

“Feeling Teaching, Teaching Feeling: Affect and Pedagogy between God and Humans”

The 2024 Florovsky Tantar Symposium at the University of Notre Dame

KEYNOTE LECTURE ABSTRACTS

Professor Natalie Carnes

“Theology as Affective Encounter: Constructive Feminist possibilities in Early Christian Texts and Artifacts”

Some of the earliest theological texts and artifacts were not simply “exercise[s] in the transmission of content,” but affectively rich sites of encounter. They witnessed to Christ, not in the sense that they pointed to evidence of Christ but in that they *were that evidence*. This paper traces how the logic of witness births and animates some of the earliest Christian texts and artifacts—from Paul’s letters to the acts of martyrs to hagiography to icons. Reflecting on what it would mean to receive them as such today, the paper turns to Augustine and his own affective encounter with Scripture. Augustine’s struggle with and for Scripture, his way of approaching it through a reparative mode of “attunement,” suggests a way feminist theologians might similarly approach Augustine and the patriarchy-soaked Christian tradition. Through the affectively-rich mode of attunement, feminist theologians can receive texts and artifacts like the *Confessions*, not as pieces of information distinct from the reader, but as dynamic sites of an encounter, the meaning of which is always co-created, renewed by a Spirit who witnesses to the living Christ.

Professor Andrew Davis

“Divine Tears, Prophetic Pedagogy, and the Balm in Gilead (Jer 8:18-9:2)”

In a book that is exceptional for its multiple instances of divine lament (9:9-10, 21; 12:7-13; 13:15-17; 14:17-18; 15:5-9), Jeremiah 8:18-9:2 stands out as an astonishing example of divine weeping. Or is it the prophet weeping? Scholars are divided on the subject of these verses, and some recent analyses have argued that the lack of clear identity is itself significant, because it implies that Yhwh and the prophet are united in grief. In this paper I build on this insight by considering the pedagogical significance of this shared grief. Specifically, the prophet’s participation in Yhwh’s emotional life in 8:18-9:2 becomes the basis of his instruction to the mourning women in 9:17-22, and in both passages we find other voices from the community mixed into the grief. The power of this prophetic theology and pedagogy can be seen in the spiritual “There is a balm in Gilead,” which draws its title from this section of Jeremiah (8:22) and continues its multivocal style and its emphasis on divine empathy.

Professor Sarah Gador-Whyte

“Emotions of Night Worship: Crafting fear and joy in Night Vigil Hymnography”

“Didn’t this night become brighter than any day with everyone jumping around in so great an excess of joy?” So asked the fourth-century preacher John Chrysostom in a sermon he delivered at a night vigil in Constantinople. Chrysostom saw the very nature of night transformed by a large group of ardent worshippers expressing their spiritual joy through communal worship.

In this paper, I examine the worship setting of the night vigil as the ideal classroom for Christian emotional transformation. By meeting at night, congregants experienced heightened emotions and senses, and preachers and hymnographers could use this intensification to teach the correct emotional responses to their listeners. I focus in particular on the kontakia of Romanos the Melodist and his presentation of fear and joy in his hymns. Through the emotional rollercoasters of the kontakia, congregants learn (often from the mouth of the character of Christ) when they should fear and when they should rejoice. Fear, for example, can be both transformative and destructive, and through the kontakia congregants learn to distinguish the helpful emotions from the hindrances.

Professor Dawn Lavalle Norman

“Blushing Philosophers in Early Christianity: Embarrassment and Education”

Philosophical dialogues, as a combination of philosophy and drama, script emotional responses into educational narratives. Philosophical dialogues contain a range of actor emotions: anger (e.g. Thrasymachus in the *Republic*), sadness (e.g. Gregory of Nyssa in *On the Soul and Resurrection*), and joy (e.g. Monica at the end of Augustine’s dialogue *De Beata Vita*). In my presentation, I focus in on one emotion, embarrassment, and especially its expression in blushing. Plato’s dialogues contain a few boy blushers, but in Christian dialogues, blushers are predominantly female. In pre-Christian dialogues, blushing frequently went hand-in-hand with silence (Autolychus in Xenophon’s *Symposium* and Cleobulina in Plutarch’s *Symposium of the Seven Sages*). Some early Christian examples are the same: Licentius in Augustine’s dialogue *De Ordine* blushes and remains silent after being caught out in his pride (Aug. *De Ord.* I.10.29). However, some early Christian examples of blushing do not end in silence, and the speakers continue through their embarrassment. I focus in on one of those moments, Methodius of Olympus’ *Symposium*, and the way that the speakers deal with their emotions as part of the dialogic educational process.

I first discuss the tradition of representing emotions in dialogues and theories about the purpose of showing dialogic emotions before turning specifically to blushing, bringing in some treatments of embarrassment in education and also discussions of the cause and purpose of the blush. Finally, I turn from my nearly sole focus on the emotions of *students* to some of the emotions of *teachers* in dialogues.

Professor Michael Magree

“Cyril of Alexandria on Christ the Emotional Teacher and the Teacher of Emotions”

Cyril of Alexandria has been celebrated for his insight into crucial theological themes of Trinity, Christology, and biblical exegesis. What has drawn less notice is how this work is integrally related to a deeply pastoral and educational purpose involving the reordering of affection. My paper here focuses on Cyril’s *Festal Letters* and his *Commentary on John*, in

which he presents what can be called an ascetical theology for the people. He is relating the high points of his teaching on the Trinity and on Christ to trenchant observations on how Christians make the saving work of Christ effective through their ascetical practices. For this presentation I concentrate in a particular way on Cyril's account of fasting and the eucharist. Both this ascetical practice and this liturgical celebration involve a re-ordering of the Christian believer's affections away from merely fleshly objects and toward the love of God. The eucharist, in a particular way, enables this emotional reorientation because of its basis in Cyril's understanding of the single subject of the incarnation. What is more, because Christ has accepted the "dimensions of self-emptying," Cyril highlights Christ's own emotions as a teacher who feels at times frustration while he deals with humans' lack of what might be called emotional intelligence. Thus, in both directions, both in Christ and in the believer, Cyril's Christology directly meets the divine plan of salvation as it bears on education of the affections.

Professor Jeff Wickes

"Affect, Syriac Poetry, and the Liturgies of an Uncertain World."

In the landscape of the early Christian world, the Syriac tradition took shape through poetic voices. Formative poets such as Ephrem, Isaac, Narsai, and Jacob distilled theological knowledge and formed theological subjects in liturgical settings. In the poetic corpora they built—poems that treated everything from the Bible to birds—they formed not only their audiences' minds and bodies, but also their affections. The poets crafted a rich lexicon of emotion, situating their audiences via the Bible and the world through wonder, sadness, joy, and awe. Biblical characters that in their canonical versions remained mostly silent sprung to life with pathos-laden speech. The emotion of these characters helped to render familiar narratives afresh—as sites of dramatic uncertainty. Poets retold narratives so as to re-build the Bible's narratives as open-ended and capable of inspiring deep emotion.

The Syriac representation of the emotional lives of biblical characters has, in the past decade, begun to receive serious attention. In this talk, I show that biblical characters—even human characters—are not the only sites of affect and narrative uncertainty. Syriac poets' tendency to situate audiences in moments of uncertainty extended also to their depictions of the world. In the context of the liturgy, poets ritualized the world in surprising ways—as an ultimately unknowable object of didactic wonder and unexpected agency. In these liturgical representations, the poetry's goal was not merely to convey content, but to shape audiences' affective orientations. Through these depictions of the world—through rendering the world as a thing that demanded awe—they ritually reframed the affections of their audiences.