

ST THEOSEVIA CENTRE FOR CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

OPEN STUDY DAYS IN MICHAELMAS TERM 2026

St Theosevia House, 2 Canterbury Road, Oxford OX2 6LU
An Ecumenical Centre for Christian Spirituality

Wednesday 7 October 7.30 pm: 'Ethiopian Monasticism and contemporary challenges' Talk by Dr Joachim Persoon (Univ. of Addis Ababa). With discussion and drinks, all welcome.

Saturday 14 Nov 10.30 am – 4 pm

Understanding and singing the Psalms:

a Mosaic of Perspectives & Experience

Professor John Day, Professor David Taylor,
Michael Koenig FRCO, Betts Fellow in Organ Studies

Saturday 5 Dec 10.30 am – 4 pm

Exploring the meaning of 'Holy Tears' in East and West

Dr Tikhon Vasilyev, Dr Santha Bhattacharji,
Dr Edward Sutcliffe, Professor Brandon Gallaher

All welcome, no registration. Study Days: students free, others £5 cash. Free coffee from 10.00 am and in lunch break 1-2 pm. You are welcome to bring packed lunch. Website: sttheosevia.org

From the Director: Revd Dr Liz Carmichael, liz.carmichael@sjc.ox.ac.uk
New Assistant Director of Studies: Adam Wilcox@Bfriars.ox.ac.uk
Website: sttheosevia.org St Theosevia House (messages): 01865 310341.

Michaelmas Term 2026

Dear Friends of St Theosevia's,

Welcome to another new academic year, and to a Michaelmas Term with two intriguing Study Days, preceded by a special evening lecture at 7.30 pm, Wed 7 October, on the nature of Ethiopian monasticism and its present challenges.

We welcome Adam Wilcox as our new Assistant Director of Studies.

Thanks to those who made last term's Study Day on the early spread of Christianity to the East, combined with a Garden Party, an enjoyable and memorable event despite the rain!

The first Study Day this term, on **Sat 14 November** will explore the Psalms from three widely contrasting perspectives: those of a OT scholar, a Syriac scholar, and a musician steeped in the liturgical use of the Psalms in the worship of the Western churches. It promises to be an enjoyable and informative day, offering fresh insights on familiar texts.

The second Study Day **on Saturday 5 December**, delves into a subject which is probably less familiar: the phenomenon of weeping, or '**holy tears'** as encountered in the spirituality both of the West - particularly in the Middle Ages - and of the East. What is its history, its nature, and its significance in the past and today?

Let us continue to pray and work for just and lasting peace.

LIZ CARMICHAEL

Free tea & coffee are available at Study Days from 10 am and in 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 Adam.Wilcox@bfriars.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 Adam.

For events at the Oxford Centre for Spiritual Growth (OCSG), see https://www.ocsg.uk.net/ or contact info@ocsg.uk.net

Saturday 14 November 10.30 am – 4 pm

Understanding and singing the Psalms: a Mosaic of Perspectives & Experience

Prof. John Day: 'Understanding the Psalms'. I shall give a general overview of the Psalter, discussing the different types of psalms, their original setting in ancient Israel, who wrote them and when, and what ancient music sounded like. I shall also discuss problems modern Christians might find in using the Psalms, errors in Coverdale's translation (still widely used in Anglican worship), and spell out my favourite psalms. **John Day** is Emeritus Professor of Old Testament at Oxford, and Emeritus Fellow of LMH. He has a PhD from Cambridge and DD from Oxford, and is currently working hard on his 18th book, a massive commentary on Genesis 1-11.

Prof. David Taylor: **The Psalms as Christian texts in the early Greek and Syriac churches.** In the sixth-century the Syriac exegete Daniel of Salah wrote: 'the power of this book of Psalms matches the power of all the books of the New Testament and the Old, for (the Psalms) speak about everything; about creation, and about the providence of God, and about the revelation in the flesh of Emmanuel, and about the future judgement, and about the kingdom which is prepared for the saints, and about good actions.' This talk will explore how the Psalms came to be understood as Christian texts, and how they were interpreted by early Greek and Syriac exegetes. D**avid Taylor** is Associate Professor of Aramaic and Syriac, with a particular interest in the theology and exegesis of the Syriac and Assyrian churches.

Michael Koenig: Beyond Anglican and Gregorian chant: tracing the psalms in the Western musical tradition. Western church music abounds with settings of the psalms - be it motets by Palestrina, Byrd or Schütz, cantatas or organ chorale preludes by Bach, Anglican anthems or large-scale psalm settings for concert use (e.g. Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms,* commissioned in 1965). Many church organs have cases adorned with inscriptions from the psalms, or feature a statue of the archetypal psalmist, King David, with his harp. In popular music, Boney M's version of "Rivers of Babylon" (1978) has become one of the best-selling singles of all time. Besides presenting a representative selection of aural and visual examples to illustrate the remarkable breadth of the psalms' presence in the Western musical tradition, this paper also seeks to explore two questions in greater depth. Firstly, what to think about the fact that most Western composers, even though they are not Bible scholars or ministers, engage with interpretations of the psalms in lush and colourful ways and frequently use the organ or even a symphony orchestra for more illustrative effects and tonal richness. Secondly, what the prominent reference to the psalms in organ cases could mean and what this might reveal about contemporary attitudes towards the psalms. **Michael Koenig FRCO** is the Betts Fellow in Organ Studies, Faculty of Music, Oxford.

Saturday 5 December, 10.30 am - 4.00 pm

Exploring the meaning of 'Holy Tears' in East and West

Dr Tikhon Vasilyev: The Mystery of Tears: Embodiment and Transformation in Eastern Christian Mysticism. Why do tears occupy such an important place in Eastern Christian spirituality? Drawing on writers from St Isaac the Syrian and St John Climacus to modern Athonite figures - St Silouan, St Sophrony , St Joseph the Hesychast - this talk explores tears as an embodied expression of repentance and encounter with God, and a sign of transformation of the human person. Might this tradition contribute to a wider understanding of why humans cry and what tears reveal about us? **Dr Tikhon Vasilyev,** an Academic Visitor at the Faculty of Theology & Religion, focuses on Eastern Christian theology & spirituality, theological anthropology, & Russian religious thought, with particular interests in the relationship between spiritual experience, the human person and the sciences.

Edward Sutcliffe: The Tears of St Francis: Accounts of the life of St Francis describe him moved to tears on various occasions. His weeping expressed his devotion to the Passion, but was so intense and frequent that it threatened to undermine his health, and caused physical pain. This talk explores the multivalence of holy tears, and the relationship between weeping and suffering in early Franciscan spirituality. **Dr Edward Sutcliffe** works on health, medicine, and gender in C13th Latin preaching, and teaches Theology and Study Skills at LMH & Regent's. His Ph.D examined leprosy in early Franciscan life and thought. He was a postdoctoral fellow of the British School at Rome, & Lecturer in Medieval Christianity at Bristol.

Dr Santha Bhattacharji: Tears and screaming in late medieval western devotion. In the late medieval west, a tradition of weeping in repentance evolves into a more general reaction of intense sobbing to events of the life of Christ, even accompanied by loud cries and screaming. We look at passages from several medieval writers, and at the C15th mystic Margery Kempe. **Santha Bhattacharji** taught English at Oxford for over thirty years., and was also for some time an Anglican nun. Now a Research Fellow of Blackfriars, she specialises in English medieval mystics.

Prof. Brandon Gallaher: Creative Mourning: The Spiritual Tradition of the Gift of Tears and Creative Renewal I explore how tears and mourning can reorganise attention and recollection and help in embodying emotional expression within the creative work of a thinker or an artist, thereby potentially opening up new ways of creative organization moving from a clogged, dark & chaotic state to another sphere of development that is open, light & free. Emotional weeping, therefore, might be linked to moments of epiphany and creativity and can open up new spheres for thought and the enlarging of the human spirit when encountering despair and seemingly irresolvable problems. I will explore diverse examples. **Brandon Gallaher** is Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at Exeter. See his *Kallistos Ware of Oxford (1934-2022): A Life in Pilgrimage* (Boston: The Wheel Library, 2026).