



PILGRIMAGE TO MOUNT ATHOS

Madingley Hall, Cambridge

18 – 20 February 2022

This year's conference is devoted to the theme of 'Pilgrimage to Mount Athos'. As usual, there will be seven sessions (nos 6 and 7 being a combined session). Summaries of the talks are given below together with brief notes on each of the speakers. Each talk will last for approximately 40 minutes and will be followed by time for discussion.

PROGRAMME

(subject to possible change)

1. What is Pilgrimage? The Orthodox Understanding *by Sister Magdalen*

This talk will present a meditation on the theme of pilgrimage as it is understood in the Orthodox Church past and present: what is its importance, and how is it practised?

Sister Magdalen converted to Orthodoxy in 1972. She studied theology in London and joined the Community of St John the Baptist (founded by St Sophrony) in 1975. Over the years she has been involved in various tasks, including translating and giving talks. In normal circumstances on Sundays many people come to the monastery for worship and spend the day, and she spends her Sundays with the children and young people. She has written two books about children in the Church, based on the guidance of St Sophrony.

2. What is Pilgrimage? The Early Western Church's Understanding *by Fr Douglas Dales*

This address will concentrate on the early period before the schism and look at patterns and expectations of pilgrimage in the years leading up to AD 1000. It will consider pilgrimage as exile in search of God and also the influence of visits to the Holy Land on Christian culture, with reference to artistic as well as literary evidence. Reference will also be made to early Christian architecture in the West and the way in which a sense of pilgrimage was woven into liturgy. The significance of pilgrimage to places associated with saints and martyrs will also be considered, with particular reference to the importance of pilgrimage to Rome.

The Revd Douglas Dales, BD, MA, FRHistSoc, is a parish priest in the diocese of Oxford and was for many years Chaplain of Marlborough College. He is the author of several studies of early English church history as well as of theology, having recently published a trilogy of studies of St Bonaventure.

3. The Path-Clearing Pilgrimage by *Chris Thomas*

In his 2016 essay, Athos scholar (and close friend) Peter Desmond contends that ‘fundamentally, pilgrimage is predicated upon action. It demands personal experience and encounters with places, fellow pilgrims, local people, prayer and liturgy.’

Should you ever wish to test this assertion and to see it played out intensely, gloriously, and multi-dimensionally, come and join us in helping to clear the footpaths of the Holy Mountain. It’s not just being there, it’s being so close to the landscape that you are almost part of it. It’s not just meeting other pilgrims, it’s being deep in conversation with them in seconds. It’s not just meeting the monks, it’s forming lifelong friendships with them. And it’s not just being closer to God, it’s feeling that He is allowing you into His home. Some of what you bring back from the Mountain makes for great dinner-party stories and the rest resides in your heart quietly and privately, never to be shared directly but always influencing and guiding and helping and reassuring – making you just a little bit more useful to the planet and your fellow humans than you otherwise might have been.

Chris Thomas, FRGS, FRSA, is a seasoned path clearer, a trustee of the Friends of Mount Athos, and co-editor of *Encounters on the Holy Mountain* (2020). He is a very proud father of three, owner of Dexter the ridgeback, and a huge Arsenal fan. He has also done some other, less important stuff.

4. Pilgrims or Tourists? Modern-Day Travellers by *René Gothóni*

In modern times, tens of thousands of travellers visit the Holy Mountain of Athos every year. The majority are Greeks, but there are numerous visitors from other European countries and Russia. Are all visitors really pilgrims? Are some of them merely curious tourists? The aim of this paper is to answer these questions from a theoretical and an empirical point of view, based on my own field research among Athos pilgrims.

René Gothóni is Professor Emeritus in the Study of Religions at the University of Helsinki, Finland, a life member of Clare Hall, Cambridge, UK, and a life member of the Finnish Society of Sciences and Letters. His publications include *Paradise within Reach: Monasticism and Pilgrimage on Mt Athos* (1993) and *Tales and Truth: Pilgrimage on Mount Athos Past and Present* (1994).

5. Monastic Hospitality: A Monk’s View by *Archimandrite Methodios*

Hospitality is a virtue which, like all other Christian virtues, has its source in Scripture. Its basis is love of one’s neighbour, the second of the two great commandments of Our Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 22:39). There is a degree of difference between the hospitality seen as ‘the friendly and generous reception of visitors’ and the hospitality understood as the love for visitors and strangers, close to the meaning of the Greek *philoxenia*. (In Serbian this difference is preserved in the words *gostoprinstvo* and *gostoljublje*.) An Orthodox monk believes that hospitality is equal in importance to all other monastic feats and virtues. The Holy Theotokos, Abbess of all Mount Athos, has often shown that it is her sacred wish for all Athonite

monks to be hospitable (*gostoljubivi*), extending love to their guests, pilgrims, and strangers. During the global crisis provoked by the Covid pandemic the welcome of visitors to Mount Athos was considerably reduced, but was never completely stopped.

Archimandrite Methodios was born in Čačak, Serbia (then still Yugoslavia), in 1970. He studied electrical engineering in Čačak and Belgrade. He came to Mount Athos in the beginning of 1994 and was tonsured a monk in 1995, on the Feast of the Transfiguration. The Hilandar monastery brotherhood elected him Abbot on the Sunday of the Myrrhbearers in 2010.

6. The Monastic Experience: A Pilgrim's View of Mount Athos by *Rory Fraser*

Mount Athos is a magnetizing name of almost mythical significance, whispering of great churches, libraries, and the relics of Byzantium. In my talk I shall discuss my first impressions of it from a visit made during the Covid 19 pandemic, from the highly Russian St Andrew's skete to Vatopedi, less a monastery than a small town. Within these places, I shall describe some of the characters I met, the ancient routines we encountered, and the services we participated in, culminating in an all-night vigil where, under soot-caked walls that swirled with saints, congregations, and councils, stories of pirates, martyrs, and miracles seemed tangibly close.

Rory Fraser is a writer, painter, and recent graduate from Cambridge University in Architectural History. His book, *Follies: An Architectural Journey*, was published in November 2020.

7. An Athonite Childhood: Stories and Childhood Experiences of the Ormylia Convent by *Anna Conomos-Wedlock*

Anna Conomos-Wedlock will be taking us on a story tour of the convent of the Annunciation in Ormylia, Greece - a dependency of Simonopetra monastery on Mount Athos. Anna's presentation will include the story of the dynamic Elder, Abbot Aimilianos, and the founding, life, and outreach of Greece's largest convent, through animated descriptions, personal recollections, and childhood memories.

Anna Conomos-Wedlock is an international storyteller: a performer, author, educator, and trainer. She has performed internationally in museums, universities, festivals, and schools, boats, castles – even Buckingham Palace! She has won several awards for her storytelling and training, including Storyteller of the Year UK, and she performs real-life stories as well as folk and fairy tales, myths, legends, and songs from across the globe.

8. Climbing to the Highest Place on Earth by *Metropolitan Nikolaos Chatzinikolaou*

My talk will focus on both the physical and spiritual ascent to Mount Athos. Firstly, I will describe an actual ascent to its summit, as well as the beauty of its natural

environment mainly through a personal encounter with a monk, who has developed a unique ‘Athonite ecology’.

The physical ascent though is not an end in itself, but rather serves as the pathway to reach the spiritual heights of the Holy Mountain. Life on Mount Athos reflects the quest for the Lord ‘who dwelleth on high’. Therefore, the second part concentrates on those characteristics that make the Holy Mountain the abode of God.

Metropolitan Nikolaos holds a BSc in Physics; MA in Astrophysics (Harvard); MSc in Mechanical Engineering (MIT); PhD in Biomedical Engineering and Hemodynamics (Harvard); MTS and ThM (Holy Cross); ThD in Bioethics (University of Thessaloniki). His profound quest for God led him to Mount Athos, where he was tonsured a monk. There, in the persons of unknown ascetics and simple monks, he recognized the uniqueness of the Orthodox faith and truth. He is founder of the Hellenic Center for Biomedical Ethics and the first Palliative Care Unit in Greece, chairman of the Bioethics Committee of the Church of Greece, and Church representative in various bioethical committees. In 2004 he was elected Metropolitan of Mesogaia and Lavreotiki, in Attica, Greece.



THE VENUE

This will be our tenth 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.

