



ST THEOSEVIA CENTRE FOR CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

OPEN STUDY DAYS IN HILARY TERM 2025

at St Theosevia House, 2 Canterbury Road, Oxford OX2 6LU

An Ecumenical Centre for Christian Spirituality

Artificial Intelligence - What Does it Mean to be Human?

Navigating the Theological and Ethical Challenges

Saturday 1 February, 10.30 am – 4 pm

Rev Dr Simon Cross, Rachel Singleton (MOD)

Mother Maria Skobtsova, St Mary of Paris (1891-1945): appreciating the many facets of her life, work and witness

Saturday 8 March, 10.30 am – 4 pm

Revd Dr Jane Baun, Dr Elena Narinskaya

All welcome, no registration required. Free for students;
non-students £5 cash on door. Free tea and coffee provided.

You are welcome to bring a sandwich lunch.

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Hilary Term 2025

Dear Friends of St Theosevia's,

Welcome to AD 2025! We had two very thoughtful Study Days last term, on the architectural and pastoral responses to human mortality, and the many facets of the contestation of the Holy Land. You may like to know that on Wed 5 Feb at 7.00 pm the Old Library at the University Church hosts 'Towards Peace in the Middle East', speakers include Brian Klug's brother Tony and film maker Dr Imad Karam from Gaza. Then to mark to mark 1700 years since the Council of Nicaea (AD325) the same venue hosts a lecture by Prof Andrew Davison on Thurs 13 Feb 7.30-9.00 pm, and a colloquium on the Council on Sat 22 Feb. 10.00 – 12 noon. All welcome.

Coming to this term's St Theosevia Study Days: On Saturday 1 February we welcome the Revd Dr Simon Cross, who advises the Church of England, and naval officer Commodore Rachel Singleton who wrestles with ethical questions at the Ministry of Defence, to speak and lead discussion on the theological and ethical issues raised by Artificial Intelligence.

Then on Saturday 8 March the Revd Dr Jane Baun and Dr Elena Narinskaya lead a day on the life and work of Mother Maria of Paris, martyred on 31 March 1945 in Ravensbrück Concentration Camp. This day will be multi-media and interactive, with talks, film, slides and discussion, exploring St Maria's life and witness, her thought and poetry (in Russian and in translation), embroidery, drawings, and paintings.

Let us continue to pray for just and lasting peace.

LIZ CARMICHAEL

Free tea and coffee are available at Study Days from 10 am and in the lunch break 1-2 pm. Bring a packed lunch, or forage nearby in North Parade. If you can help serve coffee you will have a free place – please leave a message on 01865 310341 or email David.Rytz@exeter.ox.ac.uk. Please send a **Newsletter Subscription** for costs and postage, suggested £5 pa, by cash, or cheque to 'St Theosevia Trust', to: Newsletter, St Theosevia House, 2 Canterbury Rd, OX2 6LU. For bank details please ask David. For the Oxford Centre for Spiritual Growth (OCSG), see <https://www.ocsg.uk.net/> or contact info@ocsg.uk.net

Saturday 1 February, 10.30 am – 4 pm

Artificial Intelligence - What Does it Mean to be Human? Navigating the Theological and Ethical Challenges

This Day will feature both talks and discussion exploring some of the many issues raised by artificial intelligence and its rapid spread.

Imago Dei, or ‘imago AI’? Rev Dr Simon Cross

It is commonly claimed that "artificial intelligence is calling into question what it means to be human." Why is this so? And why does artificial intelligence enable such a broad range of interpretations; helpmate; vehicle for transhumanism; total existential destruction? This talk will consider the pros and cons of artificial intelligence from a theological perspective. Beginning with the genesis of the term "Artificial intelligence" it will explore some of the pros and cons of AI in their wider social and philosophical setting concluding that we are in the midst of a bigger battle for self-understanding between the *imago Dei* and an *imago AI*.

Rev Dr Simon Cross works for the Bishop of Oxford offering policy support and advice to the Church of England's Faith in Public Life team on technology ethics, specialising in artificial intelligence. He works with the 26 Anglican bishops in the House of Lords on government technology regulation and with a consortium of civil society organisations advocating for beneficial tech and campaigning against tech harms.

Implementing Artificial Intelligence in a military context Rachel Singleton (MOD)

This talk will explore the opportunities and challenges associated with the exploitation of Artificial Intelligence within military capabilities, with particular focus on the ethical challenges of AI in a Defence context, and practical steps that can be taken to manage these challenges.

Rachel Singleton is a serving military officer whose current role is to lead the Defence Artificial Intelligence Centre, charged with accelerating exploitation of AI in the UK Ministry of Defence.

Saturday 8 March, 10.30 am – 4 pm

Mother Maria Skobtsova, St Mary of Paris (1891-1945): appreciating the many facets of her life, work and witness

Revd Dr Jane Baun, Dr Elena Narinskaya

‘There will be lots of pictures, poetry reading, and films, so it will be a multi-media, interdisciplinary, and interactive day.’ So Dr Jane Baun introduces this Study Day in which she and Dr Elena Narinskaya will lead us in an exploration of this remarkable, creative, gifted personality, canonised in 2004: a Russian noblewoman, poet, nun, thinker and member of the French Resistance during World War II. St Maria was born Elizaveta Yurievna Pilenko in 1891 in Riga, was married twice, had three children, moved from atheism to Orthodoxy and took monastic vows in Paris in 1932. Her confessor was the theologian Fr Sergei Bulgakov. She moved in intellectual theological circles and worked with the poor. Under occupation, she assisted Jews to escape. Imprisoned in Ravensbrück, she was sent to the gas chamber in 1945.

Mother Maria was one of several Russian women of her era who fulfilled radical vocations to Christian service. Her legacy continues today in multiple ramifications among Orthodox, Catholics, Anglicans, and Protestants; she has a growing profile online. One talk will explore her political, cultural and spiritual witness in relation to the *Russkiy Mir* ideology;

The Revd Dr Jane Baun is an Anglican priest and Chaplain of Wadham College, and a member of the Faculty of Theology and Religion. A Byzantinist by training, before Oxford she worked in Moscow, and taught Late Antique and Byzantine History at New York University. She has published widely on the religious culture of the Byzantine and medieval Slavic churches, Mother Maria of Paris has been a constant presence in her life since the early 1980's, when one evening after Vespers she discovered Fr Sergei Hackel's *Pearl of Great Price* on the bookstall of St Nicholas Orthodox Cathedral (OCA) in Washington, DC.

Dr. Elena Narinskaya specializes in Scriptural Studies and Biblical Exegesis within Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. She has studied extensively in Jerusalem, Cambridge, and Durham, earning a PhD and completing postdoctoral work. She is the founding director of Women's Ministries Initiative, an educational forum for the general public.

Advance notice: Fri 25 April, a day on Ethiopian Orthodox Marian devotion, joint with SS Gregory & Macrina, Regent's Park and others.

Artificial intelligence has the power to transform lives for the better, but without careful and ethical deployment, it could wreak havoc and suffer what the physician and author Siddhartha Mukherjee has called an “AI Fukushima”, a catastrophe that derails its potential. AI made headlines in 2024 for delivering precision forecasts for flash floods, heatwaves, and the climate more broadly, but its huge energy consumption could hinder crucial efforts to combat the climate crisis.

Ian Sample, Science Editor, The Guardian, email 7 Jan 2025