

THE ORDER OF SANKT IGNATIOS 2023 & 2024

What drives scholars to work through the nights, spending hours writing articles and lectures. First of all we should be honest. It often concerns our need for recognition, which is the way of the world, but when we come to theology one must ask why couldn't we have chosen medical science or something more lucrative as finances to achieve this. Why theology? I am an old romantic guy and I believe that it is the search for something greater than ourselves. This is what this event is all about, the search for something greater, something that breaks the boundaries, something that breaks the spell of injustice, death and corruption, as is visible in the works of Dr Pantelis Kalaitzidis, or the search for the eternal light, as becomes attainable in the works of Dr Jacob Thekkeparampil. I believe that most scholars who love theology, have this longing of breaking out from our egoism and limited perspectives and encounter the warmth of the mystery of love.

1. Rev. Dr. Jacob Thekkeparampil (2023)

The first prize winner Jacob Thekkeparampil has dedicated his entire life for discovering the depth of the mystery of love, which he often describes as light, or the morning of our existence. Through this light Jacob has been fighting against giants of egoism, creating a team of scholars, with the same humbleness that characterized the first generation of Syriac scholars, including both Sebastian Brock and Jacob Thekkeparampil. That humility has opened doors toward the future of theology, embracing collegiality, for the sake of humanity. In the ancient times the Church inspired the Academy to embrace collegiality, today the Academy must inspire the church to embrace collegiality. This is precisely what Jacob Thekkeparampil has done through the centuries, making the Academy an inspiration for the Church through the creation of SEERI and through his own personality.

Therefore I call Very Reverend Dr Jacob Thekkeparampil to receive the 2023 order of Sankt Ignatios. The board motivated the prize in the following manner:

Very Reverend Dr Thekkeparampil receives the 2023 Order of Sankt Ignatios for his outstanding work in promoting studies in the Syriac tradition from the outset of an Asian perspective. Instead of viewing the Asian tradition as subordinate Dr Thekkeparambil has restored the unique voice of the Indian tradition to its rightful place and thus served the ancient Christianity of the Far East in its variety of jurisdictions and confessions. Through the work of Dr Thekkeparambil and the work of scholars connected to St Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute (SEERI) Christianity in India is recognized as original prior to both Western colonization and Western confessionalization. The ecumenical perspective in Dr Thekkeparambil's work has been very important to preserve the original perspective beyond confessionalization and colonization, thereby promoting the Gospel proclaimed in the ancient sources that transcends the variety of confessions giving Indian Christianity its rightful ancientity. In the work of Dr Thekkeparambil sources have been connected to people and people to nations and nations to the one Church.

2. Dr. Pantelis Kalaitzidis (2024)

The second prize winner, already when he was young, experienced the shortcomings in Greek Orthodox tradition, but had early on a burning desire to find a meaning behind all problems that were connected with the Church. What captured his mind was the idea of the coming Kingdom, but not as an escape from the present but as a motivation for changing and making the present better. In his work Dr Kalaitzidis has used critique as a vehicle for progression, criticizing everyone, trying to make Greek theology break out from its isolation. A couple of weeks ago I experienced, first hand, the success of a new generation of theologians in Greece, in the mega-conference in Athens, where ecclesiastical perspectives were met with scholarly perspectives, revealing a new discourse of theology where academic freedom becomes visible.

Therefore I call Dr. Pantelis Kalaitzidis to receive the 2024 order of Sankt Ignatios. The board motivated the prize in the following manner:

Dr Kalaitzidis receives the 2024 Order of Sankt Ignatios for his work on establishing a critical perspective of Greek theology, creating a critical dialogue with church authorities, civil society, and the state authorities. Through this critical dialogue, Dr Kalaitzidis has been a crucial voice in the creation of the new paradigm in Greek theology, where theology has been detached from authority, becoming an independent voice in forming the future of the Greek Church. The creation of Volos Academy for Theological Studies was in many ways the sequel to the Greek Orthodox Church opening up towards the inter-Christian movement with a renewed understanding of mission as solidarity with all nations and all religions. Institutions like Volos Academy and scholars like Dr Kalaitzidis were instrumental in consolidating this change within Greek orthodoxy, especially after the departure of Archbishop Christodoulos. By offering the Order of Sankt Ignatios to Dr Pantelis Kalaitzidis we want to emphasize that Dr Kalaitzidis and Volos Academy has been of major importance in maintaining the openness of the Greek Orthodox Church. Through their work they have promoted emancipation and dialogue instead of the ancient fortress ecclesiology that marked the early 20th century. Together with other institutions in Greece, they have transferred the Greek Orthodox Church from the carceral archipelago of securitism and control in the 20th century, to a hospitable and living ecclesiology that now marks the Greek Orthodox Church in the 21st century. Volos through its Diocese, Academy, and people have been in the midst of this change, for better or worse, leaving an indelible imprint on the Greek nation.