given rise, in the past as well as more recently, to misunderstandings and misrepresentations of the rich Orthodox tradition, especially by Western Christianity and the Western world in general (e.g., the negative presentation of Serbian Orthodoxy by the Western media in the 1990s in the context of the wars in the former Yugoslavia). This is a powerful narrative, which has influenced not only general perceptions of Orthodoxy internationally, but also, to a large extent, the way in which the Orthodox themselves perceived their own religious heritage. It is therefore necessary today to deconstruct such narratives on the basis of more recent (and especially post-colonial) approaches. More broadly, what is needed is a critical and creative assessment of the contemporary Orthodox Christian situation, avoiding both romantic idealisations and triumphalisms, as well as essentialist classifications and devaluations. An appreciation of the diversity within the Orthodox world – whose historical and contemporary manifestations are not identical and invariable, due to the differing local conditions (as revealed, for example, in the dissimilarities between Greek/Greek-speaking and Slavic, especially Russian, Orthodoxies) – can, in itself, contribute to this. Equally important is a sober and thorough comparison of Orthodox with Western Christianity, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, in order to identify common elements in their historical development and articulation, as well as important discrepancies between them.

More specifically, the pre-modern background of Orthodoxy, such as the particular emphasis on its tradition as a binding, normative past (e.g., in relation to the unsurpassed value, authority, and supremacy of the Church Fathers and the decisions of the Councils), often constitutes an obstacle to the renewal of Orthodoxy. Byzantium is often regarded from an idealised and romanticised perspective in various areas (and not only in relation to Orthodoxy), which is sometimes linked to a nostalgia for some form of its modern “revival”. Indeed, the past is still basically considered within Orthodoxy to be superior to the present and the future. But all this does not necessarily and deterministically mean that Orthodoxy is unable to evolve and

Cover photograph: Olya Gluschenko (Athens, 2010)

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that it cannot respond to modern challenges. The same applies to the general relationship of Orthodoxy with modernity, specifically the value framework of the latter (e.g., individualisation, secularisation, liberalisation). The Russian Orthodox Church in post-communist times may often have given the impression of an “anti-modern Orthodoxy”, but the whole issue clearly needs broader consideration, contextualisation, and analysis. The undeniable difficulties that Orthodoxy encounters (e.g., with individual human rights) do not render it *a priori* and by definition incompatible with modernity. The phenomenon of Orthodox (mostly Russian) theological migration to the West in the 20th century, the multifaceted collaborations of the Orthodox Churches with numerous secular actors and institutions of the modern world, as well as the multifaceted and global role of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople (e.g., regarding environmental issues) prove that a more creative encounter of Orthodoxy with modernity is possible. Beyond this, the various developments of the last decades in the post-modern context (e.g., post-secular societies, multiple modernities), which have relativised earlier absolute and normative narratives, opened unexpected new possibilities for the presence of Orthodoxy today, and increased its attractiveness internationally (e.g., among various converts to Orthodoxy from Western Christianity or other religions). At the same time, the emergence of a new generation of Orthodox thinkers and scholars, either in the historical Orthodox cradles or – and especially – internationally, offers many possibilities for the future presence and action of Orthodoxy in a globalised and competitive environment.

The planned international conference intends to address this issue and its main aspects systematically and holistically, which can be summarised as follows:

1) The pre-modern roots and commitments of Orthodoxy, their lingering impact on today’s conditions, and the possibilities for their reform based on modern developments;

2) The numerous challenges of modernity, the related difficulties and problems for Orthodoxy, as well as the efforts for a more creative correlation between Orthodoxy and modernity;

3) The various multifaceted changes in the post-modern context, their significance for Orthodoxy, and the emerging new trends in the current globalised environment;

4) The comparison between Orthodox and Western Christianity in the above context, their common elements and their differences, as well as the possibilities for their more productive mutual correlation.

This conference is part of and financed by the research project “The Challenge of Worldliness to Contemporary Christianity: Orthodox Christian Perspectives in Dialogue with Western Christianity” at the University of Erfurt (2021–2023) under the direction of Prof. Vasilios N. Makrides and with the collaboration of the postdoctoral researcher, Dr. Efstathios Kessareas. Both were involved in the conception and organisation of the conference, together with Dr. Pantelis Kalaitzidis, Director of the Volos Academy for Theological Studies.

CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2023

Arrival

19:00–22:00 Evening Together, Roof Garden, Kypseli Hotel, Volos

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2023

Link for remote access (Zoom):
<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/83162144590>

8:30 Departure from the Hotel to the “Thessalia” Conference Centre;
 Registration

9:00 Opening of the Conference

I. THE PRE-MODERN COMMITMENTS OF ORTHODOXY

9:00–10:30 First Session:

Moderator:
 Prof. Vasilios N. Makrides
 (University of Erfurt, Germany)

Dr. Pantelis Kalaitzidis

(Director, Volos Academy for Theological Studies,
 Volos, Greece)

*When the Desert Becomes an Empire:
 Monasticism, Politics, and Church-State Relations*

Dr. Vassa Kontouma

(Professor and Director of Studies in Orthodox Christianity, 15th–21st c.;
 Dean of the Religious Sciences Section,
 École Pratique des Hautes Études, PSL, Paris, France)

*An Uncomfortable Compromise?
 The Gradual Adoption of the Sacramental Septenary
 in Orthodox Doctrine and its (In)Adequacy with Practice*

10:30–11:00 Coffee Break

11:00–13:15 Second Session:

Moderator:
Sister Prof. Tereza Obolevich
(Pontifical University of John Paul II, Krakow, Poland)

Dr. Ekaterini Tsalamponi

(Professor of New Testament, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece;
Member of the Board of Directors, Volos Academy for Theological Studies)

*Exploring the Role of Women in Orthodox Christianity:
Past Commitments, Perennial Problems, and Recent Developments*

Dr. Gregory Tucker

(Postdoctoral Researcher, Faculty of Catholic Theology,
University of Regensburg, Germany)

*Ressourcement, Reform, Revolution?
Liturgical Development in Eastern Orthodox Christianity*

Dr. Lidiya Lozova

(Postdoctoral Researcher, University of Exeter, Exeter, UK;
“Spirit and Letter” Research and Publishing Association, Kyiv, Ukraine)

*Pre-Modern, Anti-Modern, Pro-Modern?
The Ethos of Icons in Ukraine and Russia Today*

13:15–15:00 Lunch Buffet

15:00–16:30 Third Session:

Moderator:
Prof. Vassa Kontouma
(École Pratique des Hautes Études, PSL, Paris, France)

Georgios Vlantis, MTh

(Director of the Council of Christian Churches in Bavaria, Germany;
Research Associate, Volos Academy for Theological Studies, Volos, Greece)

*Church Renewal and the Authority of the Fathers in Orthodoxy:
A Historical and Systematic Approach*

Dr. Vasilios N. Makrides

(Professor of Religious Studies/Orthodox Christianity,
Faculty of Philosophy, University of Erfurt, Germany)

*Orthodox Anti-Westernism in a Global Age:
The Burden of the Past and Contemporary Critical Voices*

16:30–17:00 Coffee break

II: THE MODERN CHALLENGES FOR ORTHODOXY

17:00–19:15 Fourth Session:

Moderator:
Prof. Ekaterini Tsalamponi
(Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece)

Sister Dr. Tereza Obolevich

(Professor and Head of the Department
of Russian and Byzantine Philosophy,
Faculty of Philosophy,
Pontifical University of John Paul II, Krakow, Poland)

*Russian Religious Thought
in the Face of Modernity*

Dr. Konstantinos Papastathis

(Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science,
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece)

*Investigating Modernisation
in the Orthodox Christian World:
The Jerusalem Church and the Sacralisation of the Nation*

Rev. Dr. Ioan Moga

(Associate Professor of Orthodox Systematic Theology,
Faculty of Catholic Theology,
University of Vienna, Austria)

*Dialectics of a Christian Kairology in Modernity:
The Case of the Romanian Orthodox Theology*

20:00 Dinner



SATURDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2023

Link for remote access (Zoom):
<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/85000795101>

8:30 Departure from the Hotel to the “Thessalia” Conference Centre

9:00–10:30 Fifth Session:

Moderator:
Dr. Lidiya Lozova
(University of Exeter, UK)

Dr. Mihai-D. Grigore

(Privatdozent and Research Fellow at the Department of Religious History,
Leibniz-Institute of European History, Mainz, Germany)

*Orthodoxy Challenged:
A Church Becomes World's Second Christian Confession*

Dr. Dimitrios Moschos

(Professor of Church History and Head of the Department of Theology,
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece;
Member of the Board of Directors, Volos Academy for Theological Studies)

Greek-Speaking Orthodox Theology Facing Modernity

10:30–11:00 Coffee break

11:00–12:30 Sixth Session:

Moderator:
Dr. Nikolaos Asproulis
(Volos Academy for Theological Studies, Greece)

Dr. Efstathios Kessareas

(Postdoctoral Researcher, University of Erfurt, Germany)

*The Phenomenon of Orthodox Rigorism/Fundamentalism:
Its Deep Historic Roots and its Modern Transformations*

Dr. Maria Hämmerli

(Lecturer in Religious Studies, University of Fribourg, Switzerland)

*Eastern Christianity in the West:
Endogenous and Exogenous Challenges of an Encounter*

12:30–14:00 Lunch buffet

III. THE POST-MODERN RELEVANCE OF ORTHODOXY

14:00–16:15 Seventh Session:

Moderator:
Prof. Dimitrios Moschos
(National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece)

Dr. Spyridoula Athanasopoulou-Kypriou

(Religious Education Teacher at the Moraitis School,
and Psychotherapist, Athens, Greece)

*Gender Theories
and Constructive Orthodox Theology:
An Eschato-Christocentric Understanding
of Sexuality and the Body*

Rev. Dr. Timothy Boniface Carroll

(Principal Research Fellow, Department of Anthropology,
University College London, London, UK;
Director of the Centre for Anthropology and Ethnography
of Orthodox Christianity,
Institute of Orthodox Christian Studies, Cambridge, UK)

*On the Veracity of Participation:
Quotidian Mysteries in Orthodox Christianity
as Means to Certainty*

Dr. Christopher D. L. Johnson

(Senior Instructional Designer,
Walker Center for Teaching and Learning,
University of Tennessee
at Chattanooga, USA)

*“Weaving Ropes from Sand”:
The Role of Orthodox Christianity
in the Postmodern Age of Intelligent Machines*

16:15–16:45 Coffee break



16:45–19:00 Eighth Session:

Moderator:
Dr. Pantelis Kalaitzidis
(Volos Academy for Theological Studies, Greece)

Short Presentation of the RESILIENCE Programme:
RESILIENCE Meets International Scholars

Dr. Nikolaos Asproulis
(Deputy Director, Volos Academy for Theological Studies;
Lecturer, Hellenic Open University, Patras, Greece)

*Post-Modern Orthodox Theologies:
Venturing into Uncharted Waters?*

Dr. Zdenko Š. Širka
(Research Fellow and Lecturer, The Ecumenical Institute,
Protestant Theological Faculty, Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic)

*Post-Modern Hermeneutics and Orthodoxy:
An (Un)Fruitful Encounter*

Dr. Sebastian Rimestad
(Privatdozent and Research Fellow,
Centre for Advanced Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences
“Multiple Secularities: Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities”,
University of Leipzig, Germany)

*Conversion to the Orthodox Church:
A Theological or a Political Act?*

19:15–19:45 Concluding Discussion

20:00 Dinner

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2023

Optional Departure Day

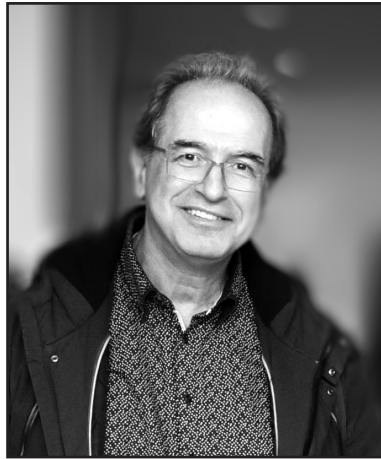
8:30–10:00 Divine Liturgy at the parish Church of St. Constantine and Helena

8:30 Optional Daily Excursion to the Meteora Monasteries – Departure from the Hotel

PARTICIPANTS AND ABSTRACTS

Dr. Pantelis Kalaitzidis

Director
Volos Academy for Theological Studies
Volos, Greece



Dr. Pantelis Kalaitzidis studied Theology in Thessaloniki, and Philosophy in Paris, Sorbonne. He has published extensively in many languages especially in the areas of the eschatological dimension of Christianity, the dialogue between Orthodoxy and modernity, religious nationalism and fundamentalism, political theology, contemporary Orthodox and Western theology, issues of renewal and reformation in Eastern Orthodoxy, Ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue, as well as religious education. He is serving as the editor of the theological series “Doxa & Praxis: Exploring Orthodox Theology” (WCC Publications), while he is a member of the Board of various theological journals (*Political Theology*, *Journal of Orthodox Christian Studies*, *Review of Ecumenical Studies*, *The Wheel*). He has taught Systematic Theology at the Hellenic Open University and St. Sergius Institute of Orthodox Theology in Paris. He has also been a Research Fellow at the Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology (Boston), Princeton Theological Seminary and Princeton University (New Jersey), DePaul University (Chicago), Faculty of Theology of KU Leuven (Belgium), and the Faculty of Protestant Theology of Münster University (Germany). He is a member of the Executive Committee of the European Academy of Religion (EuARe) and co-Chair (with Prof. Aristotle Papanikolaou) of the Political Theology Group of the International Orthodox Theological Association (IOTA). For the last twenty-three years, Dr. Kalaitzidis has been the Director of the Volos Academy for Theological Studies, a research centre in Greece dealing with modern issues for Eastern Orthodoxy. His English publications include: *Orthodoxy and Political Theology* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012), and (as co-editor) *Orthodox Handbook on Ecumenism: Resources for Theological Education* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2014), and *Politics, Society and Culture in Orthodox Theology in a Global Age* (Paderborn: Brill/Schöningh, 2023).

When the Desert Becomes an Empire: Monasticism, Politics, and Church-State Relations

Focusing on Byzantium and Tsarist Russia as well as following the well-known distinction between “Desert” and “Empire” initiated by Fr. Georges Florovsky, the present paper will deal with issues related to the relations between Church and politics. More specifically, along with a discussion of the various understandings of “symphonia”, the paper intends to address the questions of the “true tradition”, Church-State relations and monastic ownership, the way of dealing with heretics and dissenters, monastic spirituality and parish life, issues of “religious toleration”, and canon law. The paper will conclude by referring to the impact and consequences of the above matters on the ecclesial life and society in contemporary Russia and Greece.

Prof. Vassa Kontouma

Director of Studies in Orthodox
Christianity (15th–21st centuries)

Dean of the Religious Sciences Section
École Pratique des Hautes Études, PSL
Paris, France



After completing her studies in philosophy and oriental languages, Prof. Vassa Kontouma chose to focus on the history of Byzantine and post-Byzantine thought, with a particular interest in dogmatic and systematic theology. In 1996, she defended her doctoral thesis on John Damascene's "Fount of Knowledge" at the University of Paris-4 Sorbonne, but she also attended seminars at the École Pratique des Hautes Études, where she started teaching in 1998. From 2000 to 2017, she was Assistant Professor of Orthodox Christianity there and, in 2017, she became Director of Studies in Orthodox Christianity, 15th-21st centuries. Interested in books in all their aspects, she has been in charge of the patrimonial library of the Institut français d'études byzantines since 2003, while pursuing several editorial activities. Her most recent research focuses on the circulation of Orthodox books, erudite ecclesiastical networks, and the theology of the sacraments between the 15th and 17th centuries. She also explores the phenomenon of popular theology in its late expressions (18th-19th centuries) as well as the intersections between theology, ecclesiology, and ideology in the 19th-20th centuries. Finally, she is co-director of the international research programmes "Eastern Christians and the Republic of Letters between the 16th and 18th centuries" and "Ecclesiastical Chant in Venetian Crete in the 16th and 17th centuries". Since 2019, Vassa Kontouma is Dean of the Religious Sciences Section at the École Pratique des Hautes Études.

An Uncomfortable Compromise? The Gradual Adoption of the Sacramental Septenary in Orthodox Doctrine and its (In)adequacy with Practice

In 1672, for the first time in the history of Orthodox theology, the sacramental septenary was elevated to the rank of dogmatic truth. In his "Confession of Faith", proclaimed at the Synod of Jerusalem, Patriarch Dositheos II stated: "We believe that the evangelical sacraments in the Church are these seven. We have neither more nor less sacraments in the Church, for a number other than seven is a product of heretical insanity. The number seven is instituted and deduced from the Holy Gospel." In 1715, thanks to a publication by Chrysanthos (Notaras), Dositheos' successor at the Patriarchal See of Jerusalem, it became established that the septenary, allegedly taught since the earliest days of Christianity, had also been commonly accepted in the Byzantine period. As a result, the seven sacraments became an undisputed part of Orthodox doctrine until today, as they appear in textbooks, catechisms, and on many other occasions. However, we know that in the 13th century, when the sacramental septenary made its first appearance in a Greek text – namely the Confession of Faith (1267) of Emperor Michael VIII Palaeologos –, the consistency of this doctrine with practice seemed far from obvious. Discrepancies had been observed by several Byzantine authors, but surprisingly they resulted in compromises rather than critical discussions and reassessments. Should this compromise be maintained today? This paper aims to explore the history of the adoption of the doctrine of the seven sacraments in the Orthodox tradition over the *longue durée* and to point out the blind spots it may have created.

Prof. Ekaterini Tsalampouni

Professor of New Testament
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
Thessaloniki, Greece

Member of the Board of Directors
Volos Academy for Theological Studies
Volos, Greece



Ekaterini Tsalampouni is Professor of New Testament at the Department of Social Theology and Christian Culture in the Faculty of Theology at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. Her research focuses on New Testament exegesis and theology and the Graeco-Roman context of the New Testament as well as on ecological hermeneutics. She has studied at the Department of Theology of the Faculty of Theology in Thessaloniki and continued her postgraduate studies at the University of Heidelberg, Germany. In 1999, she defended her doctoral thesis titled “Macedonia in New Testament Times”. She has worked as a religion teacher in Secondary Education and as an appointed lecturer at the Department of Orthodox Theology of the University of Munich, Germany. She is a member of several academic societies, such as Society of Biblical Literature, European Association of Biblical Theology and Colloquium Paulinum. She is on the board of the Hellenic Bible Society and the Volos Academy for Theological Studies. Selected publications: *Macedonia in New Testament Times* (2002), *Ecology and the New Testament: Method and Examples* (2013), “Balancing between Domestication and Foreignization: The Case of the Bible Translations into Modern Greek” (2021), “Biblical Tradition and Same-Sex Relations: A Difficult Hermeneutical Path” (2022) and “Pandemics and Apocalyptic Texts: A Critical Exegetical Approach” (2022).

The Ambivalent Place of Women in Contemporary Orthodoxy: The Legacy of the Past and the Challenges of the Present

This paper will focus on the position of women in contemporary Orthodox Church communities in comparison to their position in their broader social contexts. A double tension seems to determine their gender identities. On the one hand, within the Church, the theological discourse of gender equality and respect for women is not reflected in life and practice. Women remain silent and invisible in their Church communities. On the other hand, Orthodox women experience a tension between their public and often leading roles in secular social life and their passive and auxiliary roles in their congregations. It seems that anthropological models and worldviews of the pre-modern past play a normative role in contemporary Orthodox communities, which treat the rapid developments of their post-modern social environment with suspicion or rejection. It is, therefore, important to discuss how contemporary Orthodox communities can deal with the challenges of the present and whether the future as an eschatological reality could also play a normative role in a reassessment of previous anthropological and ecclesiological models. In the first part of this paper, certain aspects of this pre-modern paradigm will be critically discussed. In the second part, a brief assessment of this situation will be given. The question will also be raised whether the tensions triggered by current social developments in Greece and worldwide as well as by new ideological agendas in the last decades could provide the necessary impetus for a change of the role of women and men in the Orthodox Church. Finally, in the third part, some suggestions will be made for a critical re-evaluation of the prevalent paradigm and for a re-determination of female roles in Church life and structures that will respond to contemporary challenges and be inspired by the eschatological vision of the Gospel.

Dr. Gregory Tucker

Postdoctoral Researcher
Faculty of Catholic Theology
University of Regensburg
Regensburg, Germany



Dr. Gregory Tucker currently holds a “DFG-Eigene Stelle” as a postdoctoral researcher in the Faculty of Catholic Theology at the University of Regensburg, Germany. His project is an edition and study of the late antique and medieval Greek hymns for the feast of the Transfiguration of Christ. He earned the degrees of Bachelor of Arts and Master of Studies in theology at the University of Oxford and Master of Arts at St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary in New York, before completing doctoral studies at the University of Regensburg. His dissertation has been published as *The Hymnography of the Middle Byzantine Ecclesiastic Rite & Its Festal Theology: Introduction – Edition & Translation – Commentary* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2022).

Ressourcement, Reform, Revolution? Liturgical Development in Eastern Orthodox Christianity

Most Eastern Orthodox Christians worship today according to a liturgical rite that has remained fundamentally unchanged for centuries and has roots stretching back into Late Antiquity. Apologists often identify the apparent stability of the Orthodox liturgical tradition as a mark of the authenticity and reliability of the tradition as a whole. Sometimes, genuine continuity is mythologised as an absolute immutability from the apostles to the present day. Yet, since at least the 19th century, liturgical historians have been documenting the indisputable fact that the ritual practices of Eastern Orthodox Christians have undergone countless transformations, large and small, over the last two millennia—a fact of which previous generations were also not ignorant. Indeed, one may conclude that the relative uniformity of modern-day Orthodox liturgical practice is the exception rather than the norm within the history of the church. Nonetheless, conscious liturgical development is not only a contentious prospect today but appears to have been so in the past. Furthermore, while historical liturgical development can be easily and plentifully documented, the motivations and mechanisms behind it remain almost always hidden from view. With reference to historical and contemporary case studies, this paper offers a synthetic exploration of the topic of development in Orthodox liturgical practice, considering how the pre-modern commitments and rhetoric of continuity that characterise current Orthodox discourse and self-understanding may be reconciled both to the historical evidence for change and to current needs, challenges, and theological and pastoral desiderata.

Dr. Lidiya Lozova

Postdoctoral Researcher
University of Exeter
Exeter, UK

“Spirit and Letter” Research
and Publishing Association
Kyiv, Ukraine



Dr. Lidiya Lozova defended her doctoral thesis on the theological dimension of the Leningrad School of avantgarde art at the Modern Art Research Institute of the National Academy of Art of Ukraine in 2015. Earlier, she had completed her Bachelor's and two Master's degrees in cultural studies and intercultural humanities at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy in Kyiv and Jacobs University in Bremen, Germany. Before February 2022, she had worked for twelve years at the European Humanities Research Centre of the University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy and at “Spirit and Letter” Research and Publishing Association (Kyiv), focusing on Christian theology, ecumenical relations, and civic peacebuilding involving faith communities. Her current research project at the University of Exeter concerns the social ethos of Eastern Christian icons and specifically modern icons and icon-like images that appeared during wartime in Ukraine.

Pre-Modern, Anti-Modern, Pro-Modern? The Ethos of Icons in Ukraine and Russia Today

Orthodox Christian iconography chiefly relies upon pre-modern Byzantine sources. Because it is a theological language in itself and not just a form of church art, it has been traditionally cautious regarding any “subjective” (potentially heretical) elements in it, both in terms of its content and form of expression. Today this caution often turns into an obsessive defence against anything “modern”, while the icon becomes rigidly tied to a past epoch perceived a-historically. As a result, contemporary iconography often turns into a non-reflexive and non-creative repetition of certain post-iconoclastic “Byzantine” imagery, identified as “timeless” and “eternal”. Such an approach does not tolerate any supposedly “non-traditional”, “individualistic”, “sentimental” or “political” elements and condemns any Western influences on icon painting as exclusively harmful. This is apparently a conflict with modernity in the contemporary Orthodox visual field. Such an anti-modern ethos is best articulated in the “Social Concept” of the Russian Orthodox Church (2000) and is correlated with an extremely negative attitude towards anything “modern” in icon painting within Russian Orthodoxy. Meanwhile, in Ukraine there has been more freedom and variety of both theological thought and its visual expression in dialogue with modernity and the West. The ethos of the visual sphere in Ukraine is much more in tune with the document “For the Life of the World. Towards a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church” (2020) of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and thus more dialogical towards modernity. In my presentation, I will focus on the difference between those two kinds of ethos as revealed in contemporary iconography in Ukraine and Russia, especially under the circumstances of the current Russian aggression against Ukraine.

Georgios Vlantis, MTh

Director
Council of Christian Churches in Bavaria
Munich, Germany

Research Associate
Volos Academy for Theological Studies
Volos, Greece



Georgios Vlantis, MTh, was born in Athens, Greece, in 1980 and has studied in Athens and Munich, Germany. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Theology and a Master's degree in Comparative Philosophy of Religion. From 2009 to 2011, he has worked as scientific staff member and conference leader at the Orthodox Academy of Crete, Greece. From 2011 to 2016, he was research and teaching assistant at the Chair of Orthodox Systematic Theology in the Faculty of Orthodox Theology at the University of Munich. Since 2012, he is research associate of the Volos Academy for Theological Studies. He has published several articles on issues of philosophy of religion, history of theology, and ecumenism in Greek, German, English and Italian, such as on apophaticism, Patristic considerations of atheism, reception of ecumenical documents, the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, Ukrainian autocephaly, Orthodox fundamentalism, as well as Orthodoxy and modernity. He has also translated books and articles in Greek, German and English. He is active in various ecumenical forums in Germany and beyond. Since May 2016, he is the director (*Geschäftsführer*) of the Council of Christian Churches in Bavaria (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft Christlicher Kirchen in Bayern*), Germany.

Church Renewal and the Authority of the Fathers in Orthodoxy: A Historical and Systematic Approach

The centrality of the Church Fathers in the Orthodox Church (theology, ethics, spirituality) seems indisputable. Orthodoxy is broadly understood as the “Church of the (Eastern) Fathers”. Following the multi-faceted Orthodox encounter with modernity, one is often confronted with narratives of a linear continuity that, in the name of the Fathers, discourage any attempts at Church renewal. This is not a new phenomenon; in fact, the traditionalist challenge accompanies Orthodox Christianity for many centuries. The paper will focus on figures and cases from the history of the Orthodox Church, basically in Greek-speaking contexts, when the authority of the Fathers and their normativity was being questioned (e.g., Michael Psellos, Dimitrios Kydonis, Theoklitos Farmakidis, Neo-patristic and Post-patristic theology). To what extent do contextual factors determine the discussion on the normativity of the Fathers? What understandings of authority do Orthodox theologians develop when defending traditionalist approaches or looking for renewal? Are there any confessional or contextual specifics of the Orthodox discourse on the Church Fathers in comparison to relevant discussions in the West? Does this pre-modern commitment to a binding past shaped by the Fathers impede Orthodoxy's ecumenical activity and its encounter with modernity and the post-modern world or does it work as a compass guaranteeing the authenticity of its message? What will be the future of the Orthodox understanding of the authority of the Fathers?

Prof. Vasilios N. Makrides

Professor of Religious Studies
(Orthodox Christianity)
Faculty of Philosophy
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Orthodox Anti-Westernism in a Global Age: The Burden of the Past and Contemporary Critical Voices

Those dealing with the history of Orthodox Christianity cannot but be well aware of an enduring phenomenon that characterises it across time, namely its tenacious anti-Westernism. This grew out of the famously problem-ridden relationship between Eastern Orthodox and Western Latin Christianity during the Middle Ages for religious, political, cultural and other reasons. The “West” as an all-encompassing and undifferentiated category came to represent a place, which in the Orthodox mind could only harbour dangers and havoc. This was especially the case from the beginning of the early modern period onwards when the East-West divide grew bigger and created a strong enemy syndrome and inferiority complex amongst numerous Orthodox Christians in Eastern and Southeastern Europe. Truth be told, in many cases Western attitudes and policies towards the Orthodox East were responsible for the widespread anti-Western sentiments there. Nevertheless, Orthodox critiques of the West as a “fallen place” (due to secularisation, the Enlightenment etc.) were incessant and became even more systematised and theorised from the 19th century onwards, starting with the Russian Slavophiles. Considering that they are still very much alive today (cf. C. Yannaras’ ideas or the anti-Westernism of Orthodox rigorists/fundamentalists), this begs the question about the role of Orthodox anti-Westernism in the current global age. Looking at some developments in post-communist times (e.g., the official discourse of the Russian Orthodox Church, especially after the Russian invasion of Ukraine), we can clearly observe the still lingering impact of Orthodox anti-Westernism. The same also applies to some Orthodox Christians in the West itself as well as to converts to Orthodoxy, who develop similar anti-Western feelings. However, in the last thirty years there have also been significant developments in the opposite direction, especially among a new Orthodox, internationally active theological and intellectual generation that attempts to overcome the traditional East-West opposition and seeks to initiate their mutual fruitful encounter. Although there have been such productive East-West encounters in the past as well, these recent attempts to deconstruct the “Orthodox constructions of the West” (but also the “Orthodox constructions of the East”) show promising potential to really break new ground in substantially reassessing this complex issue, which is vital not only for the entire Christian world as such, but also beyond it in global terms.

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Russian Religious Thought in the Face of Modernity

Russian religious philosophy was formed and reached its apogee in a period that is stretched between the two poles of modernity: the 19th century, marked by positivism on the one hand and romanticism on the other, and the end of the 20th century, on the eve of post-secularism, which is the fundamental element for the end of modernity. This time was also marked by the challenges of the Russian Revolution of 1917 including the subsequent communisation and atheisation of Russia and the expulsion of independent philosophers "from paradise", as well as the First and Second World Wars. Under these conditions, Russian thinkers – starting at least with Vladimir Solovyov – have developed their own style of philosophising, which sometimes deviates from the criteria of (Western) academic accuracy, but perfectly reflects the spirit of the times, the current needs of the world, the Church, individual people, and various aspects of culture. In this paper, I will consider some characteristic features of Russian religious philosophy, which were, among other things, a response to the phenomenon of secularisation: (1) The close connection between philosophy and theology, and thus the religious character of Russian thought; (2) the existentialist orientation of Russian philosophy; (3) the principle of *Sobornost'*. In addition, two case studies of the "Russian response" to modernity will be examined: the philosophy of religion of Vladimir Solovyov (exemplified in his *Lectures on Divine Humanity*) and that of Semyon Frank (contained in his book *The Unknowable*).

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Investigating Modernisation in the Orthodox Christian World: The Jerusalem Church and the Sacralisation of the Nation

The paper adopts the notion that modernity is not a uniform, homogenising, and linear development, but should be analysed within the unique regional, cultural, and social contexts of each case study. Within this perspective, the paper addresses the question of modernisation within the Orthodox Church of Jerusalem, exploring the theoretically paradoxical articulation of allegedly conflicting processes of nationalising the holy and sacralising the nation. In particular, the research focuses on the ideological background and mechanisms of representing national essentialism as a perpetual historical fact, and thus pre-modern, while in contrast forms an effect of modernity and the overall nationalisation process of Eastern Orthodoxy; in other words, the cleavage when the Church's structure was transformed from non-national sectarian representation to national-based communal affiliation. The paper investigates how this “invented tradition” may have influenced the Church's institutional framework, hindering the democratisation of the Patriarchate's operation. Additionally, the paper examines the impact of the political and financial aspects on the potential for reform within the community. Finally, it concludes with discussing the potential repercussions of such reforms on the Patriarchate's interactions with other communities, considering the significance of the Status Quo Agreement in fostering cooperation among Church institutions.

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Dialectics of a Christian Kairology in Modernity: The Case of the Romanian Orthodox Theology

This paper aims to address the different contexts and currents in the history of the Romanian Orthodox theology in its relation to modernity. What were, broadly speaking, the different attitudes of Romanian theologians in the 20th century towards the various aspects of modernity? Can we speak of different stages of the Romanian theological reflection on modernity? What were the main challenges, where are the current construction sites, how does the actual marriage between postmodern Eastern European society and faith practice look like in the Romanian context? How is all this reflected theologically? A special emphasis is placed on the lesser known, almost suppressed, contribution of the Orthodox theologians at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology at the (mostly German-speaking) University of Chernivtsi/Czernowitz (1875–1918) in Bukowina (today in Western Ukraine) for a scholarly dialogue with modernity. A second focus lies on André Scrima's (1925–2000) hermeneutics and his contribution to the unfolding of a critical-prophetic function of the Christian faith in modernity. This paper also aims to sketch some perspectives on what elements a Christian kairology in late modernity might include, beyond the old but still functioning diastasis between traditionalists and progressives.

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Orthodoxy Challenged: A Church Becomes World’s Second Christian Confession

In my paper, I shall offer a synthetic overview of the changes that affected the Orthodox world from the early modern period onwards. After the fall of Constantinople and the disappearance of Serbia and Bulgaria, the Orthodox traditions in Southeastern Europe experienced a new situation: the lack of state infrastructure in order to implement religious conformity and uniformity. Orthodox theocratic systems were gone, and Russia was not yet risen to a geopolitical power. The Orthodox Church had to cope with several historical challenges, such as Ottoman rule, Roman Catholic mission, and Protestant proselytism – not to speak of the lack of funds to support ritual life, theological education, and literacy. In this sense, I will follow the arrival of Orthodoxy in the modern period on three levels: first, the confessionalisation process and the emergence of a polycentric Orthodox Commonwealth; second, the emergence of “National Orthodoxies” beginning with the *de facto* Russian Church autocephaly already in the 15th century; and third, in a very short outlook, the contacts of Orthodoxy with the post-modern world. By employing examples from the Balkan area, the Near East Patriarchates, or the Rus’, I shall also attempt a broader contextualisation and evaluation of the presence of Eastern Orthodoxy across the Christian history of modern (and contemporary) Europe.

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Greek-Speaking Orthodox Theology Facing Modernity

The theology and the general ecclesiastical discourse of Orthodox Christianity is considered to be primarily characterised by its foundation in the past tradition. This fact alone makes it seem unlikely that the Orthodox Church can appropriate modern thought or even contribute to it. In this paper, I shall examine the positions of key representatives of Greek-speaking theology (from the 18th century up to the present day) on four characteristic areas: first, the development of knowledge and critical thinking; second, the articulation of the individual subject vis-à-vis the community; third, the organisation of society on the basis of political principles of modernity (equality, freedom, justice, etc.); and fourth, the issue of divergence and alterity in the contemporary global and pluralistic world including the existence of minorities of all sorts (which is in fact the most challenging and difficult one). My argument is that in most of these areas there are many possibilities for a conversation and a substantial enrichment of modernity by Orthodox Christian perspectives. This, in turn, highlights the responsibilities of Orthodox theologians nowadays to intervene in a landscape of growing neo-authoritarianism, intolerance, and barbarism by putting the human being at the centre of attention.

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Dr. Efstathios Kessareas studied Greek philology at the University of Crete and sociology at the Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences in Athens. He received his MA in religious studies from the University of Leeds and his PhD in sociology from the Department of Philosophy and Social Sciences, University of Crete, Greece. He has conducted postdoctoral research at the Centre for Social Theory (Department of Sociology) of Ghent University in Belgium, and at the Department of Religious Studies of the University of Erfurt in Germany. He is author of the book *Church, Ideology, and Politics in Post-dictatorial Greece: A Sociological Approach* (Athens: Papazisis, 2022, in Greek). His scholarly articles have been published in *The Sociological Review*, *Social Compass*, *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, *Social Science Tribune*, *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, and *Religions*, among other outlets.

The Phenomenon of Orthodox Rigorism / Fundamentalism: Its Deep Historic Roots and its Modern Transformations

Orthodox rigorism, fundamentalism, and radical traditionalism are some of the contested terms used to describe an uncompromising adherence to the allegedly sole true and unchanging Orthodox faith and tradition, a dedicated zeal to defend or restore the latter to its former dominant position of reverence and glory in a desired truly and exclusively Orthodox society and state, and at the same time a strong willingness to fight against all its perceived enemies. This paper will outline the ideological traits of this mode of religious thinking and behaviour, which are based on a particular conceptualisation of the fundamental categories of understanding (e.g., time, space). It will argue that at the core of this behaviour lies an “anti-something” mentality, which is shaped and transformed according to cultural and historical conditions. Therefore, Orthodox rigorism acquired a different content and evaluation in pre-modern and modern secular contexts. It is in the latter case that it emerges as ethno-religious fundamentalism, namely as a strong or even aggressive opposition to the liberal values of Western modernity and, more recently, to globalisation, and accordingly as a strong defence of the alleged superior Orthodox nation, albeit using the secular means and possibilities that the modern context offers. By recycling old themes, motifs and memories as the basis for new articulations, Orthodox fundamentalists fire up feelings of anxiety and fear about the present and future, and in so doing, they create for their adherents a state of fervent tension in contrast to the routine of ordinary life.

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Dr. Maria Hämmerli is a researcher and lecturer affiliated with the Department of Religious Studies of the University of Fribourg, Switzerland. Her scholarly interests revolve around Orthodox Christianity, its recent global spread, the challenges related to migration, and its relation to modern secular values. She currently works on developing a notion of an “Orthodox ethic” that combines Max Weber’s notion of religious ethic and Marcel Mauss’ theory of the gift. Her most recent publication is the monograph *Christian Orthodox Migrants in Western Europe: Secularization and Modernity through the Lens of the Gift Paradigm* (Routledge Studies in Religion), London/New York: Routledge, 2023.

Eastern Christianity in the West: Endogenous and Exogenous Challenges of an Encounter

The settlement of Orthodox people and Churches in Western Europe and North America, as a result of successive waves of migrations from the early 20th century onwards, occasioned unprecedented challenges for the ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse religious group of Orthodox Christians. On the one hand, there arose internal questions of proper ecclesial organisation, liturgical practice, identity (re)construction, and religious transmission. On the other hand, migration brought Orthodox people and Churches in unmediated interaction with modern and postmodern cultural, political, and religious developments in the West with which they were not acquainted before. One of the internal challenges discussed in this paper is the complicated jurisdictional arrangements of the Orthodox diaspora along national/ethnic lines, which has led to replicating in the West the political and ecclesiastical intricacies back in the homelands, and to creating the grounds for competition between the various Orthodox groups present in the West. The exogenous challenge that this paper addresses refers to the liberal secular values of the West (e.g., moral autonomy of the individual, relativism, pluralism, social activism, propensity for change), which constitute the “conditions of belief” (C. Taylor) today. As a result, the Orthodox are called to reconstruct their own religious identity (primarily centred on notions of tradition and continuity) as well as to live and act accordingly, be it as individuals, as a community or institutionally. This paper will also underline the heterogeneous nature of the responses to the aforementioned challenges, which range from embracing liberal secular Western values to selectively adopting them or to critical stances of rejection. These (by far not definitive) diverging attitudes and positions are a result of an ongoing negotiation among various Orthodox actors, as well as between the Orthodox ethos and the wider Western context.

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Gender Theories and Constructive Orthodox Theology: An Eschato-Christocentric Understanding of Sexuality and the Body

Some Orthodox Christians are anxious and uncomfortable about gender diversity, transitions, and human sexualities. Sometimes, they understand these issues as a rejection of God’s intention for creation. Similarly, they accuse gender theorists of “aggressive liberalism and permissiveness”. Sexuality and gender diversity have also been assumed to entail self-deception, mental ill-health, and sinfulness. Yet, humans seem to be diverse, unique, and inherently transformative creatures with a vocation to shape their own worlds and traditions. Given the theology of personhood and the fact that the ultimate goal of Orthodox Christian faith is *theosis* (translated as “divinisation” and understood as transformation that involves transitions from one stage to the next), an attempt will be made in this paper to reframe the issues of gender diversity and transitions in constructive Orthodox Christian theological terms. Drawing upon the teachings of the Church Fathers, arguing on the basis of the Orthodox tradition and theology, resisting deficit-based discourses as well as avoiding essentialism, objectifications, and exclusions, an attempt will be made to develop an eschato-Christocentric understanding of sexuality and the body. In this way, gender diversity will be presented in a way that is positive and non-oppositional in order to contribute both to the spiritual aspirations of all human beings who are marginalised, oppressed or/and discriminated against on the basis of their gender identity or/and sexuality, and to the contemporary discourse about gender and sexuality.

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On the Veracity of Participation: Quotidian Mysteries in Orthodox Christianity as Means to Certainty

Orthodox Christianity in “Western”, Euro-American, contexts is experiencing rapid growth. While this growth is in part due to international migration, it is unquestionable that many are coming to Orthodoxy in the West with no prior familial or cultural attachments to the Orthodox Church. While some scholars note the attraction to beauty or the perceived conservatism of Orthodoxy as the primary driving factor, I would like to suggest a double reading of Orthodox Christianity’s attraction in response to the wider milieu of the postmodern moment. In the first movement, I suggest that in the context of the postmodern malaise, and the lack of a grand narrative to give meaning, Orthodoxy, with its claim to historical continuity and shared, global liturgical form, offers an antidote to the loss and futility of the postmodern and (by extension) modern project(s). In the second movement, however, I propose that – in no small irony – it is postmodernity, its epistemology and rejection of universal certainty, that prepares Western audiences to accept the grand narrative and certainty of Orthodoxy. This, I argue, is accomplished by the quotidian, material and embodied practices of Orthodoxy. In a context where truth has been pushed into the subjective realm of personal experience and discovery, the biblical invitation to “come and see” is a beguilingly simple point of departure which, if lived out, precipitates the inversion of the postmodern condition.

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“Weaving Ropes from Sand”: The Role of Orthodox Christianity in the Postmodern Age of Intelligent Machines

In the past year, the topic of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has once again made global headlines as large language models such as ChatGPT and image generators like Dall-E have become household words. Some dismiss these headlines as hype, but tools such as these will likely have profound and long-lasting social and economic impacts. AI was already ubiquitous in nearly every sector of modern societies. These recent developments have simply made the technology more visible, as evidenced by the cascade of op-eds, petitions, debates, congressional hearings, and legislation. Most media coverage has focused on the apocalyptic AI predictions made popular by countless science fiction plots, the impact of AI on jobs and education, or the uncanniness of instantaneous, seemingly ex nihilo creation of text and images. The relationship of religion to AI has very rarely been at the forefront of the current conversation and Orthodoxy’s relationship to AI is almost completely unexplored. This paper begins to explore what the implications of the most recent wave of AI are for Orthodoxy, addressing the questions: How does AI relate to postmodernity? How might these technologies affect Orthodox believers and communities? How can these believers and communities faithfully respond to the new technological landscape? And what does Orthodoxy have to offer in a world filled with and increasingly reliant on intelligent machines?

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Post-Modern Orthodox Theologies: Venturing into Uncharted Waters?

The difficulties of Eastern Orthodoxy to enter into a fruitful dialogue with the achievements of modernity and the rapid developments of postmodernity have long been established. Despite the given ambiguity, however, by looking at the history of the 20th century Orthodox theology, one can clearly discern the efforts of a creative group of thinkers who attempted to address, not always successfully, the questions posed by modernity, often in dialogue with the West and certainly many times in a particularly constructive way; for example, Fr. Sergius Bulgakov (1871–1944) and his sophiological account, or the late Metropolitan of Pergamon John Zizioulas (1931–2023) with his eschatological outlook, although they belong to different theological camps and epochs. These largely paved the way for the appearance of the subsequent currents and thinkers nowadays, who, based on a constructive re-interpretation of the Orthodox tradition, try to formulate a creative view on various topics (e.g., politics, gender issues, ecological crisis, philosophical theology) on which the Church has not yet expressed herself with conciliar authority. In this presentation, an attempt will be made, first, to trace the common historical background of these developments, and second, to examine key figures and themes who contributed to this direction of formulating an Orthodox reflection of a postmodern theological perspective by sketching a useful typology. This is only the beginning of a discussion that is acutely needed within current Orthodoxy about the prerequisites, the criteria, and the parameters of what it means to theologise in a postmodern way.

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Dr. Zdenko Š. Širka works and teaches at the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University and at the Jabok Institute for Social Pedagogy and Theology in Prague, Czech Republic. He has studied theology in Bratislava, Tübingen, and Prague. He teaches and publishes in the fields of hermeneutics, systematic theology, ecumenical theology, Orthodox theology, and theological ethics. He has undertaken various research projects, such as “The Hermeneutics of Experience in the Christian Tradition”, “Transformations of Tradition: Implications for Ecumenical Theology”, and “Theological Anthropology in Ecumenical Perspective”. He is author of *Transcendence and Understanding: Gadamer and Modern Orthodox Hermeneutics in Dialogue* (2020) and *Man, God-man and the Church: A Selection from the Writings of Justin Popović* (2023). He is also co-author and editor of *Who Is the Human Being? An Ecumenical Approach to Theological Anthropology* (2021), *Home as a Bridge: Festschrift for the Fiftieth Birthday of Prof. Ivana Noble* (2016), and *The Hermeneutics of Experience in the Christian Tradition* (2014).

Post-Modern Hermeneutics and Orthodoxy: An (Un)Fruitful Encounter

The potential relevance of Orthodox Christian thinking in a postmodern realm will be here approached from a hermeneutical standpoint. My presentation will be structured along the following three parts. In the first two parts, the touching points between the two partners in dialogue (Orthodoxy and hermeneutics) will be presented and critically assessed on the basis of selected examples, with a special focus on their similarities and dissimilarities in both the past and the present. In the third part, my presentation will further try to answer whether the post-modern context (in comparison with and contrast to modernity) has brought an environment unique enough to overcome the centuries-long disparities between Orthodox Christianity and Western thinking.

Dr. Sebastian Rimestad

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Dr. Sebastian Rimestad is “DFG-Heisenberg Fellow” at the University of Leipzig in Germany, where he is affiliated with the Research Centre for Advanced Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences “Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities”. He has completed his PhD and his Habilitation (Privatdozent) at the University in Erfurt, both under the supervision of Prof. Vasilios N. Makrides. His doctoral thesis was published as *The Challenges of Modernity to the Orthodox Church in Estonia and Latvia (1917–1940)* (Erfurter Studien zur Kulturgeschichte des Orthodoxen Christentums, 6) by Peter Lang in 2012, while his Habilitation thesis, titled *Orthodox Christian Identity in Western Europe: Contesting Religious Authority*, was published by Routledge in 2021. His current research is concerned with the theoretical nature of religious conversion, especially as it relates to the public role of the convert. He also researches into early modern discourses about Orthodox Christianity and confessionalisation and has published a dozen articles and blogposts on the religious dimensions of the Russian war in Ukraine since February 2022.

Conversion to the Orthodox Church: a Theological or a Political Act?

Conversion from one religious community to another is usually an eminently intimate move that touches the innermost core of the human psyche and religious identity. However, and especially in the case of a number of converts to the Orthodox Church in Western Europe and North America in recent years, this religious core is overshadowed by the way they instrumentalise the conversion for political purposes or tainted by controversial subsequent public utterances. Early examples of such controversial conversions in the anglophone world include Seraphim Rose, Peter E. Gillquist, Andrew Phillips, Federica Mathewes-Green, and Michael Harper, as well as more recently Matthew Heimbach, Joseph Heers, and Roosh V. These cases stand alongside more mainstream conversions of public figures, such as Jaroslav Pelikan, Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, and Andrew Louth. What all these converts have in common is that they conceptualise their becoming Orthodox not as a sudden change of heart, but as an intellectual realisation of the Orthodox truth. My presentation uses theoretical approaches to religious conversion to argue that a characteristic of a number of recent conversions to the Orthodox Church is not so much a traditional conversion as it is rather a protest move against secularised Western society. This trend is growing, especially in predominantly Protestant contexts, where it is greatly helped along by advances in communication technology. This favours the creation of conservative and reactionary Orthodox “convert bubbles” that often exist independently of canonical church structures in the virtual space.

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