

Congrès « Dialogue des rationalités culturelles et religieuses »

27-30 juin 2016

## *Diverse Cultural and Religious Ways of Thinking A Dialogue*

**International & Interdisciplinary Conference – *Theologicum* – Paris**  
*Institut Catholique de Paris, UR « Religion, Culture et Société » - EA 7403*

*June 27-30, 2016*

in collaboration with *Concilium* International Journal for Theology,  
the Order of Preachers & 25 universities

<http://congretheologicum2016-icp.fr>  
*congresTheologicum2016@icp.fr*

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### **Introduction to the Conference**

Our world is made up of very diverse cultural and religious traditions. How do they come together and engage in dialogue when they each have their own particular intellectual conventions and understanding of the world?

This is the fundamental and inescapable question being considered by the Conference: *Diverse Cultural and Religious Ways of Thinking and Reasoning – a Conversation*.

A research project on this subject was initiated five years ago by the Institute of Science and Theology of Religions, as part of the Research Unit: “Religions, Culture and Society” of the Catholic Institute of Paris. It has led to three successive colloquiums (two organized in Paris and one in Taipei), research days, as well as several publications.

Following these five years of research, this conference presents a unique opportunity to bring together in Paris researchers from universities in the four points of the compass: South Africa and Latin America, the North Atlantic region, Asia and the West.

It builds on the collaboration initiated by the University Fu Jen of Taipei, the International Review of Theology *Concilium*<sup>1</sup> and the Order of Preachers, and will engage university partners from different continents and religions (researchers and universities), in particular those of the Southern Hemisphere.

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<sup>1</sup> The 20 editors of the *Concilium* Review, who are the most prominent theological researchers of 16 countries from five continents, will play an active role in the conference occurring on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Review.

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The structure of the program allows for both plenary and workshop sessions. Each workshop will take the form of a panel of three speakers who will make short presentations and then open discussion with the audience. In this way the conference will enable both experienced and beginning researchers to make contributions that will promote interaction among a variety of religious and cultural disciplines. The conference will bring together about 300 people.

Outcomes of the conference will be featured in an issue of *Concilium* (2017/1, with 10,000 printings in 6 languages). Papers of panelists will be published in an e-book. Hard copies will be available on request everywhere in the world.

The conference will be covered by French and international public and academic media, both civil and religious.

### Background and issues

We are always East or West of another culture. What happens when cultures meet?

What happens when a Chinese person encounters a European line of thought or speech, the structures of which have been built and developed over centuries?

Similarly, what happens when a Western individual encounters a Chinese idea, born out of a Chinese culture that has also been built and developed over centuries?

Is it enough to know the language? Is it enough to have lived in the other's environment? On a broader level, what is involved in thinking and communicating in a particular culture, a religious tradition, a certain milieu and how do these acts of thinking and communicating interact with their counterparts in other cultures and traditions?

Ever present in our contemporary globalized world, that experiences the pressure of cultures interacting with each other, these questions are of primary importance as much in theological research as in many other disciplines, starting with political science. For if communication is supposed to bring people together and build bridges for mutual understanding, it is conversely true that conflicts based on different worldviews are ever increasing.

At a time when migration and the displacement of persons are increasing at a rapid pace, the political and social stakes are high when it comes to the interaction of different cultural traditions.

In an age when modern means of communication do away with time and space it is crucial that any process whereby individual worlds of thought might exchange ideas and values should be governed by a spirit of dialogue rather than an attitude of inducement or confrontation.

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The conference seeks to contribute not only reflection, but also the pedagogical tools and models that would enhance the acquisition of the skills of engagement and dialogue in universities and in society at large.

### An innovative approach

Various fields of enquiry have adopted the concept of dialogue, so it is not new. However, there are very few collaborative projects that address differences in research approaches and methodologies on one hand, and the variety of religious and cultural backgrounds on the other.

Theology itself has not progressed far in tackling this idea head on, particularly in light of the fact that it was confronted long ago with issues like, hermeneutics, inculturation, evangelization, to name only a few fields of enquiry where dialogue might be utilized with great effect.

### A scientific enquiry in five stages

In this examination of diverse ways of thinking and reasoning the plan is not to adopt the more usual approach of moving from common ground to then develop a process for the exchange of ideas that might foster unity among people of different cultures and faiths. On the contrary, the inductive methodology of the Catholic Institute of Paris and its partners will work from cultural differences as the point of departure. This involves regarding the distinctive and unchangeable aspects of different cultures and traditions not as obstacles but rather as assets, or even requirements, for authentic dialogue.

The conference will proceed in 5 stages:

**1. *Define the concept of "cultural or religious way of thinking"***

Firstly, defining the art of reasoning. This needs to take contextualization into account as the ways of thinking and reasoning in different cultures may be quite foreign to each other. Any definition or description needs to be couched in philosophical terms. Secondly, examining what is meant by the art of reasoning that may be governed by cultural or religious traditions. This entails an assessment of the common idea that a single cultural or religious way of thinking and reasoning might transcend the differences inherent in the varied and complex structures of individual cultures and religions.

**2. *The dialogue as a work between diverse processes of reasoning***

Every human encounter brings into play the art of reasoning and thinking. When we dialogue about this process we are seeking understanding. For this to bear fruit those involved should avoid compelling others to think as they normally do. This would encourage others to adopt totally different ways of thinking and speaking. Learning from the experience of fruitful

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dialogical encounters is the way to understand how successful dialogue works.

### 3. *Ground realities of the encounter of different ways of thinking*

For an encounter to be a genuine meeting of different and well-established traditions of thought and reasoning certain conditions are called for. Do specialists and scholars always need to be present? Couldn't such a dialogue take place through social networks, outside the university environment, and thereby become a 'life sharing' experience?

### 4. *Evaluating the concepts of truth and universality*

Could talking about a plurality of ways of thinking and reasoning lead to a denial of the universality of human reason? Could this process of dialogue and the recognition of individual approaches to thinking and reasoning oblige us to rethink our relationship with truth, and if so, to what extent?

### 5. *Estimating the benefit for society and theology*

This dialogue with traditions of thinking and reasoning raises a number of theological and religious issues, namely, the reading and interpretation of their sacred texts, their doctrinal traditions, their missions and conversions among people of different culture, their place in society, their approach to other religions and cultures. What happens to the question of God in this dialogue?

How can theological research help build a pedagogy of living together when different ways of thinking and reasoning are not open to each other or try to engulf or exclude the other? This is what characterizes the rigid mindset of religious or philosophical fundamentalism.

## Agencies involved in the preparation of the conference

An organizational committee, chaired by the Dean of the *Theologicum*, Prof. Thierry-Marie Courau, is responsible for the overall coordination of the conference. A scientific committee of scholars from various universities is responsible for the academic organization.

To date, the *Concilium* International Journal for Theology, the Order of Preachers and around 25 participating universities from five continents committing to send at least one researcher to give a paper to the conference, joined the *Theologicum* Conference.