

**MAN AND THE CHURCH
IN THE CHRISTIAN THOUGHT OF NICHOLAS BERDYAEV**

An international scholarly conference on the 150th anniversary of the philosopher's birth

Workshop

**“The Dogma of the Human Person”: from the Ethics of the Human Image towards the
Mystery of Personality**

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The subject of the human person and his dignity as a divine-human being is central to Berdyaev's inheritance. We might say that his motto was “philosophy should be anthropology”.

It is this focus on the human person by which Berdyaev explained the ethical and eschatological tendencies of his thought, his deep interest in questions of good and evil, the meaning of human life, and the course of human history. This interest also distinguishes Berdyaev's primary anthropological work, *The Destiny of Man*, which is subtitled “a paradoxical experience of Ethics”.

In Berdyaev's thought, the primary anthropological issue is the problem of human personality, which is first and foremost related to the problem of the human image: “The personal manifestation of the human image is always a break or discontinuity within objective reality, a ray of light from the mysterious world of human existence which reflects the divine. It is through the human image that the personality can enter into communion with other personalities.”

From his earliest works in the first decade of the 20th century, the fact that revelation of authentic personality was achieved at Golgotha was central to Berdyaev's anthropological thought. This, perhaps, remains the most difficult aspect of his anthropological thought, which simultaneously demands that the reader have an experience of faith and aids in the acquisition of such experience.

It so happened, that Berdyaev witnessed the appearance of many phenomena which determine the spiritual landscape of our modern life; these include the individualisation and “enmassment” of society, attempts to explain the human person from without, giving him over to definition in terms of Economics, Psychology and Sociology, and the levelling of the spiritual world along with acceptance of a sort of agreement to “leave each other alone” as the ideal for human fellowship and common life.

At the same time, Berdyaev noted that “Christianity has yet to fully reveal that which we might venture to call a “Christology of the human person”, i.e. the mystery of the divine nature of the human person – a dogma of the human person similar to our dogma of Christ.” In our workshop we would like to follow in Berdyaev's footsteps and take one more step in that direction.

Moderator:

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Questions for Discussion:

1. A hundred years ago, Nicholas Berdyaev noted that people were becoming acutely aware of three “new and eternal” spiritual principles – freedom, compassion and creativity. Our modern melange of complex and contradictory ideas, which come together as our understanding of a sort of “new ethics”, are also shot through with quirky sentimentality regarding freedom, compassion and creativity. What are the similarities and differences between Berdyaev’s understanding of this triad of values and our “new ethics”? What human image and understanding of authentic personality inform these two triads?
2. Human image and authentic personality in Berdyaev’s anthropology: how do we understand the (inter)relationship between these concepts? How and for what reason does a person lose or acquire his own authentic image and unique personality?
3. In our day the word “sobornost” conjures up deeply ecclesial, if not downright clerical associations. Berdyaev insists upon the connection between authentic personhood and sobornost, underscoring that first and foremost it is the authentic human personality which is sobornal. He calls sobornost “a quality of the personal conscience, standing before God”. What criteria does Berdyaev propose for authentic sobornost and personality? Are these sufficient and justifiable in the experience of modern Christianity?