

# Evgenios Voulgaris, a brilliant personality for the Post-Byzantine Hellenism. (Alexandros Christodoulou)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



[Previous Publication: <http://pemptousia.com/2016/06/evgenios-voulgaris-archbishop-of-slaviansk-and-kherson/>]

In his work *Outline*, on the subject of the toleration of other religions, he poses the question of religious freedom from his own point of view, which is different from that of Voltaire. According to Voulgaris, freedom of thought can exist only in humanistic arts and sciences: 'In the divine and mysterious dogmas of the faith, freedom of thought is insolence, because for anyone to seek reason in what is beyond reason is dementia'. When the soul tries 'to see with another light' what is taught by Holy Scripture and the Church, it is blinded and deceived. It is not permissible for people to seek freedom such as this for themselves or for others. And devout rulers should take steps to avoid the corrosion which is caused by the misuse of this kind of freedom.

Voulgaris wanted to use the concept of religious tolerance to protect the interests of the Orthodox and to lead a campaign for the religious and administrative unification of the Eastern Orthodox Church. With his notes and comments on Voltaire's text and well as the addition of his own work *Outline on Religious Tolerance*, he attempted to remould the original work in accordance with his personal political expectations.



1771, on being recommended to the Empress of Russia, Catherine the Great by Vasili Orlov, whom he had met in Leipzig, he was invited to Saint Petersburg, where he settled in as librarian to the imperial court. Despite his ignorance of the language and his reservations, he was persuaded by the thought that he would be serving an inspired Empress and by the fact that the Russo-Turkish war was being fought at that time (1768-74). The anticipation of the liberation of the enslaved nation of the Greeks was expressed by Voulgaris in his address when he was presented to the empress and also in a series of pro-Greek pamphlets which he published. At the request of the empress he translated a series of texts and wrote the treatise *Reflections on the present critical times in the state of the Ottomans* (1772), in which he campaigned for the establishment of a new Greek leadership, as a guarantee of stability in Europe. His years in Russia were productive in a number of ways.

After four years there, he was consecrated in Moscow Cathedral as Archbishop of Slaviansk and Kherson and left for Poltava, which is the seat of the see. During his time there he organized the refugee neighbourhoods, founded churches and a seminary at which Greek lessons were taught. As the director he invited his friend and compatriot Nikiforos Theotokis to come from Iași, in whose favour he resigned the archiepiscopal throne.

He settled in Kherson and occupied himself with study and writing.

He translated Virgil's *Georgics* and *Aeneid*, into verses in Ancient Greek and then had it printed with valuable comments and footnotes. Before leaving Kherson, he sold his library to the regional governor, General Grigory Potyomkin. Part of this

survives today in the University Library in Kazan.

In the latter years of his life, he continued his literary, translation and publishing activities just as energetically. In 1802, at the age of 86, he withdrew to the Monastery of Saint Alexander Nevsky, where he died on 10 June, 1806. To the end of his life he retained his clarity of mind as well as his ability to study and pray.

He wrote a great deal on a variety of subjects. He wrote treatises on law, history, theology, grammar, language, astronomy, politics, mathematics, archeology, music, religious toleration, euthanasia and tides. He also wrote manuals on logic, mathematics, metaphysics, poems, speeches, petitions to Catherine the Great on the liberation of Greece and hundreds of letters.

Included in his theological works are: *Theologikon, or Philotheic Musings, that is Observations redemptive and beneficial to the soul from reading the Pentateuch Bible of Holy Moses, vol. I* 1801; *Meditations of divine and holy Augustine, Bishop of Hippo*, Moscow 1824; *Orthodox Confession, that is an exposition of the faith according to Christ's holy, catholic and apostolic Church*, Aiyina 1828; and *Letter to Petrus Clercius [Pierre Leclerc] on the Saints after the Schism*.

Some of his most interesting works are: *Treatise on Euthanasia* (1804); *What Philosophers Prefer* (1805); *On the Universe* (1805); *Elements of Metaphysics* (1805); *Essay on Music* (1868). He also translated Gravesande's *Introduction to Philosophy* and Quirini's *Antiquities according to Homer* (1804).

Pride of place in his philosophical works goes to his *Logic*, which can be considered the fundamental philosophical work of the modern Greek Enlightenment. In his thinking, there are both modern philosophy and experimental science, together with his adherence to Orthodoxy. As he himself makes clear he remained a 'philosopher who theologized'. In his numerous notes in *Logic*, there are passages from ancient, Byzantine, and modern philosophers such as Bacon, Descartes, Wolf, Hobbes, Gravesande and Malebranche et al. Voulgaris' aim in writing *Logic* was not to make an original contribution but rather to provide a rich introduction to logical thinking. Because it was written in Ancient Greek, however, it was not particularly accessible to the students at whom it was aimed.

His teaching and writings inaugurated a new era in the history of Greek education. Setting aside the Aristotelian tradition, which had, in the Greek East had been predominant for fifteen centuries, he was the first to teach young students in Turkish-occupied East about Descartes' rationalism, John Locke's empiricism, the physics and mathematics of Newton and Leibniz, the philosophical inquiries of Hobbes, Malebranche, Wolf and others. In his conscience and his life, he was able to combine the 'neoteric' spirit with Christian Orthodoxy without compromise,

because, as he himself wrote, he saw no contradiction between thinking well and the truth revealed in the Scriptures. Even in his non-theological works, there are theological interpolations. Theological thought dominates the whole of his literary activity.

Students of his work refer to his 'love of hesychast monasticism' (Podskalsky); his being an heir to the mystical theology of the Orthodox East (Tatakis and Kitromilidis); his being 'one hundred per cent within the ground of traditional Orthodoxy, not only as regards dogma but also ecclesiastical practice' (Knapp); and his love of services (Goudas). 'Voulgaris represents the type of modern Greek scholar who went to the West, accepted its philosophy and science, but did not surrender anything of his inheritance as a Greek and Orthodox' (Tatakis). The bedrock of Voulgaris' intellectual life and spiritual experiences always remained his store of Orthodoxy from the East, with its hesychast roots and apophatic outlook, even though at times he was distanced from the Church through his lively philosophical and scientific interests. On this tradition, which is always there in the wings, even when it is not centre-stage, the imposing structure of his work is built' (Kitromilidis).