



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY AND IDENTITY POLITICS

IDP - LIUDGERHAUS
ÜBERWASSERKIRCHPLATZ 3, MÜNSTER

JUNE 28 - JULY 1, 2024



Universität
Münster

UNIVERSITY OF MÜNSTER
CENTER FOR RELIGIOUS STUDIES
CHAIR OF ORTHODOX THEOLOGY

International Conference

**ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY
AND IDENTITY POLITICS**

IDP - Liudgerhaus
Überwasserkirchplatz 3
Münster, Germany

June 28 - July 1, 2024

As a preface

The Conference is organized by the Chair of Orthodox Theology,
Center for Religious Studies, University of Münster (Germany)

in cooperation with
Volos Academy for Theological Studies (Greece)
Orthodox Christian Studies Center of Fordham University (New York, USA)
Sankt Ignatios Orthodox Theological Academy (Stockholm, Sweden)
Institute for the Study of Culture and Christianity (Belgrade, Serbia)
Center for Philosophy and Theology of Trebinje (Bosnia-Herzegovina)
St. Andrew's Biblical Theological Institute (Moscow, Russia)
European Forum of Orthodox Schools of Theology (Brussels, Belgium)

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It is widely recognized that religious nationalism constitutes one of the major threats to Eastern Orthodoxy, especially in the framework of the traditional Orthodox countries. After a long period of multiethnic existence within the Byzantine Empire, the Orthodox Church was obliged to undertake a new role, that of *ethnarchia*, alien to its innate nature and mission, in order to 'safeguard' the Orthodox *genos* during the Ottoman occupation, in other words to politically represent the Orthodox peoples before the Muslim Sultan. This resulted in a long ecclesiastical and theological aphasia which gradually, and in connection with the rise of the modern nation-states, was reflected in the identification of Church and nation, Church and state, Church and ethno-cultural identity, Church and national ideology or narrative, leading thus to the rise of the national churches. This new reality amounted to the inability of the Orthodox Church to conceive its mission in, and witness to, the world independently from the national vision and particular national idea or narrative. The substitution of the ecclesial criterion with the national led to profound divisions among the national churches and jurisdictions, evident even today in various instances (Ukraine, the Orthodox Diaspora, etc.), thus rendering religious nationalism the most serious problem that Orthodoxy has been facing since the fall of Byzantium (1453). By doing so, Orthodoxy not only has lost its sense of catholicity and ecumenicity, but has been also involved in the ethnogenesis of the specific nations, considering it as a way through which the Church can accomplish its mission. This idea fits also very well into the theory of a "new chosen people of God" (no matter whether it is Greek, Russian, Romanian, Serbian, Bulgarian, etc.), as the fundamental vision which pervades ecclesiastical discourse and practice.

Living today in a totally different multinational, pluralistic, and post-modern society, Orthodoxy is losing its theological and spiritual resources, deeply rooted in its patristic and Eucharistic tradition, in favor of a rhetoric of "identities" and an outdated religious tribalism. At the same time, the insistence of many Orthodox clerics and lay people on viewing Orthodoxy

as an integral part of their national identity and culture, as well as of their ancestral heritage, undermines every serious attempt to face the challenges posed by the contemporary world to Orthodoxy, ranging from the corona virus pandemic and the rise of national and religious fundamentalisms, to the devaluation of the human rights' language and the recent Russian invasion of Ukraine with the ensuing socio-political upheavals and the energy crisis.

Against this background, the goals of the projected conference can be summarized as follows: 1) to investigate the theological background that lies behind the close connection between the Orthodox Church and the nation and its consequences for both Church and theology; 2) to explore the historical and theological parameters as to how to deal with the challenges raised by the nationalization of Orthodoxy; 3) to study the process and the concrete circumstances that led to the understanding of the Orthodox faith in terms of culture and ancestral heritage; 4) to examine the role played by the concept of identity in shaping the ecclesial and theological perspective, and the way in which this concept has been used to construct the ethno-religious narrative; 5) to explore how the use of Eastern Orthodoxy as an identity marker affects the Eucharistic and eschatological self-consciousness and the unity of global Orthodoxy; 6) to inquire the impact of the above on the formation of Orthodox anti-Westernism as well as on the still ambivalent relationship between Orthodoxy and Modernity.

Timetable

FRIDAY, JUNE 28, 2024

16.30 – 17.00 Registration

17.00 – 17.30 Opening-Greetings

Dr. Assaad Elias Kattan, Professor of Orthodox Theology, University of Münster

Metropolitan Augoustinos of Germany (Ecumenical Patriarchate), President of the Orthodox Episcopal Assembly of Germany

Dr. Pantelis Kalaitzidis, Director, Volos Academy for Theological Studies

Session I:

Moderator: Dr. Assaad Elias Kattan
(Professor of Orthodox Theology, University of Münster)

17.30 – 17.50: **Dr. George E. Demacopoulos** (Fr. John Meyendorff & Patterson Family Chair of Orthodox Christian Studies; Co-founding Director of the Orthodox Christian Studies Center, Fordham University, NY, USA)

*Contemporary Orthodox Identities
and the Specters of Byzantium*

17.50 – 18.10: **Dr. Pantelis Kalaitzidis** (Director of the Volos Academy for Theological Studies, Volos, Greece):

*Identity Christianity and Religious Nationalism:
From the History of Salvation to the History of National Revival*

18.10 – 18.45: Discussion

19.30: Dinner

SATURDAY, JUNE 29, 2024

Session II:

Moderator: Rev. Dr. Christophe D'Aloisio
(Director, Orthodox Theological Institute of Brussels – IOJ;
Secretary of the European Forum of Orthodox Schools of Theology – EFOST,
Belgium)

09.00 – 09.20: **Dr. Tim Noble** (Associate Professor of Missiology, Protestant Theological Faculty Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic) and **Dr. Ivana Noble** (Professor of Ecumenical Theology, Protestant Theological Faculty, Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic)

*Memory, Identity and Orthodoxy:
From a Singular Metanarrative to Various Testimonies*

09.20 – 09.40: **Rev. Dr. Vasilios Thermos** (Professor, Supreme Ecclesiastical Academy of Athens; Psychiatrist of Children and Adolescents, Athens, Greece)

*Healthy Identity vs Identity as a Defense:
Applications for the Orthodox Church*

09.40 – 10.00: **Dr. Sarah Riccardi-Swartz** (Assistant Professor of Religion and Anthropology, Northeastern University, USA)

*Radical Recruitment:
Cybernetic Cartographies of Orthodox Conversion Online*

10.00 – 10.45: Discussion

10.45 – 11.15: Coffee Break

Session III:

Moderator: Dr. Michael Hjälm
(Senior Lecturer in Eastern Christian Studies,
Dean of Sankt Ignatios College, Stockholm, Sweden)

11.15 – 11.35: **Dr. Hans-Peter Grosshans** (Professor of Systematic Theology, Institute for Ecumenical Theology, Faculty for Protestant Theology, University of Münster, Germany)

*National, Ethnic and Cultural Belonging –
and Transnational, Transethnic and Transcultural Loyalties of Christians.
A Protestant Perspective on Political Responsibility and Christian Catholicity*

11.35 – 11.55: **Dr. Anna Briskina-Müller** (Research Associate, Saxonian Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Leipzig; Lecturer at the Faculty of Theology at the University of Halle, Germany)

*Living Together, or Preserving Nationalities
under Surmounting National Dominances:
The Polyethnic Brotherhood of Paissius Velitchkovsky (1722-1794)*

11.55 – 12.30: Discussion

12.30 – 14.00: Lunch

Session IV:

Moderator: Dr. Branko Sekulić
(Lecturer, University Center for Protestant Theology “Matthias Flacius Illyricus”, Zagreb, Croatia; Member of the Institute for the Study of Culture and Christianity, Belgrade, Serbia)

14.00 – 14.20: **Dr. Michael Hjälm** (Senior Lecturer in Eastern Christian Studies, Dean of Sankt Ignatios College, Stockholm, Sweden)

*Becoming Orthodox:
Ethos before Ethnos in the Diaspora*

14.20 – 14.40: **Dr. Yauheniya Danilovich** (Lecturer, Institute for Orthodox theology, University of Munich; Research Associate, Evangelical Theological Faculty, University of Münster, Germany)

*Identity and Orthodox Religious Education
in the Diaspora*

14.40 – 15.15: Discussion

15.15 – 15.45: Coffee Break

Session V:

Moderator: Ms. Katerina Pekridou, ThM
(Programme Officer for Theology and Studies, CEC, Brussels, Belgium;
Research Associate, Volos Academy for Theological Studies, Greece)

15.45 – 16.05: **Dr. Vladimir Latinovic** (Lecturer & Research Fellow, University of Tübingen, Germany)

*Rethinking Orthodox Ecclesiology:
Constructing a Supranational Paradigm*

16.05 – 16.25: **Rev. Dr. Christophe D'Aloisio** (Director, Orthodox Theological Institute of Brussels – IOJ; Secretary of the European Forum of Orthodox Schools of Theology – EFOT, Belgium)

*Panorthodox Identity as a Political and Ecclesiological Project
in Recent inter-Orthodox Relations*

16.25 – 16.45: **Dr. Athanasios N. Papathanasiou** (Associate Professor of Missiology, Supreme Ecclesiastical Academy, Athens, Greece; Chief Editor of the Greek Theological Quarterly “Synaxi”)

*Orthodox Christianity between Eschatology and Eschatologies,
Cultural Sarx and Cultural Sarcophagus,
Post-colonialism and Anti-colonialism*

16.45 – 17.15 Discussion

18.00 – 19.15: Visit to the Exhibition “Encounters with Orthodox Christianity in Greece” (“Begegnungen mit dem Orthodoxen Christentum in Griechenland”), with photos by **Olya Gluschenko** and **Costis Drygianakis** from the Metropolis of Demetrias, co-organized by the Protestant Faculty of Theology of Münster University and the Volos Academy for Theological Studies

19.15: Reception – Drink

20.15: Dinner

SUNDAY, JUNE 30, 2024

10:30: Divine Liturgy at the Antiochian Orthodox Church of the Annunciation

12:30: Lunch (offered by the Antiochian Orthodox Parish)

Session VI:

Moderator: Dr. Hans-Peter Grosshans
(Professor of Systematic Theology, Faculty for Protestant Theology,
University of Münster, Germany)

16.00 – 16.20: **Dr. Georges El Hage** (Lecturer, Catholic Institute of Paris, France; President of “Syndesmos”)

*The Orthodox in Antioch
between Cultural and Political Levantinism*

16.20 – 16.40: **Dr. Ionut Biliuta** (Research Associate, Gh. Sincai Institute, Romanian Academy, Târgu Mureș, Romania)

*An Anti-Western Theology?
The Ultrationalism and Fundamentalism
of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Post-Communist Years*

16.40 – 17.15: Discussion

17.15 – 17.45: Coffee Break

Session VII:

Moderator: Dr. Alexei Bodrov
(Rector, St. Andrew's Biblical Theological Institute, Moscow, Russia;
Associate Researcher, Institute of Eastern Christian Studies, Radboud University, Nijmegen, Netherlands)

17.45 – 18.05: **Dr. Jennifer Wasmuth** (Professor of Ecumenical Theology with special reference to Orthodox Christianity, Faculty of Theology, Göttingen University, Germany):

*Creating Identity through Polemical Delineation?
Protestantism in Russian Academic Theology of the 19th/20th Century*

18.05 – 18.25: **Dr. Nadezhda Beliakova** (Guest Researcher, University of Bielefeld, Germany):

Is there a Room for a Feminist Identity in the Orthodox Church?

18.25 – 19.00: Discussion

19.30: Dinner

MONDAY, JULY 1, 2024

Session VIII:

Moderator: Rev. Dr. Vladan Perišić
(Director of the Center for Philosophy and Theology,
Trebinje, Bosnia and Herzegovina)

09.00 – 09.30: **Dr. Branko Sekulić** (Lecturer, University Center for Protestant Theology “Matthias Flacius Illyricus”, Zagreb, Croatia), and **Dr. Zoran Grozdanov** (Associate Professor, University Center for Protestant Theology “Matthias Flacius Illyricus”, Zagreb, Croatia)

*Kingdom Turned Inside Out:
The Theology of National Liberation in the Former Yugoslavia*

9.30 – 10.00: Discussion

10.00 – 10.30 Coffee Break

Session IX:

Moderator: Dr. Aristotle Papanikolaou
(Archbishop Demetrios Chair in Orthodox Theology and Culture,
Co-founding Director of the Orthodox Christian Studies Center,
Fordham University, NY, USA)

10.30 – 10.50: **Dr. Regina Elsner** (Professor of Eastern Churches and Ecumenism, Catholic Theological Faculty, University of Münster, Germany)

*“Not like them!” The Harm of Othering
and the Quest for a New Orthodox Paradigm in Ukraine.*

10.50 – 11.10: **Dr. Lidiya Lozova** (Post-Doctoral Researcher, Exeter University, UK; “Spirit and Letter” Research and Publishing Association, Kyiv, Ukraine)

The Visual Identity of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine

11.10 – 12.30: Discussion, Conclusions, End of the Conference

Participants and Abstracts

Dr. George E. Demacopoulos

Fr. John Meyendorff & Patterson Family
Chair of Orthodox Christian Studies,
Fordham University, NY, USA



Dr. George E. Demacopoulos is Fr. John Meyendorff & Patterson Family Chair of Orthodox Christian Studies at Fordham University. Dr. Demacopoulos received his Ph.D. in Religious Studies from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2002. His research and teaching interests are in the History of Christianity during late ancient and medieval periods, with a primary focus in the interaction between Eastern and Western Christian communities. He has published four monographs on topics ranging from early Christian spiritual direction to the Fourth Crusade. His fifth book will be published by Dumbarton Oaks later this year, its title is *Sacralizing Violence in Byzantium: Hymns, Empire, and the Narrowing of Christian Identity*. Along with Aristotle Papanikolaou, Dr. Demacopoulos is co-founding Director of the Orthodox Christian Studies Center. He is also the co-creator and co-editor of the *Journal of Orthodox Christian Studies*, which is now in its seventh year of production. In 2010, Dr. Demacopoulos became an Archon of Ecumenical Patriarchate with the "Offikion" *Didaskalos Tous Genous* ("Teacher of the Nation").

Contemporary Orthodox Identities and the Specters of Byzantium

A pessimist's view of the current state of the Orthodox church is that it is riven with division: Ecumenical Patriarchate versus Moscow Patriarchate, Hellenes versus Slavs, cradle-born versus converts, neo-traditionalists versus progressives, ecumenists versus anti-ecumenists . . . the list is seemingly endless. One of the more underappreciated dynamics animating these current divisions, however, is that they are legacies of much older, unresolved debates: How do we negotiate competing authorities? What is the value of non-Christian learning? Is the post-Schism West Christian? What is the proper relationship between ecclesial and secular jurisdiction? This paper argues that contemporary appeals to Byzantium (its authors, canons, and histories) are rarely given sufficient methodological consideration and that all sides err when they present Byzantium as the normative Orthodox experience. Not only was the Byzantine experience far more diverse (canonically, theologically, and practically) than modern apologists acknowledge, but it is both historically and theologically incorrect to presume that Byzantium constitutes some better age in Christian history than our own.

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 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, Religious education, and more. 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 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 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. Papanikolaou) of the Political Theology group of the International Orthodox Theological Association (IOTA). For the last twenty-four years Dr. Kalaitzidis has been the Director of the Volos Academy for Theological Studies, a research center in Greece dealing with modern issues for Eastern Orthodoxy. His English publications include among others *Orthodoxy and Political Theology* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012), *Orthodox Handbook on Ecumenism: Resources for Theological Education* (as co-editor, Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2014), and *Politics, Society and Culture in Orthodox Theology in a Global Age* (co-editor with Hans-Peter Grosshans, Paderbon: Brill & Schöningh, 2023).

Identity Christianity and Religious Nationalism: From the History of Salvation to the History of National Revival

The paper discusses the challenges that Christian identity and religious nationalism pose to the Orthodox Church in the modern world. It criticises the harmful effects of identifying religious and national spheres, leading to the instrumentalisation of religion for national or state interests. The fusion of national and religious identities often leads to conflict and intolerance. The focus is on a different understanding of identity, based on unity and overcoming divisions, as exemplified in the teachings of personalities such as St Maxime the Confessor. It also calls for a more eschatological perspective, stressing the unity of all nations and the active anticipation of the coming kingdom. The overall emphasis is on the need to transcend divisive identities and embrace the unity brought by Christ.

Prof. Dr. Ivana Noble

Professor of Ecumenical Theology

Prof. Dr. Tim Noble

Associate Professor of Missiology

Protestant Theological Faculty,
Charles University,
Prague, Czech republic



Ivana Noble is professor of Ecumenical Theology in the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University in Prague, where she is head of the Ecumenical Institute. She led a five-year project on Symbolic Wholeness in Orthodoxy in the West in the Twentieth Century (2011-2015) and a six-year University Centre of Excellence programme on Theological Anthropology in Ecumenical Perspective (2018-2023). She is now leading a continuation University Centre of Excellence Programme on Theological Anthropology in Intercultural Perspective with a team of 30 people across the three theological faculties. She is also coordinating the work of the theological team in a much larger project on Conflict Resolution and Resilience. She is the author of many books and articles, most recently *Essays in Ecumenical Theology II: Conversations with Orthodoxy* (Leiden: Brill, 2022). She is a former President of Societas Oecumenica and a priest of the Czechoslovak Hussite Church.

Tim Noble is associate professor in the Ecumenical Institute of the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University in Prague, specialising in missiology and contextual, especially Latin American, liberation theology. He participated in the five-year project on Symbolic Wholeness in Orthodoxy in the West in the Twentieth Century (2011-2015) and the six-year University Centre of Excellence Programme on Theological Anthropology in Ecumenical Perspective (2018-2023) and in the University Centre of Excellence Programme on Theological Anthropology in Intercultural Perspective and in the work of the theological team in a much larger project on Conflict Resolution and Resilience. His books and articles include work on Orthodox mission in Alaska.

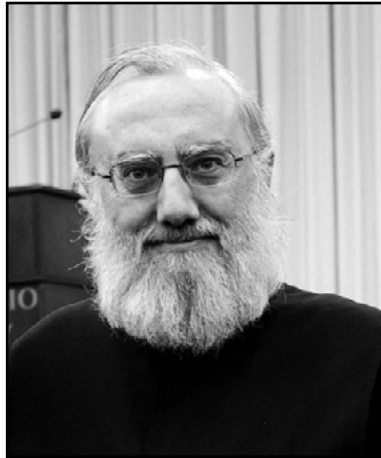
Memory, Identity and Orthodoxy: From a Singular Metanarrative to Various Testimonies

The paper will use Theodor Adorno's and Jean Francois Lyotard's critique of identity thinking and of metanarrative building in order to explore relations between memory, identity and Orthodoxy. It will also offer an alternative approach to memory from below, a non-synthesized memory or a small narrative approach, in which details may become revelatory, as they testify that which the identity thinking and its metanarratives have excluded. As a case example, we will take the case of Archimandrite Spiridon Kislyakov, a missionary to Siberia and then a chaplain in the First World War. This latter experience led him to reflect on the relation of the church to state and violence, and to write a letter to the then Metropolitan (later Patriarch) Tikhon, before the start of the Moscow Council in 1917, urging the church to consider these issues. Archimandrite Spiridon will serve as both an example of how memory and identity are related, how experience and reflection on it changes us, but also as an example of the roads not taken, the memories lost, the identities not formed at the Moscow Council.

Rev. Prof. Dr. Vasileios Thermos

Professor, Supreme Ecclesiastical Academy of Athens, Greece;

Psychiatrist of Children and Adolescents



Rev. Vasileios Thermos, MD, PhD, is a child and adolescent psychiatrist and holds a doctorate on Pastoral Psychology of Athens University. In 1986 and 1987 he was ordained, and has been engaged into training programs for clergy in Greece, Cyprus, USA. In 1996-97 he was a Visiting Scholar at Harvard Divinity School, Boston College, Boston University, Andover Newton. In 2014 he worked for 3 months as a Visiting Research Scholar at the Institute of Medical Humanities of the Medical School of Texas University. He has written extensively on sexuality and gender, and also conducted a research on clergy health and burnout. Some of his books and articles have been translated into English, French, Russian, Romanian, Bulgarian, Serbian, Finnish. He is the editor of a Greek journal on the relationships between religion and psychology. Two master theses on his total work have appeared, in 2004 at the Theological School of Balamand University, and in 2020 at the Theological School of the University of Wien. In 2017-18 his essay was awarded the prize on the contest of the Jean-Marc Fischer Foundation in Switzerland. He is a Professor in the University Ecclesiastical Academy of Athens.

Healthy Identity vs Identity as a Defense: Applications for the Orthodox Church.

The notion of identity applies not only to individual but also extends to the collective domain. Orthodox Christians share a sense of their relevant identity, which is unavoidably susceptible to all human influences and nuances. In this presentation I will explore the Eriksonian tension between identity exploration and commitment, the defensive processes that often shape a vulnerable identity, the transition from the 'schizoid-paranoid' position to the 'depressive' one, and the aggressiveness that accompanies fragile identities. The phenomena of 'cultural Orthodoxy', of nationalism and fundamentalism, and of Greek 'exceptionalism' will be examined as well. My purpose will be to highlight the differences between a healthy and a morbid religious identity as for the Orthodox Church.

Dr. Sarah Riccardi-Swartz

Assistant Professor
of Religion and Anthropology,
Northeastern University, USA



Sarah Riccardi-Swartz is assistant professor of religion and anthropology at Northeastern University, where she is also an affiliate faculty member in the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies program. She earned an M.Phil. and a Ph.D. in Anthropology from New York University, where she also obtained an Advanced Graduate Certificate in Culture and Media (ethnographic film-making and theory). She received her B.A. and M.A. in Religious Studies from Missouri State University. Her previous work, including her first monograph, *Between Heaven and Russia: Religious Conversion and Political Apostasy in Appalachia* (Fordham University Press, 2022), was funded by Citizens and Scholars (formerly the Woodrow Wilson Foundation), the Social Science Research Council, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Henry Luce Foundation, the Jordan Center for the Advanced Study of Russia, the Orthodox Christian Studies Center at Fordham University, New York University, the Center for the Study of Religion and Conflict at Arizona State University, and Northeastern University's Humanities Center. She is the author of numerous articles, the co-editor of the forthcoming *Anthropologies of Orthodox Christianity* (Fordham University Press, 2025), and currently has a co-authored book under contract with Routledge on Orthodoxy in the United States.

Radical Recruitment: Cybernetic Cartographies of Orthodox Conversion Online

This paper focuses on the role social media plays in the process of religious conversion and political radicalization (of far/alt-right Orthodox Christians in the United States). Looking expressly at the digital intersection of religious and political conversion among self-professed radicalized Orthodox Christian converts, who believe they have found ontological truth through their digital social communities of likeminded believers, I highlight how conversion takes on different ideological meanings in the virtual world that have real world implications for Orthodox identity. Through tweets, memes, and links to websites, books, and videos, converts create circuits of conversion content that provide ready, yet often conspiratorial, answers for their social and spiritual issues. Drawing from digital case studies, I show how technology has empowered religious actors to convert to the Orthodoxy on their own terms and for their own ideological reasons. Ultimately, these digital spaces afford far-right religiously motivated actors endless possibilities for individual and collective (re)formation and (re)orientation offline through technological mediated means.

Prof. Dr. Hans-Peter Grosshans

Professor of Systematic Theology,
Institute for Ecumenical Theology,
Faculty for Protestant Theology,
University of Münster, Germany



Prof. Dr. Hans-Peter Grosshans is Professor of Systematic Theology and director of the Institute for Ecumenical Theology at the Faculty of Protestant Theology at the University of Münster in Germany. Before he came to Münster he had teaching position at the universities of Tübingen, Munich, Hamburg and Zürich. In 2007-08 he was Study Secretary for Theology and the Church of the Lutheran World Federation in Geneva (Switzerland). He was in 2020-21 president and is now vice-president of the European Academy of Religion (EuARe); he is president of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Religionsphilosophie and one of the vice-presidents of the European Society for Philosophy of Religion (ESPR). He also serves in church bodies, like in the synod of the Evangelical church of Westfalia (Germany), in the ecumenical board of the Community of Protestant churches in Europe (CPCE) or in the official dialogue of the Evangelical church in Germany and the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. Among his publications is a book on ecclesiology with the German title "Die Kirche – irdischer Raum der Wahrheit des Evangeliums" (2003).

National, Ethnic and Cultural Belonging – and Transnational, Transethnic and Transcultural Loyalties of Christians. A Protestant Perspective on Political Responsibility and Christian Catholicity

The paper discusses a few basic questions: What is the link between ethnic and religious belonging? And: what is the link between ethnic and religious diversity in contemporary societies? Then there are also loyalties within religious communities, especially if they consider themselves to be catholic, which transcend ethnic, political and cultural belongings. How are these loyalties linked to ethnic and political belongings and responsibilities? Such questions are not only pressing in Orthodox theology, but have been in discussion since long also in Protestant theology and in Protestant churches. In the past some Protestant churches and their theology have been explicit nationalistic and very ethnocentric. This can be observed still today, although now more in a general cultural sense. The intensive relation of religious communities to ethnic or social groups, and to societies and political states is not generally problematic. All religions and all churches are very concerned with the existential, economic, political, cultural and social situations of people and their communities. The more specifically religions relate to these life situations, the more intensively they identify with the respective people and communities and consequently take also political responsibility for these situations. In a Protestant perspective, it is good to preserve ethnic identities and traditions. Protestantism has done a lot to contribute to this in translating the Bible into many vernacular languages. The contextual theologies of recent decades have drawn attention to the fact that a religion or church can make the concerns of an ethnic group or a social class entirely its own in order to stand up for an ethnicity or a social class as a whole - by calling for justice or for self-determination - and thus help to fight the injustice and lack of liberty that befall a people or a social class. It is extremely difficult to perceive of a church or a religion that lacks solidarity with all aspects of the concrete life of the people belonging to it. The paper then discusses various aspects of such solidarity of a church or religion with a ethnicity or culture, which make it highly problematic and offend their transethnic, transcultural and transnational religious and ecclesial loyalties.

Dr. Anna Briskina-Müller

Saxonian Academy
of Sciences and Humanities,
Leipzig;

Lecturer at the Faculty of Theology,
University of Halle, Germany



Born in St. Petersburg in 1973, studied Orthodox theology in St. Petersburg (graduated in 1996), worked as a journalist, studied Protestant theology and completed her doctorate in theology (Church history) at the Faculty of Theology at the University of Heidelberg (2005), 2004-2018 research assistant at the Faculty of Theology at the University of Halle (Saale), 2010-2014 also at the Faculty of Theology at Humboldt University Berlin, since 2018 research assistant at the Saxon Academy of Sciences in Leipzig in an editorial project on the history of German Pietism and lecturer at the Faculty of Theology at the University of Halle (Saale). Her research focuses on the history of Early Church monasticism, but also on the Orthodoxy in the Russian Empire and in south-east Europe in 18th century.

Living Together, or Preserving Nationalities under Surmounting National Dominances: The Polyethnic Brotherhood of Paissius Velitchkovsky (1722-1794)

The paper deals with the former student of the Kievan Academy Paisius Velichkovsky (Romanian: Paisie de la Neamț), who became known above all as a translator of patristic texts and the renewer of the early monastic tradition of pastoral care. Less well known is he however in his function as the head of a large monastic brotherhood that was decidedly atypical for the time. The brotherhood was founded on Mount Athos in the mid-1750s and lived from 1763 in three different monasteries (Dragomirna, Secu and Neamț) in Moldova (now Romania). While the Balkan peoples and the Danube principalities showed clear tendencies towards search for national profile and liberation from the Ottoman rule in the 18th century, the Paisian brotherhood, on the contrary, united monks from several nations. The Ukrainian St Paisij managed not only not to renounce or reduce the multilingualism of his brotherhood, but he succeeded rather consciously maintaining and cultivating it through a series of concrete measures. For him, the boundary of the “foreign” was not at the level of national consciousness, but at the level of values. Paisij and his multinational and at least trilingual brotherhood provide an exemplary model of the productive coexistence of national Orthodoxies while consciously renouncing the dominance of one of the national orthodox traditions.

Dr. Michael Hjälml

Senior Lecturer in Eastern Christian
Studies,
Dean of Sankt Ignatios College,
Stockholm, Sweden



Michael Hjälml studied theology at the University of Uppsala, beginning with Patristic Studies, and later changed to Ecclesiology. He was awarded the grade of "Doctor of Theology" with a thesis on a descriptive comparative analysis between the theory of sublation in the works of Jürgen Habermas and negated sublation in the works of Alexander Schmemmann in regard to his theory of Liturgical Theology. In 2012 he was appointed Dean of Sankt Ignatios foundation (later Sankt Ignatios College), and later in 2018, he was appointed Dean of Faculty at Stockholm School of Theology for the Department of Eastern Christian Studies. Hjälml is co-chair for the Ecclesiology Group in the International Orthodox Theological Association (IOTA). His research is focused on understanding the relation between history and tradition, as well as understanding the relation between theory and practice. As Dean he has focused on overcoming the historical misrepresentation between the so-called Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian Churches.

Becoming Orthodox: Ethos before Ethnos in the Diaspora

The Byzantines never regarded themselves as anything but Romans (Romaioi). As late as 1912 during the First Balkan War the inhabitants of Lemnos refused to call themselves Greeks, "No, we are Romans," they replied to the Greek soldiers. The Greek identity became further accentuated in the later dispersal when the Greek diaspora were created out of the dislocated population of Asia Minor. A similar situation happened with the Syriac population who had nothing but a local village identity from South Eastern Turkey but in the diaspora they felt compelled to develop an ethnos, a national identity which created strong tensions within one and the same people. The dispersal of the people from Asia Minor has created a stronger focus on ethnos rather than a Christian ethos, where structures of faith has been replaced by structures of identity. A plurality of "worlds" has seen the light that did not exist prior to the dispersal, which now has captivated orthodoxy and transformed the Christian ethos into ethnos. In this lecture this transformation will be problematized as well from a general perspective, where the churches in the diaspora risk being alienated from tradition continuously trying to please an identity theology that will make the unity between nations, unnecessary. It will also locate the discussion in the unfulfilled unity between pre-Chalcedonians and post-Chalcedonians arguing that the inter-orthodox dialogue is irrelevant from an identity perspective, where the plurality of nations is encouraged, even if it leaves theology irrelevant and divided. The solution, the lecture argues, is a dispersal that abandons the conceptual diaspora making its new home in the Western world, but this can only happen if ethos becomes primary instead of ethnos, which in turn requires a rationalization of the life-worlds in the diaspora. This suggests educational institutions that are anchored in the new context instead of being dispersed as cultural embassies in the periphery, but that will pose a challenge toward churches that more or less has left theology behind, arguably being the prime diaspora institution of ethnos, preserving the homeland abroad, sometimes even lost homelands, or even imagined homelands.

Dr. Yauheniya Danilovich

Lecturer,
Institute for Orthodox theology,
University of Munich;

Research Associate,
Evangelical Theological Faculty,
University of Münster, Germany



Born in Grodno (Belarus), studied Orthodox theology in Minsk. In 2014, she received her doctorate at the Evangelical Theological Faculty at the University of Tübingen. The title of the dissertation, supervised by Prof. Dr. Friedrich Schweitzer, was “Religious learning in youth in the Orthodox and Protestant churches: Confirmation Work, Religious Education, Sunday School. An international comparative study”. Since 2014, Dr. Danilovich is researcher at the Evangelical Theological Faculty of the University of Münster. In addition, she is a lecturer in the field of religious education at the Institute for Orthodox theology at the University of Munich. Her postdoc project is dedicated to the topic: “Religious education in post-migrant society. Attempt to lay a multi-perspective foundation for subject-oriented religious education in the Christian-Orthodox diaspora in Germany.” Selected research areas include Orthodox religious education, multilingualism and religious education, churches and political crisis in Belarus.

Identity and Orthodox Religious Education in the Diaspora

Orthodoxy in Germany lives in the diaspora. In the case of Orthodoxy, this means, on the one hand, that the mother churches are located in other countries, and, on the other hand, that several Orthodox dioceses, each with different jurisdictional affiliations, are located on the same territory. In the area of Orthodox religious education in the diaspora, the question of identity comes to the fore. Numerous references in the curricula, statements from the Assembly of Orthodox Bishops of Germany or even the titles of the educational events indicate that the question of preserving identity becomes virulent. The processes of identity formation take place under conditions that, on the one hand, are essentially different from the countries with the Orthodox majority or the countries of origin of Orthodoxy. On the other hand, these characteristics are becoming more and more natural for religious communities in a post-migrant society like Germany. The paper deals with questions of identity formation in the context of Orthodox religious education and against the background of the diaspora situation and post-migrant society.

Dr. Vladimir Latinovic

Lecturer & Research Fellow,
University of Tübingen, Germany



Vladimir Latinovic graduated from the Faculty of Orthodox Theology at the University of Belgrade (Serbia) and obtained his PhD in Catholic Theology from the University of Tübingen (Germany). Currently, he is pursuing a habilitation (second PhD) in Protestant Theology at the University of Heidelberg (Germany) with the project “Orthodoxy Between Tradition and Modernity”. He is employed as a research fellow and lecturer at the Ecumenical Institute in Tübingen, where he teaches on topics related to Dogmatics, Ecumenism, and Orthodox theology. He has published 11 books so far, most recently the two-volume work “Decolonial Horizons”. Furthermore, he serves as a board member of the International Research Network Ecclesiological Investigations (EIIRN) and co-chairs the Orthodox/Eastern-Catholic Dialogue Group (OECD).

Rethinking Orthodox Ecclesiology: Constructing a Supranational Paradigm

In the past, national Orthodox Churches have played pivotal roles in forming and preserving national identity in countries where Orthodox constitute the majority of the population. While the principle of national Orthodox churches offers benefits such as contextual relevance, stable membership, and simplified state-church relations, it also presents inherent drawbacks, including nationalism, restricted missionary outreach, and susceptibility to state manipulation. Additionally, the current model furthers the hegemonic or imperialistic agendas of certain nations, as evidenced by the ongoing conflict in Ukraine and the ideology behind it. This paper aims to explore theoretical pathways for Orthodox Churches to transcend their roles as conduits for specific national interests and instead evolve into unifying agents across diverse nations. By examining the possibilities of establishing a supranational framework, this exploration seeks to retain the aforementioned advantages while concurrently addressing issues of nationalism and ethnophyletism. Though purely theoretical, such a model could empower Orthodox Churches to transcend their current limitations, foster unity, spearhead missionary efforts, and potentially lead to the emergence of new Orthodox churches.

Rev. Dr. Christophe D'Aloisio

Director,
Orthodox Theological Institute
of Brussels – IOJ;

Secretary of the European Forum
of Orthodox Schools of Theology – EFOST,
Belgium



Rev. Dr. Christophe D'Aloisio is Director of the Saint-Jean-le-Théologien Orthodox Theological Institute of Brussels, Secretary of the European Forum of Orthodox Schools of Theology (EFOST), Affiliated Research Fellow at the “Religions, Spiritualities, Cultures, Societies” Research Institute of the Catholic University of Louvain (UCLouvain) and Visiting Professor at the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies of the same university. He is a Member of the Belgian Association for the Study of Religions (BABEL), he is the Chief Editor of the Theological Journal “Le Messager Orthodoxe” (Paris) and he is a Member of the International Board of the International Federation of ACATs (FIACAT). He was President of *Syndesmos*, the World Fellowship of Orthodox Youth, between 2003 and 2014.

Panorthodox Identity as a Political and Ecclesiological Project in Recent inter-Orthodox Relations

Long before the large-scale Russian invasion of the country, the ecclesial situation in Ukraine was thorny. The church people of Ukraine are at the centre of this situation, but is pastoral concern for the people of Ukraine the only motivation for church actors from outside, such as the Ecumenical Patriarchate or the Patriarchate of Russia? In fact, the ecclesial situation in the Ukraine provides an adequate/inadequate space for the manifestation of antagonistic ecclesiological visions. This paper will try, thanks to the ethical criteria underlying the logic of identity politics, to analyse and evaluate these visions. This will contribute to an understanding of the different positions of churches which are less directly involved in the conflict than Constantinople or Moscow. The research could help to consider the implications of this crisis for global Orthodox unity.

Prof. Dr. Athanasios N. Papathanasiou

Associate Professor of Missiology,
Supreme Ecclesiastical Academy,
Athens, Greece;

Chief Editor of the Greek Theological
Quarterly “Synaxis”



Athanasios N. Papathanasiou, born in 1959, is Associate Professor of *Missiology, Intercultural Christian Witness and Dialogue*, at the Supreme Ecclesiastical Academy of Athens, Greece. He also teaches at the post-graduate Program of the Hellenic Open University. He is the editor of the Greek theological quarterly “Synaxis”, and member of The European Society for Intercultural Theology and Interreligious Studies. His research focuses on Missiology, Cross-cultural Studies and Political Theology. He obtained first-hand experience in short-term missions in Kenya (1995), Nigeria (2000) and Tanzania (2004), and has been a member of the “Mission Work and Evangelization Committee” of the Metropolis of Nigeria. His recent publications include: “Mission(s) and Politics: An Orthodox’s Approach”, *Politics, Society, and Culture in Orthodox Theology in a Global Age* (Brill 2022), 292-309; “Orthodox Theology’s First Encounter with Contextual Theologies: Nikos Nissiotis’ Pioneering Approach to Truth, Tradition, Witness, and Praxis”, *Holding fast to the Mystery of the Faith: Festschrift for Patriarch Daniel of the Romanian Orthodox Church* (Brill 2022), 205-222; “Traditional African anarchism and Orthodox theology: Is a dialogue between them possible?”, *Communio Viatorum* 64.3 (2022), 234-258; “Orthodox Theology’s Hide and Seek with Postcolonialism: Mission praxis and Missiology as a Field Study”, *International Review of Mission* 112.2 (2023), 218-227.

Orthodox Christianity between Eschatology and Eschatologies, Cultural Sarx and Cultural Sarcophagus, Post-colonialism and Anti-colonialism

Orthodox Christianity is tasked with confronting the eclipse of eschatological consciousness, yet at the same time it is called to elaborate authentic Christian Eschatology in juxtaposition to various dominant eschatologies, religious or secular (such as the conviction that post-humanism has no limits, or that a particular regime is endowed with a messianic role). This task implies facing the imperial ideal, which means not only reconsidering its Byzantine heritage, but also judging the current planetary Empire (as defined by Hardt and Negri et al.). Neo-liberalism’s alliance with advanced cyber technology strives to turn everything and everyone into merchandise. So, while the Church must always have a real encounter with cultural diversity, this seems to be the first time in history that human creativity is radically jeopardized. Orthodoxy needs on the one hand to affirm cultural creativity as the potential flesh / sarx of the Gospel, and on the other hand to denounce traditionalism which imprisons the Gospel in one culture / sarcophagus. Consequently we need to oppose every kind of colonization of consciousness (even inside the Church), and to be suspicious of theologies which forge a neo-imperial, quasi-Confucian hierarchical pyramid, rendering post-colonial analysis into a neo-imperial instrument deprived of anti-colonial vigilance.

Dr. Georges El Hage

Lecturer,
Catholic Institute of Paris, France;
President of “Syndesmos”



Dr. Georges El Hage was born in Beirut and first worked in finance and banking before turning to theology and history. He studied theology at Saint-Serghius, the Catholic University of Paris and Loyola Faculty (Jesuit institute), as well as history at the Sorbonne-Paris. He teaches Patristics, Orthodox missiology, and the history of the ecumenical movement at the Catholic Institute of Paris. He is the current President of “Syndesmos”, The World Fellowship of Orthodox Youth Movements.

The Orthodox in Antioch between Cultural and Political Levantinism

The meaning of the term “Levantine” has evolved over the ages. It has described several different religious and political groupings since the sixteenth century. Some commentators find its use pejorative, others claim it as an alternative identity against the dominant Islam. A century ago, the revival of Orthodox theology in Antioch forged a new understanding of this term. However, since the invasion of Iraq in 2003, it seems that the trivialization of its use in the religious and especially political spheres has caused confusion in people’s minds. To better understand the identity issues raised by the use of the term “Levantine” today, we propose a comparative study examining the discourses of thinkers, religious and political leaders.

Dr. Ionut Biliuta

Research Associate,
Gh. Sincai Institute,
Romanian Academy,
Târgu Mureș, Romania



Ionut Biliuta works as Researcher with the Gheorghe Sincai Institute (Romanian Academy). His academic interests focus on the relationship between Orthodoxy and Modernity, Romanian Orthodoxy and nationalism, antisemitism and Orthodox theology, ecumenism and anti-ecumenism in Orthodoxy, discourses of hate and discrimination within Romanian Orthodoxy, and the translation of intellectual ideas from Western to Orthodox milieus. His latest publications engaged with the recent canonizations of saints, the Orthodox underground movements during Romanian Communism, and fascism in Orthodox milieus. Latest Publications: “Legionary Dreams, Visions, and Divine Apparitions in the Communist Prisons: Designing a Fascist Carceral Theophany in Contemporary Romania,” *Review of Ecumenical Studies* (Sibiu) 14, 2 (2022): 263–288; “Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy: The Religious Underground in the Twentieth Century East-Central Europe” (co-edited with Anca Sincan), in *Review of Ecumenical Studies*, 14:2 (2022); “To Murder or Save Thy Neighbour? Romanian Orthodox Clergymen and Jews during the Holocaust (1941-1945),” in *Religion, Ethnonationalism, and Antisemitism in the Era of the Two World Wars*, edited by Kevin P. Spicer and Rebecca Carter-Chand (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2022), 305-330; “The Saints of the Communist Prisons: Making Fascist Saints in Post-Communist Romania,” *Contemporary European History*, 31: 3 (November 2021): 435-455.

An Anti-Western Theology? The Ultrationalism and Fundamentalism of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Post-Communist Years

This paper aims to examine the prevalence of nationalist ideas within the Romanian Orthodox Church today. Religious nationalism has become a dominant narrative within the Orthodox community and has influenced subcultures within the Church. The presentation builds on previous research to answer the question of why ultranationalist ideas from the interwar years still exist within Romanian theological and monastic circles today. These ultranationalist ideas have led to dissent towards the Romanian state and its pro-European and Atlantic efforts. Orthodox nationalists have opposed mandatory vaccinations, attempted to modify the Romanian Constitution in favor of the traditional family through a national referendum, and opposed the closure of churches during the COVID-19 pandemic. The presentation also explores the conservative and ethnocentric side of the Romanian Orthodox Church, which rejects contemporary medical practices and the rights of sexual minorities. This side of the Church supports the neo-fascist Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR) as a political outlet for their anti-Western and Orthodox fundamentalist views.

Prof. Dr. Jennifer Wasmuth

Professor of Ecumenical Theology
with special reference
to Orthodox Christianity,
Faculty of Theology,
Göttingen University, Germany



Prof. Dr. Jennifer Wasmuth did her undergraduate work in Protestant theology and Slavic studies. After a year of study at the St. Petersburg Theological Academy in Russia she wrote her dissertation under Erlangen theologian Prof. Dr. Karl Christian Felmy. Pursuing the question of Protestant influences on Russian academic theology in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, she analyzed the phenomenon of “liberal Orthodox theology.” From April 2018 to September 2021 she was Director of the Institute for Ecumenical Research, Strasbourg. As of October 2021, she is Chair of “Ecumenical Theology with special reference to Orthodox Christianity and its global impact in history and the present” at the Faculty of Theology of Göttingen University.

Creating Identity through Polemical Delineation? Protestantism in Russian Academic Theology of the 19th/20th Century

The 19th/20th century of Russian Orthodox theological history is characterized by an intensive engagement with contemporary German Protestant theology: there was practically no significant publication on the Protestant side that was not taken note of in Russia. Controversies in Protestant theology were followed closely. The publications on the Orthodox side show that the reception was essentially motivated by the desire to clarify the question of Orthodox identity under the conditions of modernity, both theologically and ecclesiastically. However, this happened in different ways among leading theologians, and very different patterns of dealing with Protestantism can be recognized. The aim of the lecture is to present the epoch of Russian theological history and to explain the patterns that can be seen in the reference to Protestantism and that are characteristic of the associated definition of Orthodox identity.

Dr. Nadezhda Beliakova

Guest Researcher,
University of Bielefeld, Germany



Nadezhda Beliakova, PhD in History, is a Guest Researcher at the University of Bielefeld (Germany) with a PostDoc Fellowship of the Humboldt (Philipp Schwartz Initiative) Foundation. Her contemporary research project is on religious activists' networks of communication through the "Iron Curtain" during the Cold War. Before coming to Germany as a scholar at risk in June 2022 she was a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of World History, Russian Academy of Sciences (Moscow). From 2003 to 2022 she developed and read interdisciplinary courses on comparative history and culture of religions, relations between science and religion, and religion in international relations at various universities in Moscow. Between 2018 and 2021 she participated in projects with physicians on the relationship between religion and women's health, religion and bioethics. Her research interest are: gender in religious communities in the late USSR, post-Soviet Russia and Ukraine; religious activism in the Cold War context, religion and women's health. She is an author of several articles on elusive / ignored female agency in churches and religious minority communities. She is a co-author of books: *Zhenshchina v pravoslavii: tserkovnoe pravo i rossijskaia praktika* [Woman in the Orthodoxy: Church Law and Russian Experience] (Moscow: Kuchkovo pole, 2011); *Zhenshchiny v evangel'skikh obshchinakh poslevoennogo SSSR (1940-80-u gg.)* [Women in the Evangelical Communities of the Post-War USSR (1940s-1980s)] (Moscow: Indrik, 2015); *"Es gibt keinen Gott!" Kirchen und Kommunismus. Eine Konfliktgeschichte.* (Herder Verlag, 2016); *Religious Life in the Late Soviet Union From Survival to Revival (1960s-1980s)* (Routledge, 2023). She is a Member of ESWTR (European Society of Women in Theological Research) and a member of Steering Committee of the Orthodox-Eastern Catholic Dialogue Group.

Is there a Room for a Feminist Identity in the Orthodox Church?

The topic for my paper was suggested by the organizers of the conference and I decided to accept the challenge. The paper will focus on how the female agenda has been gradually displaced in recent decades from the public sphere of Orthodoxy; and how this displacement has been influenced by the evolution of second wave feminism. The neo-traditionalism, entrenched in the Orthodox media agenda and focused on gender in recent decades (anti-genderism) poses "feminism" as a threat to "Orthodox identity". The diversity of feminism has been reduced to a call to "ordain women into priesthood". In the absence of clear and generally recognised theological arguments about the absence of women's ordination inside Orthodoxy, the trend (tendency) was formed to exclude women's agenda in the public space, to entrench a system of latent discrimination within Orthodox communities, and neglect women's agency. Meanwhile, my focus on the socio-historical development of Orthodox churches throughout the XX-XXI centuries has demonstrated a stable feminization of Orthodoxy together with diversity and importance of women's ministries without them being marked as "feminist". The paper will explore whether the Orthodoxy can reflect / recognize its dependence on «Western gender battles» (primarily, the American culture wars) and formulate a different women's (female) agenda without perceiving feminism as a threat.

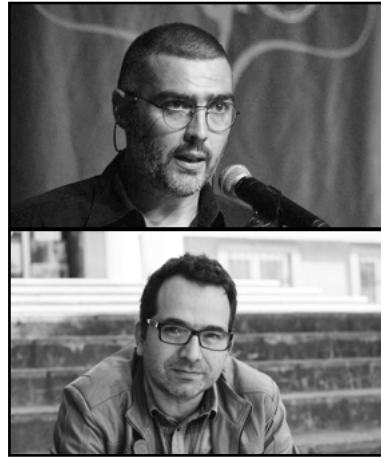
Dr. Branko Sekulić

Lecturer

Dr. Zoran Grozdanov

Associate Professor

University Center for Protestant Theology
“Matthias Flacius Illyricus”,
Zagreb, Croatia



Branko Sekulić received his master's degree at the Theological Faculty “Matthias Flacius Illyricus” in Zagreb, Croatia (2011), at the Ecumenical Institute of the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv, Ukraine (2016), and obtained a certificate in peace education from the Center for Peace Studies in Zagreb (2009). He obtained his doctoral degree at the Faculty of Protestant Theology at Ludwig-Maximilian University in Munich, Germany (2020), where he has been a post-doctoral researcher (since 2021). He is a lecturer at the University Center for Protestant Theology “Matthias Flacius Illyricus” in Zagreb (since 2017), president of the Institute for Theology and Politics (since 2023), director of the Academy for Theology and Politics (since 2023), coordinator of the theological program of the Festival of Alternatives and the Left in his hometown of Šibenik (since 2014), and a fellow at the Stanford's Center for Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies (2024). He recently published *The Veils of Christian Delusion*, Lanham MD: Lexington Books & Fortress Press, 2022; “Towards the Balkan Theology of Political Liberation”, Political Theology Network, September 2023; “The Theology of the Ethnocultural Empathic Turn: Towards the Balkan Theology of Political Liberation”, Religions 2024.

Zoran Grozdanov is an Associate Professor at the University Center for Protestant Theology “Matthias Flacius Illyricus”, University in Zagreb. He is also a Professor at Sinclética Monastic School of Theology in the monastera Poblet (Spain). He has widely published in the field of Balkan contextual theology, relationship between nationalism and religion. Among his publications are: *Balkan Contextual Theology: An Introduction* (Routledge, 2022), *The Homeland painted with Scent: Theology of National Identity* (in Croatian, Ex libris, 2023); “From Incarnation to Identity: The Theological

Kingdom Turned Inside Out: The theology of National Liberation in the Former Yugoslavia

A fascinating historical narrative unfolds when delving into the Balkans, particularly the former Yugoslavia. It becomes evident that the ecclesiological aspect has been intricately entwined with the ethnic dimension of national ideology since the inception of nationalism in the region. This fusion, which remains pivotal for the Serbian Orthodox and Croatian Catholic communities today, has a rich and complex history. Unraveling the origins of this fusion, we unearth its roots in what Radomir Konstantinović characterizes as the provincial Spirit-Nation, a concept that encompasses allegiance to kin and serves as an existential essence defining this type of community. As elucidated in Eric Voegelin's writings, this historical groundwork is deeply embedded in political religion. It takes the form of a concept known as the theology of national liberation, culminating in the phenomenon identified by Branko Sekulić as ethnoreligiosity. Exploring potential avenues out of this political religion in the Western Balkans, we might consider the perspective of what Johann Baptist Metz termed “interruption” when describing the character of religion in our analysis of social and political communities. This paper will delve into the interruptive character of religion regarding ethnonational allegiances, drawing on the insights of J. B. Metz, Juergen Moltmann, and Jacob Taubes.

Background of National-Populist Politics in the Western Balkans”, in U. Schmiedel and J. Ralston (eds.), *The Spirit of Populism: Political Theologies in Polarized Times* (Brill, 2022), and *Theology. Descent into the Vicious Circles of Death* (published in the occasion of 40th Anniversary of Juergen Moltmann's *The Crucified God*, Cascade Books, 2016). Since 2004 he is an editor in the publishing house Ex libris and was an initiator and editor of the Croatian edition of the International Journal for Theology *Concilium* (2010-2018).

Prof. Dr. Regina Elsner

Professor of Eastern Churches
and Ecumenism,
Catholic Theological Faculty,
University of Münster, Germany



Regina Elsner is a catholic theologian and, since January 2024, Professor at the Chair of Eastern Churches and Ecumenism at the Catholic Theological Faculty of the University of Münster. Before, she worked as researcher at the Center for East European and International Studies ZOiS in Berlin and as a project coordinator for Caritas Russia in St. Petersburg. In her research, she focuses on Orthodox social ethics and Orthodoxy in the post-Soviet space. Her latest book is “The Russian Orthodox Church and Modernity” (ibidem 2021), and she published widely on Orthodoxy in times of war and social turmoil in the post-Soviet space.

“Not like them!” The Harm of Othering and the Quest for a New Orthodox Paradigm in Ukraine

For several decades, Ukraine was an example of how Orthodox identity could be prevented from becoming a tool of identity politics even if the majority population identifies with Orthodoxy. Religious pluralism and tolerance as well as a strong civil society have been decisive in this unique constellation. Russia’s war against Ukraine posed – among many other challenges – a particular threat for this development. In order to withstand the Russian war of annihilation, pursuing a straight demarcation strategy of “us” and “the Other” became existential. The 10 years since the beginning of the Russian aggression exemplified several ways of interpreting Orthodox identity as exclusive or inclusive, showing the openness of Orthodox tradition for both ideas and the potential for developing a new paradigm. The paper uses the concept of “Othering” in order to analyze the processes of identity formation in Ukrainian Orthodoxy in the context of war. This concept from the post-colonial discourse allows to widen the focus from the existential defense of a sovereign identity against the neo-imperial claims by Russia to the broader discourse of a common European and transnational identity, where “Othering” shows, on the contrary, its significant harm.

Dr. Lidiya Lozova

Post-Doctoral Researcher
Exeter University, 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 completed her Bachelor's and two Master's degrees in cultural studies and intercultural humanities at National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy in Kyiv and Jacobs University in Bremen, Germany. Before February 2022, for twelve years she worked 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, specifically modern icons and icon-like images that appear during wartime in Ukraine.

The Visual Identity of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine

While it is clear that the Russian Orthodox Church has sacrificed its eschatological identity for the weaponized political one, the situation in the Ukrainian Orthodoxy is complicated. The identity of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is ambivalent as it presents itself as “apolitical” while transmitting certain Russian narratives; not attempting to be a church for the society, it takes a victimized stand against both society and state. The autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine attempts to be a church *for* the nation and supports the state's defence against Russia. However, what it *means* to be a church for the nation undergoing enhanced self-identification under the threat of genocide must be discovered in the process. My presentation concerns the visual identity of OCU as manifested in its design and branding created by artist, calligrapher and designer Oleksiy Chekal and widely used in this church. First, I will discuss his “anti-imperialist” design of St George church of the National Guard in Kharkiv. Then I will turn to his OCU brand images, explaining the relationship between the eschatological, ecclesiological and historical (as well as social and political) dimensions. Finally, I will consider his design projects for Kyiv Cave Lavra. At the end, I will discuss problems and challenges involved in creating the visual identity of Ukrainian Orthodoxy.

