

# THE LIFE OF PRAYER ON MOUNT ATHOS

**Madingley Hall, Cambridge**

**1 – 3 March 2019**

According to St Basil, the monk's whole life should be a season of prayer, both public prayer and private prayer. That is what the monks of Mount Athos are there to do. That is the basis of their entire way of life. Athos is sometimes called 'the mountain of silence', but as one living Athonite has written, 'here you can hear the hum of unceasing prayer.'

Our conference will explore all dimensions of this mystery, beginning with the deceptively simple question 'what is prayer?' Subsequent talks will consider various aspects of prayer as practised on Athos both in public and in private: the prayer of the katholikon and the prayer of the cell, prayer when working, prayer when painting icons, the musical tradition of prayer and the poetic tradition, culminating in the Jesus Prayer or prayer of the heart which is the foundation of the hesychastic renewal of monasticism on Athos.

In addition to the talks, and the discussion that we hope will follow them, the usual liturgical framework of our conference will provide opportunities for praying together in Madingley's lovely medieval parish church. All are welcome to attend these services which will be celebrated mostly in English.



Here are some brief notes about our speakers and their talks.

### **1. Fr Stephen Platt: What is Prayer?**

Fr Stephen Platt is Rector of the Russian Orthodox Church of St Nicholas the Wonderworker in Oxford. He is also General Secretary of the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius.

#### Abstract

[to be supplied]

### **2. Fr Maximos Conostas: Liturgical Prayer**

Fr Maximos Conostas is Senior Research Scholar at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, in Brookline, Mass. He holds a PhD in Patristics and Historical Theology from the Catholic University of America, in Washington, DC. For many years he was a professor of theology at Harvard Divinity School, after which he became a monk at the Holy Monastery of Simonopetra on Mount Athos.

#### Abstract

The Orthodox tradition accepts no essential division between the life of corporate worship and liturgy, and the practice of private prayer and personal spiritual devotion. Instead, the structures and sacraments of the visible Church are understood to be on a continuum with the inner Church of the heart, so that the objectively outward and the existentially inward are mutually present and interior to one another. Neither a merely ecclesiastical ritual nor psychological event, this mutual interiority unfolds as the discovery of a new human identity, a new mode of being, in the ecclesial body of Christ.

### **3. Archimandrite Ephraim: Work as Prayer**

Elder Ephraim is the Abbot of the Holy Great Monastery of Vatopedi on Mount Athos. Born in Cyprus in 1956, he is a graduate of the Theological School of the University of Athens. In 1982 he was tonsured a monk in the brotherhood of Elder Joseph in New Skete on Mount Athos. This brotherhood repopulated the monastery of Vatopedi which in 1990 reverted from the idiorhythmic to the cenobitic way of life with the enthronement of Elder Ephraim as its abbot.

#### Abstract

The daily life of a monk in an Athonite coenobium may be divided into three approximately eight-hour periods, namely the services in church, the monastic tasks (*diakonima* or 'obediences'), and the time spent in his cell. In the church services the monk is occupied with communal prayer, and in his cell with personal prayer. But even the assigned tasks of the monk remain a part of his prayer, because these tasks are performed under obedience. This obedience is performed out of love, not for man, but for God Himself. The monk carries out his monastic tasks in a continuous cycle of remembrance of God.

#### **4. Professor Elizabeth Jeffreys: Poetry as Prayer**

Elizabeth Jeffreys is Emeritus Bywater and Sotheby Professor of Byzantine and Modern Greek Language and Literature, and Emeritus Fellow of Exeter College, University of Oxford. She has published widely on topics in Byzantine literary studies. She is a Patron of FoMA.

##### Abstract

After a brief overview of the contexts and purposes of some of the best-known patristic and medieval Greek personal religious verse, this paper will focus on the epigrams which in a humbler way help direct monastic, and also congregational, devotion. Inscribed on liturgical objects, icon revetments, or placed on church and refectory walls, the majority express anonymously the prayers of their authors and readers. Examples will be taken from objects in the Athonite monasteries.

#### **5. Dr Dimitri Conomos: Music as Prayer**

Dimitri Conomos is a musicologist specializing in medieval and contemporary Byzantine, Russian, Latin, Romanian, and Serbian chant traditions. Born in Sydney, Australia, he travelled to Oxford where he completed doctoral studies in musicology under Egon Wellesz. He has published books and articles on various aspects of Orthodox church music.

##### Abstract

What is there in the subtle force of sacred chant that inspires us so deeply? For his presentation, Dimitri Conomos interviewed several Athonite fathers, each from different cultural backgrounds, each with strong opinions. At the same time, all agreed that, of all religious artistic endeavours, it is the musical one which holds one's attention most readily. How radically it draws us to worship, moves us to spontaneous prayer, adds colour and drama to liturgical gestures!

#### **6. Aidan Hart: Painting Icons as Prayer**

Aidan Hart has been a professional icon painter and carver since 1984, with commissions in over twenty-five countries of the world. He lectures widely, and runs the three-year part-time Icon Painting programme for The Prince's School of Traditional Arts. He has published two books, including *Beauty, Spirit, Matter: Icons in the Modern World* (2014).

##### Abstract

To craft an icon is to pray with matter. The stones and earth that the icon painter uses for pigment are like words for the hymnographer: good, but calling to be made even more articulate in the praise of God. Icon-making is a microcosm of how the Church is called to exercise her role as prophet, monarch, and priest, revealing, guiding, and offering creation in its journey towards the New Jerusalem.

## **7. Metropolitan Kallistos of Diokleia: The Jesus Prayer**

Metropolitan Kallistos holds a doctorate in theology from the University of Oxford where from 1966 to 2001 he was a Fellow of Pembroke College and Spalding Lecturer in Eastern Orthodox Studies. He is a monk of the monastery of St John the Theologian, Patmos, and an assistant bishop in the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain. His publications include *The Orthodox Church* (3rd edn. 2015) and *The Orthodox Way* (2nd edn. 1995). He is President of FoMA.

### Abstract

[to be supplied]

### THE VENUE

This will be our ninth weekend conference at Madingley. The house dates from the sixteenth century and stands in its own grounds amid beautiful country 3 miles west of Cambridge. The surrounding park was landscaped by ‘Capability’ Brown in 1756. In the 1860s Queen Victoria rented the house for The Prince of Wales when he was an undergraduate. Bought by the University of Cambridge in 1948, it operates as a centre for continuing and adult education. The house has been extensively refurbished to provide disabled access, en-suite facilities to all study bedrooms, well-equipped meeting rooms, and a bar. Meals are taken in the great hall where the cuisine achieves a high standard. We are fortunate to have the use of the nearby parish church for our services during the weekend.

## BOOKING FORM

I/we wish to attend the conference.

- Please reserve a single/shared room @ £335 per person.
- Please reserve ..... non-residential place(s) @ £100 per person per day.

If you can attend only certain lectures, please contact Simon Jennings for special rates.

A number of bursaries are available for students: details are available from Simon Jennings.

Dietary requirements (if any) .....

Name of member/guest .....

Address .....

..... Tel. or e-mail .....

*Please send this form with a non-refundable deposit of £50 per person, payable to The Friends of Mount Athos, to Simon Jennings, 18 Warwick Street, Oxford OX4 1SX, UK. He may be contacted by e-mail at [admin@thejennings.org.uk](mailto:admin@thejennings.org.uk)*