

# **The On Knowing Humanity Conference**

## ***Call for Papers***

What does it mean to study humanity from both scientific and theological perspectives? How might Christian theology inform the work of anthropological ethnography and theory? Might such integrative work yield results that are valuable for the purpose of solving human problems? This conference will bring together scholars from anthropology, theology, social practice, and other related disciplines to discuss their common interests and potential collaboration on topics such as: the significance of humanity's unique creation for human personhood and the construction of culture; the underlying reasons for humanity's destructive behavior toward self, others, and the environment; and the role that purpose and hope play in praxis.

The conference will address questions such as:

1. How does the human spirit interconnect with the human mind and body in the course of everyday life, including not only religious behavior, but all cultural behavior and processes?

a) How do Christian theological arguments about humanity being “in the image of God” compare to naturalistic scientific arguments about “human nature”? Which presuppositions do these two groups of scholars share, and which ones diverge?

b) How does the human spirit, expressing itself in daily life in cross-cultural contexts, make a discernible difference to human experience?

c) How do theological constructions of the human person elucidate human behavior and cultures beyond what naturalistic explanations have been able to do?

2. What difference does the existence of the divine make to human life and cultural processes, as measured by the direct evidence of elicited testimony from consultants (subjects of study), by the indirect evidence of behavior modified by larger purposes, and by the explanatory value of paradigms borrowed from theological anthropology and the theology of culture?

a) How have ethnographers sidelined, ignored, and explained away the witness of anthropological consultants to their own experience of the divine? What in the ethnographic method needs adjusting and/or expanding to make possible the legitimation of this kind of evidence?

b) What is the value added of bringing a theology of culture to bear upon the limited understanding in anthropology of religious belief and practice? How might the discoveries in this area provide explanatory value to other aspects of culture?

c) How does epistemological stance with regard to the divine limit and/or enrich the ability of anthropologists to discover deeper meanings in cultural life? How might we

best facilitate a true dialogue between researchers/scholars of different epistemological stances and faith commitments?

d) How are the barriers of scholarly language to be crossed between anthropology and theology so that a common understanding of the relationship between the divine and human beings can be discussed?

3. How might the introduction of teleology, the study of meaning and purpose, enrich the conversation in anthropology on matters such as human origins, development, diversity, commonality, and destiny?

a) What is the history of, and reasons for, the rejection of teleology in Western science? How might a re-examination of the subject assist in the resolution of current dilemmas in science over the dualisms of mind/body, natural/supernatural, and randomness/pattern?

b) How might the theology of humanity as created in the divine image and for divine purposes enrich our understanding of the human condition and help us to solve global human problems effectively?

c) What is the value and purpose of human diversity, and its relationship to human commonality? What are the natural and/or divinely ordained limits of that diversity, given human purposes, and what are the reasons to protect it?

d) How do we understand the teleology of human beings' role in the natural world? What benefits and responsibilities are entailed in the view that human beings are vice-regents of the divine in creation?

The OKH conference is the culmination of the work of the OKH project, funded by the John Templeton Foundation. It will take place at Eastern University, in the Philadelphia area, on May 28-30, 2015. Please see our webpage at [www.eastern.edu/okhconference](http://www.eastern.edu/okhconference). Paper proposals may be submitted by email to Dr. Eloise Meneses at [emeneses@eastern.edu](mailto:emeneses@eastern.edu).