

Call for Papers

International *Kosmoi* Conference
21-23 October 2019

Good – Better – Best Asceticism and the Ways to Perfection

Organising Committee: Joseph Verheyden, Johan Leemans, Geert Roskam (all three KU Leuven), An Heirman (UGent)

Venue: Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, KU Leuven, Belgium

Kosmoi is the name of the association of scholars working in the field of religious studies at the KU Leuven. The association was founded in 2015. It organises every year an number of lectures and every two years an international colloquium. In 2017 members of *Kosmoi* co-hosted the general meeting of the European Association for the Study of Religion (EASR).

The international conference of this year will deal with the question of how ascetic practices and lifestyles as lived and practiced in various religious traditions are thought to help realise aspirations to transcend oneself and maybe even to reach “perfection”. The desire to improve oneself – in whatever respect – is a key feature in human life. Religion has played on this, claiming to be able to fulfil such aspirations in a unique way and to offer the tools to realise them. Perhaps before anything else, religion is about reaching out for nothing less than becoming “perfect”, however this may be understood and formulated: to become a better person, maybe even a saint; to be transformed or saved; to meet or unite with the divine ... One of the major tools to reach such goals, so it seems, is to practice a form of ascetic lifestyle – to give up on things, to start living differently, to change oneself. Asceticism is about struggle and reward, about hoping for success and coping with failure, about persistence and transformation, about guidance and guiding. The way may be long or short, but always in one sense or another “adventurous”. All of these and many other aspects related to ascetic lifestyles have been studied at length in various religious cultures and traditions and from various perspectives and approaches. The additional value of the *Kosmoi* colloquium will primarily be in the comparative perspective across religious traditions. This should bring to the fore major differences and similarities in various religious systems.

In addition to a dozen invited speakers, the programme allows for a *selected number of offered papers* related to one of the following key aspects: (1) the goal and purpose of living an ascetic life (obtaining “salvation”, being transformed or purified, meeting with the divine, ...); (2) the means, both material and immaterial, available for reaching this goal (physical and mental exercises, prayer, diets, practising virtue, ...); (3) the place of asceticism within the whole of religious practices in a particular religious tradition (an occasional or a recurrent event, a mass event or a more elitist one, “professional” ascetics, ...); (4) and the challenges and dangers of adopting such a lifestyle (disillusion, failure, pride, ...). These topics will be addressed in various religious traditions – primarily Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism –, and through various approaches – historical, philosophical, psychological, anthropological, empirical...

The organisers are inviting students and colleagues to submit a proposal for a paper of 20 minutes on a specific topic related to the overall theme of the conference. Those who are interested should send their proposal (title and summary of max. 300 words) by May 15 to Prof. Joseph Verheyden at jos.verheyden@kuleuven.be

A scientific committee will decide which proposals are accepted. You will be informed of its decision by May 31.

A selection of the papers presented at the conference will be published in a peer-reviewed and internationally circulated series.