

'Forming a Human Being', With the Early Church Fathers

From Monday 6th to Friday 10th October 2025, St George's House will hold a Consultation entitled '*Forming a Human Being*', *With the Early Church Fathers*. This has been designed for Clergy with at least five years of ministerial experience. Three doctoral researchers from the University of Aberdeen – Sophia Theodoratos, Rebekah Pikkarainen, and John Nolan – will lead it, assisted by St George's House Staff.

According to the early Church Fathers, each of us is in a process of continual spiritual transformation, so that only at the end will we finally be made 'in the image and likeness of God'. Indeed, as the second century figure St Irenaeus of Lyons splendidly puts it, we are yet to become a 'living human being'. Such visions of humanity as God's ongoing project provide fascinating insights that remain important to our life and ministry today. Consequently, we will explore some ancient writings, alongside contemporary sources, discerning various distinct, yet complementary, perspectives on what it means to be human.

In addition to Irenaeus, we will especially focus on the 'Father of Fathers', St Gregory of Nyssa, who declares the beauty of the human being who 'has come to be as an imitation of God'. Other key figures, such as St Ignatius of Antioch in the early second century and St Maximus the Confessor in the seventh, will also be treated. We will examine these figures' historical contexts, together with their own unique approaches to reading Scripture, as nourished within the life of the Church. All these aspects will converge at one central point: how it is that these theologians harmoniously understand what it means to truly become a human being in the light of the cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The program will feature shared discussion, individual reflection, and engaging presentations from our speakers:



John Nolan is a second-year postgraduate researcher in Patristics at the University of Aberdeen. His work explores the motif of the cosmic cross in ancient Christian literature – the dense network of poetic images, exegetical traditions, and metaphysical commitments that places the cross at the centre of all things – especially in the work of figures like Ignatius of Antioch and Irenaeus of Lyons. He holds a Master of Arts in Theological Studies from Regent College in Vancouver, BC and a Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies from the University of Virginia. He has taught courses on patristic figures like Basil the Great and Maximus Confessor at Regent College and tutors at Aberdeen.

Rebekah Pikkarainen is currently in her second year of doctoral studies. Her research focuses on Gregory of Nyssa's biography of his eldest sister, *Life of Macrina*, specifically how Macrina is the paragon of the Christian life and central representative of Gregory's theological vision of the gradual transformation of the human being into the image of Christ. Key themes of Macrina's transformation include her life of prayer, her hope in response to death, and her pioneering of an ascetic community. Rebekah has a master's degree in theology from Trinity Western University, in Langley, BC, where she also lectured for one year; she also tutors at the University of Aberdeen.

Sophia Theodoratos is in the final year of her doctoral research on Irenaeus, exploring the unity that he finds between his figures of Paul and John, in the early church period. Overall, her work focuses on the formation of a 'spiritual human being', who, as God's handiwork, is gradually being fashioned into the image and likeness of God, through the work of his life-making Word and Spirit. She has attained two master's degrees in theology from St Vladimir's Seminary, New York, where she held a Dean's Fellowship. Sophia has tutored at the University of Aberdeen; she also lectures at St Andrew's Theological College, Sydney.

If you would like to join us from 6-10 October, please email St George's House – patricia.birdseye@stgeorghouse.org – or telephone 01753 848886 for an application form.

Places will be allocated on a first-come first-served basis.
www.stgeorghouse.org