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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

THE EMERGENCE OF THE CONCEPT
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FOREWORD

It is commonly recognized that the Church Fathers and Tradition occupy a dominant place in the experience, the consciousness and the theological discourse of modern Orthodoxy. The appeal to “Return to the Fathers,” moreover, has been the central demand of the “neo-patristic synthesis,”¹ the still dominating current of 20th century Orthodox theology. Despite its predomi-

¹ For a first critical overview of the theological thought in general, and methodology in particular, of the two basic representatives of this current (Georges Florovsky and Metropolitan John Zizioulas of Pergamon) cf. my doctoral dissertation: *The Mystery of Christ and the Mystery of the Church: Georges Florovsky and John Zizioulas in Dialogue on Theological Methodology* (Sebastian Orthodox Press, Kindle edition, 2019, in Greek).

nant character, a fervent debate² has been taking place in recent years about the char-

² For a real landmark in the process of this debate one should refer to the International Conference organized in Volos, Greece, June 3-6, 2010, by the Volos Academy for Theological Studies, in cooperation with the Center of Orthodox Christian Studies of Fordham University (New York), the Chair of Orthodox Theology at the University of Münster (Germany), and the Romanian Institute for Inter-Orthodox, Inter-Confessional and Inter-Religious Dialogue (Cluj-Napoca) on the topic: “Neo-patristic Synthesis or Post-patristic Theology: Can Orthodox Theology be Contextual?”. The discussion and debate on the same topic continued with a second conference in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, May 23-26, 2013, with an International Conference on “Can Orthodox Theology Be Contextual? Concrete Approaches from the Orthodox Tradition,” organized by the same institutions and several others which joined the project (St. Andrew’s Biblical Theological Institute, Moscow; the Christian Cultural Center, Belgrade; the Institute for the Study of Christianity and Culture, Belgrade; and the European forum of the Orthodox Schools of Theology, Brussels). The papers of this last conference have been published in *The Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 69:1-4 (2017): Guest

acter, the place but above all about the role of the patristic tradition in formulating a vital and creative discourse, by which both theology and the Church attempt to engage in a fruitful and constructive dialogue with the challenges of post-modernity.

In this context, this little book, written by a prominent scholar of patristic literature and deeply knowledgeable about the spiritual-ideological developments and currents of contemporary Orthodox theology, Fr. Andrew Louth, attempts in a penetrating and critical way to define terms and concepts, to overcome some certainties of the past, often a sterile, scholastic and non-historical approach to the Fathers, but also through an indirect dialogue, to positively re-evaluate representatives of the later theological generation, especially of the Russian diaspora, always in the perspective of the soteriological dialogue with humanity of all times.

Editors Assaad Elias Kattan and Radu Preda. For the background of this discussion see Pantelis Kalaitzidis, "From the 'Return to the Fathers' to the Need for a Modern Orthodox Theology," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 54:1 (2010), pp. 5-36, and in French, *Istina* 56 (2011), pp. 227-251.

Fr. Louth's collegiate education was at the Universities of Cambridge and Edinburgh where he studied Mathematics and Theology and prepared his thesis on Karl Barth. After graduation he taught early Christian theology and patristics at the University of Oxford and early Medieval and Byzantine history at the University of London Goldsmiths College. He is now Professor Emeritus of Patristic and Byzantine Studies at Durham University, while he continues to teach as Visiting Professor, Eastern Orthodox Theology at the Vrije University of Amsterdam (Holland). Andrew Louth was ordained a priest of the Russian Orthodox Patriarchal Diocese of Sourozh in 2003, and he serves a parish in Durham (U.K.), while he is editor of the journal *Sobornost* and member of the scientific committee of other English speaking international journals. His interests in research lie mostly in the history of theology in the Greek tradition, especially in periods later than what is usually studied in the universities of England; that is, after the fifth century during the period of the Byzantine Empire to 1453. He is also interested in later periods including the modern peri-

od; that is the nineteenth century and later, where his research includes Russian and Romanian Orthodox theology.

This publication includes, after the necessary editorial process, the two papers presented by Fr. Andrew Louth, as an invitee by the Volos Academy for Theological Studies on the opening of the public lecture series (May 15 and May 16, Volos and Athens), and special Patrology seminar (May 18, 2013 Athens) during the academic year 2012-2013, generously sponsored by an Orthodox charitable Institution, the Virginia Farah Foundation (U.S.A.). Their unification in the form of an individual book was considered as necessary due to the deep affinity of the two texts, a fact that demonstrates both the interdependence of individual aspects of patristic thought and the possibility of a creative theological reflection on subjects that are, albeit classical in their character (i.e., the creation of the world, the relationship between God and the world), not only still at the core of *orthodoxia* itself, but also at the center of the diachronic interest of the theological dialogue and the existential concern of human being.

The publication of this book could not be completed without the persistence and multifaceted and long-term support by the Director of the Volos Academy and dear friend, Dr. Pantelis Kalaitzidis, whom I would also like to thank, as well as the overall design work by my colleague Costis Drygianakis. We must cordially thank the Virginia H. Farah Foundation for the generous funding of the lectures and the Patrology seminar in 2013, and we would also like to thank the Volos Municipal Gallery and especially its Directress, Dr Chryssa Drantaki, for the permission to use the painting “Explosion” by Paliologos Theologou for the cover of the book.

Nikolaos Asproulis
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