

Orthodox Christian rigorism: attempting to delineate a multifaceted phenomenon

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In the historically Orthodox Christian heartlands of Eastern and South Eastern Europe, as well as sometimes in the Orthodox diasporic communities around the globe, one may come across fundamentalist-like phenomena. For various reasons explained in this paper I subsume these cases under a category which I call rigorism. Such cases exhibit certain particularities vis-à-vis their Western Christian or Islamic counterparts and also attest to the diversity existing within the wider and dispersed body of Orthodox Christianity. Orthodox rigorists of varied provenance are at times in serious tension and conflict with the respective official Orthodox Churches, while in other instances they collaborate with them for common purposes. Using various theoretical perspectives on this topic and selected examples from different Orthodox contexts, this paper attempts to delineate the main contours of this phenomenon by focusing on the bearers of rigorism and their activities, the main characteristics, the socio-historical background and the later transformations of this phenomenon including its endogenous and exogenous causes. Finally, the potential resources and counter-currents from within the Orthodox world, which are aimed at neutralizing the rigorist influences, are also presented and discussed.