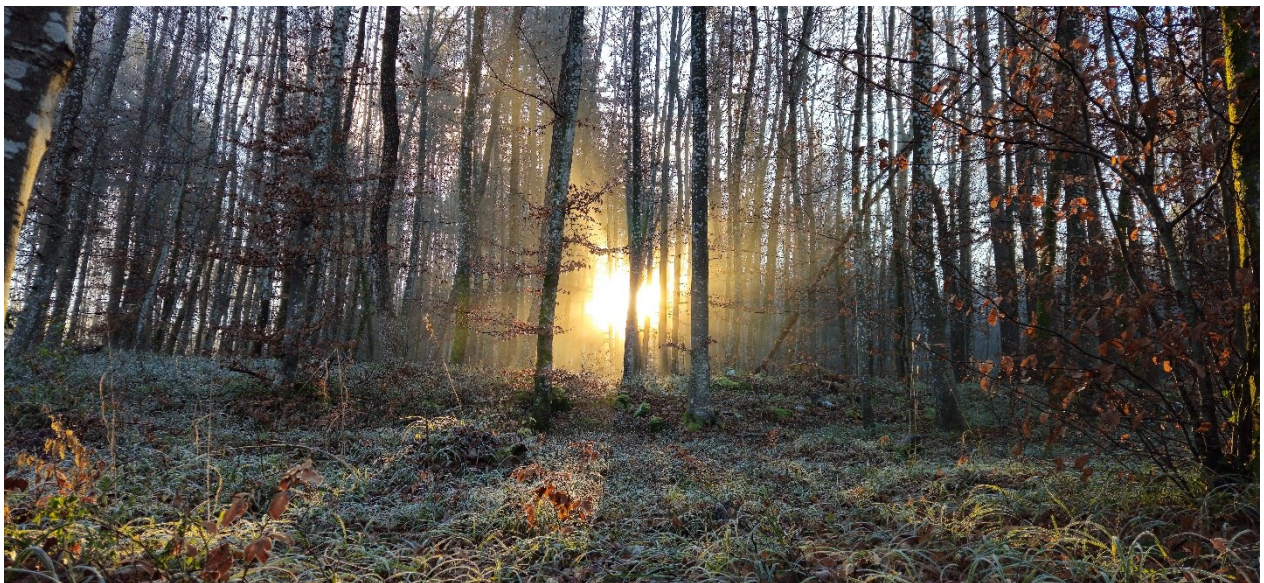


EMOTIONS AND SPIRITUALITY

International Scientific Conference

Ljubljana, December 14th, 2024



Organization

University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Theology

University of Zagreb, Faculty of Philosophy and Religious Studies

The Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow, Faculty of Theology

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On-line

Program and abstracts

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University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Theology

(Institute of Moral Theology and Spiritual Questions of Modern Culture; P6-0269: Religion, ethics, education, and challenges of modern society; J6-50212: The Power of Emotions and the Status of Female Characters in Different Literary Genres of the Old Testament)

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Editor:

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PROGRAM

On-line: <https://uni-lj-si.zoom.us/j/94527930326> ; Meeting ID: 945 2793 0326

14:30-14:35 Welcome speeches

Dean of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Ljubljana **Tadej Stegu**, PhD, Asst. Prof.

President of the Organizing Committee **Ivan Platovnjak**, PhD, Assc. Prof.

(Chairperson: Irena Avsenik Nabergoj)

Lectures

- 14:35-14:50 **Ivan Platovnjak** (Slovenia): *The Role of Emotions in the Spiritual Life*
14:50-15:05 **Tone Svetelj** (USA): *Emotions as Windows to Existence: the Role of Emotions in Existentialism*
15:05-15:20 **Ines Skelac** (Croatia): *Emotions and Spirituality in the Philosophy of Martin Buber*
15:20-15:35 **Erika Prijatelj** (Slovenia, USA): *Embracing the Right to Feel and Mastering Emotional Resilience*
15:35-16:00 **Discussion and Break**

(Chairperson: Erika Prijatelj)

Lectures

- 16:00-16:15 **Irena Avsenik Nabergoj** (Slovenia): *Mastering Emotions in Accepting the Death of Loved Ones Through the Power of Faith in Old Testament Narratives*
16:15-16:30 **Mariola T. Milik** (USA): *Thomas Keating's theory of Divine Therapy. Centering Prayer and the Healing of Emotions.*
16:30-16:45 **Liza Primc** (Slovenia) *St. John Henry Newman on Emotions*
16:45-17:00 **Marina Novina** (Croatia): *Emotions and the Pursuit of Happiness*
17:00-17:30 **Discussion and Break**

(Chairperson: Ines Skelac)

Lectures

- 17:30-17:45 **Vassilios Bebis** (USA): *The Gifts of Tears in Eastern Christian Spirituality: A Redemptive Practice*
17:45-18:00 **Stanislaus Alla SJ** (India): *According to Hindu thought, are Emotions obstacles in attaining spiritual freedom?*
18:00-18:15 **Arokiaraj Joseph Patrick** (India): *Buddhist Teachings on Compassion: Cultivating an Emotion for Liberation*
18:15-18:30 **Ahmet Türkan** (Turkey): *Understanding of Emotion and Spirituality in Islam*
18:30-19:00 **Discussion & Conclusion**

INTRODUCTION

If we take a look at the history of spirituality, we can see a very different appreciation of emotions in the spiritual life. Due to the influence of Stoicism, the desert fathers mostly had a negative attitude towards emotions. But in the first half of the Middle Ages, monastic theology was very much concerned with this subject, so that this theology could be described as affective theology: e.g. Bernard, Richard of St Victor. At the end of the Middle Ages, however, theology became increasingly rationalised and thus disconnected from spiritual and affective life. The importance of the emotional dimension in human life was rediscovered by psychoanalysis and the phenomenological school.

Emotionality (affectivity) —briefly defined—is the active resonance of a person's existential relationship to their environment and their state of life in consciousness. It is human consciousness that gives human affectivity its special character. Man is aware of himself, his life and its dynamics: this awareness is also the basis of emotional consciousness.

Nowadays, there is a great deal of research in psychology, neurology, sociology, philosophy, etc., which confirms that all emotions play an important role in our inner world and in our relationships with others. They influence our ability to understand ourselves, our self-esteem, our self-confidence and our perception and interpretation of the world around us and thus also our spiritual life, both in the context of religion and in all other contexts. Emotions are certainly very important if we want to present a more holistic view of the human person and develop a spirituality that embraces all aspects of our being.

ABSTRACTS

Ivan Platovnjak, PhD, Assc. Prof., Faculty of Theology, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, Ivan.Platovnjak@teof.uni-lj.si

The Role of Emotions in the Spiritual Life

The role of emotions in Christian spirituality is significant because they enable a deeper personal relationship with God and contribute to spiritual growth. While some Church teachers have regarded emotions as potential obstacles to maturity in faith, it is generally recognised that emotions play a crucial role in the spiritual life. Researchers agree that emotions are made up of physiological responses, subjective experiences and behaviours, with joy, sadness, fear, anger, disgust and surprise identified as fundamental emotions. In Christian spirituality, each of these emotions plays an important role. Spiritual emotions such as love for God, humility, repentance and peace have been described by numerous mystics and theologians throughout church history. St Augustine and St Bernard of Clairvaux regarded spiritual emotions as an integral part of spiritual transformation. In his *Spiritual Exercises*, St Ignatius of Loyola defined consolation and desolation as key states that aid in spiritual discernment. St John of the Cross emphasised the need to overcome attachment to emotions and see them merely as a means to union with God. Similarly, Thomas Merton warned of the danger of emotional experiences becoming an end in themselves rather than a tool for a deeper devotion to God.

Keywords: Emotions, Christianity, Experience, Spirituality

Tone Svetelj, PhD, Lecturer of Philosophy and Theology, Hellenic College; Boston College, USA, tsvetelj@hchc.edu

Emotions as Windows to Existence: the Role of Emotions in Existentialism

Emotions hold a complex and multifaceted place in philosophy, from being seen as interference with reason in its pursuit of truth to being treated as revealing profound truths about human existence. In Existentialism, emotions disclose the nature of our existence, our relationships to others, and our existential concerns. Emotions are closely tied to our sense of self, freedom, responsibility, our understanding of meaning and authenticity. Consequently, emotions are not seen as irrational or secondary but as essential states that shape how we experience and understand our human existence.

Keywords: Existentialism, Emotions, Authenticity, Responsibility

Ines Skelac, PhD, Asst. Prof., University of Zagreb, Faculty of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Croatia, ines.skelac@ffrz.unizg.hr

Emotions and Spirituality in the Philosophy of Martin Buber

This talk explores the connection between emotions and spirituality in the thought of Martin Buber, primarily through his concept of the *I-Thou* relationship. Emotions, for Buber, play a crucial role in transcending mere intellectual engagement to form genuine connections with others, nature, and God. Spirituality, in Buber's view, is not confined to abstract religious ideas but is lived through direct and personal encounters, in which emotional openness and presence are vital. In this talk, it will be argued that Buber's *I-Thou* relationship embodies the fusion of emotional depth and spiritual engagement, making space for a non-verbal, existential connection that extends beyond human interaction to encompass nature and the divine. Thus, Buber's work offers an insight into how emotions and spirituality intersect, shaping the essence of true dialogue and presence in human life.

Keywords: Martin Buber, I-Thou Relationship, Emotions, Spirituality, Philosophy of Dialogue

Erika Prijatelj, PhD, Asst. Prof., Hellenic College, USA; Faculty of Theology, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, Erika.Prijatelj@teof.uni-lj.si

Embracing the Right to Feel and Mastering Emotional Resilience

This presentation delves into the interplay between honouring the right to feel and mastering emotional resilience. It begins by emphasizing the essential importance of recognizing and validating all emotions as an integral part of the human experience. The "right to feel" underscores the necessity of granting ourselves permission to experience emotions—be it joy, sadness, anger, or fear—without judgment or suppression.

Building on this foundation, the presentation explores the concept of emotional mastery. This does not imply controlling or suppressing emotions but rather understanding, managing, and responding to them in constructive ways. Emotional mastery involves cultivating self-awareness, regulating emotional reactions, and developing strategies to maintain balance during challenging situations.

The discussion will highlight practical tools for mastering emotions, such as presence, emotional reframing, and adaptive coping techniques. It will also address how acknowledging the right to feel enriches emotional resilience, fostering a sense of inner peace and emotional strength.

Keywords: Emotional Self-awareness, Coping Strategies, Emotional Mastery, Emotional Resilience

Irena Avsenik Nabergoj, PhD, Professor and Scientific Adviser, Faculty of Theology, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, Irena.AvsenikNabergoj@teof.uni-lj.si

Mastering Emotions in Accepting the Death of Loved Ones Through the Power of Faith in Old Testament Narratives

The Bible immerses us in the depths of faith and emotion through the story of Abraham, who stands ready to offer his son Isaac (Genesis 22:1-19). Abraham's example goes beyond human nature and paternal love, for his unconditional devotion to God enables him to master his deepest emotions and demonstrate complete obedience to God's will. In this way, he embodies a faith rooted in a transcendent, meta-historical truth beyond human reason. A similar strength of faith is found in the mother of the Maccabees, who encourages her seven sons to accept death rather than renounce their faith, as demanded by the pagan ruler Antiochus (2 Macc 7). This mother's courage reverberates through history, echoed later by the Jewish matron Rachel, who follows a similar path during the massacre of the Jewish community in Mainz in 1096. Drawing on biblical and historical primary sources, this paper demonstrates how faith can overcome even the most powerful emotions, leading to acts of selfless sacrifice that resonate deeply within theology and liturgy. While Jewish and Christian liturgies today interpret sacrifice not as the literal giving of life, but as a symbolic and spiritual commitment to faith, these ancient narratives continue to inspire a profound dedication.

Keywords: The Sacrifice of Abraham, The Martyrdom of the Maccabean Mother, Lady Rachel of Mainz Emotional Mastery Through Faith, Echoes of Faith-Driven Sacrifice in Theology and Liturgy, Faith and Emotional Resilience

Mariola T. Milik, MA, Doctoral Student, The Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow, mtmilik@gmail.com

Thomas Keating's Theory of Divine Therapy. Centering Prayer and the Healing of Emotions.

Thomas Keating, a Trappist monk, is one of the fathers of Centering Prayer (CP). CP is a form of contemplative practice, which seeks God with help of a sacred word. This word symbolizes the praying person's consent to God's presence and action within. Keating developed theological background for spiritual journey, of which Centering Prayer is an essential part. Using psychological language, he explains the dark nights, that are experienced during the practice of CP, as times of healing of the unconscious, when God heals us on every level, including repressed into the unconscious difficult emotions from early childhood. Keating calls this process the Divine therapy. He describes how child, unable to satisfy its instinctual needs for survival/security, control/power, and affection/approval, develops centers of our unconscious motivation – the emotional programs for happiness. When we cannot obtain what we desire, we experience the afflictive emotions like anger, frustration or fear. When we open up to God's grace in CP and let the Holy Spirit act in us, God unloads our unconscious, dismantles our false self, and leads us to the union with Himself.

Keywords: Thomas Keating, Centering Prayer, Divine Therapy, Emotional Programs for Happiness, False Self, Afflictive Emotions

Liza Primc, MA, Teaching Asst., Junior Researcher, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Theology, Slovenia, liza.primc@teof.uni-lj.si

St. John Henry Newman on Emotions

Saint John Henry Newman (1801-1890), a 19th century theologian and cardinal, emphasised the profound role of the emotions in faith and reason. He believed that the emotions are integral to understanding the religious truths that shape our moral and spiritual lives. Newman argued that genuine faith comes not only from rational analysis but also from the experience of the heart.

Keywords: John Henry Newman, emotions, faith

Marina Novina, PhD, Asst. Prof., Faculty of Philosophy and Religious Studies, University of Zagreb, Croatia, marina.novina@ffrz.unizg.hr

Emotions and the Pursuit of Happiness

All people by nature strive for happiness is a well-known philosophical thought. People would agree with that, even if they defined happiness and happy life in numerous ways, as many authors in the history of philosophy and psychology have done. Happiness is both a goal and a state, something mine and something we build with others, and always desirable. This is visible in everyday life, in psychotherapy processes and in learning processes. However, without negative states and failures, it remains unattainable. Thus, emotions, among which happiness and sadness are equally important, are a vital link on the biological, psychological and spiritual levels of human development. Namely, emotions are a kind of motive and a kind of detector of the quality of human adaptation and the fulfilment of needs in a biological, psychological and spiritual sense. The aim of this presentation is to highlight the importance of emotions for human development in achieving well-being.

Keywords: Emotions, Happy Life, Philosophy, Psychology, Psychotherapy, Well-being

Vassilios Bebis, PhD, Prof., Graduate Theological Foundation; Hellenic College Holy Cross, USA, bebis128@gmail.com

Women's Spiritual Empowerment in Orthodox Christianity, following the Example of the Virgin Mary

This scholarly inquiry examines women's spiritual empowerment within Orthodox Christianity, drawing inspiration from the exemplar of the Virgin Mary. Rooted in theological discourse, the exploration delves into the equal spiritual dignity of men and women, as affirmed by Orthodox theology. Through a rigorous analysis of Mary's role as a model of faith, obedience, and compassionate intercession, the presentation elucidates the theological significance of women's agency and participation in the life of the Church. Delving into devotional practices inspired by Mary and her compassionate motherhood, the inquiry sheds light on the transformative power of theological archetypes in shaping gender dynamics within religious traditions. Ultimately, the study seeks to deepen our understanding of women's spiritual empowerment within Orthodoxy and the enduring influence of the Virgin Mary's example.

Keywords: Spirituality of Women, Orthodox Christianity, Virgin Mary, Spiritual Empowerment

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According to Hindu thought, are Emotions Obstacles in Attaining Spiritual Freedom?

Indic thought employs words such as *bhava*, *vedana* to refer to emotions, and love, attraction, hatred, joy, fear, sorrow are the frequently cited examples. Both philosophical and Scriptural texts discuss emotions and their importance. One school, promoted by Sankara and Vedanta suggest that emotions are obstacles on one's path to liberation and be overcome. The Bhagavad Gita wrestles with a related primordial question: should we keep away from the emotions or let them influence our thought and reasoning? In it, Krishna exhorts Arjuna to keep off from emotions and fulfil the duties. Alternately, Bhakti Marga -the path of devotion-revolutionizes the horizon by giving signal importance to emotions in attaining spiritual liberation. The paper reviews the complexities around emotions in Hindu thought and their potential to be the bridge builders in fostering inter religious discourses.

Keywords: Bhakti, Bhava, Vedana, Sankara, Vedanta

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Buddhist Teachings on Compassion: Cultivating an Emotion for Liberation

One of the central teachings of Buddhism is compassion—known in Buddhism as *karuna*. It is not just an emotion, but a powerful force for transforming suffering, cultivating wisdom, and realizing the true nature of interconnectedness. Like all phenomena in Buddhism, emotions are seen as impermanent and interconnected. They arise in response to conditions and can lead to suffering or liberation, depending on how they are understood and managed.

One of the primary ways Buddhists develop compassion is through meditation. A common practice is *Metta Bhavana* or loving-kindness meditation. This meditation begins with cultivating love and kindness toward oneself, then extends outward to others: first to loved ones, then to neutral individuals, and finally to those we may consider enemies. Engaged compassion asks us to act in ways that alleviate the suffering of others.

Keywords: Buddhism, Compassion, Karuna, Mediation

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Understanding of Emotion and Spirituality in Islam

Humans are emotional beings. These emotions emerge in different ways in life. The Quran emphasizes that humans are created with a certain nature (*fitrah*). The religion of Islam recommends that some emotions should be highlighted and others should be suppressed. In other words, it emphasizes that humans should control their emotions positively. Prophet Muhammad stated in one of his hadiths that the strong is not the one who has physical strength, but the one who controls his emotions in times of anger. In the Quran, while narrating the events experienced by many prophets, especially Prophet Muhammad, their emotions are also frequently mentioned. Prophet Moses, whose name is mentioned the most in the Quran, is one of them. In many verses, his anger, patience, repentance and need for Allah's support are expressed with different emotional descriptions. On the other hand, the experiences of Mary, the mother of Jesus, before and after birth are expressed with different emotional states. In fact, a chapter of the Quran is specifically named "Surah Maryam" to express her emotional story. Her anxiety, patience, and enduring hardships are described with intense emotion. In this study, the importance of the understanding of emotion in Islam will be discussed within the framework of basic sources.

Keywords: Islam, Emotion, Spirituality, Tradition, Prophets



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