

2019 ESITIS Conference Programme

The Hope and Despair of Religions: Exploring the Nexus of Theory and Praxis

24-27 April, Sarajevo, Bosnia & Herzegovina

WEDNESDAY, 24 APRIL 2019

13:00-15:00 **Registration**

15:00-15:45 **Opening session**

15:45-16:00 Short break

16:00-18:00 **Session I: Thinking Beyond Eurocentric and Traditional Paradigms of Religion**

Chair: Wolfram Weisse, University of Hamburg

Keynote speaker: Grace Davie, University of Exeter

In her talk “Understanding Religion in Modern Europe,” Grace Davie examines the place of religion in modern Europe from two points of view. The first part outlines the factors that must be taken into account if we are to understand Europe from within. These include cultural heritage, the historical churches, a shift from obligation to consumption, new arrivals, and secular reactions. The second part places Europe in a global context, recognizing that the relative secularity of Europe is an exceptional case in global terms. It asks not what Europe *is* but what it *is not*.

18:15-19:45 **Round table: Interreligious Education for Peace**

Chair: Julianne Funk, ELIAMEP

Participants: TBC

Last year (2017) a unique joint master’s study program began in Sarajevo, entitled *Interreligious Studies and Peacebuilding*, implemented by three theological faculties: the University of Sarajevo’s Catholic Theological Faculty, the Faculty of Islamic Sciences, and the Orthodox Theological Faculty St. Basil of Ostrog (in Foča, as part of the University in East Sarajevo). This program seeks to provide a unique opportunity for a clear positioning of religions as sources and catalysts of peace, and for religious institutions to profile themselves as advocates of a more just and better society, which remains a key concern in this post-war, ethnically homogenized context. This roundtable will give a space to learn about the challenges and successes of this program and to compare notes with other, similar study programs in Europe.

20:00 **Reception**

THURSDAY, 25 APRIL 2019

9:00-10:30 **Session II: The Apocalyptic Dimension of Religious Traditions: Inclusive and Exclusive Visions**

Chair: Anne Kull, University of Tartu

Keynote speakers: Muhamed Jusić, Islamic Community of Bosnia & Herzegovina, and Jorunn Økland, Norwegian Institute at Athens

Apocalyptic encompasses a broad range of beliefs, actions, and social processes centred on cultural disjunctures concerned with ‘the end of the world’ and thereafter. In its original use, ‘apocalypse’ signified a radical change in consciousness, a disclosure that potentially facilitates action to transform the self and social relations. Apocalyptic texts may connote a future cataclysmic reckoning for humanity, the collapse of civilization, and perhaps even annihilation of all life. However, apocalyptic texts are usually not so much about the End but about the Present Crisis. The religious imagination may provide hope and conviction that God is preparing a place for us with no tears and no brokenness— or it may promise a final battle between the powers of good and evil. Yet it is an open question as to who is and is not included in this vision, and there is little consensus regarding the nature and sequence of events that will occur prior to an apocalyptic unravelling of the present order of life. The panel will study contemporary apocalyptic discourses. Can apocalypticism be tamed and pacified?

10:30-11:00 Coffee Break

11:00-12:30 **Session III: How to Research Religious Traditions: Moving beyond a Bifurcated Field**

Chair: Stanislaw Grodz, Anthropos Institute

Keynote speakers: Kajsa Ahlstrand, University of Uppsala, and Marloes Janson, SOAS

For scholars of religions and theologians, the boundaries of religious traditions tend to conveniently demarcate their field of research. But who sets these boundaries and why? To what extent do these boundaries perpetuate divisions between people who tend to interact in daily life? What are the ways of researching religious traditions/issues that do not contribute to entrenching religious divisions? Is such research possible only within the scope of social sciences, or can it also be done in theological inquiry? In what way can an interdisciplinary turn be helpful?

Lunch

14:00-16:00 **Papers Session I**

16:00-16:30 Coffee break

16:30-18:00 **Session IV: Religious Leadership: Prophets and Protectors?**

Chairs: Yaser Ellethy, VU, and Nelly van Doorn, Wake Forest University/VU

Keynote speakers: TBC

Religious leadership is crucial to understanding the religious dimension of both peace and conflict periods. Yet the shifting and contested character of religious leaders may lie in their protective role of caring for ‘tradition,’ on the one hand, while simultaneously claiming prophetic authority, envisioning the way into the future, on the other. In times of social conflict, of increasing ethnoreligious nationalism, and hostile discourses of identity politics, religious leadership may be squeezed between different needs and expectations. Meticulous reflections on these aspects may produce very acute dilemmas. Can their shifting roles in dynamic contexts be analysed and critiqued? The panel poses the question: To what extent do religious leaders have/use their moral authority to contribute to conflict resolution, to counteract despair and to promote hope?

18:00-18:30 Coffee Break

18:30-19:30 **ESITIS General Assembly**

FRIDAY, 26 APRIL 2019

9:00-10:30 **Session V: Gender, Religion, and Violence. Seeking Transformative Practices**

Chairs: Jude Lal Fernando, Trinity College Dublin, and Jagbir Jhutti-Johal, University of Birmingham

Keynote speakers: Carola Roloff, University of Hamburg, and Lieve Troch, University of Nijmegen/University of Sao Paolo

The bodies of women have become weapons of war, both as victims of sexual violence and ‘mothers of war heroes.’ War widows have become the most vulnerable segment of populations in conflict-ridden societies. Oppressive views and practices of religious traditions regarding women have played a key role in the ways in which gender relations are organised in wars and post-war contexts. ‘War time’ often reveals what goes unseen during ‘peace time’. Patriarchal societies and religious institutions have practised systemic structural violence against women for centuries. This session will explore how religious traditions have been part of these oppressive social practices and, at the same time, have engaged in transformative and liberative gender practices.

10:30-11:00 Coffee break

11:00-13:00 **Papers Session II**

Lunch

15:00-18:00 **Interfaith city tour of Sarajevo**

18:00-18:30 Coffee break

18:30-20:00 ***Interreligious Studies and Intercultural Theology* Journal Panel: Special issue on Robert Schreiter’s work and contribution.**

SATURDAY, 27 APRIL 2019

9:00-10:30 **Session VI: Embodied Narratives of Hope and Resilience**

Chair: Lidia Rodriguez Fernandez, Deusto University

Keynote speakers: TBC

Moving from the theoretical framework in Plenary Session V, in Session VI we have the opportunity of hearing, first-hand, about practical experiences from the field of collectively experienced trauma. The aim of this session is to exemplify the healing potential of narratives, i.e., how life stories may offer insights and possibilities for treating individuals and communities that have been victims of extreme violence. As such, we place the emphasis on the ‘hope’ of religions within different conflict and post-war contexts, where peacebuilding actors, including those from a faith base, contribute to reconciling previously warring communities, achieve greater social cohesion, help people recover from traumatic experiences, foster post-traumatic growth, and build resilience.

10:30-11:00 Coffee break

11:00-12:30 **Closing Panel**

Chair: Anne Hege Grung, University of Oslo

Participants: TBC

For those who wish, an optional trip to Mostar will be organized for 28 April at the participant's expense.