

“Human Being in the Image of God”

Under this title, the seventh International Symposium of the International Association of Orthodox Dogmatic Theologians (IAODT) took place in Paralimni, Cyprus, on March 5-7, 2024. This theological association was established in Arad, Romania, in 2007, coinciding with its first International Symposium held from June 6–8, 2007. On that occasion, the theme addressed was the discipline of Dogmatic Theology and its perspectives as a part of the Church’s mission in the contemporary world. The second International Symposium of this Association took place in Arad again from June 11–13, 2009, with the theme: “Tradition and Dogma. What kind of Dogmatic Theology do we propose for our time?” The third International Symposium took place in Thessaloniki, Greece, on June 23–26, 2011, with the theme: “The Role and Limits of Reason in Dogmatic Theology”. The fourth similar event occurred in Sofia, Bulgaria, from September 22–25, 2013, with the theme: “Dogma and Terminology in Orthodox Tradition Today”. The academic and scientific work of this Association continued in Romania from September 25–27, 2016, at the Caraiman Monastery, addressing a current theological and ecclesiastical theme: “Primacy and Primates in the Church”. All these aforementioned themes have particularly captured the attention of theologians, hierarchs, and researchers, delving into various aspects of these themes, whose content is inexhaustible, while also responding to the inquiries of today’s time regarding theology in general and Dogmatic Theology in particular. In continuation of the aforementioned academic events, the seventh International Symposium took place in Balamand, Lebanon, from June 7–10, 2018, with the theme: “Eschatology in the Vision of Orthodox Theology”.

Through the approaches mentioned above, the attention of Orthodox dogmatic theologians has focused on more general themes regarding

Dogmatic Theology itself as a theological discipline or on the Church and its synodal, conciliar structure. However, it has been considered particularly relevant for Dogmatic Theology to highlight the importance of humans in the context of the upheavals of today's world. This is especially true since the 21st century has been considered the "century of anthropologies", just as the 20th century was called the "century of ecclesiology".

The meeting of dogmatic theologians in Paralimni, Cyprus, on March 5-7, 2024, was particularly clarifying in this regard. The theological focus of the presentations, discussions, and inquiries of those present was on humanity, its significance, or its particularity in the context of the created world as a whole. The general foundation of Orthodox anthropology is the understanding of human beings in their quality of being "in the image of God", a particularly relevant anthropological dimension that makes the essential difference between humans and other existences in the universe.

The topics addressed by the participants at this International Symposium could be grouped into three main directions: First, the presenters attempted to ground Orthodox anthropology on what it holds most valuable: that the quality of humanity is in the image of God. Certainly, from this perspective, various meanings of this "image" were outlined, especially regarding the consequences of understanding humans as created after the immortal image of God in terms of their manifestation in the world.

The second direction of Orthodox anthropology highlighted on this occasion was to put human existence in relation to the eternal Logos of the Father, which plays a special role in understanding humanity based on divine Revelation. Some Orthodox theologians particularly emphasized the restoration of this "image" of God in humans through the incarnate Word of God, through whom not only all existing things were created but also restored.

The third direction of Orthodox anthropology reflected at the Symposium was the understanding of humans in the context of today's world, especially concerning the challenges posed by various sciences dealing with humans, and last but not least, the challenges raised by "artificial intelligence" in front of contemporary humans. In this sense, several coordinates of Orthodox anthropology were highlighted in the context of contemporary European cultural phenomena.

If we were to discern the importance of the International Symposium held in Paralimni, Cyprus, we could highlight the following aspects: First, all participants felt great joy at the reunion after several years of interruption of the International Symposia of the IAODT, primarily due to the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, which cancelled or modified various activities of people in general and academic environments in particular. And the meeting in Cyprus in this context was felt by many participants as a blessing from God.

Secondly, the theme itself, “Human Being in the Image of God”, determined the Orthodox dogmatic theologians’ focus on a topic of pressing relevance, great theological richness, and, we could even say, a fascinating theme. On this occasion, participants realized that the Orthodox teaching about humans has beneficial and even therapeutic aspects for contemporary humans, exposed to the manifold problems of post-modernity.

Thirdly, this academic event and its success were enjoyed with exceptional hospitality and paternal love from Metropolitan Vasilios of Constantia and Ammochostos, who warmly welcomed us. His presence throughout the symposium was an encouragement for theological endeavor and, personally, for those who labor in the service of theology and the Church.

On this occasion, we cannot ignore that the scientific manifestations of the IAODT have garnered increasing interest from Orthodox theologians, and the large number of participants at the conference in Cyprus is an illustration of this. In other words, the gathering of Orthodox dogmatic theologians in Cyprus confirms that Orthodox theologians from various local Orthodox Churches are united in theological work and are eager to continue serving Orthodox Theology, the Church, and Orthodox values with dedication and responsibility. They aim to be a source of inspiration and creativity, contributing to other fields of research by providing relevant responses to the many challenges of contemporary times.

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