



WOMEN AND SPIRITUALITY

International Scientific Conference

Ljubljana, May 25th, 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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The Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow, Faculty of Theology

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*Female and the Feminine Element in the Islamic spiritual Tradition: Historical, Theological
and Metaphysical Fragments*

PROGRAM

On-line: <https://uni-lj-si.zoom.us/j/97917236609>; Meeting ID: 979 1723 6609

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.

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

(Chairperson: Irena Avsenik Nabergoj)

Lectures

14:40-14:55 **Erika Prijatelj** (Slovenia, USA): *Women's Patterns of Faith Development*

14:55-15:10 **Ivan Platovnjak** (Slovenia): *An Anthropological Point of View on the Spirituality of Women*

15:10-15:25 **Liza Prime** (Slovenia): *The Image and Spirituality of Women by Edith Stein – St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross*

15:25-15:40 **Ewelina Marta Maćzka** (Poland): *Postmodern Expression of Spirituality of Women*

15:40-16:15 Discussion and Break

(Chairperson: Ines Skelac)

Lectures

16:15-16:30 **Irena Avsenik Nabergoj** (Slovenia): *Aspects of the Spirituality of Female Characters in the Old Testament and Deborah's Song of Thanksgiving (Judg 5)*

16:30-16:45 **Vassilios Bebis** (Greece, USA): *Women's Spiritual Empowerment in Orthodox Christianity, following the Example of the Virgin Mary*

16:45-17:00 **Wojciech Zyzak** (Poland): *An extraordinary Woman – Dorothy Day*

17:00-17:15 **Barbara Ćuk** (Croatia): *How does Spiritual Life Benefit from a Natural Desire to Know? Ana Maria Van Schurman and Sor Juana Inés De La Cruz*

17:15-17:45 Discussion and Break

(Chairperson: Erika Prijatelj)

Lectures

17:45-18:00 **Tone Svetelj** (USA): *Sibyls in the Ancient World*

18:00-18:15 **Anil D'Almeida** (India): *Paradoxical Elements within Hinduism on Women and Spirituality*

18:15-18:30 **Murala Jagadeeswaraiah** (India): *Spirituality of Union in St. Teresa of Avila and Andal*

18:30-18:45 **Raid Al-Daghistani** (Germany, Austria, Slovenia): *Female and the Feminine Element in the Islamic spiritual Tradition: Historical, Theological and Metaphysical Fragments*

18:45-19:00 Discussion

19:00 Conclusion

INTRODUCTION

There are many definitions of spirituality. Most commonly, spirituality is understood today as a way of life that enables people to search for and find the content, purpose and meaning of life and answers to the deepest life questions. Such a spiritual life leads to a more integral relationship with oneself, others, creation and transcendence, the absolute, which for believers is God. There are, of course, many ways or paths to this, so we speak of several ways of spirituality. Throughout the history of humanity, it has been realised within different religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, so we know different religious spiritualities. Nowadays, many people separate spirituality from religion, so we speak of so-called secular spirituality. It is practised within the values they profess, in different schools of philosophy, cosmology, psychology, art, etc. There is a third way of spirituality, which has elements of both of these.

Every human being is also a sexual being and is marked by this in all that he or she is and lives, including in his or her spirituality. This does not mean that one lives a better or worse spirituality, that one is more or less spiritual, but that the way one understands and practices spirituality is also influenced by what one is as a woman or a man. In the history of humanity there are many well-known female figures in various fields such as: philosophy, religion, art, culture, science, politics, etc. Many of these figures have already been presented, but it is certainly still right and good to go further in showing how women are connected to spirituality and in what way they are or can be influential in the understanding and realisation of spirituality through their femininity, so that it can fulfil its mission to an even greater and fuller extent.

ABSTRACTS

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

Women's Patterns of Faith Development

Abstract: This presentation explores the patterns and processes of women's faith development, as recognized primarily within Christianity. According to N. Slee, there are six basic faith strategies: conversational, metaphoric, narrative, personalized, conceptual, and apophatic. There is, first, a dominance of concrete, visual, narrative, and embodied forms over propositional, abstract, or analytical; second, there is a dominance of personalized and relational forms of appropriating faith over impersonal means; and third, each of the faith strategies is rooted in a dynamic context of meaning-making.

Keywords: Women, Faith(ing), Patterns, Experience, Christianity

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An Anthropological Point of View on the Spirituality of Women

Abstract: Cardinal Kasper points out that Christian spirituality is the fruit of the collaboration (conscious or unconscious, active or passive) of two factors. The first is "from above": it is the Holy Spirit, that is, the Spirit of the Father and of the Son. He is, in fact, its foundation and source. The second factor is "from below". This is the Christian, who is also deeply marked by his or her creatureliness, corporeality and psyche, which profoundly influence his or her response to the action of the Holy Spirit, and thus also the realisation of the spirituality that he or she lives and co-creates in his or her own time and place. For this reason, we can also speak of an anthropological perspective on the spirituality of both men and women. The lecture will present an anthropological perspective on the spirituality of women, based on the research of the theologian Maria Teresa Porcile Santiso (1991) *Women, a space of salvation: the mission of women in the Church: an anthropological perspective*. According to her, the woman's body represents the three specificities of her existence: space, life and food. This biological givenness influences her perception of herself, others, the world and events, as well as the realisation of her spirituality.

Keywords: Spirituality (of Women), Woman, Body, Anthropology, Biological Givenness, Christianity

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The Image and Spirituality of Women by Edith Stein – St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross

Abstract: The German philosopher and theologian St. Edith Stein – St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (1891-1942) spent ten years of her life teaching in a girls' school. This enabled her to consider the development of female nature from a philosophical perspective. She concluded that although men and women share some universals, their instincts are separate. Her awareness of the differences between the sexes enabled her to express the unique vocation and commitment of women without stereotyping them. Her reflections and thoughts on this subject were expressed in various essays she wrote over the years. This paper will attempt to present the image of woman according to Stein's teachings and explore how she understood spirituality of women.

Keywords: Edith Stein, Spirituality of Women, Image of Woman, *Essays on Women*

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Postmodern Expression of Spirituality of Women

Abstract: The need for spirituality is inherent in every human being. Spirituality is an ambiguous term, which makes it difficult to give a satisfactory definition. The post-modern understanding of spirituality focuses on aspects concerning: self-realisation, development of the person, reaching certain 'states of consciousness', achieving a sense of happiness, well-being, etc. The aspect focusing on transcendence, on the other hand, is losing its importance. In contrast, the aspect focusing on transcendence is losing its importance. Post-modern spirituality "understood as an inner way of experiencing the supernatural in everyday life situations, is religiosity, even though it does not have to be and is not associated with church membership" (Mariański 2015). New technologies, with especially social media (Facebook, Instagram, Tik tok, etc.), with a particular focus on idols sharing their lives, knowledge and experiences, have influenced the change in approach to spirituality. Spirituality in this sense is syncretic in nature, as it combines esoteric elements (from astrology to the occult) and selected content from Asian religions. Contemporary spirituality is an important and trendy topic that is gaining interest especially among women. The aim of this presentation will be an attempt to characterise spirituality of women as it is promoted on social media.

Keywords: Spirituality of Women, Postmodernity, Social Media, Femininity, Exploration

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

Aspects of the Spirituality of Female Characters in the Old Testament and Deborah's Song of Thanksgiving (Judg 5)

Abstract: Female characters in the Bible often show a strong faith in God, hope, love, humility and obedience. Some women show gifts of discernment and wisdom, perseverance in difficult times, and a willingness to sacrifice their own desires for the good of the community. A key element of spirituality is prayer as a petition for help and thanksgiving for God's graces. Famous examples of unconditional faith are the prayer of the prophetess Deborah (Judg 5), the petition of Hannah the mother of Samuel for a child (1 Sam 1:10-11) and her prayer of thanksgiving (1 Sam 2:1-10) as well as the prayer of Mordecai and Esther in the distress of the Jewish people at the threat of a more powerful people (Esth 4:17a-17z). Each of these and similar prayers incorporates many elements from older Hebrew spiritual experience and tradition. In this lecture, various aspects of the spirituality of biblical women will be presented. The focus will be on analysing Deborah's poem in its original structure within its wider biblical context.

Keywords: Old Testament, Female Characters, Spirituality, Theological Virtues, Deborah, Miriam, Hannah

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

Abstract: 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

Wojciech Zyzak, PhD, Prof., The Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow, Poland, Wojciech.zyzak@upjp2.edu.pl

An extraordinary Woman – Dorothy Day

Abstract: The aim of the lecture is to present life, work and spirituality of Dorothy Day. She is a Servant of God, whose Canonisation Process gives hope for showing her to the whole Church as an example of lay spirituality and Catholic feminism one day. For the Church very important is the process of her conversion and different stages of her activity. Secondly, in the presentation we can find an analysis of the sources of spiritual concepts in the shape of people and publications which had the most influence on the candidate for the honour of the altars. The lecture focus on important issues in the activity of the founder of the Catholic Worker, such as her vision of the Church, the universal call to holiness, spirituality of marriage and family.

Keywords: Dorothy Day, Feminism, Spirituality, Catholic Worker

Barbara Ćuk, PhD, Assc. Prof., Faculty of Philosophy and Religious Studies, University of Zagreb, Croatia, barbara.cuk@ffrz.unizg.hr

How does Spiritual Life Benefit from a Natural Desire to Know? Ana Maria Van Schurman and Sor Juana Inés De La Cruz

Abstract: Ana Maria van Schurman (1607-1678) is considered the most educated European woman of the 17th century, eminent for her erudition, knowledge of ancient and modern languages, and lifelong engagement with the arts. She wrote poetry and several treatises on different topics, from philosophy, theory of education, and theology. She was also very pious. When in *Dissertatio*, she argues for women's access to education and scientific work using syllogistic reasoning, she understands studying as a universal calling for women and men and as an effort that can arouse greater love and reverence for God.

Sor Juana (1648-1695), a Mexican nun, was praised and admired as a woman of excellent literary and poetic talent. Many scholarly studies have been written on her poetry and plays, while her engagement with theological and philosophical issues received less attention. In *Reply to Sor Philotea*, she articulates and elaborates on her desire to learn, her quest for knowledge, deep respect and love for wisdom, and she advocates studying and writing as legitimate activities for women.

The presentation will explore these two women's opinions on how thinking life relates to spiritual life, shedding light on the relationship they establish between theological and spiritual development.

Keywords: Ana Maria van Schurman, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Studying, Sciences, Theology, Spiritual Life

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

Sibyls in the Ancient World

Abstract: The Sibyls were prophetic women believed to possess the gifts of prophecy and divination. As intermediaries between the mortal world and the divine realm, they offered guidance and insight into the future. They were often associated with specific locations (shrines, temples), where they delivered prophecies to rulers, leaders, and individuals. They held a prominent place in Greek mythology, literature, and religious rituals, depicted as symbols of wisdom, foresight, and mystical insight. Even though the Sibyls were not directly discussed in Greek philosophy, there are some references to them in Plato, Herodotus, Stoicism, and others, especially in the intersections between philosophy, religion, and mythology.

Keywords: Sibyls, Prophet, Wisdom, Philosophy

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Paradoxical Elements within Hinduism on Women and Spirituality

Abstract: Within the complex story of Hinduism, the role of women has paradoxical perceptions. On the one hand, women are revered as embodiments of *Śakti*, the divine energy, and as manifestations of the divine feminine, *Devi*. Yet, on another level, they are sometimes perceived as the root of all worldly ills, encapsulated in the concept of *pramade*. Although, this paradox is visible in Sanskrit Hinduism, the peak of the bhakti movement in the 15th to 16th centuries witnessed the emergence of remarkable women mystics such as Meerabai and Akkamahadevi. These luminaries defied societal norms and traditional gender roles to forge profound spiritual connections through their devotion and poetry. Their lives are testimonies to the transformative power of spirituality in transcending gender constraints and fostering profound spiritual realization. Besides, the village deities known as *grāma devatā*'s are benevolent goddesses that empower ordinary women in their spiritual and devotional life.

Keywords: Paradox, Śakti, Devi, Bhakti, Grāma Devatā

Murala Jagadeeswaraiyah, PhD, Asst. Prof., Satya Nilayam, Pontifical Institute of Philosophy/Department of Philosophy, Loyola College, Chennai, India, muralajagadish@gmail.com

Spirituality of Union in St. Teresa of Avila and Andal

Abstract: In the Bull of St. Teresa's canonization in 1622, her vision was cited. The vision was a mystical experience named as 'the Ecstasy'. In this vision a golden tipped arrow was pierced into her heart by an angel. Lorenzo Bernini (1598–1680) portrayed in his sculpture the description given by her in her autobiography, "In his hands I saw a great golden spear, and at the iron tip there appeared to be a point of fire. This he plunged into my heart several times so that it penetrated to my entrails. When he pulled it out, I felt that he took them with it, and left me utterly consumed by the great love of God. The pain was so severe that it made me utter several moans. The sweetness caused by this intense pain is so extreme that one cannot possibly wish it to cease, nor is one's soul then content with anything but God. This is not a physical, but a spiritual pain, though the body has some share in it – even a considerable share. So gentle is this wooing which takes place between God and the soul that if anyone thinks I am lying, I pray God in his goodness, to grant him some experience of it."

Andal is a poet in the tradition called Vaishnavism. She has written thirty poems contributing to the text called *Nālāyira-divya-prabandam* (Holy book of four-thousand verses) a Tamil text of 8th century AD. She imagined herself to be the spouse of Lord Vishnu. The hagiography of Andal tells us that she merged with the Lord.

In both of these two women there is a spirituality of Union. This union is a mystical experience where human experiences unity with the ultimate.

Keywords: Spirituality, Union, Mysticism, Inter-religious, Catholicism, Hinduism.

Raid Al-Daghistani, PhD, Postdoctoral Employee, Centre for Islamic Theology, University of Münster, Germany; Department of Islamic Theology and Religious Education, University of Innsbruck, Austria; Faculty of Theology, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, raid.aldaghistani@uni-muenster.de

Female and the Feminine Element in the Islamic spiritual Tradition: Historical, Theological and Metaphysical Fragments

Abstract: In this presentation, I will be focusing on some of the most influential female protagonists in Islam on the one hand, and reflecting on the feminine element in Islamic Mysticism on the other hand. After emphasizing the Quranic foundation of female piety, spirituality and religious equality to men, I will first illuminate the spiritual role of Prophet Mohammed's first wife, Khadijā (d. 619), and the exegetical contribution of his second wife, 'Aisha (d. 677), before I introduce the two most important female Muslim mystics, Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya (d. 801) and 'Aisha al-Bā'ūniyya (d. 1517). I will then briefly look at the feminine element in Ibn 'Arabī's mystical philosophy, and finally shed some light on the contemporary Islamic feminine theology and its contribution to the modern theological-exegetical discourse. In doing so, I will attempt to show the historical as well as the metaphysical importance of feminine dimension in the Islamic religious-spiritual tradition.

Keywords: Sufism, Islamic Mysticism, Islamic Spirituality, Female Scholars, Feminine Element



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