



The Orthodox Theological Society in America

OTSA 2022-23 Business Meeting

January 10, 2023

(Meeting in Volos, Greece and via Zoom)

Members Present: Teva Regule, Fr. John Jillions, Helen Theodoropoulos, Fr. Geoffrey Ready, Barbara Frank, Paul Ladouceur, Fr. Bodhan Hladio, Fr Nicholas Ferencz, Ashley Purpura, Hermina Nedelescu, Fr. Philip Zymaris, Deacon Gabriel (Bradley) Nassif, Joel Houston, Fr Luke Veronis, Fr Harry Pappas, Fr Sergius Halvorsen, Fr Peter Baktis, Claire Koen, Telly Papanikolaou, George Demacopoulos, Rachel Contos, Fr Philip LeMasters, Chris Durante, Nadia (Nadieszda) Kizenko, Susan Ashbrook Harvey, Alexander Lingas, Deacon Andrei Psarev. Nathan Hoppe, Katerina Pekridou and Susan Smoley also attended as listeners but are not members.

The Meeting was called to order, and Fr. John Jillions led us in prayer, at 6:45 pm (Volos, Greece time)

1. **The 2021-22 Business Meeting Minutes** were presented by the Secretary. Ashley Purpura moved to accept the minutes, George Demacopoulos seconded the motion, and the motion carried.
2. **President's Report:** President Teva Regule thanked those present both in person and via zoom for their attendance. She reported that the Executive Board met monthly (via Zoom) throughout 2022 to discuss and plan projects that engage and harness the talents and expertise of our membership while striving to be of service to the Church, and thanked the officers. She began by discussing the agenda items listed under Old Business, offering a summary of the year's projects and activities, which included:
 - a. **Collaboration with IOTA for the Quadrennial IOTA Conference in Volos, Greece**
 - Assisting in the planning of the conference
 - Donating \$11K to help sponsor scholarships/travel grants for young scholars and those with financial need
 - Co-sponsoring the Keynote Address, which doubled as the Annual Florovksy lecture
 - Sponsoring and running four sessions within the IOTA Conference
 - Offering a presentation on the work of OTSA at the Co-laborers session (Session 38)
 - b. **OTSA Annual Meeting (Volos, Greece):** Teva thanked the Volos Theological Academy, the director, Pantelis Kalaitzidis, and particularly our liaison with the Academy, Costis Drygianakis, for their generosity and invaluable assistance in enabling us to hold the OTSA meeting at the Theological Academy. The theme of the Annual Meeting was "Mission," and aligned with the theme of the IOTA conference. She noted that the offerings for the meeting had considerable depth and breadth. OTSA provided travel grants (totaling \$5500) for

twelve presenters who expressed the need for assistance, and organized a fellowship dinner for OTSA members in Volos at the conclusion of the meeting on Jan. 10.

- c. **Reception of Converts Document:**
 - OTSA was invited to assist the Assembly of Bishops in this initiative
 - One of members, Fr. Patrick Viscuso, headed the writing of a White Paper on the Reception of Converts from a Canonical Perspective, and several of our members assisted by reviewing and offering comments on the paper. This paper was subsequently presented to the Assembly of Bishops.
 - We thank these members for their offer of their time and expertise: Rev. Dr. Peter Baktis, Rev. Dr. John Erickson, Rev. Dr. Dellas Oliver Herbel, Dr. Paul Meyendorff, Rev. Dr. Stelyios Muksuris, Rev. Dr. Geoffrey Ready, Dr. Sarah Riccardi-Swartz, Rev. Dr. Anton Vrame.
- d. **Mixed Marriages Working Group:** Fr Anthony Roeber has assembled a working group to explore the issue of mixed marriages, which has now expanded to include discussion of disparate marriages. Stellar in expertise, the group is now subdivided into smaller groups studying the history and pastoral considerations of various types of marriages where one spouse is not Orthodox.
- e. **Communication:**
 - Teva detailed the activities of the Executive Board regarding communications with the Assembly of Bishops. We completed the Review of the 2020 yearly reports and have submitted to our membership adjustments to our Mission and By-Laws per that conversation (which will be discussed in New Business). We also completed and submitted in a timely manner all reports for the 2021 Yearly Review for the Assembly of Bishops. Teva thanked Daniel Powell for his extensive assistance in helping OTSA complete an independent audit of our finances for 2021.
 - Communication with our members has continued with monthly newsletters and continual updates to our website. Teva thanked Secretary Helen Theodoropoulos and webmaster Nathaniel Wood for their work.
- f. **Organizational changes:**
 - Treasurer transition: we transitioned from our past treasurer, Fr. Gabriel Rochelle, to our new treasurer, Fr. Nik Ferencz. This included several steps, such as closing and opening a new account at the Bank of America, and moving from a TIN to an EIN designation.
 - As we are now a 501c(3) non-profit, we took several necessary steps, including filing the 1990 tax return for non-profits, filing the report for non-profits in good standing with the State of Massachusetts, applying for and receiving PayPal non-profit status, and renegotiating the Google accounts.
 - Proposals for Changes to Bylaws/officers/membership:
 - Changes to Bylaws to better reflect our mission
 - Proposed addition of Assistant Treasurer
 - Bylaws changes to clarify the rights and responsibilities of the Immediate Past President
 - Proposed raise in membership dues to cover operating expenses

- **Membership:** We implemented the Lifetime membership for OTSA seniors (70 and over) in good standing. We currently have 14 Lifetime members. We have begun invoicing members regarding payment of dues, and members continue to receive discounts on subscriptions to Orthodox journals.

g. **Areas for improvement:**

- The OTSA blog on Academic and Ecclesial freedom has not been active this year. We invited members to submit essays for this blog.
- We still have fewer than 50% of our members paying dues. We also need members to volunteer for the various committees: membership, programming, and finance.
- Outstanding projects: occasional webinars, a membership directory.

3. **Treasurer's Report:**

- a. Fr. Nik Ferencz submitted the 2022 Annual Financial Report. The summary of all income and expenses: our balance at 12/31/22 is \$61,670.75. We began the year at \$85,152.92, income was \$7,483.24, expenses were \$18,787.78, and loss on investments was 12,177.63. As of 12/31/22, the investment accounts were: \$7,581.72 (Money Market); \$14,924.39 (FTSE); \$33,127.19 (S&P); for a total of \$55,633.30
- b. He explained that our expanded responsibilities have increased our costs. He will be sending invoices to members regarding their dues status, with the understanding that we now need more accurate accounting of membership dues, and greater consistency in payment of dues.
- c. Going forward, the Annual Report and our fiscal year will coincide with the calendar year (beginning Jan 1), and no longer be tied to the date of the annual business meeting.
- d. Fr. Nik explained that PayPal offers a donors account, and that we intend to restructure our PayPal accounts to maximize our ability to receive donations and minimize fees.
- e. George Demacopoulos moved to accept the treasurer's report, Paul Ladouceur seconded, and the motion passed.

4. **Secretary's Report:** Helen Theodoropoulos reported on her work of taking monthly minutes for the Officers' meetings; regular correspondence with OTSA members through the monthly newsletter which includes the work of the officers, upcoming programs and projects sponsored by OTSA, interaction with the Assembly of Bishops, information and links to new publications or other academic accomplishments of members, remembrance of members who have fallen asleep in the Lord, and all the information associated with the Annual meeting, including relevant deadlines and links, and other pertinent information; and correspondence with applicants for membership and new members.

5. **New Business:**

- a. **Revision of the Bylaws:** We discussed the proposed revisions to the Bylaws, which included revisions to Article II Purpose, and to Article IV Officers. The former gave greater clarity to our purpose, and the latter added the position of Assistant Treasurer and greater specification to the position of the Immediate Past President. Teva shared concerns that had already been raised via email from members regarding some of the proposed wording in our purpose statement, as well as the need for an Assistant Treasurer and for clarifying the responsibilities and privileges of the Immediate Past President. She explained that our newly established non-profit status and requirements from the Assembly of Bishops have added tasks and responsibilities to the work of the Treasurer. We now see the need to divide the work between a Treasurer, who will handle the necessary filings, reports, audits, and other

large tasks; and an Assistant Treasurer who will handle membership dues. We still have an Associate Treasurer to handle the investment accounts. Regarding the Immediate Past President, the duties and privileges were vague and required clarity. We then looked to the proposed additions to the Purpose statement, and in particular began a lengthy discussion of the suggested addition to Article II. Purpose, Section 1; the proposal was that after the simple statement of “to coordinate the work of Orthodox theologians in North America” we add: “bringing Orthodox scholars from all jurisdictions together for dialogue and to promote the unity of the Orthodox Church in America.” After extensive discussion on the intent and wording of this aspect of our mission, the members agreed to this suggested addition: “and to promote the collaboration of the Orthodox churches in North America.” The other small additions to the purpose statement were not challenged. Fr Peter Baktis moved that we accept all the proposed amendments to the Bylaws, with this specific wording now given to the proposed amended statement of Purpose under discussion: “bringing Orthodox scholars from all jurisdictions together for dialogue and to promote the collaboration of the Orthodox churches in North America”. Chris Durante seconded the motion, and the motion passed.

The amended Article on the Purpose now reads (in its entirety):

ARTICLE II. PURPOSE SECTION 1.

The Orthodox Theological Society in America, organized in 1966 under the auspices and with the blessing of the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas, exists to:

- promote the study and development of Orthodox theology
- coordinate the work of Orthodox theologians in North America, bringing Orthodox scholars from all jurisdictions together for dialogue and to promote the collaboration of the Orthodox churches in North America
- cultivate scholarship, fellowship, spiritual life, and cooperation in honest, open, and collegial discourse among those engaged in advanced study, teaching, research, and writing in the range of theological subjects and related disciplines (e.g., religious studies, biblical studies, the arts, the sciences, history, law, philosophy, literary studies, and bioethics)
- serve as a resource for the Assembly of Bishops and the Church
- engage non-Orthodox theologians interested in Orthodox theology

In addition, the amended Article on the Officers now reads:

ARTICLE VI. Officers SECTION 1.

The officers of the Society are: the President, the Vice-President, the Secretary, the Treasurer, and if desired by the Executive Committee, Associate Treasurer, Assistant Treasurer and Immediate Past President.

SECTION 2. No changes.

SECTION 2b. If desired, the Immediate Past President will remain on the executive committee of the society for one (1) year, with voice and vote, to assist the President and Society.

SECTION 5. The Treasurer shall be the financial officer of the Society, and shall be responsible for the proper conduct of the financial affairs of the Society. The Treasurer shall act for the Society in its financial transactions. The Treasurer shall present regular financial reports, and such special financial reports as may be required, to the Membership and the

executive committee. If desired, the Associate Treasurer and Assistant Treasurer will assist the Treasurer with the duties of the office.

- b. **Increase in membership dues:** Teva proposed that we increase membership dues to cover our increased operating expenses, suggesting that regular membership be increased from \$30 to \$40, and student/senior membership from \$15 to \$25. Telly Papanikolaou moved to accept the increase, but upon discussion, Fr. Peter Baktis recommended putting the increase higher for regular members, to \$50. Telly withdrew his motion and then moved to increase membership dues for regular members to \$50 and for student and senior members to \$25. Fr. Peter seconded the motion, and the motion carried.
- c. **Future collaboration with IOTA- promoting a more vigorous OTSA:** Fr. John informed us that conversations between OTSA and IOTA officers regarding future collaboration, while still at an early stage, have begun. We see that a number of Orthodox scholars and theologians in North America participate in IOTA and yet are not members of OTSA, and collaboration can boost participation in both societies. Regional Orthodox groups are important - for example, they can have a relationship with the local assembly of Bishops, - but there is a need for more vigorous participation. How can this be improved? Suggestions included:
- An easier process of becoming an OTSA member; in particular, identifying sponsors is a barrier for application for membership.
 - Develop and post a members directory; this can help promote interest, collaboration, and also ease the application for membership process.
 - Alter the application process so that it is less stringent than at present, but still keep some review and requirements, for example applicants submit a CV and are reviewed by a membership committee. Teva invited members to join the proposed Membership committee to assist in this work.
- d. **Working Group on reform of Liturgical Texts:** Based on discussions that arose during the presentations in the Annual Meeting, Paul Ladouceur proposed OTSA develop a working group on the topic of reviewing and adapting problematic liturgical texts written in a more polemic time (for example, Antisemitic texts occurring during Holy Week) to better reflect the Gospel message. The membership agreed, and directed the officers to discuss establishing this working group.
- e. **Future Webinar topics:** We asked for suggestions for future webinars, and these were offered:
- In addition to the suggestion of a working group on the topic, a webinar on the topic of the review of problematic liturgical texts was also suggested; this topic was the most pressing priority discussed.
 - Religious nationalism and/or phyletism (and the difference between them)
 - Missionary outreach of the local congregation to the Nones and Dones
- f. **Next Annual Meeting-** location and theme: We talked about returning to Hellenic College/ Holy Cross, especially to facilitate access to the meeting of senior faculty from HCHC who have been extremely supportive of OTSA throughout the years. Also suggested was a return to St. Vladimir's Seminary, and meeting in Toronto (supported by the Orthodox School of Theology at Trinity College), if not at the next meeting, then at the one following. Suggested themes for the next meeting included: Religious nationalism and Ecology and the care for

the environment. Barbara Frank appealed to the membership that we keep meetings in the hybrid format, enabling remote participation for members who have difficulty (due to finances, health or schedule) attending in person. Access for remote participation has been crucial and a great benefit for some of our members.

- g. **Proposed 2023 Budget:** Fr. Nik proposed the 2023 Budget. Total projected income is \$5,750.00; projected expenses are at \$11,930.00; net is - \$6,180.00. Fr Nik explained that most of the discrepancy between the projected income and expense is due to the proposed travel grants and that, in the past, those funds have not been taken from our operating funds, but from the investment account. Paul Ladouceur moved to accept the proposed budget, Fr. Harry Pappas seconded, and the motion passed.
- h. **Introduction and vote on New Members:** Five applicants for membership were presented by Helen to the membership. Each was introduced with a brief description of their qualifications, work, and references, and the officers recommended all for membership. These five are:
- Joel Houston (Full; sponsors Fr. Geoffrey Ready, Helen Theodoropoulos)
 - Fr. Sergius Halvorsen (Full; sponsors Gayle Woloschak and Fr. John Jillions)
 - Nadieszda Kizenko (Full; sponsors Teva Regule and Aristotle Papanikolaou)
 - Menios Papadimitriou (Associate; PhD student; sponsors James Skedros, Fr. John Jillions)
 - Rachel Contos (Associate; PhD student; sponsors Teva Regule, Aristotle Papanikolaou)
- Telly Papanikolaou moved to accept all prospective members into membership, Alexander Lingas seconded, and the motion passed. We welcomed these new members to OTSA.
- i. **Presentation of OTSA officers for 2023:** The slate of officers was presented by Paul Ladouceur from the nominating committee (acting on behalf of Gayle Woloschak, who was not able to be present at the meeting). The recommended slate is: Teva Regule (President); Fr John Jillions (Vice President); Helen Theodoropoulos (Secretary); Fr. Nik Ferencz (Treasurer); Fr. Geoffrey Ready (Assistant Treasurer); Jim Skedros (Associate Treasurer). Paul Ladouceur moved that this slate of officers be approved, George Demacopoulos seconded the motion, and the motion passed. Paul then offered a second motion – one of appreciation and thanks to the executive committee for their work. All agreed and offered their thanks.

The meeting concluded at 7:59 PM.

Addendum: After OTSA members returned to Volos by bus, the majority gathered together for dinner and fellowship at a local restaurant, sealing the day of study and animated discussion with friendship and celebration.

Respectfully Submitted,

Helen Theodoropoulos, OTSA Secretary