

Course Syllabus

**TRT3914 – Orthodox Life II: Eastern Christian Understanding
of Ethics, Society and the World
Trinity College
Toronto School of Theology
January to April 2021 (Winter/Spring Terms)**

Instructor Information

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Course Identification

Course Number:	TRT3914 (formerly second half of TRT3675)
Course Name:	Orthodox Life II: Eastern Christian Understanding of Ethics, Society and the World
Course Location:	Online only
Course Week Begins:	Every Tuesday (starting 12 January)
Live Sessions (<i>Optional</i>):	Tuesdays 12 January, 2 February, 9 March, 6 April
Prerequisites:	Orthodox Life I is not required, but you should have already taken some courses in Orthodox studies

Course Description

Orthodox Christian thought has always been deeply concerned with ethical-social issues of the daily encounter with life and culture, but grounds solutions to these issues in tradition, not 'progress'. How should modern Orthodoxy respond to civil rights, war, sexuality, bioethics, multiculturalism, environmentalism, women's ministries, and other contemporary social issues? Students will be evaluated on their ongoing class participation, weekly critical commentaries, a longer patristic commentary, and a final summative essay.

Expanded Course Description

I. The Intellectual Challenge

Orthodox Christian thought has always been deeply concerned with ethical-social issues of the daily encounter with life and culture, but Orthodoxy habitually grounds solutions to these issues in tradition, not 'progress'. How should modern Orthodoxy respond to civil rights, war, social inclusiveness and diversity, multiculturalism, environmentalism, and other contemporary social issues?

These questions are not abstract, concepts to be intellectualized into a formal, systematic, theory. Nor they answered from a transcendental inner state of another-worldly kind. Even though St. Basil the

Great fostered monasticism, he knew well that the holy life is a life of *praxis*, lived in the world, in each person's own time, own circumstances, own society with its conditions and circumstances. The holy person attends to his/her holy dialogue with God and extends it outward into behaviour and relationships and decisions and management which witness that holiness in the contemporary world (James 2:14-17). Eastern Christians are not called to "leave the world" or this present life; they are called to be saints within it. They are not called out of their culture; they are called to bless it. All Eastern Christians, even monastics, are expected to approach life in the world with decisiveness, "discerning the spirits" (1 John 4:1, cf. 1 Cor 12:10, 1 Th 5:21-2) and acting as good stewards of Creation and as saintly icons of morals and faith.

However, this very commitment to finding and revealing holiness in life carries within itself a fundamental challenge: the holy life can only be experienced through encounter, engagement with the world as it is; the engagement of holy persons is carried on within society and the world-environment. But Life-experience has always recognized Life-in-the-world as "messy" and complex, requiring constant ethical judgment and decision, often from a position of competing social goods or values. Life-in-the-world moves ever-onward through the unpredictable turnings of war and peace, economic fluctuation, cultural shifts in values, births and deaths, illnesses and aging, elections, population movements and demographic shifts, coups-d'état and revolutions, environmental changes, shifts in scientific knowledge and philosophical discoveries, civil court decisions about "rights," and even falling in love. Is Orthodox Tradition, as learned through Eastern Christian living and as examined and reviewed in the Orthodox School of Theology Program, a sound – and effective -- basis upon which to ground the constant judgment and decision-making which Life-in-the-world requires? Is Eastern Christian theology sufficient to cope with the challenge of Life-in-the-World, or must a holy person incorporate into the dialogue something of the truths and values of the world? Can we evaluate bioethics or environment without a knowledge of science? Can we evaluate "spiritual growth" without an understanding of psychology? Can we love our neighbour if we understand nothing of his culture? What is the true relationship between what God needs of us and what social need places four-square before our eyes?

These questions are perennial, facing everyone who has ever tried to live in the world while walking with God. But our own time and our own place have made this situation even more difficult, for everyone but especially for Eastern Christians with their strong appeal to Tradition. The 20th and 21st centuries have thrust into the centre of "reality" many issues of existentialism, pluralism of ethical values, relativity of cultures, and so on, all playing out against dramatic shifts in environment, biotechnology, religious pluralism, overcoming of old prejudices, and so on, all of which together dramatically shift the ground from under the feet of confident certitude – in fact, even challenging the possibility of certitude itself. And the social and legal environment of Canadian and US culture and "secular" democracy, grounded in notions of rights, toleration, and separation of religion from the state, makes the grasp of proper decisions and the application of religious truths to the social dynamic even harder to sort out.

Students in this course will have an opportunity, through discussions of many concrete issues of our times, to evaluate these profound issues of the problems of living in a social world and the deeper issue of what applicability Eastern Christian knowledge and Tradition have in providing a foundation for meaningful solutions to those Life-problems, and by what methods this knowledge might be made to work in ways that are respectful of the realities of the world. Reading material will range from Scripture, church fathers, and canon law down to very recent modern Orthodox (and non-Orthodox) writers on ethics,

Orthodox Life I (not a prerequisite course) followed an opening overview of the dilemma of ethical decision-making with a set of problems which touch on personal self-recognition. In **Orthodox Life II** we

move to consideration of problems which stem from persons' need to live in greater society and in socio-political relationships. The central issue in both cases is the same: How can meaningful solutions be found for these key pragmatic Life-problems which are practically useful and yet provide a true Christian witness? Scripture tells Orthodox Christians that there can be no compromise with the world; Orthodox *praxis* tells them that every life-decision engages *oikonomia* – merciful understanding of the problems of life in a way which keeps strict faith with Holy Tradition and also seeks a humanly possible, Anthropology-respecting, solution to a problem. For Eastern Christians, *oikonomia* plays a major role in preaching, in ethics, in the correction of sinners, even in canon law; yet the parameters of “oeconomic” judgment have yet to receive an adequate definition. Indeed, as said above, in the 21st century a single-valued definition may no longer even be possible – so how is an “oeconomic” decision to be reached?

II. Some Specific Topics in Orthodox Life II

Among topics to be considered will be the following; in every case we will be discussing how an Orthodox believer with an educated grounding in the Orthodox Tradition would approach and defend stances on questions such as:

- **Issues of church and state:** The political theories and practices of Orthodoxy were formed in close symbiotic relation with a monarchical state; how should Orthodoxy function in the modern “secular” state, especially in socially pluralistic democracies? In societies where Orthodoxy is the major church, should it seek Establishment? Should the Church take stands on political issues, and in democracies – especially those dependent on constitutionalized “rights” – what principles should motivate voting in elections, or voting on laws by legislators? What is the meaning of “nationalistic” prayers? Can an Orthodox worldview provide a basis for recognition of the “correct” stance in questions of “civil rights”? Or “universal human rights”? Does Eastern Christianity acknowledge “Natural Law”?
- **Wealth, social care, and charity:** Does the Orthodox worldview entail any particular form(s) of social order? What is the Scriptural, and the patristic basis for understanding social disparities, especially economic disparities? And what is the appropriate Christian response? The gospel of love leaves no room for doubt about the priority of charity and care for the poor, but for the Orthodox worldview, what is the appropriate stewardship, the useful form of such charity, in the modern world? Can the parables of “labourers” and “stewards,” whose exegesis in Scripture applies to evangelism, be equally well applied to socio-economic issues? What values should be connected with “wealth,” and how does wealth relate to financing the churches and charity? How does this social issue affect our understanding of Christian Anthropology? Does Orthodoxy encourage, or ignore attention to issues of “Social Gospel”?
- **The environment:** To what extent is concern for the environment and ecological consciousness a grounded priority in Orthodox awareness and outlook? What are the patristic and Scriptural bases for this view? In particular, is vigorous and activist environmentalism defensible as synergy with the energies of the creative Trinity, and not just as pragmatic self-protection? Are ethics toward animals, or toward all life, an environmental issue, a bio-ethical issue, or an extension of general ethics? How does this environmental outlook change our understanding of Christian anthropology?
- **War and peace:** Orthodox history and many texts in Orthodox liturgy present what at first glance seems to be a highly triumphalist, military-based reading of the Scriptural intention for an eschatological Christian world; in light of the dialogue between Orthodox Tradition and the world we live in, is this a justifiable exegesis – does Orthodoxy support the notion of a “just war”? How should we respond to a world where there is so much international lawlessness and

violent crime against humanity? What message should orthodox military chaplains bring to their evangelism? What understanding does hagiography contribute to this question?

- **Missions, missiology, and diversity of cultures:** In light of modern multiculturalism, on what basis should Orthodox carry out mission and evangelism? In what terms, with what language should Orthodox speak to non-Orthodox? Is it justifiable to evangelize other Christians? How much of Orthodox praxis -- especially liturgical rubrics – must be conveyed in outreach to other cultures? What about the special cases of liturgical language and ethnic uniformity in an Orthodox community? Does Orthodoxy support an ethic which condemns racism?
- **Relationship to non-Christians; multifaith activities:** Extending the issues of pluralism of values, democratic rights, and diversity of cultures into a “global” Christian Anthropology, how should Orthodox in the 21st C. live and interact with neighbours of other religions? In what ways is it appropriate – or even an obligatory priority – for Orthodox to join with such neighbours in common activities for the welfare of God’s world, and what form should such activities take? Do Orthodox Christians have a unique and different response, or a common “human” response, to situations of disaster or human need? Is there room for interfaith marriage?

Course Resources

Books for Purchase

From the St Vladimir’s Press Popular Patristics series:

- St Basil the Great, *On Christian Ethics*
- St Basil, *On Social Justice*
- St John Chrysostom, *On Wealth and Poverty*

Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 3rd edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011
If buying second-hand, be sure to get this third edition

Required course readings – patristic texts, articles and book extracts – will be provided via the course portal, which students can choose to view online or download and print.

Course Portal

Quercus: <https://q.utoronto.ca/>

This course uses Quercus for its course website. To access it, go to the UofT Quercus login page at <https://q.utoronto.ca/> and login using your UTORid and password. Once you have logged in to Quercus using your UTORid and password, look for the **My Courses** module, where you’ll find the link to the website for all your Quercus-based courses. (Your course registration with ACORN gives you access to the course website in Quercus.) Information for students about using Quercus can be found at: <https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-10701>.

As in the classroom, online communication must be carried out respectfully and civilly at all times. Writing within the online media of blogs, discussion forums is not an excuse for laziness, lack of proper reflection or uncivility. Arguments must be carefully crafted, respectfully presented and grounded in source texts and solid reflection. Students who fail to adhere to these guidelines will not succeed in this course.

Course Learning Objectives

Students successfully completing this course will be able to demonstrate the following outcomes.

(A) IN RESPECT OF GENERAL ACADEMIC SKILLS

- to work with both primary and secondary sources and to gather, analyse and prepare materials for reflection and engaged class discussion
- to improve their reading-analytical and idea-critical skills
- to write analytical commentaries on texts
- to write a final summative essay integrating analysis and reflection on primary and secondary sources

(B) IN RESPECT OF THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE CONTENT OF ONE OR MORE THEOLOGICAL DISCIPLINES

- analyse a wide range of contemporary social issues using factual data and knowledge from current analyses – scientific, social-scientific, journalistic, and so on – by exploring underlying principles and comparing them with Orthodox Christian theological principles and values acquired through prerequisite studies
- summarise with informed depth and precision current Orthodox stances and views on a variety of key contemporary ethical problems and issues, with reference to some of the best recent Orthodox scholarship
- construct a pastoral methodology for their own ministry in their world that fully expresses all the wisdom of Orthodox tradition without ‘compromising’ with the world, but seeks authentic solutions to living in the world and helping others to do so richly
- describe the views on these issues brought forward by other Christian partners in ecumenical dialogue, and also by the current dialogue within society in general, and assess what Orthodox could learn from these dialogues
- recommend an Orthodox Christian approach to ecumenical dialogue on these topics that is informed, thoughtful, and respectful, yet faithful to the norms of Tradition

(C) IN RESPECT OF PERSONAL AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION

- to manage his or her own learning
- to demonstrate behaviour consistent with academic integrity and social responsibility

(D) IN RESPECT OF MINISTERIAL AND PUBLIC LEADERSHIP

- to demonstrate qualities and skills necessary for ministry, further study, and community involvement
- to exercise initiative, personal responsibility, and accountability in both personal and group contexts
- to work effectively with others

Evaluation

A. Weekly readings and critical commentaries (50%): There will be reading and *short* writing tasks assigned for each week which must be completed during that week but students will manage their own work schedules. For the most part the materials for assignments will be posted on Quercus. Each week students will write one longer (3 pp. max) or two shorter (2 pp. each max) – depending on whether the assigned reading has several short items or one longer item – critical commentary or analytical notes about the assigned reading(s) of that week. The comments should also incorporate what they have learned from the brief introductory videos. Written work will be returned with professor’s comments each week because the aim is for students to improve their reading-analytical and idea-critical skills from week to week. NB: there will be not be written assignments on the weeks when class is meeting as a whole by Zoom, see below.

B. Class participation (10%): Once each month, the entire class will meet synchronously by Zoom. The discussions will review the readings and work of the weeks since the previous Zoom, and will also be an opportunity to present ideas leading to a class debate, and also to ask questions of interest to all and generally to get to know each other. Also, once each month a professor will have a 1:1 meeting with each student for about 30 minutes; this is basically to “check in” and to answer any questions or confusions the student may have. Together these constitute the “class participation.”

C. Longer commentary (15%) – due Tuesday 6 April, 12noon EDT: Where most of the weekly sources will be short articles, two or three longer texts (30-70 pp) – mostly patristic treatises or sermons – will be assigned during the semester. Students will write a longer (6 pp. max), in-depth analysis of one of these, done asynchronously at your convenience but in late March/early April, after receiving professor’s comments on your early weekly analyses. This should be in essay form, with a thesis-point and an organized argument derived from analysis of the text.

D. Final summative essay (25%) – due Friday 16 April, 12noon EDT: Written during the exam period, this must be a prose essay (10 pp. max), with a thesis and an organized argument. The argument must incorporate a significant number (at least seven) items from the course readings; feel free to critique them.

Orthodoxy flourished within a Byzantine state and culture; is it possible for Orthodoxy to thrive in an Orthodox manner within a North American democratic state and culture?

- This is not a narrow polity/politics question, but one that takes into account the whole of culture and human relationships
- While the thrust of the question is practical, not only theoretical, this should be approached as a problem in foundational ethics as understood by Orthodoxy
- As well, this engages a foundational issue about adaptability of culture in Orthodoxy

Grading System

Letter Grade	Numerical Equivalents	Grade Point	Grasp of Subject Matter	Other qualities expected of students
A RANGE: Excellent: Student shows original thinking, analytic and synthetic ability, critical evaluations, and broad knowledge base.				
A+	90-100	4.0	Profound and Creative	Strong evidence of original thought, of analytic and synthetic ability; sound and penetrating critical evaluations which identify assumptions of those they study as well as their own; mastery of an extensive knowledge base
A	85-89	4.0	Outstanding	
A-	80-84	3.7	Excellent	Clear evidence of original thinking, of analytic and synthetic ability; sound critical evaluations; broad knowledge base
B RANGE: Good: Student shows critical capacity and analytic ability, understanding of relevant issues, familiarity with the literature.				
B+	77-79	3.3	Very Good	Good critical capacity and analytic ability; reasonable understanding of relevant issues; good familiarity with the literature
B	73-76	3.0	Good	
B-	70-72	2.7	Satisfactory at a post-baccalaureate level.	Adequate critical capacity and analytic ability; some understanding of relevant issues; some familiarity with the literature
FZ	0-69	0	Failure	Failure to meet the above criteria

Please see the appropriate handbook for more details about the grading scale and non-numerical grades (e.g. SDF, INC, etc).

Late work. Basic Degree students are expected to hand in assignments by the date given in the course outline. A 2% per day penalty applies (up to a maximum of 20%) for late work. This penalty is not applied to students with medical or compassionate difficulties; students facing such difficulties are kindly requested to consult with their faculty adviser or basic degree director, who should make a recommendation on the matter to the instructor. The absolute deadline for the course is the examination day scheduled for the course. Students who for exceptional reasons (e.g., a death in the family or a serious illness) are unable to complete work by this date may request an extension (SDF = "standing deferred") beyond the term. An SDF must be requested from the registrar's office in the student's college of registration no later than the last day of classes in which the course is taken. The SDF, when approved, will have a mutually agreed upon deadline that does not extend beyond the conclusion of the following term. If a student has not completed work but has not been granted an SDF, a final mark will be submitted calculating a zero for work not submitted.

Course grades. Consistently with the policy of the University of Toronto, course grades submitted by an instructor are reviewed by a committee of the instructor's college before being posted. Course grades may be adjusted where they do not comply with University grading policy (<http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/grading.htm>) or college grading policy.

Policies

Accessibility. Students with a disability or health consideration, whether temporary or permanent, are entitled to accommodation. Students in conjoint degree programs must register at the University of Toronto's Accessibility Services offices; information is available at <http://www.accessibility.utoronto.ca/>. The sooner a student seeks accommodation, the quicker we can assist.

Plagiarism. Students submitting written material in courses are expected to provide full documentation for sources of both words and ideas in footnotes or endnotes. Direct quotations should be placed within quotation marks. (If small changes are made in the quotation, they should be indicated by appropriate punctuation such as brackets and ellipses, but the quotation still counts as a direct quotation.) Failure to document borrowed material constitutes plagiarism, which is a serious breach of academic, professional, and Christian ethics. An instructor who discovers evidence of student plagiarism is not permitted to deal with the situation individually but is required to report it to his or her head of college or delegate according to the TST *Basic Degree Handbook* and the Graduate program Handbooks (linked from <http://www.tst.edu/academic/resources-forms/handbooks> and the University of Toronto *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters* <http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/AssetFactory.aspx?did=4871>). A student who plagiarizes in this course will be assumed to have read the document "Avoidance of plagiarism in theological writing" published by the Graham Library of Trinity and Wycliffe Colleges http://www.trinity.utoronto.ca/Library_Archives/Theological_Resources/Tools/Guides/plag.htm.

Other academic offences. TST students come under the jurisdiction of the University of Toronto *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters* <http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/behaveac.htm>.

Back-up copies. Please make back-up copies of essays before handing them in.

Obligation to check email. At times, the course instructor may decide to send out important course information by email. To that end, all students in conjoint programs are required to have a valid utoronto email address. Students must have set up their utoronto email address which is entered in the ACORN system. Information is available at www.utorid.utoronto.ca. The course instructor will not be able to help you with this. 416-978-HELP and the Help Desk at the Information Commons can answer questions you may have about your UTORid and password. *Students should check utoronto email regularly* for messages about the course. **Forwarding** your utoronto.ca email to a Hotmail, Gmail, Yahoo or other type of email account is not advisable. In some cases, messages from utoronto.ca addresses sent to Hotmail, Gmail or Yahoo accounts are filtered as junk mail, which means that emails from your course instructor may end up in your spam or junk mail folder. Students in non-conjoint programs should contact the Registrar of their college of registration.

Email communication with the course instructor. The instructor aims to respond to email communications from students in a timely manner. *All email communications from students in conjoint programs should be sent from a utoronto email address.* Email communications from other email addresses are not secure, and also the instructor cannot readily identify them as being legitimate emails from students. The instructor is not obliged to respond to email from non-utoronto addresses for students in conjoint programs. Students in non-conjoint programs should only use the email address they have provided to their college of registration.

Anti-harassment policy. As we all adjust to online classes and lectures, and increasingly participate in virtual learning environments, students are reminded of the expectation that we all demonstrate respect for one another. As outlined in the Student Code of Conduct, the University of Toronto does not condone discrimination or harassment against any persons or communities especially when based on grounds protected under the Ontario Human Rights Code. The University of Toronto recognizes its commitment to human rights, equity and inclusion and acknowledges the disproportionate impact COVID-19 has on various parts of our community. COVID-19 is not isolated to people of any particular ethnic origin, place of origin or race. Equity, diversity and respect must remain integral as we continue to transition during these challenging times. The institution will monitor and address discriminatory comments or behaviour including on U of T's online platforms and classrooms.

In accordance with the Ontario Human Rights Code, no person shall engage in a course of vexatious conduct that is directed at one or more specific individuals, and that is based on the race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age marital status, family status or disability. This includes:

- Racial slurs or "jokes"
- Insults due to racial identity
- Online posts of cartoons or pictures, in a workplace or school that degrade persons of a particular racial group
- Name-calling due to race, colour, citizenship, place of origin, ancestry, ethnic background or creed
- Pseudonyms or handles that are inappropriate about ancestry, colour, citizenship, ethnicity, place of origin, race, or religion.

The University of Toronto's Equity Offices remain available to students to provide support on equity issues that arise as a result of COVID-19. Students are encouraged to support one another and the University's commitment to human rights and our values of diversity, inclusion, and respect in managing any inappropriate comments or disruptive behaviours. If you experience or witness inappropriate comments or behaviours in your classes, you are encouraged to contact your instructor. If you can, take and share a screenshot of the inappropriate content with your instructor so they can follow-up with you and address the conduct.

Course Schedule

Week 1: Review of basic issues when discussing ethics – does Orthodoxy’s ethics cohere with “general ethics”?

Absolute ethics, situation ethics, virtue ethics. Eschatology and decision-values

Private conscience and public norms: ethical individuals in society. Does diversity nullify truth?

Weeks 2-3: The church in the state: where are ethical standards established?

The issue of “rights” and the question of democracy (vs. autocracy): if laws clash, how to decide?

Should the church have political influence? Political ideology? e.g. USA and republic of Russia

What is “justice”? War and peace as eschatological issues: Israel and Palestinians

Week 4: Synchronous Zoom meeting

Weeks 5-6: Living in society

Women and feminism; racism; public health and the pandemic

Secularism as a norm; modernity and truth; critical thought and ideology – which is Orthodox?

Social atonement as an ethical problem: examples of reconciliation

Week 7: Wealth, poverty, charity, disparity

Week 8: Synchronous Zoom meeting

Week 9: The environment as an ethical issue

Week 10: Multi-faith actions and multiculturalism as ethical issues

Week 11: Pluralism in Christianity? Orthodoxy and ecumenism

Week 12: Final Synchronous Zoom; review of the issues we have recognized

Please note that this syllabus is subject to change in accordance with the regulations in the TST *Basic Degree Handbook*.