



## 2020 OTSA Annual Meeting, November 12-14

(Program with Abstracts as of 10/31/2020)

### Theme: Theological Anthropology

#### Thursday (11/12) Afternoon 1 (1:00 – 3:00 pm EST)

- Opening Prayer
- Welcome and Opening Remarks – Teva Regule, PhD: President, OTSA

#### • *Panel – Church and Academy*

This panel will explore the intersection of the Church and the Academy. We will begin by surveying the prevailing ethos in each realm and how the conversation has changed over time and within various disciplines. We will then focus on the place of academic freedom and the value of science and history to inform our liturgical and ecclesial practice. More fundamentally, our discussion will highlight the relationship between hierarchy, clergy, and laity in our ecclesial life and explore ways that we can all contribute to the building up of the Body of Christ.

- The Rev. Anthony Roeber, PhD: Professor, St. Vladimir's Seminary
- Crina Gschwandtner, PhD: Professor, Fordham University
- Hermina Nedelescu, PhD: Post-Doctoral Fellow, Scripps Research Institute
- The Rev. Stel Muksuris, PhD: Professor, Byzantine Catholic Seminary and International Hellenic University
- Respondent – The Rev. Anthony Perkins, MDiv, PhD (cand): Professor, St. Sophia Ukrainian Orthodox Seminary
- Plenary Discussion
- *Facilitated networking groups (30 min) – Our lives in the Church and the Academy*

#### Thursday (11/12) Afternoon 2 (3:30 – 5:00 pm EST)

- *Papers – Spirituality/Theosis: Becoming Fully Human*

#### • “Loving Eros: The Soul’s Journey into Love in Apuleius, St. Maximus, and Pseudo-Dionysius”

Emil Salim, PhD: Senior Lecturer in Philosophy, Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Reformed Indonesia

In *theosis*, Christians undergo a divinization in every aspect of their lives, including in how they love. In *Capita de Caritate*, St. Maximus writes that the soul’s journey into love begins with concupiscence (Επιθυμία) (2.48.2) and

terminates in her love of charity towards God (τω ερωτι της αγάπης προς τον Θεον) (1.10.1). In *De Divinis Nominibus* 709B15–16, Pseudo-Dionysius sees *erōs* as synonymous with *agapē*, which implies that God is *Erōs*. What is the place of *erōs* in *theosis*?

I argue that the myth of *Erōs* and *Psyche* in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* might provide a model of love progression that is insightful for understanding the doctrine of *theosis*. First, just as *Psyche* first loves *Erōs* in ignorance and darkness, the journey of *theosis* begins with the soul (i.e., the mind) wandering in darkness, loving *erōs* without illumination. This love of the unknown *erōs* is concupiscence: the mind obscurely and inordinately desires the desiring itself. Second, just as *Psyche* discovers that whom she has been loving is the god *Erōs*, the illumined soul begins loving the revealed *Erōs* in the knowledge of truth. This second order of love is an exercise of freedom: it is the soul's prerogative to ponder before acting whether she really loves to love what she loves. Third, just as *Psyche* is finally deified and married to *Erōs* forever, in *theosis*, the soul in her divine love (θειον ερως) is deified and eternally united with God, her beloved *Erōs*. The centrality of *erōs* in *theosis* is thus demonstrated.

• **“Fulfilling our Destiny in Christ: Reflecting on Personhood from a Contemplative Perspective”**

Brother Christopher Savage: Prior, Monks of New Skete

In John 10:10 Jesus tells his followers, “*I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*” Every human being at their core experiences this desire for abundant life. This is the distinguishing mark of personhood, the root from which every other personal desire springs. Accepting the basic premises of an Orthodox understanding of personhood (creaturehood, hypostasis, and the unique expression of that in every human person), this presentation attempts to illuminate how we realize that fully throughout the course of our lives. Personhood is something dynamic, a seed that progressively grows and matures, which St Gregory of Nyssa says comes to full fruition in an ever-deepening communion with God and each other that is eternal life.

While there has always been a deep respect for the monastic and contemplative traditions of the Church within Orthodoxy, it has frequently been seen as something that has little practical relevance to the laity. Granted, Paul Evdokimov is well known for promoting an “interiorized monasticism” that could be accessible to all, however there is so much more that can be said about how contemplative practices and insight can be integrated into every person's quest for fullness of life, what ultimately amounts to *theosis*. Drawing from the living context of a modern Orthodox monastic community and the seminal wisdom of Orthodox tradition, this presentation hopes to express in fresh ways how we might expand our understanding of personhood in a way that rings true to contemporary experience.

• **“Speaking Up for Silence: An Argument for Popularizing the Jesus Prayer Among the Laity”**

Carrie Frederick-Frost, PhD: Adjunct Professor of Theology Saint Sophia Ukrainian Orthodox Theological Seminary; Lecturer, Department of Global Humanities and Religions at Western Washington University

Source material on the Orthodox Church’s hesychastic tradition from most any era or setting assures that the Jesus Prayer contains multitudes; that, when practiced within the life of the Church and with guidance, it heals the fragmentation of the mind, contains all Christian truth, lovingly connects one with the cosmos, and is an efficacious means of deification. Even though not significantly practiced outside of a monastic context until relatively recently, the insistence that the Jesus Prayer is universally accessible to all Orthodox Christians—monastics and laity alike—is as old as the prayer itself. Why then—given its magnitude and accessibility—is it still not particularly widely practiced outside of monasteries? And what promise might it hold for Orthodox laity today?

First roughly tracing the history of monastic characterizations of the laity’s capacity for interior prayer with special attention to the popularizing moments of the publication of both the *Philokalia* and *The Way of the Pilgrim*, I will highlight and explore the tension between exoteric and esoteric tendencies around the Jesus Prayer. Looking to contemporary America, I will then consider the potential perils and pressures of appropriation and the marketplace as well as opportunities for ecumenical engagement, drawing on my own background in Tibetan Buddhist contemplative studies and parallel, but different, contemporary realities in that field. I will conclude with a series of reflections on why I understand the Jesus Prayer as urgently needed by the laity today and how the Orthodox Church might unstintingly offer this jewel of its contemplative life to the faithful.

• 5:00 pm – Evening Prayer

• 6:00 – 7:00 pm: *Dinner conversations – Breakout rooms TBD*

**Thursday (11/12) Evening (7:00 – 9:00 pm EST)**

• **Papers – *Theosis, Martyrdom, Compassion***

• **“An Arabic Orthodox Humanism: The Theological Anthropology of Theodore Abū Qurrah (ca. 9th cent.)”**

Phil Dorroll, PhD: Associate Professor of Religion, Wofford College

Theodore Abū Qurrah, bishop of Haran and probable native of Edessa, was a prolific and well-known Chalcedonian Orthodox theologian who wrote the large majority of his work in Arabic at the end of the 8<sup>th</sup>/ beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. His work is notable for its elaboration of the Byzantine dogmatic theological heritage using the tools of rationalism and dialectic. This presentation will focus on his treatise “On the Existence of God and the True Religion,” a systematic natural theology that culminates in a rational “proof” for the doctrine of *theosis*. In this treatise, Abū Qurrah argues that reasoned investigation into human nature proves the existence of an inborn and universal human

desire to become divine, an inner longing to “become gods through Him, and delight in Him for all eternity.”<sup>1</sup>

Abū Qurrah therefore constructs a theological anthropology that fuses a rationalist and universalist conception of human nature with the Byzantine Orthodox soteriology of *theosis*. After outlining the specifics of this argument, particularly with reference to their Arabic philosophical nuances, this presentation will suggest ways that Abū Qurrah’s theological anthropology might inform contemporary Orthodox theologies of human rights and the cultivation of religious humanism in the post-secular context.

• **“Martyrdom and Liberation: Who is Our Persecutor?”**

The Rev. Maria McDowell, PhD: Theological Ethics

This paper explores the connection between deification and martyrdom, suffering and liberation. Gregory of Nazianzus presents the priest as a “physician of souls” who persuades Christians to voluntarily adopt a life of virtue in communion with God. My initial explorations of his theology of the priesthood highlighted the centrality of virtue in Eastern Orthodox conceptions of deification, and the importance of the communal and liturgical formation (or mis-formation) of virtue, in order to present an Orthodox argument for the ordination of women. I did not explore the role of suffering and martyrdom in deification, in part because Orthodox rhetoric around martyrdom was misused to discourage women exploring a priestly vocation: they are to deny their (selfish) desires.

Yet serving as the priest of a historically African-American congregation in a time of particular national conflict over race, I have had to think more carefully about the role of suffering, martyrdom, and especially liberation, in our shared life together. Orthodoxy often considers martyrdom as entirely positive, so much so that even marriage is construed as martyrdom. Yet a crucial question is rarely asked: who (or what) is the persecutor? By failing to distinguish self-denial from persecution, unique personhood from socially constructed stereotypes, such theologies of martyrdom put the spouse and even the church in the place of persecutor. This paper begins to untangle this morass, and argues that liberation as resistance to persecution is essential to deification.

• **“The Virtue of Compassion”**

The Rev. John Jones, PhD: Professor, Department of Philosophy, Marquette University

Compassion is often viewed as a feeling that wells up in people periodically. However, in the Orthodox Christian tradition, compassion in any full sense is a virtue: a steadfast, cultivated dispositional awareness of suffering that leads to a response to assist those who are suffering for their sake. I will draw on texts of St. John of Damascus and St. John Chrysostom among others to develop this view.

I will briefly lay out the nature of a virtue. I will then draw on a text by St. John Chrysostom who contrasts those who value virtue as something beautiful in itself with those who seek it for its prizes. I will initially contrast compassion with stances such as greed, rapine, etc. in which people are simply indifferent to suffering. I will then develop the notion of compassion, as I characterized it above, that defines it as a virtue in the of others simply for “prizes” which satisfy self-interest and (b) what I call a sentimental

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<sup>1</sup> *Maymar fī wujūd al-khāliq wa-l-dīn al-qawīm*, ed. Ignace Dick in *Théodore Abuqurra: Traité de l'existence du Créateur et de la vraie religion*. Patrimoine arabe chrétien 10 (Rome: Pontificio Instituto Orientale, 1986), 237.

indulgence of others which is not genuinely concerned with their welfare. Finally, in the Christian tradition, we are to do all things for the sake of Christ. I will try to show how compassion does all things for the sake of Christ precisely by caring for others for their own sake.

- *Breakout rooms open for socializing*

### **Friday (11/13) Morning (10:00 am – 12:00 noon EST)**

- Morning Prayer
- *Facilitated networking groups*
- **Papers – *Gender, Women, Human Rights***

- **“Spiritual Equals but Jeopardized Humanity? Representing Women in Orthodox Tradition”**

Ashley Purpura, PhD: Assistant Professor, Religious Studies Program, School of Interdisciplinary Studies, College of Liberal Arts, Purdue University

The depiction of women in the commemorative sources of Orthodox Christianity (focusing primarily on hymnographic, hagiographic, desert ascetic, and liturgical examples) are patriarchal constructions representative of religious and social concerns more than presenting real women. Although this observation has long been made in the study of pre-modern women, I suggest the androcentric production of women that dominates much of the written Orthodox tradition is problematic theologically because it ultimately privileges male personhood in ways that women appear (in varying degrees) de-humanized. Beyond obscuring women’s autonomy, voices, and perspectives through a well-intended male normativity that claims equality, these texts also erase, control, and ideologically configure the women’s experiences in ways that subtly negate the full humanity of women. In theological, liturgical, and pastoral discourse Orthodox Christians continue to invoke historical representations and values that are predicated on the implicit assumption that women do not share an equal humanity with men. Certainly, no Orthodox theologian would say overtly that women are not fully human or that they cannot be spiritually equal. Indeed, many sources display significant efforts to try and demonstrate the spiritual equality of women and even the ability of women to surpass men spiritually despite an inequitable social and cultural historical context. Yet, the images of women commemorated within much of Orthodox tradition remain seconded to men in their humanity because they are constructed within a patriarchal system. I conclude by noting the dogmatic tension this claim poses and suggesting its resolution through a reevaluation of how we engage Tradition.

- **“Orthodox Anthropology and Human Rights”**

Paul Ladouceur, PhD: Adjunct Professor at the Orthodox School of Theology at Trinity College, University of Toronto, and Professeur Associé, Faculté de Théologie et de Sciences Religieuses, Université

Modern Orthodox theologians and philosophers are deeply divided on human rights, with both strong supporters and strong opponents of modern declarations of human rights. Even if the modern concept of human rights, derived from Enlightenment

philosophies, defines rights without recourse to a divine referent, many of the notions that modern human rights documents embody have Christian origins, in the Gospels, the Epistles and patristic anthropology. This paper aims to demonstrate that modern expressions of human rights, despite weaknesses, are profoundly grounded in and consistent with Orthodox understandings of what it means to be human. Focussing on the notion that humans are created “in the image and likeness” of God, the paper surveys scriptural, patristic and modern Orthodox thinking on human existence as relating to human rights. From this basis, the attitudes towards human rights of three contemporary Orthodox ecclesial documents will be discussed: “Basic Teaching on Human Dignity, Freedom and Human Rights” of the Russian Orthodox Church (2008); documents of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, especially “The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today’s World” and the “Encyclical” (Crete, 2016); and the document “For the Life of the World: Towards a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church” (Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, 2020).

*12:00 noon – 1:00 pm: Lunch Breakout groups (Thematic “Lunch Tables”)*

- Women in the Church – Coordinator: Carrie Frederick Frost
- Ecumenism – Coordinator: Fr. Radu Bordeianu
- Other Groups – TBD

#### **Friday (11/13) Afternoon 1 (1:30 – 3:00 pm EST)**

- **OTSA Business Meeting** (*Open to **Members in good standing**. Provisional Members may attend but not vote.*)

#### **Friday (11/13) Afternoon 2 (3:30 – 5:30 pm EST)**

- **Panel – Bridging Voices Panel: Reflections on “Contemporary Eastern Orthodox Identity and the Challenges of Pluralism and Sexual Diversity in a Secular Age – One Year On”**
- Principals:
  - The Rev. Dcn. Brandon Gallagher, PhD: Senior Lecturer, University of Exeter
  - Aristotle Papanikolaou, PhD: Professor, Fordham University
- Co-Ordinator: Gregory Tucker, PhD (cand): Research Assistant, University of Regensburg
- Panelists:
  - David Bradshaw, PhD: Professor, University of Kentucky
  - Peter Bouteneff, PhD: Professor, St. Vladimir’s Seminary
  - Ashley Purpura, PhD: Assistant Professor, Purdue University
  - The Very Rev. John Jillions, PhD: Vice-President, OTSA

This panel will offer space for reflection on the recently concluded three-year research project (2017– 2020) run by Exeter University and the Orthodox Christian Studies Center at Fordham University on “Contemporary Eastern Orthodox Identity and the Challenges of Pluralism and Sexual Diversity in a Secular Age” as part of the British Council’s “Bridging Voices” scheme. In addition to reviewing aspects of the project for the benefit of those who are unfamiliar with its work, the panel will consider issues of methodology (e.g. use of the Chatham House Rule, involvement of secular/non-Orthodox actors), as well as reactions to the project within and beyond the academy, and associated issues such as academic freedom. Panelists include project Principal Investigators Brandon Gallaher and

Aristotle Papanikolaou, associate researcher and coordinator Gregory Tucker, and project participants David Bradshaw, Peter Bouteneff, John Jillions, and Ashley Purpura. There will be ample time for questions and discussion.

- Plenary Discussion
- Following Panel: Evening Vespers
- 6:00 – 7:00 pm: *Dinner conversations – Breakout rooms TBD*

**Friday (11/13) Evening (7:30 – 9:00 pm EST): *Webinar format (separate registration)***

• **Florovsky Lecture – “Community as Church, Church as Community: Death and Resurrection in the Parish Today”**

The Very Rev. Michael Plekon, PhD: Professor Emeritus, Sociology, Religion and Culture, The City University of New York–Baruch College

- Plenary Discussion/Q+A

(After Lecture: *Breakout rooms open for socializing. Zoom Meeting Room.*)

**Saturday (11/14) Morning (10:00 am – 1:00 pm EST)**

- Morning Prayer – Canon for Racial Reconciliation
- **Papers – *Race and Otherness***

• **“Reflections on the Canon for Racial Reconciliation”**

Carla Thomas, MD: Trustee, St. Vladimir’s Seminary

The Canon for Racial Reconciliation was written in 2007 in Anniston, Alabama. It was written in response to a need to heal racial wounds. Some people respond to racial division by marching and shouting to one another. I responded by creating a healing tool that goes from one’s lips to God’s ears. National Racial reconciliation begins with individual racial reconciliation. The methodology is different for each one. The Canon shows how others have approached the crisis of racial reconciliation. The Canon draws on Orthodox dogma to define the vision of racial reconciliation. The lives of saints portrayed in the Canon demonstrate the mission of racial reconciliation. The Canon is a tool all can use, if one is poor in spirit and pure in heart.

• **“Evagrius of Pontus, Askesis, and Reckoning with Systemic Racism”**

Claire Koen, ThM: Doctoral Student, Fordham University

Throughout the writings and sayings of the desert fathers are numerous portrayals and references to demons. Of particular interest for our present moment in history, marked by shocking police brutality perpetrated against Black people, are those references to demons as black women and boys. This essay will look briefly at key examples of this trend, provide an overview of the Egyptian cultural context which gave rise to prejudices based upon skin color, and then turn to a possible way in which Orthodox Christians might use these examples to prompt a process of acknowledging, and coming to terms with, racism in the midst of our communities and hearts. This proposal for a process of acknowledgement will draw upon the teachings of Evagrius of Pontus whose references to demons are unique in that demons have their own, non-human, category within his

cosmology: this results in a lack of references to human-like demons of the type which appear in other desert fathers. This difference in demonology, coupled with Evagrius's call to contemplate and appreciate the world natural world as a means to eventual contemplation of God, provides a guide for examining the effects of systemic racism in our midst.

• **“Reckoning with Alterity and Otherness in Orthodox Theological Anthropology: An Anthropological Intervention”**

Sarah Riccardi-Swartz, PhD: Postdoctoral Fellowship, Center for the Study of Religion and Conflict, Arizona State University

Orthodox theological anthropology, for all of its rich theories of humans as images of the divine, fails to fully interrogate the grounded, personal, social, moral, and ethical dimensions of being—the day-to-day beingness of being. This is seen most readily in its lack of inquiry into the intersectional lived complexities of gender, sexuality, and disability. Personhood and being are not theoretical or philosophical; rather they are experiential, dynamic, and, most importantly, lived. This paper grapples with the anthropological gaps in our theological anthropology, asking us to reckon with the lack of grounded theology that addresses what it means to be a human being who is not an able-bodied, heterosexual, white male. Highlighting the ways in which Orthodox theological anthropology is imbued with notions of alterity and otherness, this paper provides an anthropological intervention, suggesting that we can deepen our theological conceptions of humanness, personhood, and the economy of being through critical engagement with social science theories. Drawing on disability studies and the anthropology of gender and sexuality, in conjunction with the writings of Orthodox theologians of such as John Behr, Sergius Bulgakov, Vladimir Lossky, and John Zizioulas, this cross-disciplinary presentation will offer new ways for thinking through the old philosophical question of what it means to be human, while prompting us to think critically about who gets to provide the answers to that question.

• ***Plenary – Concluding thoughts***