Parallel to the development of an increasingly plural Europe, questions arise about how we see each other’s cultural heritage, religious traditions and sacred scriptures. Hermeneutics as the art of interpretation reflects on these questions. The conference will not treat hermeneutics in a theoretical and abstract way only but will attempt to apply interreligious hermeneutics. New interest in the scriptures and traditions of the other can either be related to perceived conflicts, or it can reflect a more open-ended quest for wisdom. In a global perspective, such interest corresponds to the emerging perception that sacred scriptures and religious traditions are not the exclusive property of their religion of origin, but can also be seen as “world heritage”. Who, in the age of democratization, has the right to interpret the scriptures? Outside and inside perspectives must be related. In this conference, we will explore the issues of hermeneutics in relation to six topics:
(a) the usage of texts in our global and mass media world;
(b) reasoning about present problems by using sacred texts in a community of textual scholars;
(c) theologically comparing selected topics from religious traditions by scholars belonging to multiple religions or interreligious communities of scholars;
(d) the pragmatics of using sacred texts in social contexts of family and gender;
(e) polemical attacks on the other’s sacred text;
(f) the challenge to interreligious hermeneutics of the postcolonial deconstruction of religion by cultural studies.
Wednesday 15th April 2009

15:00-16:30 Arrivals, Registration & Coffee-Reception

17:00-18:30 Introduction

a. Conference Opening: Henk Vroom / VU-University Amsterdam, Netherlands
b. Salzburg Center: Ulrich Winkler / University of Salzburg, Austria
Franz Gmainer-Pranzl / University of Salzburg, Austria
c. General Topics: Oddbjørn Leirvik / University of Oslo, Norway
d. Organization: Judith Gruber / University of Salzburg, Austria

18:30 Dinner (in St. Virgil)

20:00-21:15 1st Section: (Plenum Hall) Uses of Texts: Kajsa Ahlstrand / University of Uppsala, Sweden

Thursday 16th April 2009

7:00-9:00 Breakfast

9:00-9:45 2nd Section: (Plenum Hall) Scriptural Reasoning and Interreligious Hermeneutics

Introduction: David Cheetham / University of Birmingham, UK

Scriptural Reasoning (SR) is a communal practice of reading the sacred texts of the three Abrahamic faiths, Tanack, Bible and Qur'an. Jews, Christians and Muslims come together to read and study texts from their sacred scriptures. They usually select a theme such as justice, law or worship; a particular figure such as Abraham, Jonah, or Mary; or a story through which to enter the scriptures. The practice has been developing for over fifteen years in an academic context and has its roots in the meeting of Jewish text scholars and philosophers who were later joined by Christians and Muslims, inspired by what they learned from the practice of co-reading and who found that study together across the Abrahamic traditions allows for surprising moments of encounter and generates valuable new resources for meeting our contemporary challenges. Over the past three years Scriptural Reasoning has been developing as a civic practice outside the academy with groups of Muslims, Christians and Jews meeting to read the scriptures that lie at the core of their tradition and to explore together the possibilities they unearth for the transformation and repair of society. (www.scripturalreasoning.org/).

Speaker: Nicholas Adams / University of Edinburgh, UK

This paper argues that one of the principal tasks for modern philosophy is keeping 'problem-solving' and 'world-disclosure' together. Problem-solving refers to the strand in that philosophy which privileges public justification, intelligibility, saying what you mean, redeeming validity claims, coming to agreement - all with a view to solving problems that present themselves. World-disclosure refers to the strand which privileges the interpretation of classic texts/works of art/music, making and discovering meaning, describing the world as a whole, the rhythms by which things are understood - with a view to making sense of life. It is vital that the one is not reduced to the other, either by treating aesthetics instrumentally, as a tool for some clearly articulated set of goals; or by treating repair purely aesthetically, as if attempts to feed the hungry are forms of 'expression' of the same order as playing the violin. Questions of freedom and limitation play a key role in the best attempts to keep the two together, in relation to each other. Scriptural reasoning is a fruitful model for the relation between freedom (the spontaneity of interpretations) and limitation (the traditions of interpretation that shape interpreters), and offers a practice that displays both world-disclosure and problem-solving simultaneously. Its practice of textual study is both 'public' and 'rooted in traditions', and it aims at the repair of relations between those traditions.

9:45-10:15 Discussion

10:15-10:45 Coffee Break (ground floor)
Comparative theology is a form of inter-religious hermeneutics that originates in the United States of America. It has its roots in liberal theology in Europe, where an alternative form of comparative theology develops. It is distinctive because it uses the comparative method from a theological perspective. Moreover it is focused on dialogue and mutual understanding between believers of different faiths and is open to religious transformation. Whereas the American form is predominantly text-oriented, the European version is more philosophical. In America, the practice of comparative theology has been incorporated in the American Academy of Religion.

Speaker: Francis Clooney / Harvard School of Divinity, USA

This paper introduces Comparative Theology as a particularly viable theological way of studying religions and bringing them into fruitful encounter with Christian theology. It is, like other forms of theology, a matter of faith seeking understanding, but it is distinguished by its particular attention to other traditions in their detail, studied with awareness of factors conditioning reception of the other tradition and the subsequent return to one's own tradition. In Comparative Theology, faith and
practice are explored and transformed by attention to the parallel theological dimensions of one or more other religious and theological traditions. As a theology that occurs within the academy, it is open to the analysis, comment, and questions of both insiders to the involved traditions, and to scholars interested in either tradition or in the comparative process. Though technical in its practice and expectations, comparative theology mirrors the values and demands of inter-religious dialogue; though akin to the practice known as Scriptural Reasoning, comparative theology expects changes in the participants in its practice, as they are changed by this learning and change their ways of thinking about their own tradition. Comparative Theology is a relatively new venture at the American Academy of Religion, filling the need for a clearly and primarily theological appropriation of learning across religious boundaries.

Friday 17th April 2009

7:00-9:00 Breakfast
9:00-10:30 4th Section: (Plenum Hall)
Sacred text and social context: family and gender
Shared challenges from modernity: changing family values

Introduction: Oddbjørn Leirvik / University of Oslo, Norway

In current discussions about processes of change within religions and cultures, attitudes to "family values" function often as a marker of either "liberal" or "conservative" attitudes. Also in discussions about new interpretive approaches to sacred scriptures, it seems that issues related to gender models and the position of women in family, faith communities and society are often the triggering factors. In a wider perspective, women’s issues seem to have become the typical test questions of how religions traditions cope with social and cultural change within modernity. In which way can modern discussions about family and gender be seen as a common factor in challenging the religions to find new approaches to their sacred scriptures?

Speaker: Anne Sofie Roald, IMER, Malmö University, Sweden / Chr. Michelsen Institute, Bergen, Norway

Recent discourses on human rights as well as individual rights have affected the traditional understanding of gender roles and family in general. Due to historical development in Christian thought, the understanding of the Holy text has tended to, at least to a certain extent, to follow the social majority discourses. The overarching idea of the Koran as the word of God has until late 1990ties obstructed a similar development within Islam. However, in the last few years the gender discourses which tend to dominate the Islamic sphere increasingly tend to rely on human rights arguments, where the idea of the justice of God makes interpretations according to a gender equality patterns more theologically acceptable. This paper will investigate European islamic discourses in view of the human right discourse.

10:30-11:00 Coffee Break (ground floor)
11:00-12:30 5th Section: (Plenum Hall)
Polemical Revival: attacking the other’s texts

Introduction: Frans Wijsen / Radboud University Nijmegen, Netherlands
Sacred texts can be used to foster dialogue and understanding between adherents of various faiths, they can also be used in insulting and offensive ways to attack the other's faith. This is what often happens in polemical debates. Polemics is of course not a new genre. It has existed for centuries in debates between Roman Catholics and Protestants, or between Christians and Muslims. But there seems to be a revival of polemics through the liberalization of public media and the development of new information and communication technologies.

Speaker: **John Chesworth** / Centre for Muslim-Christian Studies, Oxford

Muslims and Christians both have sacred texts which are central to their faith. These texts have been used as a source of polemical material, in order to attack 'the other', since the eighth century. During the latter part of the twentieth century, populist polemical discourse using sacred texts was revived amongst both Muslims and Christians. The work of two of the prime protagonists of this approach originated during the apartheid period in South Africa: Ahmed Deedat (1918-2005), with Islamic Propagation Centre International (IPCI), based in Durban, and Reinhard Bonnke (b. 1940), with Christ for All Nations (CFAN), originally based in Witfield, now based in Frankfurt, in both their writing and their rallies engaged in polemic, using sacred texts in order to attack 'the other'. The approaches of these two have attracted others who have continued to use their methods and to develop them in a continued revival of polemics between the faiths. The paper examines the approaches used by Deedat and Bonnke and the work of followers of their methods. These are illustrated through selected examples of the use of the Qur‘ān and the Bible in polemic. At a time when any statement by a Muslim or a Christian about 'the other' can be interpreted as an insult and lead to riots and deaths, the revival of polemical methods by writers and speakers is of great concern.

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12:30 **Lunch** (St. Virgil)

13:30-14:15 **Annual General Meeting** of European Society for Intercultural Theology and Interreligious Studies (ESITIS)
Board Members

14:30-16:00 **Paper presentations** (4 parallel sessions):

1. **Plenum Hall**
   - Chair: Perry Schmidt-Leukel
   - G.C de Vries: Seeing is believing? About the need for a hermeneutics of images with regard to religious meaning-making in society
   - Fatih Okumus: Fiqh of immigration: A Definition
   - Stanislaw Grodz: Interreligious Dialogue – Persisting confusion?

2. **SR2** (ground Floor)
   - Chair: Oddbjorn Leirvik
   - Pim Valkenburg: Sifting the Qur’an: Two forms of interreligious hermeneutics in Nicholas of Cusa
   - Judith Gruber: Epistemological, hermeneutical and methodological issues in intercultural theology
   - Paul Hedges: Guanyin and Queer Theology: A Study in Comparative Theology

3. **SR5** (ground Floor)
   - Chair: David Cheetham
   - Hendrik Rungelrath: Confessional and Comparative Theology: Counterparts or Complements?
   - David Slakter: An Exposition and Defence of Jayanta’s Inclusivism
   - David Bolton: Paul and the Land: Covenant Land or No-man’s Land?

4. **Club** (ground Floor)
   - Chair: John May
   - Amy Daughton: Speaking the Language of the Other
   - Andreas Telser: A Hermeneutical theory of resistance to 'more of the same': Testing the hermeneutical theory of David Tracy for its applicability to an interreligious hermeneutics in pluralistic Europe
   - Xavier Gravend-Tirole: Double-belonging or double-practice

16:00-16:30 **Coffee Break** (ground floor)

16:30-19:00 **6th Section**: (Plenum Hall)
**Is interreligious Hermeneutics possible in the light of postcolonial Deconstruction of Religion?**

Introduction: Ulrich Winkler / University of Salzburg, Austria

Hermeneutics as the art of understanding reflects on questions of mutual understanding each other and each other’s cultural heritage, religious traditions and our various sacred scriptures. But some traditional ways of understanding are
rejected by those practising hermeneutic at the interreligious interface. Neither optimistic ways of bridging the gaps with fusions of the horizons on the one hand nor the traditional methods of comparative religion which maintain an alleged neutral equidistance to all the traditions on the other hand are superseded or outdated. New challenges demand new approaches. Religious traditions are more resistant to the levelling down of differences, and their mysteries are too deep-rooted to be observed from a periscopic viewpoint. Inspired encounters as well as the tensions arising from them are increasing in our world of global communication. The postcolonial deconstruction of religion inquires the suppositions of hermeneutics and exposes the power-shaped shares of the hermeneutic theories.

Speaker: Andreas Nehring / University of Erlangen, Germany

The discussion with biblical hermeneutics and cultural hermeneutics in the light of discourse analysis and postcolonial theory is still unsatisfactory. To what extent is “microphysics of power” (Foucault) still inherent in theological hermeneutics? Institutional factors of religious authority as well as postcolonial voices deny protestant enterprises to constitute the authority of Scripture on a strictly hermeneutical basis (Centre of Scripture; canon in the canon), that is on a circle of understanding the self and understanding the text. The attempt to ascertain the canonical authority of Scripture in relation to “communities of interpretation” (Auslegungsgemeinschaften) and thereby to particularize it, has undergone heavy critique. The loss of a unified sense of Scripture and the awareness that the community of interpretation today includes men and women from other cultural and religious background can be seen as a chance, to look again into traditional hermeneutical approaches, that assume a polysemy of scriptural texts. How can such a weak reading (Vattimo) be a means of transcultural exchange? The paper will try to raise this question. Starting of with the famous No. 206 in Ludwig Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations “The common behaviour of mankind is the system of reference by means of which we interpret an unknown language.” I will try to analyse, how to understand this “common behaviour” and how this has to be differentiated from Dialogue.

Final Discussion
19:00
Dinner in St. Virgl

Saturday, 18th April 2009

7:00-9:00 Breakfast
9:00 Optional: City Sightseeing Salzburg (Panoramatours)
Guide: Horst Reischenböck (0662/883211)
Departures

Venue
St. Virgil Conference Center
Ernst-Grein-Straße 14
A-5026 Salzburg
Austria
Tel: +43/662/65901-0
Fax: +43/662/65901-509
http://www.virgil.at/en/

Arrival
by plane:
Salzburg Airport http://engl.salzburg-airport.com
& local city bus Salzburg, taxi or shuttle service
or Munich Airport www.munich-airport.de/en
& 2,5 hours by train to Salzburg railway station, local city bus Salzburg
by train & local city bus Salzburg or taxi

Interactive map
type at www.google.at/maps Ernst-Grein-Straße 14, 5020 Salzburg
http://www.bugbog.com/gallery/austria_pictures/salzburg_pictures_1.html

Pictures of Salzburg
http://www.bugbog.com/gallery/austria_pictures/salzburg_pictures_1.html
Website of the Conference
http://www.uni-salzburg.at/ztkr/ESITIS-2009

Responsible

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