University of Exeter

British Council

Orthodox Christian Studies Center

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY, SEXUAL DIVERSITY & PUBLIC POLICY

EDITED BY GREGORY TUCKER & BRANDON GALLAHER

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY, SEXUAL DIVERSITY & PUBLIC POLICY

Final Report of the University of Exeter & Fordham University
British Council Bridging Voices Project, 2017–2020

Edited by Gregory Tucker & Brandon Gallaher

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to all those who participated in our project and whose contributions have enriched this report. We would also like to acknowledge the outstanding level of support and encouragement given by the staff of the British Council in Washington, DC, especially Gerald FitzGerald, Sheridan Ruiz, and Brenna Fawson.

Layout: Angelo Jesus Canta, angeloxcanta.com

On the cover: LGBTQ+ activists participate in a march past the former Church of the Saviour on Spilled Blood (now a museum) in St. Petersburg, Russia, in 2015. (AP Photo/Dmitry Lovetsky)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- This project investigated issues of sexual diversity within the Eastern Orthodox Christian tradition. These present some of the most complex and contentious questions facing the Orthodox Church today and and public debate over them is often polarised.

- Responses of the Orthodox Church to questions of sexual diversity must be contextualised within the church's distinctive theological tradition, history, and contemporary geopolitical setting, noting especially the prevalence of anti-Western sentiments today.

- The attitude of most Orthodox Christians towards issues of sexual diversity may be characterised as "conservative" in comparison with prevailing attitudes in the secular West. Despite wide consensus, there is diversity in pastoral practice and thought.

- Theologians can find it difficult to agree on the reasoning and sources that undergird received teachings and practices. For some, questions of sexual diversity are permanently settled as first principles of Orthodoxy, whereas for others they are secondary, contextual, and potentially still open.

- This project demonstrated that polarisation of discourse on controversial religious issues can be overcome through the careful construction of spaces for dialogue. This relies, above all, on a willingness of organisers not to foreclose difficult conversations.

- Civil society actors can advance the work of this project through educating themselves and others, co-operation with religious actors, enabling further deep conversations, using our project resources, promoting our project's work, and supporting further research.


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INTRODUCTION
TO THE EXETER-FORDHAM BRIDGING VOICES PROJECT & CONSORTIUM

From 2017 to 2020, scholars from the University of Exeter (UK) and the Orthodox Christian Studies Center at Fordham University (New York, USA) led a research project under the title "Contemporary Eastern Orthodox Identity and the Challenges of Pluralism and Sexual Diversity in a Secular Age," as part of the Bridging Voices initiative of the British Council. The project was funded by the British Council, Friends of the British Council, and the Henry Luce Foundation, with additional support from the Galileo Foundation.

The project investigated, within the Orthodox Christian tradition, attitudes towards LGBTQ+ persons, frameworks for the conceptualisation and expression of sexual identity, issues around the accommodation of diversity and dissent from official teachings within church communities and societies with majority Orthodox populations, and approaches to legal provisions for the protection of LGBTQ+ rights and acknowledgment of relationships (marriage/civil partnership). Questions of sexual diversity are some of the most challenging for the Orthodox Church today and are frequently the subject of polarised debate. They are iconic of the bigger challenge of how Orthodoxy will continue to develop its relationship with late-modern secular and pluralistic democracy.

The project was led by Dr Brandon Gallaher, Senior Lecturer in Systematic and Comparative Theology at the University of Exeter, England, and Prof. Aristotle Papanikolaou, Archbishop Demetrios Chair in Orthodox Theology & Culture at Fordham University, New York, together with Gregory Tucker, a research assistant at the University of Regensburg, Germany. They worked with Dr Edward Skidelsky, Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Exeter, and Prof. George Demacopoulos, Father John Meyendorff & Patterson Family Chair of Orthodox Christian Studies at Fordham University, as additional partners, and a large network of contributors, including theologians, historians, philosophers, sociologists, biological and medical researchers, psychologists and psychotherapists, cultural anthropologists, LGBTQ+ activists, and pastors, drawn from across the globe.

Productive engagement with representatives of Orthodox Christianity on issues of sex, gender, and sexuality requires an appreciation of Orthodoxy as a religious tradition with its own sense of identity and history, which differs from and is oftentimes contrasted with other Christian traditions.


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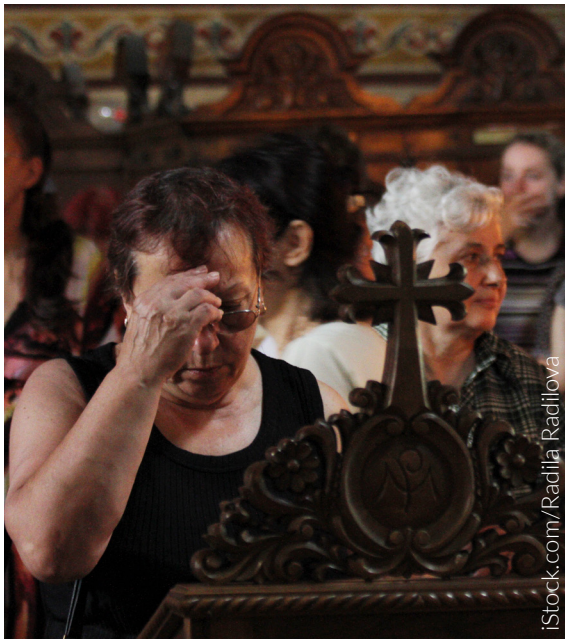
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ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY AS A DISTINCTIVE RELIGIOUS TRADITION

ESSENTIAL BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE FOR POLICY MAKERS

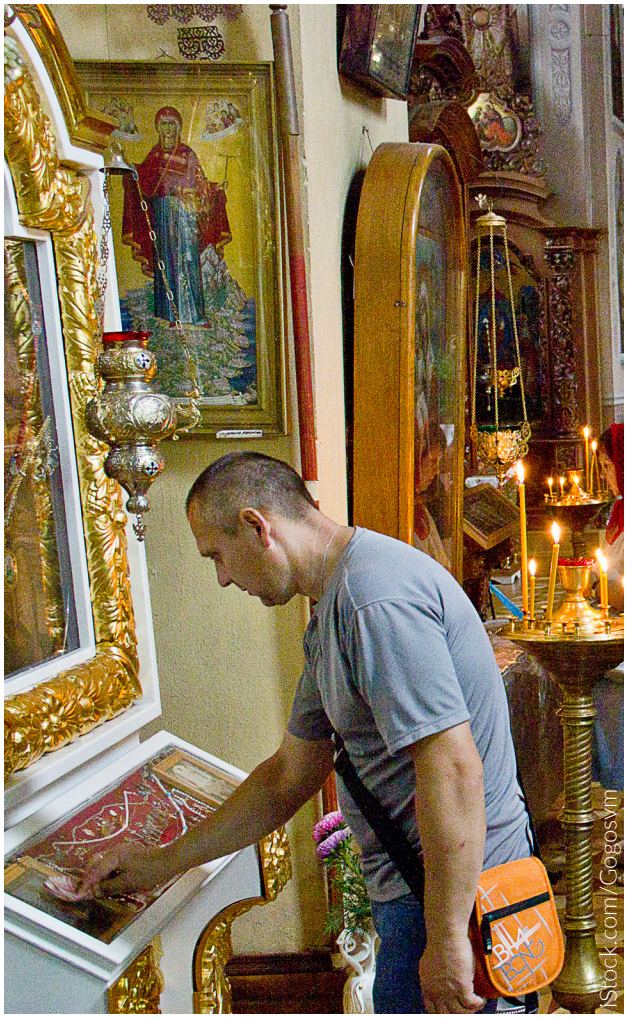
The Orthodox Church considers itself to bear uniquely faithful witness to the ultimate revelation of God in Jesus Christ. This good news ("gospel") is understood as a way of life that is disclosed perfectly and eternally in the person of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, and continues to be lived by the saints. Orthodoxy is concerned overwhelmingly with *praxis* (prayer, worship, ascetic discipline, charity), which leads to the reorientation of the human being in right relationship with God. This Orthodox "way" is also thematised as *doctrine*, explicit statements of "right belief." Doctrine and praxis are intimately related, since spiritual growth depends upon right belief and right belief emerges from right worship. Belief, worship, and "daily life" are inseparably intertwined.

The Orthodox Church treasures the Scriptures (the Bible), which are regarded as words of life, the meaning of which is not self-evident but revealed within the life of the church. Thus, the Scriptures are ultimately understandable only with certain hermeneutic keys that are transmitted as part of the apostolic tradition. They are proclaimed and interpreted especially in the liturgy.

The Orthodox Church maintains a highly developed ritual system, which is, for most believers, the touchstone of their religious life. It includes a rich cycle of feasts and fasts, the observation of which extends well beyond the church walls into daily life.

The church's liturgical life is presided over by hierarchically differentiated ministers (bishops, priests, deacons, etc.), who also bear responsibility for teaching and pastoral care. As successors to the apostles, bishops are privileged bearers and interpreters of this holy tradition. Orthodoxy places emphasis on the faithful transmission of tradition, preserving a continuity of teaching within the church, the body of Christ.

Orthodoxy today has been shaped by a series of modern "revivals" of various aspects of its life: of theology, characterised by a return to the sources of the tradition, rejection of Western secular modernity, and an emphasis on the continuity of tradition; of aesthetics, with an emphasis on pre-modern iconography and music; of ascetic life, seen in a rejuvenation of monasticism, an emphasis on rigorous discipline, and a confidence in the authority of spiritual "elders"; and of liturgy, with a return in some places to frequent communion of the laity.



Many churches are referred to as "Orthodox" but they are not a united or uniform group and cannot be approached as an undifferentiated whole. The largest Orthodox subgroup is the close-knit family of churches often known as "Eastern Orthodox." The second largest subgroup consists of the somewhat more loosely aligned "Oriental Orthodox" (e.g. Armenian, Ethiopian, Coptic) churches. There are also various small, independent groups that apply the name "Orthodox" to themselves. Each of these groups and their constituent churches has a distinctive history and culture and different priorities and concerns in the contemporary world. This report concerns the "Eastern Orthodox" family of churches.

The Eastern Orthodox Church is one of the largest Christian bodies in the world today, with over 200 million members. It is organised as a family of self-governing churches that regard themselves (individually and collectively) as the "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church" named in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, a statement of faith composed in the fourth century that remains definitive for many churches (including the [Roman] Catholic Church and the Church of England) to the present day. In short, the Orthodox Church regards itself simply as *the* Church, the sole authentic and legitimate inheritor of the tradition handed down by the apostles of Jesus Christ.

The Orthodox Church is catholic in the root sense of the word (from Greek *katholikē*, meaning "universal") and, indeed, shares much in common with the (Roman) Catholic Church in terms of history, doctrine, and practice, but the two groups also differ in important ways. Crucially for those who wish to engage with representatives of the Orthodox Church, Orthodox Christians do not accept the universal jurisdiction of the Pope and have no equivalent figure, though the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople is *de jure* the highest-ranking bishop and the Patriarch of Moscow appears to many as *de facto* leader, as the primate of the largest local church with great political influence. Orthodoxy also lacks a central administrative agency (like the Vatican) with

authority and power to effect change and impose discipline. Consequently, Orthodox ecclesiastical culture is considerable more diverse and localised. In practice, local churches often align themselves broadly with the leadership of Constantinople or Moscow, for a variety of historical and contemporary geopolitical reasons, but over recent decades some churches (e.g. in Serbia, Romania, and Georgia) have begun to chart their own course.

Although the Orthodox Church is separated from the (Roman) Catholic Church, it is also not Protestant. The division of Christianity into Catholic and Protestant, familiar to many Westerners, simply does not apply to Orthodoxy. The split between (Roman) Catholicism and Orthodoxy predates the Protestant Reformation by many centuries and, in many respects, is less pronounced especially since the modernisation of Catholicism that was effected by the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). Moreover, although much within the Orthodox Church has changed and developed over the centuries, and there have been local and limited instances of conscious reform and renewal, the Orthodox Church has never experienced a wholesale and far-reaching revolution such as convulsed Christianity in central Europe beginning in the fifteenth century with the Reformation. Likewise, while Orthodoxy is markedly de-centralised in comparison with (Roman) Catholicism, it is considerably more cohesive than the Protestant churches with regards to doctrine, polity, and praxis.

There are currently fourteen universally recognised autocephalous Eastern Orthodox churches (which are self-governing but interdependent and ultimately seek unity with the one another), two autocephalous Orthodox churches whose status is only partially accepted, and a number of autonomous Orthodox churches, which are ultimately dependent upon a "Mother Church" but operate with a large degree of self-determination (see Appendix).

For much of the twentieth century, the traditionally Orthodox lands were largely subject to Soviet rule, directly or via satellite regimes. Although religion was sometimes tolerated or even encouraged, it was more often suppressed or persecuted. There was widespread collaboration between religious and political actors, with clergy sometimes operating as government agents. Following the collapse of Communism, Orthodoxy has experienced a renaissance in many Eastern European countries, but their initial embrace of Western values, including freedom of religion, has largely given way to anti-Western attitudes. Liberal values are associated with the end of traditional ways of life (including family structures), radical individualism, secularism, and a rapacious capitalism that has not benefited all equally. An anti-Western politics has emerged, in which the Orthodox Church now finds itself increasingly enlisted as a bulwark against liberal secularism, and this often manifests itself in an opposition to sexual diversity.

Orthodoxy today is caught conceptually between the late-modern Western world that it inhabits as an institution existing in nation states and a pre-modern Eastern "lost world" to which it habitually returns as a point of reference. This lost world is encountered perhaps most directly in the Byzantine liturgical services, which presume and bear a pre-modern "liturgical consciousness," but also in the language of doctrinal formulae, disciplinary norms, and received cultural practices. An authentic and dynamic future for Orthodoxy in response to Western modernity and its challenges—including, but not limited to sexual diversity—will best be served through active engagement of non-Orthodox with Orthodoxy as a distinctive lived religious tradition.

STATUS QUO:
SEXUAL DIVERSITY IN CONTEMPORARY ORTHODOX DISCOURSE

Orthodox thought on moral questions is contained in diverse sources, which are often of an occasional nature and have only rarely been granted official, let alone universal, status. Furthermore, the Orthodox Church as a whole has not systematised or updated its approach to moral teachings and practices in modernity in the way that many other Christian groups have. This can make it difficult to speak of a unified, let alone univocal, tradition and to identify its sources concretely. There is a tendency among Orthodox pastors to allow for circumstantial discernment and a degree of leniency ("pastoral economy") with regard to the application of moral norms, according to particular life situations and in order that the faith of believers not be shattered by rigourism. Nevertheless, one can identify wide consensus, reflected in the statements of hierarchs, on many topics.

In broad terms, the attitude of most Orthodox Christians today towards issues of sexual identity and practice, gender, and sex, could be characterised as "conservative" in comparison with prevailing attitudes in the secular West. With some exceptions, the Orthodox Church is committed to moral norms that were defined in pre-modernity. Norms of sexual behaviour and gender expression are only one area in which Orthodox teaching and discipline diverges from that of modern secular societies.

So far, Orthodox leaders have largely been unpersuaded to adapt their moral teachings under the influence of the new secular Western consensus. Thus, broadly speaking, the Orthodox churches agree that:

- gender identity is biologically determined in accordance with sex;
- gender should be expressed in conformity with (Orthodox) cultural norms;
- certain activities within church life are restricted according to gender;
- marriage is the natural union of one male and one female for life;
- marriages can fail as a result of sin and remarriage may be permitted;
- sex is permissible only within marriage;
- sex acts should generally have procreative potential (opinion varies somewhat);
- sexual activity should generally be ascetically regulated, even within marriage;
- temptation to sexual sin afflicts all and must be resisted by all;
- "natural" inclination to prohibited sexual acts is not permissive.

Common examples of the effects of these teachings in practice are that:

- permitted sexual activity is forbidden to all during periods of fasting and in preparation for Holy Communion, subject to discernment with a spiritual guide;
- artificial contraception is frowned upon (although it is permitted in some contexts, so long as it is not abortifacient);
- periods of excommunication, fasting, prostrations, and other ascetic labours are sometimes assigned as therapies for sexual incontinence and/or deviance;
- heterosexual marriage and childbearing/rearing are very often encouraged and assumed to be the norm for those who do not choose to become monastics;
- participation in church life is habitually organised according to a binary model of gender (e.g. only men may be ordained; women may not ordinarily enter the sanctuary of the church or touch holy objects);
- LGBTQ+ self-identification is held in suspicion, denied, or regarded as itself sinful;
- those who identify openly as LGBTQ+ are usually debarred from leadership positions, even when sexually abstinent, and experience active hostility within many communities;
- sex acts between persons of the same gender are absolutely prohibited, even within committed monogamous relationships;
- in practice, sexually abstinent committed (romantic) relationships between persons of the same gender are usually discouraged if not forbidden, even though theoretically permissible;
- there is no recognition of same-sex marriage or civil partnership;
- trans experience and identity is often pathologised, transitioning (even without medical intervention) is prohibited, and there is no recognition of new gender identities.

The Orthodox Church generally presents its teachings and disciplines on these issues as simply a restatement of its universal tradition, which now stands in contrast to prevailing secular norms. The authority of the Bible and the "Fathers" (theologians) is habitually invoked to support the idea that the church's disciplines on matters of gender, sex, and sexuality are part of a complete package that must be accepted as a whole without scrutiny. The faithfulness, holiness, and consistency of Orthodox teaching is frequently contrasted with confusion and chaos arising out of secular modernity, and many Orthodox present themselves as an embattled Christian remnant, which secular governments and "the gay lobby" wish to extinguish. As discussed above, issues of sexuality and gender are often framed by a broader opposition to "the West" in contemporary Orthodox discourse.

The Orthodox Church's decentralised polity, its lack of systematised moral theology, and its contextual approach to individual spiritual discernment means that there is a spectrum of opinion and practice on some issues (e.g. use of contraception). However, commitment to the mainstream "conservative" teachings and disciplines of the Orthodox Church on issues of gender and sexuality is strong among both clerics and lay people. Those clergy who express dissenting views (even when framed only in terms of compassion towards suffering individuals) frequently experience public condemnation if not official censure. Orthodox church leaders are active in promoting "traditional values" and opposing the extension of legal protections to LGBTQ+ persons in the civic sphere. In countries with sizeable Orthodox populations, the church has often been effective in leveraging political power to prevent the recognition of same-sex relationships, for example, despite strong political pressure from without. LGBTQ+ persons continue to experience significant social rejection, discrimination, and violence in many majority-Orthodox countries, where the church is silent concerning their suffering.

Although this picture is overwhelmingly representative of the status quo on issues of sexual diversity throughout the Orthodox Church, especially in traditionally Orthodox countries, it is possible to register a minority report. Individuals and small groups at all levels within the church have begun to explore the church's theology and history more critically and, in a few places, in a discreet and tentative way, new approaches are beginning to be put into pastoral practice. Some pastors exercise functional inclusion of LGBTQ+ persons while maintaining official teachings when pressed to do so and a very small number of communities practice open inclusion. In some larger cities, "LGBTQ+ friendly" parishes exist with the knowledge of the bishop and permission for the priest to extend as much pastoral and sacramental care as possible (e.g. by permitting LGBTQ+ members to serve on the parish council or by baptising children adopted by same-sex couples). At least one autonomous local Orthodox Church allows the celebration of a service of thanksgiving ("doxology") for same-sex couples in civil marriages and integrates LGBTQ+ persons in many of its communities.

DEVELOPING A RESPECTFUL DIALOGUE:

PROJECT GOALS & ACHIEVEMENTS

Two distinct but inseparable goals guided the development of the Exeter-Fordham Bridging Voices project: the first was the clarification, articulation, and discussion of the theology and discipline of the Orthodox Church with regards to matters of sex, gender, and sexuality; the second was the contextualisation and exploration of the church's teaching and practice in relation to secular, pluralistic political frameworks. These goals required the constant negotiation and translation of different discourses in order to avoid the reductiveness and incomprehension that can characterise interactions between representatives of religious and secular traditions on topics related to sexual diversity.

The first goal was set because, although the stance of the Orthodox Church is frequently asserted with confidence and supported by the claim that it has been univocally taught from the beginning, there are, in fact, significant historical and theological questions yet to be answered. One reason for this is that many topics in theological anthropology have not been definitively addressed by the Orthodox Church. Another reason is that issues of sexual ac-

tivity have generally been handled in a circumstantial way with considerable local variation in practice and without comprehensive documentation or theological reflection. The third reason is that much of the framework and vocabulary that is assumed in contemporary (secular) discourse on gender and sexuality has only been developed in recent decades and centuries, and the sources of the Orthodox tradition cannot be used responsibly to respond to it without a considerable effort at conceptual alignment. Therefore, an urgent task for the Orthodox Church today is a searching and truthful investigation of its own complex, sometimes contradictory, tradition.

Attitudes towards issues of sexuality and gender vary considerably and even those who are in broad agreement often disagree about the grounds on which that is the case.

The second goal was set because the greatest tensions over issues of sexuality and gender seem to emerge in contexts in which pluralistic political frameworks establish rights and privileges for LGBTQ+ persons contrary to the teachings and disciplines of the Orthodox Church. Where Orthodox Christianity is a minority tradition, opposition to the protection of the rights of LGBTQ+ persons, extension of the recognition of relationships as marriages or civil partnerships to same-sex couples, and provision for transitioning at the cost of the public health system often takes the form of vociferous protest and embrace of "religious exceptions" clauses in legislation. Where Orthodox Christianity is a majority tradition with significant political influence, the church often acts to block all such efforts. An essential task, with implications for actors in multiple arenas, is therefore the exploration of how the Orthodox Church can and should act with respect to questions of basic human rights and how the concerns of Orthodox Christians can be ex-

pressed in such a way that they can be meaningfully heard by secular actors and not simply bracketed as an inscrutable and baseless religious opinion that need only be tolerated through exceptions to legislation for religious organisations.

Much of the project was directed towards enabling respectful but honest and deep conversations along these lines. It thus included two digital workshops with approximately twenty participants each, a public lecture by Brandon Gallaher followed by a panel discussion in New York, and an intensive weekend workshop in Oxford, with some fifty participants drawn from around the world. Considerable energy was expended on securing participants from a wide range of disciplines, churches, and ecclesial statuses (lay and ordained) who represent the full spectrum of opinions on issues of sexual diversity within the Orthodox tradition as well as the full spectrum of roles within the church. This presented the principal challenge to the success of the project, since the explosive nature of this discourse in public contexts and the commitment of the project consortium to a balanced exchange deterred many from accepting an invitation to participate.

The most significant achievement of the project therefore lies in the successful execution of its events and the quality of conversation that transpired. In particular, the weekend conference in Oxford demonstrated decisively that thoughtful and far-reaching discourse is possible on very complex topics, within a polarised group, when a framework that promotes respect and equality of participation is established and when the outcome of discussion is not foreclosed. The open-ended nature of the dialogue and insistence of the project leaders that there should be no "final joint statement" enabled a transparent and, at times, raw exchange between participants.

Pages 14–15: The 2019 Belgrade Pride march passes the iconic Church of Saint Sava, while anti-LGBTQ+ protesters at a counter-demonstration are held back by armed police. For the fifth consecutive year, the day unfolded without violence between the two groups. (Photos: iStock.com/BalkansCat)

The project meetings demonstrated the presupposition of the consortium leaders, that attitudes towards issues of sexuality and gender vary considerably between Orthodox experts in various fields, and even those who are in broad agreement about whether any given discipline should be maintained often disagree about the grounds on which that is the case.

The meetings also showed the value of enabling "unofficial" dialogue hosted by academics who are nonetheless involved in ecclesiastical life on controversial social issues. Although a large number of clergy took part in the meetings (some of whom occupy "higher" positions in the Orthodox hierarchy), none did so in their capacity as a representative of the church. Moreover, the meetings took place under the Chatham House Rule and, though this undoubtedly raises questions and challenges of its own, it also permitted an unusually frank exchange.

Finally, the project yielded a number of resources available to the public. A lengthy interim report, *Eastern Orthodoxy & Sexual Diversity: Perspectives and Challenges from the Modern West*, attempts to capture the variety of opinions currently held on questions of sexual diversity and to place debates over these particular issues within the context of the history and intellectual traditions of Orthodoxy. This is available to download for free online. Furthermore, two videos provide insight into the Oxford conference and capture something of the eirenic spirit that it was possible to harness and utilise in the service of genuine dialogue.

^ Participants in the project's residential conference in Oxford, England, 16–19 August 2019.

LET'S TALK:
AFTERLIFE OF THE PROJECT & PUBLIC POLICY

What can civil society actors learn from this project about how to work with Orthodox communities on issues of sexual diversity and gender?

EDUCATE YOURSELVES AND OTHERS

This project has underscored the distinctiveness of Eastern Orthodoxy as a religious tradition. Civil society actors should learn about the ethos, teaching, and history of Orthodoxy. They should seek to identify resources *within* its tradition that can respond to the reality of sexual diversity and adopt familiar language where possible. They should enable education in this spirit within Orthodox contexts, especially those in which a direct connection to the complex living tradition was severed and Orthodoxy has been revived in recent decades.

Educated civil society actors will avoid stereotyping Orthodoxy and traditionally Orthodox cultures on LGBTQ+ issues and appreciate Orthodoxy's nuances and diversity: Orthodoxy is "conservative" but not monolithically so. The Orthodox Church and Orthodox cultures must not be Orientalised or Othered.

CO-OPERATE WITH RELIGIOUS ACTORS

Civil society actors should seek out Orthodox religious actors who acknowledge a nuanced understanding of their own religious tradition. This will enable them to better assess and negotiate with institutional Orthodoxy, which is widely portrayed as resolutely conservative and monocultural. These Orthodox religious actors would be sympathetic to many, if not all, of the goals of civil society actors with respect to ensuring civil protections for LGBTQ+ persons, even if there remain profound ideological differences.

Co-operative Orthodox actors can also help facilitate dialogue with institutional representatives of local and national Orthodox communities, since they often have personal relationships with high-ranking clerics and key lay educators and leaders. Orthodox personal networks are often close-knit and it is crucial to connect with them in order to overcome skepticism towards Western civil society actors among Orthodox and the mutual antagonism that characterises many interactions.

Civil society actors should seek to build their own networks of trusted Orthodox actors with reliable knowledge and trustworthy judgment, who can help them to interpret and navigate the complex realities on the ground.

ENABLE DEEP CONVERSATION

Civil society actors should enable conversations on issues of sexual diversity amongst those Orthodox religious actors who wish to engage in a constructive upbuilding of civil society. This project enabled a respectful dialogue between "conservative" and "progressive" Orthodox voices that proved beyond doubt that there is more nuance within Eastern Orthodoxy on issues of sexual diversity than usually thought and portrayed in official statements.

An Orthodox LGBTQ+ activist participates in Belgrade Pride 2019, carrying a reproduction icon in which the traditional golden halos have been replaced with rainbows. This gesture proved to be highly controversial and the activist, who had contributed earlier in the same year to the Exeter–Fordham project, was sued for inciting hatred and violence against religious communities. Although his action was not connected with the project, the image was leveraged against it in a vicious online campaign by opponents of open dialogue on LGBTQ+ issues and Orthodoxy, leading to threats of violence against the activist and project leaders. Regrettably, similar behaviour has become the norm as conservative forces within global Orthodoxy (often led by Russia) seek to control the discourse. (AP Photo/Darko Vojinovic)

Orthodoxy is not monolithic, despite it being predominantly conservative in character, and civil society actors can play an important role in enabling the full spectrum of opinions to be expressed openly. This requires a bold spirit that gives space to all views, without judgment and without censure. Through encounters that permit the clashing of voices, Orthodox communities can work towards constructive responses to the challenges of Western modernity, including but not limited to sexual diversity. They must be empowered to construct modern identities and alternative secularities for themselves, in dynamic continuity with Western modernity and secularity, with respect for sexual diversity, but equally in continuity with their own histories, traditions, and cultures, re-envisioned for late modernity.

USE OUR PROJECT'S RESOURCES

In addition to building relationships with the leaders of this project, its participants, and other religious actors, civil society actors should make use of the resources that we have generated. These include a long Interim Report, which brings together important background information, a thorough assessment of questions of sexual diversity in Orthodoxy today, and some unedited contributions from project participants representing a diversity of views. We have also worked on two documentary films chronicling our groundbreaking meeting in Oxford in August 2019, which offer a clear clear presentation of our work and evidence that Orthodox religious actors are not universally opponents of LGBTQ+ rights.

PROMOTE OUR PROJECT'S WORK

Civil society actors often have greater access to promotional resources (media and social media) than academic religious actors and can help to promote and translate messages that emerge from projects such as this. Leveraging of media and social media to highlight complexity and diversity within religious traditions helps to challenge views

of religion that perceive it as entirely authoritarian and closed to discussion, and to reshape narratives that pit religious and secular values against one another.

EXPAND OUR PROJECT'S MODEL

The model that we have developed for intensive dialogue on complex religious questions with a view to civil society outcomes can be replicated for other issues and traditions. Indeed, our August 2019 conference is being used already as the pattern for a major international meeting at the Institut Catholique de Paris in July 2021 on "Catholic Theology and Homosexuality." Civil society actors should seek opportunities to enable projects on a similar model that are designed and operated by experts in the field; the participation of religious actors as directors of such initiatives is crucial if the traditions that are being engaged are to accept and take ownership of their outcomes.

Engaging Orthodox religious actors makes an essential, constructive, and positive difference to thinking through policy outcomes with respect to LGBTQ+ rights.

SPONSOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Public and private research funding should continue to be directed towards enabling gatherings modelled on our Oxford conference and greater co-operation between civil society groups and research initiatives similar to our project. Projects that encourage better understanding of Orthodoxy and facilitate deeper relationships between religious and civil actors ultimately benefit the cause of LGBTQ+ rights in traditional Orthodox countries and in diaspora communities, even when religious actors and communities maintain received stances and disciplines.

Furthermore, funding bodies should look to support the expansion of the horizon of the present project from the issue of sexual diversity alone to a whole host of interconnected contemporary modern challenges. Two of the directors of this project, Brandon Gallaher and Gregory Tucker, have outlined a major new research project under the title "Fathoming Orthodox Christian Identity: Questions & Challenges from Late Modernity for a Liturgical Pre-Modern Tradition," for which they are now seeking funding. It will address the most controversial social issues facing the Orthodox Church, which has arrived at a moment of crisis. It will be unique in scope, scale, and interdisciplinary ambition, and will build on this project by developing complex and controversial dialogues within a complex and fractured context. It has the potential to shape global Orthodox discourse for the next generation, informing policy makers interested in Orthodoxy and traditionally Orthodox societies in Eastern Europe on a variety of related modern challenges.

In short, the message of this project to civil society actors is that engaging Orthodox religious actors makes an essential, constructive, and positive difference to thinking through policy outcomes with respect to LGBTQ+ rights vis-à-vis Orthodoxy and Orthodox majority countries.

APPENDIX:
EASTERN ORTHODOX CHURCHES

AUTOCEPHALOUS CHURCHES
Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, Patriarchate of Alexandria*, Patriarchate of Antioch*, Patriarchate of Jerusalem*, Church of Russia, Church of Serbia, Church of Romania, Church of Bulgaria, Church of Georgia, Church of Cyprus, Church of Greece, Church of Poland, Church of Albania, Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia

** habitually preface their name with "Greek Orthodox" in order to self-differentiate from non-Eastern Orthodox churches bearing the same name (e.g. "Syriac Orthodox" Patriarchate of Antioch)*

AUTOCEPHALOUS CHURCHES (DISPUTED CANONICAL STATUS)
Orthodox Church in America, Orthodox Church of Ukraine

AUTONOMOUS CHURCHES (INCLUDING PATRIARCHAL EXARCHATES)
Monastic Republic of Mount Athos (Ecumenical Patriarchate), Church of Sinai (Jerusalem Patriarchate), Church of Finland (Ecumenical Patriarchate), Antiochian Archdiocese of North America (Patriarchate of Antioch), Belarussian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), Latvian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), Archbishopric of Ohrid (Serbian Patriarchate), Metropolis of Bessarabia (Romanian Patriarchate), Metropolis of the Americas (Romanian Patriarchate)

AUTONOMOUS CHURCHES (DISPUTED CANONICAL STATUS)
Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church (Ecumenical Patriarchate), Ukrainian Orthodox Church—Moscow Patriarchate, Church of Japan (Moscow Patriarchate), Church of China (Moscow Patriarchate), Moldovan Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), Archdiocese of Russian Orthodox Churches in Western Europe (Moscow Patriarchate)

SEMI-AUTONOMOUS CHURCHES
Church of Crete (Ecumenical Patriarchate), Estonian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (Moscow Patriarchate)

FURTHER READING

Brandon Gallaher and Gregory Tucker, eds., *Eastern Orthodoxy and Sexual Diversity: Perspectives on Challenges from the Modern West* (2019). Interim report of the Exeter-Fordham Bridging Voices Project. <https://www.fordham.edu/download/downloads/id/14010/BV_Report.pdf>

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