



Finding Common Words: An Eastern Orthodox academic contribution to “A Common Word,” on the occasion of the 6th UN Interfaith Harmony Week

***An academic paper by:
Pr Laurent Cleenewerck***

*Written and presented as part of the Global Events organized and coordinated by
EUCLID (Euclid University), an intergovernmental organization under
United Nations Treaty Series 49006/49007*

<http://www.euclid.int> and <http://interfaith.euclid.int>



Finding Common Words: An Eastern Orthodox academic contribution to A Common Word, on the occasion of the Interfaith Harmony Week

As we look back on the years that have passed since the publication of *A Common Word* in 2007, it seems painfully clear that its voice was both prophetic and somewhat unheard. It was prophetic precisely because it perceived that a possible breakdown in dialogue between the two great monotheistic religions was nothing less than an existential threat to mankind, as well as to the well-being and survival of both religions.

Almost 10 years later, not only should the recent tragic events which took place in Paris (and elsewhere) come to mind as the world is invited to participate in the UN sponsored Interfaith Harmony Week, but also – less visibly so – the tragic level of fear and miscommunication that has developed since then. The landmark document *A Common Word* called for dialogue between Muslims and Christians on the basis of love and the dignity of human nature, but the current climate of fear (experienced on all sides) is conducive to anything but constructive dialogue and encounters that build mutual respect.

A complex dialectic

The current state of affairs regarding Muslim-Christian relations has been deeply affected by factors and actors that are in fact on the outer periphery of both Islam and Christianity. The so-called ‘Western world,’ often perceived as representing Christianity, has for the most part become a completely secularized culture with its own agenda and quasi-dogmatic tenets. It has moved so far in the direction and fulfilment of its post-Christian worldview that in many countries formerly described as belonging to some kind of ‘Christendom,’ Christians are very much estranged and marginalized. The Patriarch of Moscow (ranked #6 on the list of recipients in the *Common Word* open letter, through his predecessor) has been quite vocal and critical of the West in his denunciation of this state of affairs which he perceives as fostering extremism. In their own way, many Christians have been caught ‘between a rock and a hard place’ in the current struggle that does exist between the Western secular state (which cannot be described as Christian) and militarized Islamic extremism (of which ISIS and Boko-Haram are the best-known manifestations, and which both the OIC¹ and ISESCO describe as not being in any way as representative of Islam).

¹ The OIC is the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, with 57 Member States. The ISESCO is the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

As a result, what could have been, since 2007, a vibrant and helpful dialogue between the historical voices of Islam and Christianity has been derailed by the polarization that has taken place on the periphery, an ongoing problem which cannot be ignored.

Examples of such a polarization abound: a recent news item mentioned that in a particular Western country, a local reaction against Muslim influence was to make pork mandatory on public school menus. This does not mean that Muslim children would be forced to eat pork, but it seemed to call for certain days of the week when pork would be the only meat option on the menu. Apart from the religious background of this situation (which was denied by the local authorities), there is a cultural aspect that must be discussed because it undergirds the very possibility of dialogue. For the Western side of the argument, it was precisely presented as a matter of culture. But from a Muslim perspective, respect of one's guest is the very foundation of the oriental code of honor, a cultural concept which transcends religious boundaries. From such an eastern cultural perspective, serving one's guest food which he cannot in conscience eat is a grave act of disrespect. The only conclusion, from the perspective of the local Muslim population (although the policy would also affect Jews and Adventist Christians) is that they, as a group, are not in fact invited to stay in the country.

As an Eastern Orthodox Christian, I often sense the importance of being described as "Eastern" or even "Oriental."² One of the most representative visual representations of Orthodox Christian theology is the icon called "the Hospitality of Abraham."³ Hospitality in respect is a cultural aspect of interfaith dialogue that should emerge as a preliminary condition for the dialogue to take place. In the Greek Orthodox tradition, a boiled wheat called *koliva* is often served at funerals and at the end of the first week of Great Lent. It is a reminder that in the fourth century, the anti-Christian emperor Julian the Apostate had blood sprinkled over the food-stands, in order to make it impossible for Orthodox Christians to consume the food.⁴

Hence, before interfaith dialogue can take place, intercultural understanding is necessary to realize how words, actions and policies are perceived. A few weeks before, two Islamic governments had similarly hardened their policies by banning all Christmas celebrations. My point in this introductory reflection is not to pass judgment on particular government policies, but rather to point to these examples as concerning signs of the current trend of polarization and deterioration, not improvement, in the foundational eastern code of interpersonal

² Interestingly, the treaty between the United States and Russia regarding the sale of Alaska formally refers to the Russian Christian presence as to the "Greek Oriental Church."

³ Sometimes and inaccurately called "The Holy Trinity."

⁴ It is sometimes forgotten that Orthodox Christian canon law forbids the consumption of blood (including in foods, such as blood sausage) and strangled animals.

and intercultural respect. The “Common Word” called for by the open letter and by the Qur’an cannot be found in a dynamic of mutual fear and disrespect, even if imposed by actors on the outer edge of Muslim – Christian dialogue. I respectfully suggest that the first Common Word should be **respect**, and with respect comes the level of **honor** to the person without which the interpersonal and intercultural foundations of dialogue cannot exist.

Beyond Debates and Apologetics

Since the publication of *A Common Word* in 2007, an interesting phenomenon has been the development and popularization of public debates as a form of contribution to Muslim – Christian dialogue. As a point of reference, one particular Christian apologist, James White of Alpha and Omega Ministries, has participated in several moderated public debates in such visible locations as London’s and Johannesburg’s largest mosques.

However, this development is probably not what the authors of *A Common Word* had in mind, and the debate form was not proposed as an adequate means to achieve dialogue by the Christian leaders who had replied to the letter. We should, nevertheless, begin with a positive assessment of this phenomenon: these personal encounters seem to have fostered genuine respect between many of the participants. On his popular webcast called “The Dividing Line,” Dr James White has been bluntly (and courageously) vocal in his criticism of Christian preachers who, following the Paris attacks, has lumped Islam and violent Islamic extremism together, without distinction.⁵ These debates also have the merit to channel youthful energies (including in the audience) towards an intellectual pursuit, which is extremely positive in itself. Last but not least, it showed that frank Muslim – Christian encounters could take place in churches and mosques without provoking any disturbance.

On the other hand, such debates have tended to be apologies of one’s entrenched position, without any effort of convergence. Closing statements were about winning the argument rather than finding common words. And sadly, I do not recall *A Common Word* ever being cited in the course of these often two-long conversations.

As a Christian theologian belonging the Eastern (also called Greek) Orthodox Church, I often wondered why the Muslim debaters would have so often chosen, in the case of James White, a Reformed (Calvinist) apologist as a partner in the dialogue. After all, the Muslim scholars who had authored the landmark document *A Common Word* had addressed it to the Pope first, then to the Eastern

⁵ For instance, on the December 22, 2015 webcast, accessed at <http://www.aomin.org/aoblog/index.php/2015/12/22/troubling-thoughts-dr-jeffress-isis-back-reviewing-wael-ibrahim/>

and Oriental patriarchs, and only last to a short list of Protestant leaders. This is of significance because I had once noticed how John Zizioulas, Greek Orthodox Metropolitan of Pergamon and a leading theologian, pointed out that the Eastern Christian doctrine of God was more apt to enter into dialogue with Islam than its Latin-West counterpart.⁶ Indeed, in the process of listening to these Muslim-Christian debates, I often found myself agreeing with the Muslim arguments taken from the Christian New Testament, and finding the Christian response, as offered from a Western perspective, less than convincing. Further, the lack of willingness, on both sides, to seek convergence through better terminology was sorely lacking. This leads me to think that the debate format, when the participants are apologists whose goal seems to win a contest, has done little to answer the call for *A Common Word*.

It is precisely because many of those debates deal with the nature of God (a typical debate topic being “Prophet or God?” or “Is Jesus God?”) that I would like to offer a modest contribution to the dialogue by suggesting a Common Word, or rather a common expression: **“One Most-High, not three”**

“One Most-High (الأعلى), not three”

Greek Orthodox Christianity, as John Zizioulas hinted, has a unique contribution to make to the difficult dialogue on the nature of God. The problem, in my view, is that “God” is not a helpful or “common” word: *theos* in Greek can be used in the personal sense, in the qualitative sense, and in the functional sense. In English, this distinction is often lost, with the result that a shift can occur in the meaning, from what I would consider accurate, to the realm of the confusing, and further on out to what the Qur’an calls “excess.”

A good example to illustrate how confusion and excess can arise through poor terminology, from a Christian perspective (on a topic that Muslims can relate with) is the English word “hell.” The translators of the King James Bible, it is well known, opted to translate two distinct Greek words (*hades* and *gehenna*) with a single English word: hell. The problem is that for the New Testament, *hades* referred to the place or state of the dead (both righteous and unrighteous), a temporary or intermediate place where the souls awaited the Day of Judgement or the coming of the Lord. “*Gehenna*,” as most theologians would agree, described the final destiny of the wicked after the Day of Judgment, which is what modern-day Christians and Muslims understand as “hell.” As a result, many Christians are confused and ask why it is sometimes said that Jesus “descended into hell,” when the actual underlying Greek word and concept is *hades*, not *gehenna*. This

⁶ John Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church*, 151

is a striking poor choice of a “common word” that only resulted in confusion (and excess), not clarity.

We can now turn our attention to the issue of effective (or problematic) common words regarding God, and suitable place to start in the Qur’an is Surah 4:171:

O People of the Scripture, do not commit excess in your religion or say about God/Allah except the truth. The Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, was but a messenger of God/Allah and His Word which He directed to Mary and a spirit from Him. So believe in God/Allah and His messengers. And do not say, “Three,” desist - it is better for you. Indeed, God/Allah is but one God... (An-Nisa, 4:171, all citations are my composite translation)

The Qur’an’s concern is distraction from the unity of God and how saying “three” is associated with such an “excess in your religion,” including the incorporation of Mary into some kind of a divine tri-unity:

And [beware the Day] when God/Allah will say: “O Jesus, Son of Mary, did you say to the people: ‘Take me and my mother as deities besides God/Allah?’” He [Jesus] will say: “Exalted are You! It was not for me to say that to which I have no right. If I had said it, You would have known it. You know what is within myself, and I do not know what is within Yourself. Indeed, it is You who is Knower of the unseen.” (Al-Ma’idah, 5:116)

Christian scholars are well aware that such “excess” (in this case, treating Mary as a divinity) was denounced by St Epiphanius of Salamis in late 4th century, as happening specifically in Arabia among a Christian sect known as the “Kollyridians.” In his aptly-titled *Letter to Arabia*, he wrote:

*[They] bake a loaf in the name of the Ever-virgin and gather together, and they attempt **an excess** and undertake a forbidden and blasphemous act in the holy Virgin’s name, celebrating offices in her name with women officiants.⁷*

“Excess” is therefore a Common Word all in itself, and a stepping stone to our discussion of One vs. Three.

There is no question that the Qur’an’s greatest concern is with *shirk*, the grave sin of placing anything or anyone on equal ontological, theological or liturgical footing with the one who is called “Most-High:”

⁷ Collected in: *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis: De fide. Books II and III* (Brill, Second Edition, Frank Williams, editor), 635. Bold added for emphasis.

God/Allah — there is no God but He, the Ever-living, the Self-subsisting by Whom all subsist... And He is the Most High, the Great. (Al-Baqarah, Surah 2:255)

Significantly, this is the Surah is that cited in the introduction to *A Common Word*, precisely because it is the essential definition of God/Allah in Islam. In other words, “God” is meant to be interchangeable with “Allah” and “Most-High.” Indeed, there is an entire Surah named *The Most-High (Al-A’la)*, which opens with these words:

Praise the name of your Lord, the Most-High (Al-A’la, 87:1)

In the Hebrew Torah, Most High is *el-elyon* (Greek LXX: τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ὑψίστου), the God of Melchizedek:

And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the Most-High God. (Genesis 14:18)

This Melchizedek appears again in Psalm 110:

he LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, “You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.” (Psalm 110:4)

This significant expression (ὑψίστου) is cited in the New Testament epistle to the Hebrews which draws a parallel between Melchizedek and Jesus:

For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most-High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him (...) For it is witnessed of [Jesus], “Thou art a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek. (Hebrews 7:1,17)

The Gospel of Luke, likewise, uses “Most-High” very specifically in relation to John the Baptist and Jesus:

He [Jesus] will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most-High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David... And the angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most-High will overshadow you; therefore, the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. (Luke 1:32,35)

And you [i.e. John], child, will be called the prophet of the Most-High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways. (Luke 1:76)

Because Psalm 110 is the most cited Old Testament text in the New Testament, the “Most-High” name of God is (or should be) of great theological importance in Christianity.

At this point, it is useful to return to the Trinitarian aberrations like the ones described by St Epiphanius (which can be found in forms of popular Christianity), because they tend to do what the Qur’an also decries, namely (my formulation): “placing anything or anyone on equal ontological, theological or liturgical footing with the one Most-High.” Here, the unique contribution of Eastern Orthodox Christianity is what is called the doctrine of the Monarchy, namely that “The Father alone is the one true God.”⁸ This may be a startling statement to Western Christians, so to be more specific, the “Father” (in the sense of “originator,” not “procreator”) is understood by Orthodox Christians as being **the only uncaused and unoriginated reality**. To use the Quranic expression, he is the only one who is truly “Self-subsisting.” The Greek equivalent of the Arabic would be *autotheos*, an expression that becomes of particular significance because it is essentially equivalent to Most-High.⁹

In historic Orthodox Christian theology, the Word/Son and Spirit/Wisdom are understood as co-eternal with God and therefore *theos* qualitatively, but they are neither uncaused nor unoriginated. There is therefore one Most-High (*theos* in its personal sense) who is the underived and uncaused fountainhead of all forms of existence, both eternal (“divine” in Christian terminology) and created. Admittedly, this expression of Christian theology (which is Eastern and primarily found in the Greek-speaking fathers of the 4th century) makes Western Christians wince. In many debates between Christian and Muslim apologists, John 14:28 is brought up, a well-known New Testament text in which Jesus states:

You heard me say to you, “I go away, and I will come to you.” If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I go to the Father; for the Father is greater than I. (John 14:28)

Understandably, Muslim apologists point out to this plain statement as affirming the existence of a Most-High who is in some sense “greater” than Jesus. The Western Christian refutation of this argument is to state that Jesus is in no way lesser, and that was only referring to a temporary state of affairs due to his incarnation as man. Yet, the ancient Greek theologians, including the 8th century

⁸ The Trinity: Scripture and the Greek Fathers, by Fr. John Behr (<https://solzemli.wordpress.com/2010/06/05/the-trinity-scripture-and-the-greek-fathers-by-fr-john-behr/>). “For the Christian faith,” Fr John Behr declares, “there is, unequivocally, but one God, and that is the Father” (Nicene Faith, II:307). Dr Behr is the dean of St Vladimir’s Theological Orthodox seminary in Crestwood, New York.

⁹ For a compilation of citations from the Christian Greek Fathers that the Father alone is to be considered as *autotheos* / self-subsisting, please see: <http://www.cleenerwerck.org/autotheos>

St John of Damascus, understood this text as acknowledging the existence of a Most-High God (i.e. the Father) without cause outside himself:

And others make known the fact of [Jesus'] origin from the Father as cause, for instance "My Father is greater than I" [John 14:28]. For from Him [God the Father] He [Jesus] derives both His being and all that He has: His being was by generative [eternal] and not by creative [temporal] means, as, "I came forth from the Father and have come" [John 16:28], and "I live by the Father" [John 6:57]. (St John of Damascus, An Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, Book I, Chapter XVIII)

Before reaching a conclusion on this proposed Common Word ("One Most-High"), I would like to mention the significance of the intra-Muslim debate, and often allowance, of at least one co-eternal reality with God/Allah, but still derived from God/Allah who remains as supreme Self-Subsisting cause. In this purely Muslim discussion, even those who favor the idea that the Word/Qur'an is an eternal reality are generally not seen by those who disagree as committing *shirk* but rather as speculating or stretching the boundaries. Likewise, by affirming a single 'Most-High ultimate cause' who is underived and purely self-existing (i.e. "God the Father" in Christian theology), but existing eternally with two hypostatic realities (Word and Spirit), Eastern Orthodox theology confesses in its Creed "One God the Father" rather than One tri-personal divine essence or another conglomerate of eternal and temporal persons.

As 'a common word between us and you,'¹⁰ God/*theos* did not and still does not work. By contrast, the Greek Orthodox concept of "Most-High," "Self-Subsisting / *autotheos*" or "single unoriginated" is much more apt to convey a convergence of understanding, and with it renew the discussion over the association of unoriginated partners to God/Allah.

From a Christian perspective, "three" remains an essential concept because it affirms that the Most-High – albeit uniquely uncaused - is not an eternally and ontologically solitary monad: existing eternally with His co-eternal Word and Spirit, God is truly love and communion, hence calling for the response of love so eloquently called for by *A Common Word*.

¹⁰ Taken from Surah 3:64: "Say: "O People of the Book! come to common terms as between us and you: That we worship none but Allah; that we associate no partners with him; that we erect not, from among ourselves, Lords and patrons other than Allah." If then they turn back, say ye: "Bear witness that we (at least) are Muslims (bowing to Allah's Will)."

A common word, in Arabic: *ibādah*

Another difficult word – and a sore cause of misunderstanding even among Christians– is the concept of worship. This is certainly a major concern in the Qur’an:

Thy Lord hath decreed that ye worship none but Him, and that ye be kind to parents. Whether one or both of them attain old age in thy life, say not to them a word of contempt, nor repel them, but address them in terms of honor. (Al-Isra, 17:23)

In this verse/ayah, The Arabic word *ibādah* (عبادة), translated here as “worship,” has a very precise and narrow scope, unlike the Greek work *proskuneo* (προσκυνέω) which has a very wide semantic range. The Greek concept of *proskuneo* covers any physical act of reverence, which can be directed to a human being in its lower form, but also to the Most-High God in its highest form. However, there is a more focused word in Greek, *latreia* (from which we have the word idolatry), which is also translated as “worship” in most English-language Bibles.¹¹ As a result, we have a situation similar to the previously-discussed case of “hell” and a significant risk of misunderstanding the intent of the original source. It is possible to decry the translation of *proskuneo* as “worship” in one verse (Matthew 2:2) but only as “pay homage” in another (Mark 15:19) as arbitrary and guided by theological presuppositions.

The Qur’an, however, is aware of the linguistic distinction between an act of reverence (“bowing down” / “prostrate” / *sujud* in Arabic, since such an act of reverence was commanded by God/Allah to be offered to Adam), and the unique act of cultic worship (*ibādah*) offered only to the Most-High/Allah.

Having served as Editor of the *Eastern – Greek Orthodox New Testament* translation (EOB), I was keenly aware of the controversy over the proper translation of *proskuneo* and *latreia*, if only because of the ongoing debate within the Christian scholarly community. The EOB translation opted for a consistent and uniform approach, to ensure that the English reader would always be aware of the underlying Greek: *proskuneo* was translated as “to express adoration” and *latreia* as “to offer divine service.” When I subsequently researched the Arabic equivalents to these terms, I discovered that *ibādah* was fundamentally equivalent to *latreia*: an act of divine service exclusively offered to the Most-High,¹² whereas *sujud/sajda* (like *proskuneo*) conveys the idea of bowing down

¹¹ Compare for instance the translations of Mat 2:2 Act 7:7

¹² There are two possible exceptions to this statement, namely possible *latreia* offered to Jesus. The main one is Revelation 22:3 which I think refers to “him” (“God” as in Rev 7:15, compared to Rev 3:21); the second one is Daniel 7:14 LXX where “him” may indeed refer to the “Son of Man” rather than to the “Ancient of Days.”

(including with one's face on the ground) and is a broader term. As the textbook *Qur'anic Keywords: A Reference Guide* confirms:

*The essence of 'Ibadah is to perform all acts of worship and service exclusively to Allah and to obey and to follow His Commands unconditionally and always remain his slave and his servant.*¹³

Returning to God/Allah's command that Adam should receive *sujud* from the angels, most translations of the Qur'an render the verb as "prostrate:"

It is We Who created you and gave you shape; then We bade the angels prostrate to Adam, and they prostrate; not so Iblis; He refused to be of those who prostrate. (Al-A'raf, 7:11)

Like *proskuneo*, *sadja* and its derivatives have a broader range of usage, the majority of which are applied to God/Allah:

Prostrating to Allah: 2:58, 125, 149; 3:43, 113; 4:102, 154; 7:120, 161, 206; 13:15; 16:48-49; 17:107; 19:58; 20:70; 22:18, 26, 77; 25:60, 64; 26:46, 219; 32:15; 39:9; 41:37; 50:40; 53:62; 55:6; 68:42-43; 76:26; 84:21; 96:19 (also Mosque: 2:114, 144, 149-150, 187, 191, 196, 217; 5:2; 7:29, 31; 8:34; 9:7, 17-19, 28, 107-108; 17:1; 18:21; 22:25, 40; 48:25, 27; 72:18)

Prostrating to Adam: 2:34; 7:11-12; 15:29-33; 17:61; 18:50; 20:116; 38:72-73, 75; Prostrating to Joseph: 12:4, 100; Prostrating to the sun: 27:24-25

Few Christians realize that the story of God/Allah commanding the angels to prostrate to Adam is implied in the New Testament as well as part of Jewish and early Christian tradition.¹⁴ Interestingly, the verse in question uses *proskuneo*, the semantic equivalent to *sadja*:

And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him." (Hebrews 1:6; most English translations, except for the Roman Catholic NAB which reads "Let all the angels of God pay him homage" and the EOB which reads "Let all God's angels express adoration to him")

In its reference to this event, the Qur'an takes for granted prior knowledge of the ancient Biblical account which explains:

¹³ Page 91

¹⁴ Cf. *Life of Adam and Eve*

And God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness..." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. (Genesis 1:26-27)

For the Eastern Orthodox tradition, this verse is tremendously significant, and it is precisely because Adam (albeit a created being) is an icon/image of the Most-High that he is worthy of *proskuneo/sadja*, as long that the ultimate intention is to obey God/Allah as the ultimate source and therefore the ultimate receiver of the relative act of reverence). The New Testament describes Jesus as the Last Adam, and as the "image/icon of the invisible God,"¹⁵ so that Hebrews 1:6 (a citation of Deuteronomy 32:43 LXX) is applied equally to Adam and Jesus. This is point of convergence, because Muslim scholars have noted the parallelism between Adam and Jesus in the Qur'an (both are mentioned 25 times) as well as the superior attributes which it recognizes to Jesus over Adam.

Certainly, Orthodox Christians may disagree with Muslims over the *eternal* existence of Jesus as Logos/Word and his absolutely unique role as the visible image of the invisible and supremely transcendent Most-High, but a common reflection on the *ibādah* as a "Common Word" can help dispel the misunderstandings that exist not only between Muslims and Christians but also among Christians of various persuasions.

Conclusion

In this constructive reply to *A Common Word*, I have attempted to effectively answer the call for "common words between us and you" by providing examples of words that have caused confusion and equivocation, as well as candidates for constructive dialogue and convergence.

When Muslims and Christians come together to consider their sacred texts with scholarly respect, much can be accomplished.

"Honor," "respect," "Most High," "divine service (*ibādah*)" are among the Common Word candidates which I respectfully submit to my Christian and Muslim colleagues on the occasion of the 2016 Interfaith Harmony Week.

¹⁵ Cf. Colossians 1:14-16

Biography: *Laurent Cleenewerck is an author and theologian of the Eastern / Greek Orthodox Church, and the rector of the historic St Innocent Orthodox Church in Eureka, California. He is a professor of International Administration and Theology for EUCLID (Euclid University) and teaches Ecumenical Methods for the Ukrainian Catholic University (Institute of Ecumenical Studies). He is also a regular extension faculty for Humboldt State University's OLLI program. Among other qualifications, Pr Cleenewerck holds a licentiate in theology from St Sergius Institute (Paris), a master's in ecumenical studies from the Ukrainian Catholic University, and doctorate in the study of religion from the St Gregory Nazianzen Institute, which is under the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Mexico and an academic unit of the University Rural de Guatemala. He is the author of several books and served as editor of the Eastern / Greek Orthodox translation of the New Testament.*

Disclaimer: *This paper is written in a strictly private capacity. Although the author is at the time of writing an ordained presbyter in the Orthodox Church in America, now serving in the Diocese of the West of the Orthodox Church in America, this presentation does not necessarily reflect the views of my past or present bishop(s), diocese, metropolia or patriarchate and does not engage their responsibility in any way.*

Likewise, although the writer has faculty status for several institutions, this presentation does not necessarily reflect the views of the institutions, organizations, officials or governments who support these institutions and does not engage their responsibility in any way.