



Home

Accepted Proposals

## INTERRELIGIOUS STUDIES AND INTERCULTURAL THEOLOGY: REFLECTIONS ON PAST TRAJECTORIES AND EMERGING HORIZONS

Robinson M.R. (Contact) <sup>[1]</sup>, Grung A.H. (Chair) <sup>[2]</sup>

Leuphana University Lüneburg ~ Lüneburg ~ Germany <sup>[1]</sup>,  
University of Oslo ~ Oslo ~ Norway <sup>[2]</sup>

**Subject Area:** Interreligious Dialogue, Religious Education, Theology

**Hours:** 1

**Panel description:** Hosted by the European Society for Intercultural Theology and Interreligious Studies (ESITIS), this panel aims to re-examine the terrain of interreligious and intercultural understanding in relation to academic and transdisciplinary (academic-civic) efforts. Over the past decades, in light of the complexities of living in pluralistic societies, interreligious dialogue and intercultural studies have evolved into a much broader and more diverse set of efforts toward mutual understanding and shared flourishing. Rapid changes — political realignments, environmental crises, digital transformations, and demographic shifts — have raised urgent questions for the relevance and future vitality of interreligious cooperation and peaceful, mutually respectful intercultural coexistence. What can IS and IcT offer to European societies now and in the future? What is needed and what is possible? How can the tasks be delineated and agendas set? What is the particular role of scholarship now and in the years ahead? Papers and Speakers: + The Role of Interreligious Studies Under Conditions of Inequality and Religious Pluralism (Yaser Ellethy; President of ESITIS; Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam) + Sacred Spirituality: A New Old Approach to Religion, Ethics, and Human Flourishing (William F. Vendley; Senior Advisor for



Home

## Accepted Proposals

envisioning intellectually and ethically robust futures for the discipline.

### **Papers:**

#### **THE ROLE OF INTERRELIGIOUS STUDIES UNDER CONDITIONS OF INEQUALITY AND RELIGIOUS PLURALISM**

Ellethy Y. (Speaker)

Vrije Universteit Amsterdam ~ Amsterdam ~ Netherlands

This paper will examine the role of Interreligious Studies under contemporary European conditions marked by structural inequality, intensified religious pluralism, and contested models of secularization and nationalism. Drawing on interdisciplinary perspectives from religious studies, intercultural theology, sociology, and political theory, the paper argues that interreligious engagement in Europe cannot be meaningfully understood apart from asymmetries of power related to history, migration, race, class, and legal recognition. While interreligious initiatives are often framed in terms of dialogue, cohesion, and mutual understanding, the paper aims to critically interrogate whose voices are included, whose religious expressions are normalized, and how inequalities shape both academic knowledge production and practical interreligious encounters. By situating Interreligious Studies within the specific European context—characterized by post-Christian secular frameworks, the governance of religious diversity, and ongoing debates on Islam, Judaism, and minority religions—the paper will draw attention to the importance of taking religious commitments seriously such that religious communities can recognize themselves and their own experience in academic and civic work on religion. It also proposes that Interreligious Studies move beyond harmonizing narratives toward an engagement that addresses



Home

Accepted Proposals

Europe.

### **SACRED SPIRITUALITY: A NEW OLD APPROACH TO RELIGION, ETHICS, AND HUMAN FLOURISHING**

Vendley W.F. (Speaker)

Fetzer Institute ~ Kalamazoo ~ United States of America

This presentation will explore the renewed interest in spirituality as a "new old" approach to religion, ethics, and human flourishing, considering its possible relevance as a resource for contemporary Interreligious Studies. While often viewed with suspicion in academic discourse for its perceived vagueness or individualism, spirituality can be reclaimed as a relational, practice-oriented, and ethically generative dimension with strong resonances across religious traditions. Drawing on the his background in Catholic theology, long-term experience in Asian religious contexts, particularly Buddhist contexts, and practical involvement with global interreligious networks such as Religions for Peace, William F. Vendley will discuss how spiritually grounded narratives and practices can foster shared moral horizons without collapsing religious differences. Like an experiential and ethical grammar, spiritualities articulate human dignity, compassion, and responsibility toward both society and the planet. In this vein, particular attention will be given to how spiritually informed approaches may address contemporary challenges—social fragmentation, ecological crisis, and declining trust in institutions—while remaining attentive to questions of power, exclusion, and theological integrity. Interreligious Studies can play a key role in clarifying, critiquing, and contextualizing spirituality as a category of analysis and practice. By situating spirituality at the intersection of religion, ethics, and human flourishing, the contribution seeks to expand current models of interreligious engagement beyond dialogue toward shared



Home

## Accepted Proposals

KU Leuven ~ Leuven ~ Belgium

This presentation proposes a reframing of interreligious encounter beyond the dominant focus on agreement and disagreement, suggesting that such binaries no longer adequately capture the dynamics, aspirations, and challenges of interreligious engagement in contemporary European contexts. While theological difference remains important, the presentation will explore the more pressing questions for today concerning how religious and non-religious actors imagine one another—as threats or partners, as fixed identities or evolving communities, as problems to be managed or resources for the common good. Drawing on developments in interfaith dialogue over recent decades, the presentation will reflect on such aspects as: how these evolving forms negotiate the presence of "committed" religious perspectives, the uneven participation of younger generations, and the ongoing tension between academic expertise and lived, non-academic religious knowledge. This talk will focus on the context of Europe (broadly) in which religion has frequently been framed through securitized lenses, associated primarily with fundamentalism or radicalization and suggest that such framings constrain the imaginative possibilities of interreligious cooperation. Against this backdrop, Interreligious Studies is presented as a field capable of unsettling reductive narratives, fostering reflexivity, and developing new conceptual tools for understanding encounter as relational, contextual, and future-oriented.





[Home](#)

[Accepted Proposals](#)