

International Conference

HOLINESS, PRAYER AND HESYCHAST SPIRITUALITY   
IN ORTHODOX TRADITION

**West University Timișoara**

**18-19 & 28-29 November**

**ABSTRACTS**

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| **FRIDAY**  **18 November** | |
| SESSION 1 | |
| 9.30 – 9.50 | **Torstein Theodor Tollefsen**  University of Oslo  *„Essence, Energies, and Real Distinction. How do we make sense of it?”* |
| 9.50 – 10.10 | **Fr. *John McGuckin*** (On-line)  University of Oxford  *“The Definition of Nous: The Understanding of Humanity's Spiritual Consciousness in St. Symeon the New Theologian”*  **Abstract**: The pre-Christan vocabulary of personhood approached the individual as a peripheral and non-substantive category. This changed after the fifth century when the Christological controversies caused thinkers from St. Cyril of Alexandria onwards, both to invent a new language of personhood and to relocate it as a substantive ontological, or hypostatic, category of thought. It was in this context that the spiritual theology of the Nous was born and generations of monastics, especially the hesychastic movement, started to chart the specifics of the noetic, or spiritual consciousness of the human being, and how this differed from rational and psychic faculties. The writings of St. Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022) represent a significant stage in the development of teaching on our noetic awareness of the Holy Spirit, and St. Symeon's doctrine in the renowned Hymns of Divine Eros is the focus of this lecture. |
| 10.10 – 10.30 | **Fr. *Alexandros Chouliaras***  University of Athens  *The Spiritual Senses in Hesychast Theology*  **Abstract**: The doctrine of the spiritual senses is found in many ecclesiastical writers, as well as in later, and even contemporary, theologians. It is an effort to explain in words how man is able to perceive God, to sense the divinity, and through which faculties this is achieved. Hesychasm has much to offer in this discussion, therefore our article will focus on a major representative of hesychast theology, namely St Gregory Palamas. Three main points will be examined: a) human knowledge of God, and the divine light; b) the notion of ‘intellectual perception’ (αἴσθησις νοερά); and c) the place of the body in theosis (deification), now and in Paradise.  **Brief CV:** Revd Dr Alexandros Chouliaras is an Adjunct Lecturer of Patristics, Anthropology, and Spirituality at the Faculty of Social Theology and the Study of Religion, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (NKUA), and a post-doctoral researcher, Faculty of Theology (NKUA). He holds a PhD in Theology from VU Amsterdam, Faculty of Religion and Theology, under the direction of Revd Professors Andrew Louth and John Behr. Some of his written work has been published in international *peer review* academic journals and edited volumes. Fr Alexandros is author of *The Anthropology of St Gregory Palamas: The Image of God, the Spiritual Senses, and the Human Body*, Studia Traditionis Theologiae 38 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), and serves as a parish priest in Athens, Greece (Metropolis of Mesogaia and Lavreotiki). |
| SESSION 2 | |
| 11.10 – 11.30 | **Pablo Argarate**  University of Graz  *„Dynamics of Holiness. An Early Liturgical Approach. The Acclamation Τὰ ἅγια τοῖς ἁγίοις”*  In my paper, I deal with the concept of the holy / sacred in the liturgical rites of late 4th century Jerusalem. To do this, I will first present the rite of the Τὰ ἅγια τοῖς ἁγίοις (Ta hagia tois hagiois in its context and its meaning. Then, I will turn to the mystagogical context from which the rite emerged. Finally, the idea of the holy in the liturgical context of the mystagogical catechesis will be examined.  Univ.-Prof. Dr. Dr. Pablo Argárate, Dean of the Faculty of Catholic Theology  (University of Graz) Head, Institute for Ecumenical Theology, Eastern Orthodoxy and Patristics, UNESCO Chair in Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue for South-East Europe |
| 11.30 – 11.50 | **Dionysios Skliris**  Hellenic Open University  *„Nous and Kardia in the Ascetic Teachings of Evagrius Ponticus and Saint Maximus the Confessor”*  **Abstract**: The paper will examine the passage from a more intellectualistic version of prayer in the *Kefalaia Gnostica* by Evagrius Ponticus, to one, which does justice to the desiring part of the soul in the works by Saint Maximus the Confessor. The latter draws from the Evagrian legacy the theory of virtues of different parts of the soul, such as the intellectual prayer and gnosis for nous, love for the irascible part and divine eros for the desiring part. He also inherits a relative theory of vices that have to be combated and transformed into virtues relative to the corresponding parts of the soul. Saint Maximus thus achieves a synthesis with the relative Macarian tradition, which insists in the importance of the heart (kardia). This synthesis has led to the famous hesychast doctrine about the ‘descent of the nous to the heart’ as the goal of intellectual prayer. In the presentation, I will examine how Saint Maximus regards the heart as related to the irascible part of the soul that is directed toward the neighbours, whereas both the intellectual and the desiring parts of the soul are tending toward God. The heart thus plays an intermediary role by collecting what the movements of the intellect and the desiring part of the soul gather from God, and by transferring it to our relation with other members of humanity. The descent of the nous to the heart is thus considered as an achievement of ultimate divine spiritual joy. |
| 11.50 – 12.10 | **Sotiris Mitralexis**  University of Winchester  *“Materiality as Spirituality in Orthodox Liturgical Life: The Exaltation of the Cross as a Case Study”*  **Abstract**: Oft-cited examples of the Orthodox Church's material culture include, for example, icons or the Eucharist itself. However, this paper argues that materiality is placed at the very core of Orthodox prayer and spirituality, transcending binary juxtapositions such as 'the material' and 'the spiritual/the religious', bringing to mind Revd Nikolaos Loudovikos' notion of 'holy materialism' and presupposing a very different understanding of spirituality in an Orthodox ecclesial context. The paper takes the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross ('The Exaltation of the Honorable and Life-Creating Cross', 14 September) observed in an Athenian Orthodox context as a starting point and discusses how basil leaves, wooden or metallic crosses, leaven and bread embody prayer and spirituality, incarnating the Church and articulating what could indeed be described, echoing Loudovikos, as a 'holy materialism'. |
| SESSION 3 | |

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| 15.00 – 15.20 | **Vladimir Cvetković**  University of Belgrade  *“Hesychast Spirituality and the Geometry of Love”*  **Abstract:** The Hesychast controversy was characterized by the increasing interest in the works of Dionysius the Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor. One of the themes that captured the attention of the Hesychast Athonite monks was the metaphor of the centre of circle and radii, by which the both authors portrayed the relationship between God and rational beings. The same metaphor was already in use by Dorotheus of Gaza, who in his *Instructions* identified monks with radii and God with the centre of the circle. The metaphysical implications drawn from Dionysius’ and Maximus’ works and applied to the circle and radii metaphor created a form of geometry of love. Although the texts of Dionysius, Dorotheus and Maximus were copied with small or without any alternations, the diagrams of the circle that accompanied these texts found on the margins of medieval Greek and Slavonic manuscripts varied in form, shape and colour. The paper investigates the way in which the main metaphysical notions of Dionysius and Maximus such as *logoi*, unity, differentiation, movement, limit, were presented the circle and radii diagrams drawn by Hesychast monks. The paper commences from the analysis of simple diagrams in which the circle’s centre is identified with God the Logos, and the radii with *logoi*, and advances by investigating more complex diagrams that include circle or square shaped centre, outer circumference, concentric rings, multi-coloured radii and twisted cruciform bands. The paper argues that these new diagramatic elements are employed to visualize complex ideas important for the Hesychast theology and spirituality such as the Holy Trinity as unity of differentiations, the ontological limit of creation set by divine providence, the triadic structure of rationality and the double movement of procession and reversion. |
| 15.20 – 15.40 | **Fr. Rafael Povîrnaru**  West Universityof Timișoara  *“The Uncreated Light as the Spiritual Experience of the Human Being through Orthodox Cult”*  **Abstract**: The aim of this paper is to emphasize several aspects regarding the presence of light as a godly reality of the human being, describing its characteristics seen as an echo of God’s Word revealed in the Holy Scripture, as the patristic knowledge shows us. Moreover, our following presentation intends to shape the certainty regarding how the entire cult of the Church grants every person with a synergic experience enlightened by the uncreated light, on his path of redemption. Through prayer, through the evangelic word, through each sacrament and liturgical act there is a continuous outpouring of light meant to transform the human being into a real icon of God, both in this earthly life and in eternity. The liturgical experience of light as the uncreated energy endlessly flowing from God is the unique way in which each Christian fulfills its calling given when embracing Christ’s garment of light – the holiness. To be holy means to become aware of the continuous dialogue with our Creator, as an exchange of lives lived in light, in the liturgical act of the Church. |
| 15.40 – 16.00 | **Spyridon P. Panagopoulos** (On-line)  Independent Researcher of Byzantine and Patristic Studies, Patras  *“The Spiritual Guidance in the Testament of Saint Theodore the Studite”*  **ABSTRACT**: This paper deals with the issue of the spiritual guidance of the monks, as we find it recorded in the writings of Saint Theodore the Studite, under the prism of Christian ethics. For this reason, we investigated and studied the Liturgical and Canonical writings addressed to monks and nuns, and especially his Testament, which establish the inner life of the monks within their monastery. The Testament outlines the basic principles that the abbot must follow when exercising the spiritual administration-guidance of the monastery, which depend on the commandment of love, which must characterize the abbot's relations with all the brothers. Among other things, we compare and contrast two almost similar texts both from the point of view of structure and from the point of view of content, the Testament and the Epistle of the saint to his disciple Nicholas, which precedes the Testament in time, in order to understand the similarities and differences between them.  **Biography**: Spyros Panagopoulos studied philology and philosophy at the University of Patras. He completed higher studies in Greece and abroad, in the field of Byzantine studies. His research activity is complemented by his publications in scientific journals and collective volumes, as well as his announcements at conferences in Greece and abroad. Main research interests: Byzantine history, Byzantine philology, theology and philosophy in Byzantium, church history up to the 15th century. In the last decade, he has been dealing, among other things, with Hesychasm and particularly with the writing work and the theological-philosophical thought of Saint Gregory Palamas. |
| SESSION 4 | |
| 16.50 – 17.10  **222** | **Fr. Andreas Andreopoulos**  University of Winchester  *„Hesychastic prayer and Spiritual life today”*  **Abstract**: This presentation will discuss the reception, the impact and the significance of hesychastic prayer in the modern Orthodox world. Armed with the legacy of the Father and the study of hesychasm in the twentieth century, we could turn our attention to the ways that hesychasm has shaped modern Orthodox spirituality. The presentation will touch on questions such as the presence of hesychastic prayer as a practice, but also of related issues such as the status and the understanding of mysticism; fideism and the centrality of the miracle in modern spiritual life; koinonia vs methexis in the reflection of individual vs communal/liturgical life. |
| 17.10 – 17.30 | **Cătălin Ștefan Popa**  Research Professor, Romanian Academy & Private docent, Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz  *“Spirituality in Polemical Writings of Syriac Christians. Conventional and Non-Conventional Arguments about Prayer and Fasting in Elias of Nisibis' Treatise ‘Demonstration of the Correctness of the Faith’ (11th c.)”*    **Abstract:** This presentation discusses the East Syriac perspective on prayer and fasting as epitomized by Elijah of Nisibis, an important bishop, historian and exegete of the Church of the East at the beginning of the Syriac Renaissance. In his polemical treatise Demonstration of the Correctness of the Faith, he advocates the genuine orthodoxy of his church’s doctrine, by systematizing the specific conditions of authentic fasting and prayer, which lie at the heart of this paper. |
| 17.30 – 17.50 | **Kyle Schenkewitz** (On-line)  Mount St. Joseph University, Cincinnati, Ohio  *“Restoration through Incarnation: Dorotheos of Gaza, Virtue, and Human Flourishing”*  **Abstract**: Dorotheos of Gaza flourished in the sixth century near Byzantine Palestine. He stood in the Gazan monastic tradition as a disciple of Barsanuphius and John and, among the collected 850 correspondence from these two Old Men, Dorotheos was a recipient of numerous letters. As a leader of his own monastic community, Dorotheos directed his disciples toward a life of human flourishing that was grounded in the incarnation of Christ. In this paper I will argue that Dorotheos centered his monastic spirituality on Christ’s incarnation as key for human flourishing. For Dorotheos humanity was adorned with virtue at creation and lived in a dispassionate state. However, when Adam disobeyed God in Eden humanity was thereafter dominated by the passions. Only through Christ could humanity begin to reacquire virtue and start the return to an Edenic state. The habituation and acquisition of virtue represented a return to a restored human life. Dorotheos taught that Christ brought humanity the cure for the illness of sin, instruction for uprooting the passions, and the hope for a life full of virtue. The imagery he used did not refer explicitly to Christ’s suffering and crucifixion but rather to the incarnation. Dorotheos founded his teaching on the role of Christ’s incarnation as a healing measure to restore the natural state of humanity and wrestle against the passions that plague humanity. In his teaching, the battle against the passions was hard fought and vital to the monastic life. He provided a paradigm from which his monastic community could analyze the passions that arise within a person and discover the roots of those passions. Likewise, he also provided detailed instructions on how virtue could be conceived, practiced, and habituated. For Dorotheos the monastic life was therapeutic, a pursuit of the flourishing life of virtue that is made available through following Christ’s incarnation and instruction. |
| **SATURDAY**  **19 November** | |
| SESSION 5 | |
| 10.00-10.20 | **Georgiana Huian** (On-line)  Institute of Old Catholic Theology, University of Bern/Institut de Théologie Orthodoxe “Saint Serge” Paris  *“The Spiritual Senses in the Conception of Diadochus of Photike”*  **Abstract**: Diadochus of Photike remains a remarkable father in the history of ascetic and mystical writings for his profound teaching on the inner senses. Although it is not clear to which extent he might have been influenced by Origen or Gregory of Nyssa, he certainly inherits the considerations on inner sensibility put forward by Evagrius and the Macarian corpus. This communication will examine the different ways of naming and describing the experience of the inner senses in the *Hundred Chapters on Spiritual Perfection*: as senses of the intellect, of the soul, of the spirit or of the heart. The variety of these denominations show a complex conception on spiritual potentialities, when they regain their unity illuminated by the knowledge of God. The examination of the spiritual senses in Diadochus of Photike offers interesting insights in the anthropology of Diadochus, which has an important influence on the hesychastic tradition. |
| 10.20-10.50 | **Daniel Lemeni**  West University Timișoara  *„Holiness and Inner Silence (Hesychia) in Late Antique Monasticism”*  **Abstract**: The subject of my paper is the close relationship between holiness and monastic practice as it appears in the spirituality of the desert. For this reason, I divided my paper in two sections: in the first section, I will discuss the positive role of the body in defining the holiness of the monk. More exactly, the monastic body was understood as a means for spiritual progress and inner silence (*hesychia*). And indeed, without ascetic discipline there is no spiritual progress (*hesychia*) because only through ascetic daily practice the monk can achieve inner peace. From this perspective, the holiness is seen as a transformation of the monk’s flesh. In the second section, I will point out that the most clear sign of this transformation was the face of the monk. In other words, the monastic body, and especially the face, was an external manifestation of the monk’s holiness, a visible proof and sign of his deification. Briefly, the holiness was written on the face of the monk. In view of these insights, our conclusion is simple: the desert monasticism developed a subtle theology of the brilliant body as a visible marker of holiness. |
| 10.50-11.10 | **Fr. Nichifor Tănase**  West University Timișoara  *“Spiritual Senses and the Experience of the Holy Spirit in the Theology of Father Stăniloae”*  **Abstract**: In this paper I will analyse Father Stăniloae’s perception of the intra-trinitarian relationships, particularly the Holy Spirit’s “resting on” and “radiating from” the Son. This facilitates a Christological-Pneumatological anthropology, as my paper points out.  I will first draw attention to the heart as the meeting place of God and human, as the mind enters deep into the heart in pure prayer. The mind resting in the heart enables one to experience God. Through prayer in the Holy Spirit and in communication with the Church we can receive the transforming and saving power of Christ. Spiritual senses develop with prayer and through sacramental preparation, transforming the human being into a eucharistic being, united with Christ in body and blood. The second section focusses on the “rest” and “radiation” of the Spirit through the Son, Hesycheia. Praying in the heart, the presence of the mind in the heart, can be understood as the human being resting in God. Father Stăniloae defines holiness as the Saint “resting” in God, in analogy with the relationship between the Holy Spirit and Christ within the Holy Trinity. God undertakes his deifying work, and the human being takes after the kenosis, the self-emptying of Christ. The resting of the human being in God has implications for one’s relationship with others. Just as Christ gave himself, so will the deified human being encounter his fellow human beings in a delicate and transparent manner with pure thoughts and feelings. Father Stăniloae refers to this as “spiritual tenderness”. Only via compassionate and generous love one can obtain the stage of resting in God. The third and last section will explore the highest level of pneumatisation of human nature, when, in Stăniloae’s view, a human being becomes the burning bush. In the Holy Spirit we can distinctly feel the fire of the complete love of the Father and his Son for us. This way, the Church is a large burning bush in the world. Its unending fire is the Holy Spirit. He enables the creature to “sense” God. Via the Holy Spirit we can feel united in Christ and oriented towards the Father.  Stăniloae’s christological-pneumonological anthropology is thus a continuation of Patristic pneumatology, according to which the Holy Spirit fulfils a special role in Revelation and in the Church. The experience of the deified human resting in God and God in him explains the origin and nature of the shining faces of Seers-of-God during intense prayer. It also accounts for the luminosity of the deified bodies of saints. My paper will address part of a not-yet explored aspect of Father Stăniloae’s theology, his “Christology of the face,” which includes the concept of pneumatic radiation. Very short it can be summarised in the well-known phrase (Ps 35,10): “in your Light” - referring the Holy Spirit – “we will see the Light” – referring to Christ, the light and the shining face. |
| **MONDAY**  **28 November** | |
| SESSION 6 | |
| 10.00-10.20 | **Sebastian Brock** (On-line)  *University of Oxford*  *„The Hesychastic Life according to Isaac of Nineveh and Dadisho' (7th Century)”*  **ABSTRACT**: The term *hesychia* features some 200 times in the Greek translation of the Discourses by Isaac of Nineveh, usually rendering *shelya*, 'stillness', and referring to shorter or longer periods of seclusion 'in *hesychia/shelya/stillness'*, a distinctive feature of Syriac monastic life in the late seventh century.  Isaac devotes several Discourses to the subject, as does his contemporary Dadisho'.  The paper will explore and describe some of the man features of this Syriac hesychastic life. |
| 10.20-10.40 | **Natalie Depraz**  *University of Rouen*  *„The Self-Descriptions of the Prayer of the Heart by Hesychast Monks. A First-Person Phenomenology of Attentional and Emotional Moves in the Light of Hesychius of Batos and of Diadochos of Photiki"* |
| 10.40-11.00 | **His Holiness, Benedict Vesa**  University Babeș-Bolyai Cluj  *“Inner prayer according at Isaac of Nineveh and Simon Taibuteh”*  **Abstract:** Prayer is a unique and unitary reality in its ultimate purpose – to achieve a familiarity with God. As a process we can call this journey – ‘inner unification’, and as a ‘final product’, ‘inner prayer’, both concepts present in ascetic-mystical terminology. Being relatively common concepts in the patristic tradition, in the present research, we will restrict the area of analysis to the East Syriac space, and more precisely to two authors who are very close in terms of experience, geography and time, a unity expressed, above all, at the level of language and style. These are Isaac of Nineveh and Simon Taibuteh. The research will analyse one single concept indicated in the title – ‘inner prayer’, as it appears developed in the writings of the two authors, trying to highlight the similarities and possible differences, along the spiritual itinerary. |
| SESSION 7 | |
| 11.40-12.00 | ***Fr. Nathanael Neacșu***  *University Alexandru Ioan Cuza, Iași*  *“The ‘hypostatic prayer’ in St Sophrony Sakharov’ s Theology”*  **Abstract**: The paper with title “hypostatic prayer” tries to analyze the theological background of prayer in St Sophrony Sakharov’s thinking. There are many doctrinal realities that influencethe prayer and will try to shortly underline them. The “hypostatic prayer” determines the entire theology about “person/hypostasis” in the spiritual and the theological heritage of St Sophrony Sakarov, fact that will be in our atention in the below study. |
| 12.00-12.20 | **Claudiu Mesaroș**  West Universityof Timișoara  *„On the philosophical nature of prayer”*  **Abstract**: One of Aristotle’s less discussed phrases belongs to the On interpretation (17a 1-7) and distinguishes between statement-making sentences (those in which there is truth or falsity) and sentences that do not state, that is to say, are beyond the problem of truth or false so they can be dismissed. The concept of prayer (euche) is distributed here to the Rhetoric and Poetry, as it stands out of the truth value sentences: it will be a product of art. But still, there is a peculiar text in the Politics 7 where the regime "according to prayer" (kat'euchen) is described as the authentic aristocracy we would pray for, which needs further clarifications in relation both to previous classification of prayer as a matter of discourse and ulterior developments of philosophy of petitionary prayer. |
| 12.20-12.40 | **Bogdan-Gabriel Drăghici**  University of Oxford  *Title reserved* |
| 12.40-13.00 | **Alessia Brombin** (On-line)  The Pontifical University of Santa Croce, Rome  *“Spiritual Fatherhood Engagement and Direction according to Theoleptos of Philadelphia and Gregory Palamas”*  **Abstract:** Following the topic *Holiness, prayer and hesychast spirituality in orthodox tradition* I will try to analyze the *Discourses* and the *Letters* of Theoleptos (1250-1322), Metropolitan of Philadelphia, collected by nun and his spiritual daughter Irene-Eulogia Choumnaina, daughter of the intellectual Nikephoros Choumnos and widow of the Despot John Palaiologos. Theoleptos directed the princess, prematurely widowed, to the monastic life. Irene-Eulogia erected her urban monastery on the remains of the ancient *Philantropos Soter* Monasteryin Byzantium. During the foundation Theoleptos lived in this double monastery to support the Abbess. Late-Byzantine hesychastic master developed his own concept of *hesychia* by addressing monks (and especially nuns) who live a cenobitic life, who dedicate themselves to personal prayer and meditation in their own cell, but also to community prayer in the church, to the liturgy and to the other moments of the common life.This Metropolitan was also decisive for the monastic vocation of Gregory Palamas (1296-1359), Archbishop of Thessaloniki. He in turn weaves a relationship with the nun Xene, analogous to that of his master. He wrote the work *To the most reverend nun Xene, on the passions, virtues and fruits of the application of the intellect*, which represents the most complete synthesis of his spiritual teaching. Bishop of Thessalonica wrote this work to respond to requests for help on the conversion and spiritual life of the elderly nun Xene, surrounded by a great reputation in the capital, so much so that she was hired as an educator of the Emperor’s daughters, probably Andronicus III. The analysis will allow us to observe the point of view of two great Bishops who contributed to the monastic tradition of spiritual direction in Byzantine female monasticism.  **Academic & biographical notes:** Alessia Brombin is a *lecturer* of Spiritual Theology at the Pontifical University of Saint Crux (Rome – 2018present). She earned Ph.D in Theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University (Rome, 2022). Her research field is oriental spirituality and Greek Patristic Literature, specially Palamas’s theology. She earned a M.Div. (Master of Divinity) in spiritual theology at Pontifical Gregorian University (Rome) in 2015. She holds a B.D. (Bachelor of Divinity) from St. Anthony’s Doc. Theological Institute of Padua (2009). She holds an Master’s degree in Philosophy from Padua’s University, in the department of philosophy’s history, where she wrote her thesis on *philosophical counseling* (director’s thesis prof. Enrico Berti) in 2003.  Data base: <https://santacroce.academia.edu/alessiabrombin> |
|  | **TUESDAY**  **29 November** |
|  | **Anthony Briggman** (On-line)  Emory University  *„The Role of the Anointing Spirit in the Christological Mission and Salvation according to Irenaeus”*  **Abstract**: The baptism of Jesus by the Holy Spirit plays a significant role in Irenaeus’ theology. This paper will explain that Irenaeus believes that at Jesus’ baptism the Holy Spirit anointed Jesus’ humanity in order to empower Jesus’ human nature to fulfill the Christological mission. Moreover, as a result of this anointing – as the Unction of Christ – the Holy Spirit becomes accustomed to working and dwelling in the human race and becomes prepared to bring salvation to the rest of the human race. Upon the glorification of Christ, the Holy Spirit, as the Unction of Christ, mediates the presence of Christ to believers. |