



UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA
COLLEGE *and* GRADUATE SCHOOL *of* ARTS & SCIENCES

ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN STUDIES CHALLENGE



The Department of Religious Studies at the University of Virginia seeks to fix Orthodox Christianity permanently in the curriculum.

The Department of Religious Studies at the University of Virginia is the largest in North America and widely regarded as one of the most desirable places to teach and learn. The Department takes pride in teaching each religious tradition in all of its historical density and cultural, political and theological complexity. Course offerings in Orthodoxy at UVa contribute greatly to studies of theology, and the opportunities for interdisciplinary learning are significant. UVa is currently a leader in the field of Orthodox Christian studies, and with financial support, UVa is poised to become the only major research institution with a commitment to this critically important field.

Christianity is the world's largest religion, and within Christianity, Eastern Orthodoxy is, after Roman Catholicism, the second largest faith community. There are nearly 300 million adherents to Orthodox Christianity worldwide. It is shocking that Orthodox Christianity, which Pope John Paul II referred to as "the other lung of the church," is largely untaught and unacknowledged in most religious studies departments in the United States. This omission is particularly troubling given the importance of students understanding current political and cultural dynamics in the Middle East, Eastern Europe, Russia and Africa.

UVa made a bold move in filling this void when it recruited Professor Vigen Guroian to the Department of Religious Studies in 2008. In five short years, Professor Guroian has made Orthodox Christianity a vital part of the religious studies curriculum. His breadth of expertise has enabled him to teach a variety of courses in ethics, theology, history, literature and iconography. UVa is now one of the few universities in the U.S. offering MA's and PhD's focused on Orthodoxy. Professor Guroian's undergraduate classes have long wait lists, and in 2011 he received the Student Council's Distinguished Teaching Award, a high honor demonstrating the impact of his teaching on the lives of students.

When he came to UVa, Professor Guroian brought seed funding to undertake a major library acquisitions project. The goal of this project, called "Paradosis," was to create a unique and comprehensive collection of Orthodox Christian books at UVa to be used by students and scholars alike. Thanks to Paradosis, UVa's library now contains one of the best collections of Orthodox materials in the English-speaking world. With grant funding, Professor Guroian and his graduate students have put Paradosis online as a fully searchable, annotated electronic bibliography available to the world.

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The Department of Religious Studies seeks philanthropic support to continue the excellence of the Orthodoxy program at UVa. A private foundation has issued a challenge whereby it will match gifts to the program dollar-for-dollar up to \$45,000 per year for the next two years. Donors who make gifts to meet this match, by restricting their donation to "Orthodox Christian Studies at UVa," will be recognized in annual giving societies at the University. For example, a gift of \$2,500 would be honored with participation in the Rotunda Society at the University and a gift of \$25,000 would put the donor at the prestigious Dome Level.

Ultimately, the Department of Religious Studies seeks to endow a permanent position and program in Orthodox Christian Studies, to ensure its ongoing impact on studies of theology and a myriad of interdisciplinary fields, from ecology to art history. The Mormon Church recently raised such an endowment at UVa, and the Roman Catholic Church is in full fundraising mode for its own endowment. The future implications of such an endowment are immeasurable. Already, five of the nation's leading Orthodox priests have UVa degrees, and UVa undergraduates are pursuing graduate degrees in theology at other elite institutions. Students of Professor Guroian testify to the profound ways in which his teaching has made Orthodoxy a central part of their lives, regardless of their profession.

A gift to Orthodox Christianity at UVa will leverage the impact of the program and benefit countless students at the University for years to come. To make a gift, please contact Liz Blaine in the Development Office for the College of Arts and Sciences:

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