

Call for papers for a 2-day interdisciplinary symposium on

Religion and the Experience of Nature: Comparative Perspectives

at the Center for Advanced Studies, LMU Munich
19/20 March 2020

Keynote speakers:

Professor Lisa Sideris,

Department of Religious Studies, Indiana University, Bloomington;

Professor Kocku von Stuckrad

Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Groningen

Religious interpretations and idealizations of 'nature' run like a common thread through the whole of (not only) Western cultural history. Already Seneca has explicitly addressed the religious importance of nature when he described in one of his letters how the experience of being in a dense forest could incite belief in a divine being (*fidem numinis; epist.* 41.3). In Christian allegory and mysticism, a deep engagement with nature has been an established element of religious thought and practice ever since antiquity; in early medieval Ireland, this engagement has brought forth some of the most famous creations of Irish monastic literature. A monument at one of the viewing points of the panoramic high alpine road across the Großglockner, erected with a direct view of the summit (3798 m), bears the inscription *Saxa terrae loquuntur gloriam tuam*. To this, a plethora of non-textual phenomena can be added. Here, for instance, belongs the religious interpretation of 'nature' in parts of the environmental conservation movement (classically already in the activism of John Muir, who played a central role for the establishment of the American national park system). Taking its starting point from such examples of a close interconnectedness of 'nature' and 'religion', the symposium will approach the mutual relationship between religion and the experience of nature in a broad, cross-culturally comparative perspective:

how, when, and by whom is 'nature' interpreted through a religious lens and 'experienced' as such? What forms can this 'experience' take? How do individual stakeholders use it politically, e.g. to justify human access to 'nature' and natural spaces, to legitimize conservation efforts or, conversely, to vindicate the exploitation of natural resources? How is the entanglement between nature and religion used economically? Or much more fundamentally: which kinds of engagements with 'nature' are supported or precluded by different religious attitudes?



Nature and religion in Iceland: plaque with a quotation from the Psalms on a rock above the waterfall Goðafoss ("Waterfall of the Gods") in northern Iceland.

This call for papers is broadly interdisciplinary. The relationship between ‘nature’ and ‘religion’ is a pertinent topic for a wide spectrum of disciplines, ranging from ancient history through the study of languages and literatures of the Middle Ages, to social sciences focusing on the present day. It will be a core aim of the conference to bring together participants from as broad a range of fields as possible to facilitate an interdisciplinary dialogue on the relationship between nature and religion. Topics addressed by the contributors will include, but not be restricted to:

- approaching the challenges of a critical terminology (what do we mean when we talk about ‘religion’, ‘nature’, or ‘experience’?);
- the religious use and interpretation of ‘natural’ spaces;
- ‘nature’ in religious art;
- nature and religious tourism;
- or the relationship between religion and environmentalism.



“Lumbini Crane Sanctuary. Notice: Hunting and Grazing is Prohibited in this Sacred Land.” Lumbini, Nepal, January 2019.

Papers will be 20 minutes in length; the conference language will be English. Participants who have been accepted as speakers will be provided with accommodation in Munich for the duration of the conference, though they need to cover their own travel expenses. The proceedings of the conference will be published as an edited volume.

Proposals of a length of no more than 300 words should be sent to

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