



PILGRIMS TOWARD  
*the* KINGDOM

*the beginnings of the*  
**INTERNATIONAL ORTHODOX THEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION**

PAUL L. GAVRILYUK, *editor*

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IOTA PUBLICATIONS  
St. Paul, Minnesota  
2020



“The International Orthodox Theological Association is performing a ministry essential for the life of the worldwide Orthodox Church, and it is a ministry that no one else at present is fulfilling. As Orthodox thinkers and pastors we have everything to gain by keeping closely in touch with one another, both through publications and still more through personal contacts at conferences. Long may it continue to flourish!”

– *The Most Rev. Kallistos (Ware),  
Metropolitan of Diokleia, Ecumenical Patriarchate*



“In January 2019, IOTA held its Inaugural Conference in Iași, Romania. It was the consummation of a long-held hope and fulfilled every expectation. The hospitality of the local church and the welcome afforded us by Archbishop Teofan of Iași were lavish and overwhelming. Over 250 speakers from forty countries – scholars, clergy, and lay leaders – made presentations covering virtually every aspect of the Church’s contemporary life and ancient past. I was myself profoundly moved by the occasion and hope that the conferences will continue on a regular basis into the future.”

– *The Most Rev. Alexander (Golitzin), Archbishop of Dallas,  
the South and the Bulgarian Diocese, Orthodox Church in America*

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## PART I. INTRODUCTION

“IOTA is a unique pan-Orthodox theological forum that not only enables academic growth and exchange but also actively fosters Orthodox unity. In these troubled times for church unity, such a forum is of inestimable value. Opportunities for Orthodox scholars to meet on a global level are few and far between. In many ways, IOTA fills something of the gap left by the current relative inactivity of the Orthodox youth fellowship Syndesmos, once a vibrant place of encounter between Orthodox of all stripes. IOTA promises to continue to enable and enhance the theological voice of the Orthodox Church while also forging bonds between members of the various local churches. It is a splendid and much-needed initiative.”

– *Dr. Marcus Plested,  
Henri de Lubac Chair and Professor of Greek Patristic and  
Byzantine Theology, Department of Theology, Marquette University*

Imagine a global communion of the Orthodox churches united in their mission of proclaiming Christ to a troubled world. Envision a world in which the Orthodox Church has regained the power of its prophetic witness. Picture the faith spreading around the world as fast as it did at the time of the apostles. Imagine the Church's leaders keeping a razor-sharp focus on mission, education, and pastoral care instead of being preoccupied with problems of governance, authority, and canonical territory. Consider the seminaries offering education of the highest caliber in order to produce a new generation of clergy and lay leaders well-equipped to deal with the challenges of our time. Assume that in order to address those challenges, the leadership of the global Church draws upon robust pan-Orthodox institutions. Dare to believe that some of these things could actually become a reality and you will understand the impulse behind the creation of the International Orthodox Theological Association (IOTA).





## A CONCILIAR MOMENT

The initial inspiration for IOTA came from the experience of the Holy and Great Council of Crete in June 2016. The preparation for the Council lasted over fifty years and was accompanied by numerous delays and setbacks.<sup>1</sup> Given the complex relations and tensions between some local Orthodox churches, many doubted that the Council would be able to convene at all. Months before the Council, its original location was changed from the Church of Hagia Irene in Constantinople (Istanbul, Turkey) to the Orthodox Theological Academy in Crete for security reasons. Just a few weeks before the Council's intended opening date, the leaders of four autocephalous (self-governing) Orthodox Churches announced that they would not be sending their delegations to the event. The

<sup>1</sup> For the history of the conciliar preparations, see Theodoros S. Meimaris, *The Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church & the Ecumenical Movement* (Thessaloniki: Ant. Stamoulis Publications, 2013).


move threatened to undermine the legitimacy of the Council and caused consternation around the world. In response, a group of Orthodox scholars, who had volunteered in the preparatory work of the Council, issued "A Plea for Pan-Orthodox Unity," publishing it on change.org.

### A Plea for Pan-Orthodox Unity



**Petition Closed**

This petition had 1,333 supporters

 Pan-Orthodox Council of Crete: A Plea for Pan-Orthodox Unity

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Conciliarity started this petition to Pan-Orthodox Council of Crete

June 9, 2016

An Open Letter of the Orthodox Christian Scholars around the World to the Holy and Great Council of Crete

## PART II. ENVISIONING THE FUTURE OF WORLDWIDE ORTHODOXY

“Jerusalem is a city where every stone speaks of the ancient tangled roots of three Abrahamic faiths, yet every step you take comes with a reminder of the tensions and divisions of modernity. It was this, rather than simply the proximity of the holy places, that made Jerusalem an appropriate location for the first meeting of chairs of the twenty-five groups of the recently-formed International Orthodox Theological Association.”

– *Dr. Alison Ruth Kolosova,*  
*Research Fellow, Tartu University, Estonia*

# CHAIRS' SYMPOSIUM 2018



IOTA chairs and Advisory  
Council members in  
Jerusalem, Israel

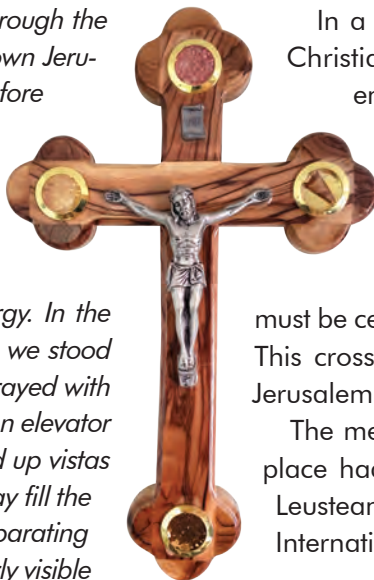


## MEETING IN THE HOLY LAND

The Symposium took place on January 10–13, 2018 at the YMCA Three Arches Hotel in Jerusalem. As one Symposium participant recalled:

*A fifteen-minute walk from our hotel through the chic, modern shopping arcades of downtown Jerusalem brought us to the Old City, where before breakfast one morning we found ourselves standing at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher alongside a Coptic bishop, priests, and nuns. They gladly gave us their blessing and holy bread as crowds pressed in to take selfies with the exotically-clad clergy. In the courtyard before the nearby Western Wall we stood with Jewish women as they swayed and prayed with words of holy texts pressed to their faces. An elevator ride into the tower above our hotel opened up vistas of the sprawl of modern buildings that today fill the steep hills and cliffs of the city. The Wall separating the Palestinian and Jewish sectors was clearly visible in the distant haze. During the short bus ride that took us to join the throngs of pilgrims in Bethlehem we drove past the Walled-Off Hotel, Banksy's evocative graffiti, and his wry words of comfort "Nothing lasts forever."<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Alison Kolosova, "A New Step towards Pan-Orthodox Unity: The International Orthodox Theological Association," *Public Orthodoxy*, February 27, 2018, at [publicorthodoxy.org/2018/02/27/iota](http://publicorthodoxy.org/2018/02/27/iota).



This graffiti was a particularly poignant reminder of the transitory nature of all human walls, not only those between the Palestinians and the Israelis, but also among the Orthodox Christians of different ethnic backgrounds.

In a particularly moving gesture, a Palestinian Christian hotel worker, who helped the conference organizers with various arrangements, presented the IOTA leaders with a gift of a wooden cross to be hung in the Symposium's meeting room. This cross will be passed on to future IOTA presidents as a reminder that the organization's work must be centered in Christ and his servant leadership. This cross will also ensure a tangible link with the Jerusalem Symposium.

The meeting room in which the Symposium took place had a further significance. As Dr. Lucian N. Leustean (co-chair of the Orthodoxy, Politics, and International Relations Group) noted:

*After I arrived at YMCA Hotel and reread the program circulated among participants, I found that we were due to meet in the rather non-descriptive "lecture room." I wasn't sure where the "lecture room" was and searched on Google a few words to try to identify its location. I discovered that in*



IOTA scholars gathered for the Opening Ceremony at the National Theatre





## CONFERENCE PROGRAM

Metropolitan Cathedral,  
Iași, Romania





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**Orthodox Theological Society in America**, USA

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**Paul L. Gavrilyuk**, Ph.D., Founding President

**Gayle E. Woloschak**, Ph.D., Vice-President and Treasurer

**Carrie Frederick Frost**, Ph.D., Secretary

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