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Degree: Master
Major: Social Anthropology
University: London School of Economics

Dear Admissions Committee,

According to the Public Religion Research Institute, only 0.5% of the American population is made up of Orthodox Christians. Naturally, when it was time to choose a bachelor's thesis topic for Hunter College's Religion department, my professor advised me to write about my adhered faith. At the time, I found it quite absurd that the department — an infinite fount of knowledge for me — did not have any courses on Orthodox Christianity. As such, I took to immersing myself in my own anthropology, thereby teaching my peers about a mysterious, yet quite relevant faith.

In the quest for relevance, I presented a project entitled "Orthodox Christianity: The Stumbling Block of Unity." My research was divided into four components: 1) the very origins of the Orthodox Church — despite orienting its structure, philosophy, and faith around the idea of unity, a schism, or formal separation of the Church, between "Eastern" and "Oriental" Orthodoxy was inevitable; 2) the influence of the Serbian Orthodox Church during the 2020 presidential election in Montenegro, which marked the end of Milo Đukanović's thirty-year rule in light of protests against the Religious Freedom Law; 3) the status of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Soviet Union, where restrictions posed by the State prevented both civilians and clergy alike from practicing their faith; 4) the Ethiopian Orthodox Church as a representative of Oriental Orthodoxy in the conflict with Eritrea. These explorations led to an interesting conclusion: while unity is, for all intents and purposes, the central force welding together the faith of the Orthodox Churches, there is more than enough evidence to display the way in which this idea of unity is problematic. Our human desire for unification is inevitably cluttered by the natural process of our divided-ness — even when unity is the central, unifying force, man will turn to defining it differently in order to enforce some form of division.

So, how is any of this relevant? Well, it is hard to argue with ontology — reality is divinely subjective, and thus pertinent to its bearer. If one considers the ontology of interpretation, then being the spawn of a Russian Orthodox mother and an American Catholic father had an interesting effect on my hermeneutics. For one thing, living in both Russia and the United States revealed just how divergent our perceptions of reality can be — and how such perceptions can be shaped by our faith, seeing as our environments serve as the manifestive grounds for ontological questions. Because I spent the majority of my life in the States, it's a given that I was mystified, and later influenced by the so-called "minority" religion I come to bear. As a result of said background, I have spent my life attempting to discern why we perceive reality in our particular ways, along with how these perceptions lead to conflict.

With this in mind, it was almost intuitive for me to complete a double major in Religion and Philosophy, along with a sub-plan in International Relations, for my bachelor's study. Much can be said about the direction in which my learning took pace — for instance, my philosophy education gave me a certain type of knowledge that isn't meant to be learned for the sake of a day job. Rather, it taught me things about reality in and of itself. Not a day goes by where I don't make use of my ability to structure sound arguments and question every narrative that I come to face. At the same time, my religion courses emphasized a phenomenological approach towards our study subjects. An effective analysis of something as debatable as religion requires a strong consideration for the subjective experience and/or outlook of all phenomena, and such an approach can extend to all of the information one takes in — by genuinely understanding the subjective outlooks of others, one is able to gauge a thorough understanding of what may factor into their perceptions and assess the dynamic of faith as a whole. And, of course, when it comes to an assessment of how religion is portrayed in modernity, an understanding of various cultural intricacies can only assist in the process — thus, an in-depth study of international relations allowed me to factor in the global trends and demographics that influence the manner in which information is portrayed.

With an aim to further understand how religion may serve as not only a major component of identity, but also a social tool in the modern realm, I found myself highly interested in the MSc Social Anthropology (Religion in the Contemporary World) program at the London School of Economics. First of all, I wish to put my ontological qualms at rest through the (AN461) Anthropological Approaches to Questions of Being course — when the nature of being becomes a true concern that pervades the mind (and later a subject of rigorous study), one comes to question how certain occurrences, people, or things contributed to his up-to-date life trajectory. If such a thought is treated with reason and one puts his spiritual qualms at ease, he is able to approach the role of religion in the global arena through an all-embracing eye.

Moreover, being particularly interested in how Christianity is portrayed along with technological advancement, the Anthropology of Christianity course caught my attention — I yearn to understand the problems of writing about religion in the digital era, especially considering the implications it may have on public opinion. Another question arises regarding the means of integrating religion into our obviously secularized lives — how does technology and digitalized media come to hinder or foster this process?

Finally, the (EU475) Racial Diversity and Conflict in Europe course would allow me to gauge the manner in which ethnic groups identify with their religious affiliations, thereby understanding how such dispositions lead to political and ideological conflict. From there, I can go on to assess other forms of social problems. For example, seemingly secular movements such as Black Lives Matter have an undeniable dynamic of faith that could be compared to religious thought — by recognizing this, I could more effectively address the issues that such movements are concerned with and embody the spirituality of contemporary activism.

By further exploring religion in the contemporary world, I strive to understand the implications, agendas, and perceptions that influence the current anthropological realm. As such, I find myself highly inclined towards developing in academia and contributing to innovative research among diverse, yet like-minded professionals. At the same time, I also aim to gain experience in teaching, as an understanding of religion's impact on global relations would allow others to conscientiously navigate their truth. All in all, I believe the Social Anthropology program at the London School of Economics would allow me to take the right path towards a prominent future — whilst in itself embodying prominence.

Sincerely,