

Call for Papers

## *Humour in the Beginning*

An international and interdisciplinary conference on

*Cultural Interaction of Laughter and the Comic in the First Phase of Asian religions, Christianity and Islam*

---

*Organisers:* Dr Roald Dijkstra & Prof. Dr Paul van der Velde  
Radboud University Nijmegen  
*Venue:* Soeterbeeck (Ravenstein, the Netherlands)  
*Date:* 4-7 March 2019 (Monday-Thursday)

### **Theme and aims**

Religion and humour are often considered to be at odds nowadays, at least in the Western world. Indeed, religious doctrines often condemn laughter, the comic and humour with recourse to authoritative ancient texts and traditions that originate in the formative phase of the religion's history. This conference invites scholars from different fields and academic traditions to return to the origins of Asian religions, Christianity and Islam and investigate the complex relationship between religion and humour and laughter.

On a general level, much has been written about religion and humour. Often, however, the religion's attitude towards laughter and humour is either presented as a continuous, never-changing stand or as a monolithic opinion, depending on sacred rules and writings alone, without - or only partially - taking historical, social and cultural developments into account. At this conference, scholars are invited to investigate the topic of religion and humour further within the specific historical contexts that their sources provide. Sources include but are not restricted to (literary) prose texts, poetry and visual materials.

*Humour in the Beginning* focuses on the initial phase of religious movements as diverse as Asian religions (up to the tenth century AD), Christianity and Islam. We encourage our colleagues to scrutinize sources from the first centuries of the existence of these religions and consider them in their social, cultural and historical context. Emphasis may be put on the way in which new religious thoughts on humour and laughter are anchored in already existing ideas (both religious and non-religious) and how they respond to them. Other questions consider the importance of humour in new religions, the innovative character of religious ideas on the matter, the role that humour plays in the formation of a religious identity and the differences and similarities between religions that arose in distinct cultural environments and in different periods.

When the different circumstances in which Asian religions, Christianity and Islam arose are taken into account, it also becomes possible to better appreciate the differences and similarities in religious attitudes towards humour and laughter. It then becomes possible to formulate answers to questions such as whether there is any overlap in the attitude towards humour in the initial phase of religions, despite cultural and chronological differences, and why. It is the wish of the organisers to stimulate fruitful comparisons between results of the work by scholars from humanities and colleagues from fields such as sociology and gelotology, which will also receive due attention during the conference.

*Confirmed speakers:*

Prof. Dr F. Bernard (Universiteit Gent)

Prof. Dr G.J.H. van Gelder (University of Oxford)

Prof. Dr A.I.S. Gilhus (Universitetet i Bergen)

Dr. I. Kuin (Dartmouth College)

Prof. Dr G. Kuipers (Universiteit van Amsterdam)

### **Procedure**

Scholars who want to address these and similar questions is invited to submit an abstract of 250 words (bibliography excluded) **before 13 October 2018**.

Your full submission should include:

I. contact details and affiliation

II. abstract

III. preferential session:

1 - Know thy enemies: humour as a boundary

2 - Verses versus humour in religious contexts

3 - Exit? Religion and theatre

4 - Time to laugh? Monks and humour

5 - Fine arts, fine humour? Visual humour in context.

Selection based on quality of the abstracts and theme of the proposed talk. We aim to address the three main religious spheres mentioned at least once in every session.

Abstracts can be submitted at [r.dijkstra@let.ru.nl](mailto:r.dijkstra@let.ru.nl). Selection of abstracts will take place end of October. The organisers intent to publish conference proceedings.

Selection will be based on the quality of the papers given.

### **Practicalities**

The outline of the preliminary programme is as follows:

Monday 4 March 2019: Drinks & Dinner for speakers only

Tuesday 5 March 2019: Sessions 1-2 + key-notes

Wednesday 6 March 2019: Sessions 3-4

Thursday 7 March 2019: Session 5, Closure and lunch

Our **venue** is an old convent turned into a conference centre for Radboud University. Soeterbeeck is beautifully located in the meadows of Ravenstein, near Nijmegen (the Netherlands), and is situated at walking distance from the Ravenstein railway station (plan your journey at <https://www.ns.nl>).

For **speakers**, we will accommodate stay and catering (from dinner on Monday night up to and including lunch on Thursday). The slightly Spartan nature of the place may result in a room without personal bathing facilities. Unfortunately, we cannot compensate travel costs.

**Visitors** who want to attend the conference without giving a presentation are warmly invited to do so. These participants pay €20 euro's per shift, i.e. morning or afternoon session (€100,- for the entire conference). For visitors, lunch is not included and can be booked for €15,-. **Students** may ask the organisers for possible arrangements (depending on our budget and the number of interested people).

For all questions, please email to [r.dijkstra@let.ru.nl](mailto:r.dijkstra@let.ru.nl).

### Sponsors

This conference is made possible due to the generosity of several institutions and foundations:



KONINKLIJKE NEDERLANDSE  
AKADEMIE VAN WETENSCHAPPEN



*National Research School in Classical Studies, The Netherlands;  
Research Group Impact of Empire*

**Radboud Universiteit**



*Department of Classics  
Faculty of Arts, Institute for Historical, Literary and Cultural Studies  
Faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies*

Stichting Sormani Fonds