

Univerza v Ljubljani  
*Teološka* fakulteta



# FORGIVENESS AND SPIRITUALITY

## International Scientific Conference

Ljubljana, December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2023



### **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**

### **Organization**

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:

Ivan Platovnjak

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**Cover image:** Ivan Platovnjak

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## PROGRAM

**On-line:** <https://uni-lj-si.zoom.us/j/91307598180>, Meeting ID: 913 0759 8180

### 14:30-14:40 Welcome speeches

Dean of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Ljubljana Janez Vodičar, PhD, Prof.

Dean of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Zagreb Ivan Šestak, PhD, Prof.

Dean of the Faculty of Theology at The Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow Jan Dziejczak, PhD, Prof.

President of the Organizing Committee Ivan Platovnjak, PhD, Asst. Prof.

Member of the Organizing Committee Erika Prijatelj PhD, Asst. Prof.

*(Chairperson: Erika Prijatelj)*

### Lectures

14:40-14:55 **Durica Pardon** (Croatia) *Blessed is the One Whose Transgression is Forgiven, Whose Sin is Covered! (Ps 32:1) A Few Examples on Forgiveness Form the Old Testament*

14:55-15:10 **Ivan Platovnjak** (Slovenia): *"And Forgive us our Debts, as we also have Forgiven our Debtors."*

15:10-15:25 **Vassilios Bebis** (Greece, USA): *Messages of Forgiveness and Reconciliation from Ancient Gaza: The Teachings of St. Dorotheos, the Monk*

15:25-15:40 **Marcin Godawa** (Poland): *Preparation for Forgiveness in the Face of Martyrdom*

15:40-16:15 Discussion and Break

*(Chairperson: Ivan Platovnjak)*

### Lectures

16:15-16:30 **Daniel Miščin** (Croatia): *Vulnerability and Forgiveness in the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas*

16:30-16:45 **Ines Skelac** (Croatia): *The Complex Relationship between Apologies and Forgiveness*

16:45-17:00 **Tone Svetelj** (USA): *Anger, Forgiveness, and Generosity*

17:00-17:15 **Erika Prijatelj** (Slovenia, USA): *Trauma, Community, and Forgiveness*

17:15-17:45 Discussion and Break

*(Chairperson: Tone Svetelj)*

### Lectures

17:45-18:00 **Meta Rus** (Slovenia): *On the Meaning of Forgiveness in Palliative Care*

18:00-18:15 **Ahmet Taskin** (Türkiye): *The Recipe for the Disease of Sin*

18:15-18:30 **Stanislaus Alla** (India): *Hindu Perspectives on Forgiveness*

18:30-18:45 **Murala Jagadeeswaraiah** (India): *Forgiveness, an Alien Idea to Buddhism*

18:45-19:00 Discussion

19:00 Conclusion

## INTRODUCTION

Personal experience and research (ten Have 2016; Capantini and Gronchi 2018; Brown 2019; Fleming 2019; Globokar 2022) confirm the fact that we are all vulnerable, as it is the human condition to be not self-sufficient, to be always imperfect. For this reason, we yearn for relationship, for the other. Our vulnerability makes us capable of empathy, of love, of transcendence. No human being can therefore live life to the full without accepting this vulnerability, which is his or her "universal anthropological characteristic". It enables him or her to be "inwardly open" towards people and the world. But whoever, in this vulnerability, opens himself up to another, exposes him or herself to the possibility of being hurt, wounded, frustrated. Without this risk, it is not possible to be human.

First of all, it is also a fact, confirmed by personal experience and history, that where there are two, three or more people together, tensions, quarrels, disappointments, resentments, even hatred, violence, can quickly arise. The fact is that it is impossible not to be disappointed or to hurt each other. If we are already disappointing ourselves, how can someone else not disappoint us or we disappoint others. We are all vulnerable and weak. No one is so perfect, "not even God", that he cannot disappoint us.

When disappointment strikes, we have at least two options. We can stay in it, walling ourselves off from the one who hurt us with a wall of resentment, mistrust, sadness, pain, anger, hatred or even a desire for revenge, or we can take the path of forgiveness. If we have acknowledged the first two facts, then it is right to acknowledge the third: No relationship can last if there is no space for forgiveness.

There is a considerable body of research and books (e.g. Monbourquette 2000; Enright 2019; Erzar 2017) that discuss the importance of forgiveness in relationships and reveal the different paths to forgiveness and reconciliation. The international scientific conference will explore the connection between forgiveness and spirituality. We will explore what happens in a person who experiences various forms of evil in his or her relationships with others, and what are the possible paths that can free him or her from being trapped in this "evil" and from being able to live the relationships that he or she longs for and without which he or she cannot become fully human. In particular, we will pay attention to the place of spirituality in the process of forgiveness and how it enables a human being to live his or her spirituality more fully. We will approach the research from different perspectives: philosophy, anthropology, psychology/psychiatry, exegesis, theology, ethics, religious studies, etc.

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## ABSTRACTS

**Durica Pardon**, PhD, Asst. Prof., Catholic University of Croatia, Zagreb, Croatia, [durica.pardon@unicath.hr](mailto:durica.pardon@unicath.hr)

*Blessed is the One Whose Transgression is Forgiven, Whose Sin is Covered! (Ps 32:1) A Few Examples on Forgiveness Form the Old Testament*

*Abstract:* In biblical texts forgiveness is presented as the act of the removal of sin and its consequences by wiping it out from memory. The Bible stresses both human forgiveness and divine forgiveness. There is a lot of biblical directives and examples concerning the obligation to forgive. In the Old Testament, God continually forgave and restored a wayward chosen nation. Humans, created in God's image, also demonstrated the capacity to forgive in Old Testament accounts. In the Old Testament the concept of forgiveness is expressed by three roots: *kpr*, *ns'*, and *slh*. The root *kpr* signifies 'to cover'; the meaning of *ns'* is 'to lift'; while the basic meaning of *slh* is mostly translated 'to forgive.' The Greek equivalent of these roots is the verb *aphiemi*, 'to send forth, let fall, give up, send away, let go, loose, set free.' God himself cleanses, washes, covers and remembers no more the transgressions of his people. By his forgiveness God creates anew relations with his people. In human relationships both forgiver and the one who is forgiven benefit in health and prosperity.

*Keywords:* Bible, Theology, Psychology, God's Forgiveness, Human Forgiveness

**Ivan Platovnjak**, PhD, Asst. Prof., Faculty of Theology, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, [Ivan.Platovnjak@teof.uni-lj.si](mailto:Ivan.Platovnjak@teof.uni-lj.si)

*"And Forgive us our Debts, as we also have Forgiven our Debtors."*

*Abstract:* Christians often pray the Lord's Prayer, as Jesus instructed us to do (Mt 6:9-13), in which we also address God the Father with the petition, "And forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven our debtors." (Mt 6:12) After Jesus told them the prayer, He emphasized, "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Mt 6:14-15)

In this lecture, I will not make an analysis of the different interpretations of these words of Jesus that have arisen throughout the history of the Church, but I will dwell on the question: how is it possible to say that God the Father forgives gratis or unconditionally, when in the Lord's Prayer we pray that He may forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven our debtors? Is our forgiveness, then, a condition for Him to forgive us of our sins? What did Jesus want to say to us?

*Keywords:* Forgiveness, Conditional or Unconditional Forgiveness, Forgiveness Towards Others and Oneself, Jesus Christ, New Testament

**Vassilios Bebis**, PhD, Prof., Graduate Theological Foundation; Hellenic College Holy Cross, USA, [bebis128@gmail.com](mailto:bebis128@gmail.com)

*Messages of Forgiveness and Reconciliation from Ancient Gaza: The Teachings of St. Dorotheos, the Monk*

*Abstract:* This presentation will examine St. Dorotheos of Gaza's teachings on forgiveness. St. Dorotheos emphasized that forgiveness is at the heart of the Christian life as a fundamental Christian virtue. His writings encourage individuals to cultivate a spirit of forgiveness, not only for the benefit of others but also for their own spiritual growth and well-being. St. Dorotheos also stressed the practical aspect of forgiveness, and he taught that forgiveness should be accompanied by a desire for reconciliation whenever possible. While reconciliation may not always be achievable, the willingness to restore a broken relationship should be present in the forgiver's heart.

*Keywords:* Patristics, Ethics, Forgiveness, Healing, Reconciliation, Growth

**Marcin Godawa**, PhD, Asst. Prof., The Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow, [marcin.godawa@upjp2.edu.pl](mailto:marcin.godawa@upjp2.edu.pl)

*Preparation for Forgiveness in the Face of Martyrdom*

*Abstract:* The aim of the presentation is presenting how, from the Christian theological perspective, a man can prepare himself to accept martyrdom by manifesting forgiveness for persecutors. This specific kind of experience makes it possible to probe into the essence of forgiveness as well as its dynamic and forms. This attitude uncovers the fundamental role of God's grace which human action cooperates with. The result will mainly be achieved by studying St. Thomas More's case (1478-1535).

The possibility of forgiveness, coming from the cooperation of grace and human nature, leads to the complete understanding of man, which should necessarily be taken into account in contemporary discourse. In this way spiritual theology indicates a way-out from extreme tribulations faced in history and the true source of hope.

*Keywords:* Forgiveness, Greater Good, Christ-Formation, Love, Joy

**Daniel Mišćin**, PhD, Prof., Faculty of Philosophy and Religious Studies, University of Zagreb, Croatia, [dmiscin@ffrz.unizg.hr](mailto:dmiscin@ffrz.unizg.hr)

*Vulnerability and Forgiveness in the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas*

*Abstract:* The presentation will aim to briefly outline the arguments in favor of the following hypothesis: by analyzing the theoretical and autobiographical elements of Emmanuel Levinas's thought, it appears that the concept of the face and its vulnerability in his philosophy is actually derived from the typically Jewish "guilt of the survivor". Although this issue is rarely mentioned



in Levinas's oeuvre, the way he approaches the concept of the face suggests that it is inextricably linked to the experience of the Holocaust.

*Keywords:* Levinas, face, guilty of survivor, vulnerability, Holocaust

**Ines Skelac**, PhD, Asst. Prof., Faculty of Philosophy and Religious Studies, University of Zagreb, Croatia, [ines.skelac@ffrz.unizg.hr](mailto:ines.skelac@ffrz.unizg.hr)

*Beyond Words: The Complex Relationship between Apologies and Forgiveness*

*Abstract:* By integrating insights from contemporary philosophy and psychotherapy, this presentation aims to address certain issues of the interrelation between apologies and forgiveness. Wittgenstein's notion of language games underscores the idea that the meaning of words is intimately tied to their context of use. Apologies and forgiveness are embedded in specific linguistic and cultural contexts. Apologies may have different connotations and implications in various cultural or relational settings. Similarly, forgiveness can manifest differently depending on the context in which it occurs. From a psychoanalytic standpoint, Freud's exploration of the unconscious and the role of guilt and repression in human psychology informs our understanding of the emotional baggage that can hinder the giving and receiving of apologies. An interdisciplinary approach to this topic can shed light on how language and relational dynamics intersect in the complex terrain of human reconciliation.

*Keywords:* Apologies, Forgiveness, Freud, Wittgenstein

**Tone Svetelj**, PhD, Prof., Hellenic College; Boston College, USA, [tsvetelj@hchc.edu](mailto:tsvetelj@hchc.edu)

*Anger, Forgiveness, and Generosity*

*Abstract:* The modern notion of anger is often based on the assumption that the suffering of the wrongdoer will restore the thing that was damaged. Martha Nussbaum shows that this assumption is infantile and harmful and suggests forgiveness as the best way of transcending anger. Her examination includes the notion of forgiveness in the Jewish and Christian traditions and in secular morality. Some forms of forgiveness are ethically promising, others are reduced to retribution. Martha Nussbaum argues that the spirit of generosity is the best way to respond to injustice.

*Keywords:* Anger, Forgiveness, Generosity, Nussbaum

**Erika Prijatelj**, PhD, Asst. Prof., Hellenic College, USA; Faculty of Theology, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, [Erika.Prijatelj@teof.uni-lj.si](mailto:Erika.Prijatelj@teof.uni-lj.si)

*Trauma, Community, and Forgiveness*

*Abstract:* The suffering of traumatized people is not only a matter of personal healing but also of social justice. The healing process usually has three main stages. In the first stage, the survivor focuses on the complex task of establishing safety. In the second stage, the survivor

can revisit the past to grieve and make sense of the trauma. In the third phase, the survivor needs recognition of the truth and condemnation of the crime by those in their community who are important to them. During recovery, community support and understanding are very powerful. Survivors need recognition of the truth and acknowledgment of the harm that has been done. If this genuinely happens, it can significantly facilitate a healthy personal and communal forgiveness process.

*Keywords:* Trauma, Survivor, Offender, Community, Justice, Forgiveness

**Meta Rus**, M. Sc., MD, Faculty of Medicine, University of Ljubljana, [meta.rus9@gmail.com](mailto:meta.rus9@gmail.com)

*On the Meaning of Forgiveness in Palliative Care*

*Abstract:* In palliative care, forgiveness is an important issue for several reasons. By approaching the end of life and by the decline of bodily functions, a person's inner life usually becomes more vivid and turns to retrospection. An act of forgiveness is often needed to accept and to reconcile with the past and with other people. Conflicts can happen on three different levels, corresponding to the three dimensions of forgiveness: relational, biographical, and spiritual. The concept of forgiveness as a task of end-of-life closure has been increasingly recognized and elaborated in the palliative care literature. With learning how to forgive, patients' well-being is shown to increase despite the decline in physical health. Reaching forgiveness is also linked to more peaceful dying. Health-care workers have an important role in supporting the process of forgiveness by being a loving and neutral third party.

*Keywords:* Palliative Care; Forgiveness; End-of-life; Dying; Forgiveness Therapy; Spiritual Care

**Ahmet Taskin**, PhD, Research Asst., Dokuz Eylul University School of Theology, Izmir, Türkiye, [ataskinn@gmail.com](mailto:ataskinn@gmail.com)

*The Recipe for the Disease of Sin*

*Abstract:* A classical theological dilemma, at least in the human space, still persists: mercy and justice, forgiveness and accountability for wrong cannot coexist; rather, they cancel each other out. However, we know from scriptures, narratives, and practices that these concepts can operate together, and in many cases they are necessary for one another. For instance, Jesus's interactions with the Pharisees and sinners provide us with a hint about this. Similarly, Muhammad's encounter with Wahshi, who killed his uncle Abu Talib in battle and later himself became a Muslim, also offers a clue that these concepts can operate together. How can we, then, extend forgiveness without forgetting, without thereby minimizing or negating wrong? With this question in mind, forgiveness remains an essential virtue in Islam, and it is highly encouraged in both personal and communal aspects of life. This virtue is deeply and particularly connected to Islamic spirituality, and considered as an effective way of helping to deepen one's spiritual growth. This presentation aims to explore the correlation between forgiveness and spirituality in Islamic tradition, focusing on the role of "Istighfar", an exemplary Islamic practice for forgiveness and spiritual journeys.

*Keywords:* Spirituality, Forgiveness, Islam, Istighfar, Repentance

**Stanislaus Alla**, PhD, Assc. Prof., Vidyajyoti College of Theology, Delhi, India,  
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*Hindu Perspectives on Forgiveness*

*Abstract:* The virtue of forgiveness, *ksama*, prized by several Hindu streams of thought, is to be correlated with how *karma*, sin (*papa*), and grace (*krupa*) are understood and appropriated in diverse texts and contexts. More than being a theological or doctrinal topic, forgiveness is discussed by the Hindus from a spiritual point of view, frequently drawing upon the people's experiences. Since the notions of a personal God, a God who forgives, and the need for, and assurance of heaven is ambiguous, it differs greatly from the Christian thought. However, prayers, penances, pilgrimages, ritual baths make the virtue of forgiveness real in the lives of many devout Hindus. The paper explores these complexities and attempts to build bridges between the Christian and Hindu notions.

*Keywords:* Karma, Krupa, Ksama, Papa

**Murala Jagadeeswaraiyah**, PhD, Assit. Prof., Satya Nilayam, Pontifical Institute of Philosophy/Department of Philosophy, Loyola College, Chennai, India,  
[muralajagadish@gmail.com](mailto:muralajagadish@gmail.com)

*Forgiveness, an Alien Idea to Buddhism*

*Abstract:* The term 'forgiveness' itself is not in Buddhist literature; it's an adoption from the other spiritual tradition/s. In Buddhism proper 'forgiveness' is seen as letting go of our expectations and disappointments in others - in other words, it's detachment from a different past. Another notion in Buddhism is 'loving-kindness.' Yet another practice is patience and compassion. The popular understanding of 'forgiveness' has nothing to do with this understanding of Buddhism.

The popular understanding of 'forgiveness' something like a debt. Supposing one is indebted to someone, either in terms of materials or honour, and s/he is unwilling to honour the debt, that someone can choose to forgive the debt. In the Vajrayana of Tibetan Buddhism there are four kinds of activities to meet the conflict and the final among them is destruction. It means to forgive the debt after the first three means had failed. Here there's no 'grace' but only principle like that of gravity.

*Keywords:* Buddhism, Forgiveness, Karma, Samsara, Purification, Compassion

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