

Laudatio for Archbishop Dr. John Behr, Metropolitan Kallistos Ware Chair

E.A.J.G. Van der Borgh, Ph.D., vice-dean of the Faculty of Theology at ACOT

Highly esteemed colleague Behr, Dear John,

Thank you for your inaugural lecture. I characterize your lecture not as paschal but rather as apocalyptic in the literary sense of the word: that is, unveiling the mystery of the Gospel of John, but also unveiling some elements of the theology of two Johns the theologian: John the evangelist and John Behr.

Thank you for accepting the Metropolitan Kallistos Ware Chair in Orthodox Theology at the Faculty of Theology at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. We are honoured because you embody what we as individual scholars and as community at this specific faculty try to be or to become.

We recognize your prolific academic writing of 12 academic volumes and almost 60 referred articles in a diversity of disciplines. It is not only about the quantity, but even more about the quality. You have shown your critical and methodological abilities in your critical editions and translations of the work of Irenaeus, Diodore of Tarsus, and Theodore of Mopsuestia. Building on this in the interface of patristic study and historical theology, you are able to produce cutting edge volumes of the highest quality such as your work on Origen's *De Principiis*.

But you are even able to go beyond these abilities to be one who is able to understand and engage empathetically with the thought world of antiquity. And through this you are able to reveal — apocalypse! — the continuing relevance of the patristic thought in an existential actualisation. Through this you have become able to write substantial and original pieces of theological reflection, like your theological meditations on the Christological foundation of Christian existence: *Mystery of Christ: Life in Death (2006)*. It shows how your scholarly originality has been matched by intellectual creativity and spiritual depth.

But this deep understanding of the patristic thoughts has now brought you to a new reading of the New Testament itself, as witnessed in this inaugural lecture and soon made accessible in your forthcoming *John the Theologian and his Paschal Gospel: A Prologue to Theology*. What we witness here is production of public theology of the highest order, bringing a new and deeper understanding of the Christian source texts in dialogue with contemporary hermeneutical and phenomenological perspectives, as in the work of Jean-Luc Marion and Michel Henry.

Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury and now at Magdalene College Cambridge recommended you with the following words: "In his generation he stands out as perhaps the finest scholarly mind in English-speaking Orthodoxy. I believe him to be absolutely ideally suited to this important position and to represent all the qualities your specification lists. I recommend him with the greatest enthusiasm."

Professor Khaled Anatolios from Notre Dame added to this: "To my mind, Fr. Behr exemplifies the best features of the Orthodox theological tradition, faithfully rooted in the wisdom of the past but generously engaged with the present, and creatively open to the future. I recommend him wholeheartedly and enthusiastically and without any hesitations."

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I'd also like to mention that you have produced some survey volumes on the development of patristic theology that have become the standard textbooks in the field. And this brings me to the field of teaching. You teach with energy, passion, and excitement.

Dear Dr. Behr, we welcome you as teacher at the Amsterdam Centre for Orthodox Theology. We congratulate its trustees and its director Michael Bakker with the appointment and this event.

We also welcome you as colleague at the faculty. This is a faculty of ecumenical encounter of Christian, and non-Christian religious and non-religious traditions. Your colleague John McGuckin, Nielsen Professor of Church history at Columbia University, New York, wrote in his reference letter about you that you represent a style of Orthodoxy that is at once historically and doctrinally faithful, yet open hearted, expansive, and inclusive in the best way. That is the exactly the spirit with which we try to engage with each other coming from our diversity of traditions.

We look forward to collaborating with you, especially within the department *Texts and Traditions*, the research group *Early Christianity*, and the Dutch *Centrum voor Patristisch Onderzoek*. We look forward to collaborating with you when you will be supervising doctoral research.

Dear colleague, dear John, we congratulate you, on behalf of the Faculty Board, with this festive moment in your life and career—congratulations also to your family and friends.

I want to give the last word to Metropolitan Kallistos Ware: "I can think of no candidate better qualified to be appointed to this position than Dr Behr. Ever since the time that I acted as his university supervisor when he was working at Oxford for his doctorate, I have had a very high opinion of his scholarly ability and of the skill with which as a teacher he can communicate his ideas. He is extremely hard-working, genuinely original in his ideas, and remarkably gifted as a writer, as is indicated by his substantial list of publications. I am fully confident that his presence as a member of your Faculty will greatly enhance the work of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam."
