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Conference Review

Conferences Honored the Late Metropolitan of Pergamon, John D. Zizioulas

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The passing of the late Metropolitan of Pergamon, John Zizioulas, came as a profound loss that shook the world of theology and Christendom. Recognized as "one of the most original and most profound theologians of our time" (Fr. Yves Congar, among many others), Metropolitan John inspired numerous theologians, philosophers, scientists, and artists, to interpret, develop, and even critique his theological genius. His theology, in this way, left no one indifferent. For this reason, during his lifetime, in addition to the many essays and theses written on his theological perspectives, numerous conferences were organized in honor of his theological brilliance.

During his lifetime, a few conferences were dedicated to directly honoring and addressing John Zizioulas' distinguished contributions. In the Diocese of Braničevo, Serbia, a series of conferences were held in his honor (2006, 2014, etc.). The International Conference in Volos, which took place on October 28–30, 2011, was organized by Volos Academy for Theological Studies, Volos, and was titled "Metropolitan of Pergamon John Zizioulas: Person, Eucharist,

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and the Kingdom of God in Orthodox and Ecumenical Perspective." Similarly, the Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies organized a conference at Westcott House in Cambridge on June 14, 2014, titled "On Eschatology Today: A Celebration of the Life and Work of John Zizioulas." Both of these conferences brought together theologians from both East and West to reflect on Zizioulas' theological perspectives, honoring not only his person but, above all, his immense contribution to theology.

Following his passing in Athens on February 2, 2023, renewed and intensified interest in John Zizioulas' theological vision led to the publication of numerous new books, essays, and the organization of several conferences. Three major conferences held after his repose further affirmed his status as a theological giant of our time.

Soon after Metropolitan John's repose, in the spring of 2023, the Diocese of Požarevac and Braničevo organized a series of three lectures in his memory. Furthermore, a conference in his honor was organized at the University of Belgrade, Serbia, on December 13, 2023, titled *"The Contribution of Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon to Contemporary Systematic Theology."* It is worth noting that Zizioulas was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Belgrade in 1991 and attended numerous conferences organized by its School of Theology. The conference gathered many speakers who presented papers on the Metropolitan's theological contributions. One of his students, Metropolitan Dr. Ignatije of Požarevac and Braničevo, spoke about his teacher, affirming that *"time will show that he is one of the greatest theologians of our time."* Metropolitan Ignatije presented a paper dedicated to Zizioulas' use and understanding of Neopatristic synthesis. Other professors critically engaged with his theological reasoning, exploring key topics such as Zizioulas' contribution to modern theology, ontological questions in ecclesiology, Christian anthropology, death, and resurrection.

Shortly thereafter, an online conference in honor of the late Metropolitan John was held on February 2, 2024, organized by a group of theologians from the Orthodox Church of Georgia. The conference aimed to highlight Metropolitan John's contributions to

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theology and his distinctive theological approach. The organizers invited distinguished scholars from around the world, including Rt. Rev. Rowan Williams, Professors John Milbank, Cyril Hovorun, Tamar Grdzelidze, and Bishop Maxim Vasiljević, among others. Williams spoke on Zizioulas' theology of otherness, a theme central to his theological work. He also emphasized the Metropolitan's *"substantial reflection on eschatology,"* presenting his vision through Zizioulas' latest work, *Remembering the Future: Toward an Eschatological Ontology*, published by St. Sebastian Orthodox Press.

The Department of Theology at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens has inaugurated a new series of annual international lectures in honor of Metropolitan John Zizioulas. Inspired by his theological legacy, these lectures serve as a driving force for contemporary theologians. The first lecture in the series was held at the School of Theology on May 16, 2024, and was delivered by Dr. Thomas Graumann, Professor of Ancient Christian History and Patristic Studies at the Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge. His lecture, titled "The Authority of the Church Fathers in Late Antique Theological Debates," explored the role of patristic tradition in early doctrinal discussions. The next lecture in the series is scheduled for March 13, 2025, and will be presented by Fr. Thomas Joseph White, OP, Rector of the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas (Angelicum) in Rome. His talk, titled "Relational Ontology in Christian Theology: The Trinity, Human Nature, and the Mystery of Christ—Reflections on a Theme in Thomas Aquinas with a View to Catholic-Orthodox Relations," will examine the intersection of Thomistic thought with Orthodox theology.

The most comprehensive conference in honor of the Metropolitan of Pergamon, John D. Zizioulas, was held in Istanbul from October 5–8, 2024. Organized by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in collaboration with the Volos Academy for Theological Studies and the Center for Orthodox Christian Studies at Fordham University, this significant event brought together numerous scholars at the invitation of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. Titled "Theological Legacy and Ecumenical Perspective: A Conference in Memory of Metropolitan John D. Zizioulas of Pergamon," the con-

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ference was structured into nine sessions, each exploring various aspects of Metropolitan John's theological vision in a creative and critical manner. Each session concluded with a Q&A segment, which sparked further discussions and deepened engagement with his theological legacy.

Patriarch Bartholomew's introductory address emphasized Metropolitan Zizioulas' Eucharistic-centered vision, which shaped his life, thought, and hope. This focus on the Eucharist as the lifeblood and sustaining force of his theology is also a reflection of his eschatology—a perspective confirmed by the distinguished speakers who followed. Among them were Their Eminences: Metropolitan Emmanuel of Chalcedon, Metropolitan Ignatije of Braničevo, Metropolitan Maximos of Selyvria, Archbishop Maxim of Los Angeles, and Metropolitan Job of Pisidia, as well as Demetrios Linos, Nikolaos Asproulis, Paschalis Kitromilides, Pantelis Kalaitzidis, Rt. Rev. Christopher Hill, Stavros Yangazoglou, Rt. Rev. Paul McPartlan, and many others.

The sessions were thoughtfully structured to examine key theological themes central to Metropolitan Zizioulas' legacy, including eschatology, ecclesiology, Trinitarian theology, his engagement with philosophy, and ecumenism. Most of the discussions were further enriched by constructive and thought-provoking questions and dialogues, fostering deeper engagement with his theological contributions.

Additionally, the conference was enriched by a panel exhibition depicting Metropolitan Zizioulas' life and work, making it a significant component of the event. Participants praised the exhibition, noting its ability to visually convey Metropolitan John's theological legacy. Patriarch Bartholomew himself took time to engage with the panels, carefully observing the photographs and offering reflections on Metropolitan John's life and contributions. Many panelists referenced the exhibition in their discussions, commending the initiative of displaying large-scale images of Metropolitan John, which made his presence felt throughout the event. The panels will have a permanent home at the Volos Academy in Volos, Greece, ensuring their continued role in academic and theological discourse. At the conclusion

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of the conference, the organizers expressed gratitude for the thoughtful curation by Marija Aćimović and the design by Denis Vikić, acknowledging their dedication in bringing the exhibition to life.

Finally, participants of this significant event were introduced to the "John Zizioulas Foundation," presented by Prof. Stavros Yangazoglou. The foundation, chaired by Andreas Goulas from Athens, seeks to promote and compile a comprehensive collection of Metropolitan Zizioulas' career, studies, and works, enriched with photographs and archival materials. As part of this initiative, the foundation has already launched a dedicated website for Metropolitan Zizioulas, managed by Vladimir Aćimović, and introduced a new international journal, OmegAlpha, edited by Nikolaos Asproulis, which will focus on the study and dissemination of Metropolitan's theology. Prof. Yangazoglou expressed gratitude to all those contributing to this project, particularly Archbishop Maxim of Los Angeles and St. Sebastian Orthodox Press, for their dedicated efforts in making many of Metropolitan's texts available in English.

As the conference in honor of Metropolitan John of Pergamon concluded, a vision for new projects dedicated to his theology was both inspired and encouraged for the near future. These initiatives reaffirmed the continued relevance of Zizioulas' theological hermeneutics, eschatology, and ecclesiology—centered on the Eucharist and koinonia—as well as many other themes essential to contemporary theology.

Meanwhile, since his repose, a number of John Zizioulas' books appeared in Greek, English, Serbian, and other languages: *Receive One Another: 101 Sermons* (Los Angeles: St. Sebastian Orthodox Press, 2023), *Remembering the Future: Toward an Eschatological Ontology* (Los Angeles: St. Sebastian Orthodox Press 2023), *Ascetic Ethos and Monasticism* (Los Angeles: St. Sebastian Orthodox Press 2024), *Freedom and Existence: The Transition from Ancient to Christian Hellenism* (Los Angeles: St. Sebastian Orthodox Press 2024), *Knowing as Willing: The Ontology of Person, Nature, and Freedom* (Los Angeles: St. Sebastian Orthodox Press 2025). It is noteworthy that the book *Remembering the Future: Toward an Eschatological Ontology* is being translated into eight languages and has already

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been published in Italian and Spanish. Let us mention that, in addition to writing a heartfelt Foreword for *Remembering the Future*, Pope Francis has frequently referenced Metropolitan John's theological insights since 2023. The Diocese of Požarevac and Braničevo has undertaken the publication of the collected works of Metropolitan John in Serbian, with three volumes published so far: *Evharistija čini Crkvu* (2023), *Crkva kao zajednica* (2023) and *Asketski etos i monašto* (2024).

Three journals devoted to Zizioulas' legacy: The magazine *Anthropos* 14 (October 2024 – January 2025), dedicates an issue to Metropolitan John of Pergamon, highlighting his contribution to theology and philosophy. The special edition includes articles that examine his thought and his relationship with other thinkers, such as Jean-Luc Marion and Paul Ricœur (*Ἄνθρωπος*: https://www.anthrwpos.com). *The Wheel* Journal's Issue #36 (https://wheeljournal.com/issue/the-wheel-36/), titled "John D. Zizioulas: Perspectives," focuses on the theological contributions of Metropolitan John D. Zizioulas. This edition features articles such as "Towards an Eschatological Ontology" by Zizioulas himself, "Person and Confession: Truth-Telling as a Hypostatic Fact" by Aristotle Papanikolaou, "Between the 'Already' and the 'Not Yet': A Journey with Metropolitan John Zizioulas" by Bishop Maxim (Vasiljević), and others. Also, the journal *Φρέαρ*, Issue May 2023 (https://frear.gr/?p=34741), was dedicated to Metropolitan John, featuring articles by Maxim Vasiljevic, Nikolaos Asproulis, Giorgos Vlantis, Stavros Yangazoglou, Giorgos Grigoriou, Fr. Panteleimon Manoussakis, Demetrios Mavropoulos, Sotiris Mitralexis, Kostas Bousbouras, Giorgos Papageorgiou, Aristotle Papanikolaou, and Dionysios Skliris.

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