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**Opening Greetings**

**To the Conference “Orthodoxy and Fundamentalism”**

Your Eminence,

Your Honor the Minister of Culture and Information of the Republic of Serbia,

Reverend Fathers,

Dear Representative of the Youth Center of the City of Belgrade,

Dear colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honor for me, in my capacity as the Director of the Volos Academy for Theological Studies, and on behalf of the co-operating institutions, to address the conference on “Orthodoxy and Fundamentalism,” and to greet the audience in this inaugural session.

In our globalized world, in our “global village,” under the powerful impetus provided by the various financial, technological, cultural, and sociopolitical innovations, more and more boundaries and local differences are being overcome, to the detriment of local and national traditions, but to the advantage of universal values and cosmopolitanism. This loss of “tradition,” of religious and national identity, of small, “closed” traditional societies—which results in a recourse to the religious as well as to the national narratives—, has been regarded by many as the cause not of the birth but of the rise and the spread (especially in the 60s) of fundamentalism. Anthony Giddens keenly notes that fundamentalism “has arisen in response to the globalizing influences we see all around us.... Fundamentalism is a child of globalization, which it both responds to and utilizes. Fundamentalist groups almost everywhere have made extensive use of new communications technologies.” For this reason Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, at the beginning of their monumental five-volume work *The*

*Fundamentalism Project*, characterize any kind of fundamentalism as “a martial form of spirituality,” while Giddens defines fundamentalism as “beleaguered tradition,” as a tradition “defended in a traditional way—by reference to ritual truth—in a globalizing world that asks for reasons. Fundamentalism, therefore, has nothing to do with the context of beliefs, religious or otherwise. What matters is how the truth of beliefs is defended or asserted.” The extreme political-religious movements, characterized as fundamentalist, constitute responses not only to globalization but also to modernity. In fact, the reaction to modernity comes before the reaction to globalization. What causes the birth of fundamentalism is modernity and, by extension, the revolution that modernity brought with it into all fields (the relationship between religion and politics and between the sacred and the secular, the disengagement of societies and the individual from religious influence, new hermeneutical approaches to the Bible and sacred texts, the reexamination of the relationship between faith and science, the re-evaluation of nature and the natural world, etc). This is why fundamentalism is incomprehensible outside the context of modernity and can be only understood as a reaction to it. In addition, before considering fundamentalism the child of globalization, it must be perceived as the child of modernity, to which it might be radically opposed, even if it has no reason to exist without the former. Fundamentalism’s most characteristic and radical reaction to modernity has to be the phenomenon of the “return of God,” the “return of religion,” in other words the dynamic re-appearance of the religious factor in the public sphere and on the front line of politics and history.

Has Orthodox Christianity something to do with the above phenomena? Is Orthodoxy exempted from the fundamentalist temptation? Have the Orthodox Church and theology really addressed the different kind of challenges the fundamentalist mind imply?

As it is now commonly maintained, the 20<sup>th</sup> century was for Orthodoxy a period of significant change and upheaval. With the rise of the ecumenical movement, Orthodox Church and theology, especially in the context of Diaspora, emerged for the first time from its introversion and confessional isolation and entered into dialogue with the other Christians and the modern world. However, in this era of rapid change characterized by secularization and post-secularization, globalization, pluralism and

liberal democracy, but also by various kinds of authoritarianism, fundamentalism, or even jihadism, Orthodoxy is confronted with radical challenges posed by the current reality, totally different from what it has experienced during the past. This new situation and context require serious reflection and creative thinking, something that is not always the case in today Orthodoxy.

It is precisely this need of reflection, and of dialogical openness to these challenges and to the urgent need of witnessing the Gospel in a way suitable to the concerns and the language of our time, that a network of widely estimated Orthodox institutions, from traditional Orthodox settings of Eastern and Central Europe (Romania, Russia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Greece) as well as from Western Orthodoxy and the New World (Germany, Sweden, USA), attempt to address with a series of epoch-making conferences and with the blessing of the local Orthodox bishops.

Today's conference did not suddenly appear as a storm out of the blue. It began with the widely now recognized as a historic event of unparalleled importance, International Conference on the general theme "Neo-patristic synthesis or post-patristic theology: Can Orthodoxy be contextual?" organized in Volos, Greece, in June 2010, in which the still dominant a-historical way of interpreting the patristic tradition was put under question. The Greek version of the papers of that conference, after some delay, have been just sent to the printer for publication. It has been followed by another important conference on "Ecclesiology and Nationalism in Post-modern Era," held again in Volos, in May 2012, in which the national reasoning both in the structure and self-consciousness of the Church was strongly challenged. The papers of that conference have been published in 2013, in a double special issue by the well-known to the Orthodox world journal *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*. The next step in this series of epoch-making conferences was the May 2013 conference in Cluj-Napoca (Romania) on the theme "Can Orthodox Theology be Contextual? Concrete Approaches from the Orthodox Tradition", in which the dynamic character of the Orthodox tradition was presented in creative dialogue with the modern and post-modern world. The papers of that conference have been published in October 2017, by the *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* in a quadruple special issue. The last step before the present conference was in May 2015, in Helsinki, hosted by the local Orthodox Metropolis in its prestigious "Sofia Conference Center," where the critical topic "Political Orthodoxy and Totalitarianism in a Post-communist Era" was

discussed. The present conference then aims to address again a very challenging and timely topic that of “Orthodoxy and Fundamentalism.” Little by little, step by step a network of co-operating Orthodox theological institutions was built at the occasion of the above conferences which at present include the Volos Academy for Theological Studies (Volos, Greece); the Institute for the Study of Culture and Christianity (Belgrade, Serbia); the Orthodox Christian Studies Center at Fordham University (New York, USA); the Chair of Orthodox Theology, at Münster University (Germany); the Romanian Institute for Inter-Orthodox, Inter-Confessional and Inter-Religious Studies (INTER, Cluj-Napoca, Romania); the St. Andrews Biblical Theological Institute (Moscow, Russia); the Sankt Ignatios Orthodox Theological Academy (Stockholm, Sweden); the European Forum of the Orthodox Schools of Theology (EFOST, Brussels), and the Center for Philosophy and Theology in Trebinje (Bosnia and Herzegovina). This network which has the ambition to continue to address burning and difficult issues for the Orthodox Church and theology, bringing together people and institutions from traditional Orthodox countries and from the Diaspora, represent a kind of cross, uniting the north and the south, the east and the west. All these years, this un-official network of Orthodox theological institutions, which Volos Academy has the great honor and unique privilege to coordinate, seeks in a spirit of mutual friendship, faithful academic and ecclesial commitment and creative dialogue with the surrounding world, to address various questions and issues related to the witness of the Orthodox theology in a pluralistic and rapidly changing world, where Orthodoxy experiences various new challenges unexpected in the past.

Although, a discussion of the relationship between Orthodoxy and fundamentalism may sound quite strange or even provocative to the ears of many Orthodox, it is rendered inevitable by several factors: the still experienced unpleasant reality of the phobic reaction and the conservative defensiveness of Orthodoxy against the various achievements of late modernity that are widely considered as the common ground of our globalized pluralistic world (i.e., liberal democracy, human rights, acceptance of every form of otherness, etc); its (Orthodoxy’s) identification with methods and principles stemming from a radically different worldview; its unwillingness to abandon the worldly and state power and any sort of authorities of this world by

kenotically assumed the current existentially needs and problems of humanity and more.

The main objective of this conference is to address the phenomenon of fundamentalism in the contemporary world, especially in the context of the countries and regions where Orthodox Christianity has been the dominant and traditional faith. The issues that we aspire to explore include (but are not limited to): fundamentalist accounts of biblical narratives, fundamentalism and ecumenism, fundamentalism and anti-Westernism, fundamentalism as a religious, psychological, and ideological phenomenon, the relationship between fundamentalism, traditionalism and modernity, fundamentalism in the contemporary Orthodox world, fundamentalist responses to the issues of modernization, pluralism and democracy, Orthodox responses to political liberalism and secularism, the construction of the (fundamentalist) “self,” Orthodox theological responses to fundamentalism, and the way to go out of it. The conference also aspires to discuss the role of religious fundamentalism in the contemporary social and political crises.

The timely topic of this conference, the validity and the prestige of the speakers, as well as the plurality of approaches, render our conference an important and attractive event locally, but also internationally. Thus, in our conference, except local people from Belgrade and Serbia, we have the pleasure to welcome people from different European countries, and beyond.

On behalf of the organizing committee, I would like to thank the Serbian Minister of Culture and Information Mr. Vladan Vukosavljević, for honoring our conference by his presence. Sincere thanks are also due to the Youth Center of the City of Belgrade, and its representative Sergej Beuk, for hosting our conference in its prestigious conference facilities. We also extend our warmest thanks to the speakers, and the moderators of the conference, for trusting us and accepting our invitation, and for traveling in many cases from a very long distance. In addition I would like to thank my very good friends and companions in this theological and academic journey Professors Aristotle Papanikolaou, George Demacopoulos, Assaad Elias Kattan, Radu Preda, Alexei Bodrov, Michael Hjalm, Rev. Grigorios Papathomas, and Rev. Vladan Perisc, with whom we share a common vision and commitment for a lively, honest

and ecumenical open witness of Orthodoxy within the context of the late modernity. Allow me to particularly thank and mention Professor Davor Dzalto, the President of the Institute for the Study of Culture and Christianity for assuming the heavy responsibility of organizing this conference in Belgrade, and for putting at the disposal of the speakers every kind of facility. Without the continuous efforts of him and his team, especially of Mrs. Danijela Markovic, and Mrs. Bojana Bursac, we would never be able to have this conference held in Belgrade. Moreover, I would like to thank the Volos Academy's colleagues, Mrs. Valila Giannoutaki, Mr. Philoktimon Stamopoulos-Samaras, Mrs. Claire Nikolaou, and Dr. Nikolaos Asproulis, for their hard work and excellent cooperation, as well as their uncomplaining assistance, many times even outside working hours. Last, but not least, I would like to thank you all of you for your participation in this conference, making thus by your presence more clear and visible your support of and trust in our work.