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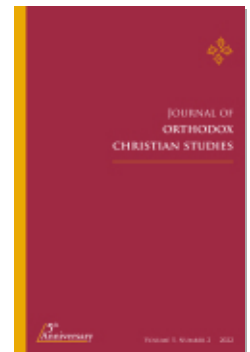
*Pilgrims toward the Kingdom: The Beginnings of the
International Orthodox Theological Association* ed. by Paul
L. Gavriilyuk (review)

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for the past and a desire to understand and preserve it.

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Paul L. Gavriilyuk, ed. *Pilgrims toward the Kingdom: The Beginnings of the International Orthodox Theological Association*. St. Paul, MN: IOTA Publications, 2020. 245 pp.

With sufficient discernment that includes requisite testing over time, every manifestation of the Holy Spirit has the same result: a palpable experience of communion with the Holy Trinity among the chosen people of God. “The Spirit blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes” (John 3:8). This communion is what I experienced as a participant in the inaugural conference of the International Orthodox Theological Association (IOTA) in Iași, Romania, in early January 2019. The hospitality of the Orthodox Church of Romania provided a warm and loving environment in the midst of cold and snow. Now, after reading *Pilgrims toward the Kingdom: The Beginnings of the International Orthodox Theological Association*, I have a greater awareness of and appreciation for the breadth and depth of the theological enterprise at all levels. How rare to find so much of relevance to the global church’s encounter with contemporary life in one volume.

As the book attests, IOTA is barely five years old, deriving inspiration from the Holy and Great Council of Crete in 2016, which energized its founder, Dr. Paul Gavriilyuk, and his key cohorts, Drs. Gayle Woloschak and Carrie Frederick Frost. IOTA follows in the line of other movements (such as *Syndesmos*, the World Fellowship of Orthodox Youth) that bring members of the disparate, worldwide Orthodox communion together for fellowship, collaboration, and

service. Clearly and crisply, *Pilgrims toward the Kingdom* describes in extensive detail the search for episcopal blessing and guidance, diverse support from both theologians and institutions, and the slow, deliberative process of preparing for the first international conference.

In well-chosen words and lavish photos, *Pilgrims* documents the genesis, development, and tangible initial results of a unifying, responsible ministry that holds great promise. All too often, as some note in the book (which includes well-placed testimonials), academic organizations and conferences remain in the ivory tower, with experts speaking technical language that only others in their guild can decipher. While theological discourse can be highly refined, this volume clarifies and illustrates the explicit intention and development of IOTA to connect the realm of theological and scholarly research with the actual life of the Orthodox Church today in all its varied contexts—traditional Orthodox lands and burgeoning new areas, developed and developing countries, areas of great social freedom and those with significant limitations, if not threats. After all, this is what theology is supposed to do, and it is to the credit of IOTA to pull it off with nearly three hundred scholars from over forty countries.

The book centers on the inaugural conference theme, “Pan-Orthodox Unity and Conciliarity.” Everyone will benefit from the keynote address by Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, long regarded as one of the foremost Orthodox theologians in the world (87–104). In an insightful yet honest way, he articulates both the problems and the promise of unity and conciliarity in Orthodoxy today, sometimes with wry humor and acute observations of our own actual record in the last century.

IOTA seeks not just to foster collaboration between distinct areas of theology but also to incorporate the sciences, literature, and the arts with an inclusive embrace that reaches out to all who claim to be Orthodox

and to those who study Orthodoxy. In an era when so many scholars from Western Christian traditions are studying the Christian East, here is a nascent global Orthodox ministry capable of responding to the thirst of our own members, as well as others beyond our canonical boundaries. The “Group Vision Statements” (20–69) reflect some of contemporary Orthodoxy’s strengths and growth areas. Biblical studies, for example, remains less well developed than dogmatic theology or patristics. Canon law and pastoral theology are quite brief, though fortunately there are plenty of pastoral possibilities in other areas, such as theological anthropology, ecumenical relations, and missions. Critical contemporary issues stand out, reflected in groups such as international relations, the public square and media, political theology, religion and science, and women in the Orthodox Church. This includes the desire to form two more distinct groups—one on literature and another on the environment in view of the climate crisis (227). Such engagements are vital, since Orthodox discourse on newer, contentious matters can easily descend into slogans and caricatures (think, for example, of evolution and creation) rather than critical research and thoughtful reflection that engages various perspectives.

More broadly, a common thread in *Pilgrims* underlies the work of IOTA and surfaces regularly: the power of critical thinking that does not just apply the best standards of scholarship to exploring the rich and diverse heritage of the Orthodox Church at all levels—biblical, historical, theological, cultural, social, environmental—but also includes the willingness (all too often absent in prevailing Church culture) for self-critique, not just of the past (such as empire) but also of the present (such as the writing of notable theologians). As a pastor laboring in the field of parish ministry for thirty-five years who has worked to keep one foot in the world of the academy, I was especially sensitive to the many and varied contributions that reflect the impact of IOTA’s mission and work for clergy and people in local contexts.

Finally, this book reports important observations from engaged ecumenical observers, since IOTA seeks to dialogue with Western culture in a way that is both appreciative and critical. Two things stand out: the absence of addressing the movement of Christianity from its long-standing base in the Northern Hemisphere to the South; and the absence of dealing with changes in Western culture, given that many in younger generations are not just abandoning an identity in the church of their upbringing but also questioning faith itself. I look forward to IOTA taking such loving criticism to heart and, through its beautifully designed working groups, tackling these and other issues.

In profound gratitude for the heavy spade work that has been done by the ever-expanding circle that is IOTA, I heartily recommend this volume for all who wish to learn more, not just about the cutting edge of traditional areas of Orthodox study—like Scripture, liturgy, and theology—but also contemporary issues, such as women, social media, politics, science, humanity, and the environment. I encourage clergy, theologians, and devoted laypeople to take such vital information from mind into heart, and then utilize the process, results, and promise of IOTA for themselves before sharing word of this organization and its first publication with others.

Blow, Spirit, blow, so that, by God’s grace, this “iota not pass from the Law until all is accomplished” (Matt 5:18).

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Kathleen Gallagher Elkins. *Mary, Mother of Martyrs: How Motherhood Became Self-Sacrifice in Early Christianity. Feminist Studies in Religion Books 4.* Indianapolis, IN: Dog Ear Publishing, 2018. 178 pp.

With both past and present notions of motherhood fixed in her sights, Kathleen Gallagher Elkins rejects caricatures of self-giving