

PAPERS AND PUBLICATION

Those who wish to present a paper should send a summary (400–500 words) by email to St. Andrew's Institute by 1 October 2019. The Organizing Committee selects papers for the Conference and sends invitations to the speakers. The full texts of all selected papers will have to be submitted by 1 December 2019. The working languages of the conference will be Russian and English.

Papers are scheduled for 20 minutes each. Some of the papers will be published in St. Andrew's quarterly *Pages: Theology, Culture, Education*. The registration form can be found on St. Andrew's website www.standrews.ru. Registrations, summaries and papers should be sent to:

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ORGANIZATION AND ACCOMMODATION

The Conference will assemble on Wednesday, 11 December for the opening ceremony in the evening. Participants will depart after breakfast on Saturday, 14 December. The organizers can assist the speakers in finding suitable accommodation in Moscow. Some scholarships to cover part of the cost of participation in the conference might be available upon request.

St. Andrew's Biblical Theological Institute

PATRONS: METROPOLITAN KALLISTOS OF DIOKLEIA, LORD RICHARD HARRIES,
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POKROVSKIE VOROTA
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Invitation and Call for Papers

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

RELIGION AND LIBERALISM

11–14 December 2019
Moscow, Russia

Visit our web-site
WWW.STANDREWS.RU

THEME OF THE CONFERENCE

Liberalism is a political doctrine that takes protecting and enhancing the freedom of the individual to be the central problem of politics. Modern liberalism seems to have originated as a defensive reaction to the horrors of the wars of religion of the 16th century, but its roots can be traced back to ancient times. Liberalism is the culmination of developments in Western society that produced a sense of the importance of human individuality, a liberation of the individual from complete subservience to the group (clan, tribe, kingdom, etc.), which was the case throughout much of history. Liberals may espouse a wide array of views, but they generally support human and civil rights, democracy, secularism, gender and racial equality, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of religion, and free markets.

How should religion relate to liberalism and its values? On the one hand, religion is usually considered to be conservative by its nature and preoccupied mainly with the interests of the group, not the individual, thus supporting traditional ways of life and traditional values. This especially applies to Eastern and Oriental religions, including non-Western forms of Christianity. In this respect religion, especially in its fundamentalist manifestations, is expected to be sharply opposed to much of what liberalism embraces and implies. On the other hand, since no religion is a homogeneous phenomenon, different stances on liberal values can be found among representatives of the same religion. Even fundamentalists readily appeal to these values (e.g. freedom of religion or freedom of speech) when such could be advantageous to them. All this makes the relation of religion to liberalism complex and difficult to interpret univocally.

In the West, Christianity has in general accepted liberal values and has accommodated itself to them. In post-communist Eastern Europe and Russia, however, the encounter with liberal values was often a hard experience for Christian churches as well as for other religions. In spite of the fact that the communist regimes in these countries usually suppressed and controlled religion, it felt in a certain sense secure in a closed society, even under many restrictions. After the collapse of communism, religion in the post-communist countries had to face new, frightening challenges often perceived as brought about by “imported western liberal” values aimed to destroy “indigenous traditional” ones.

This negative attitude to liberalism as “a western construct” has further increased with growing nationalist and populist sentiments in world politics in the first two decades of the 21st century. Such forces often present a caricature of liberalism as extreme individualism or simply as an orgy of immorality and permissiveness. Moreover, contemporary authoritarian regimes and traditionalist churches attempt to relativize some basic concepts of liberalism, such as human rights, by insisting that these are not universal and should be interpreted in different ways depending on cultural and national peculiarities. The idea behind this is to belittle the value of human individuality and to subordinate it again to “national interests”, which would allow these regimes to restrict or reject the rights and freedoms which they deem “alien” to their country. Needless to say, such “sovereign” concepts are a gross distortion of the very idea of universal human rights and freedoms, and this should be taken into account when the relation of religion to liberalism is considered.

The forthcoming conference aims to discuss the compatibility of religion, especially in its traditional forms, with liberalism and its values; the obstacles found here; and possible ways of overcoming them.