



PRESS RELEASE

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Groningen Centre of Discussion on Religious Heritage in a Diverse Europe

The Centre of Religion and Heritage of the University of Groningen and the Foundation for Historic Groningen Churches are hosting an international conference that will bring over 175 scholars, heritage professionals, government officials and students to discuss religious heritage in diverse societies. Running over three days, participants of this fully booked conference will choose from over 60 presentations by experts coming from around Europe and the world to explore how heritage might be used as a force of inclusion, rather than exclusion of religious minorities.

The Urgency of Religious Heritage

Conference convener Prof. Todd Weir, director of Groningen's Centre for Religion and Heritage, spoke to the urgency of the topic: 'Secularization and immigration are changing the religious makeup of European societies. While more people identify as non-religious, new arrivals and conversion mean that the religious landscape is becoming increasingly more complex. This presents challenges and opportunities to the organizations and agencies engaged with maintaining and promoting cultural heritage. How should Europe's plural religious pasts be represented? How can we translate heritage for audiences that do not identify with local religious traditions? These are pressing questions that led us to undertake the conference *Religious Heritage in a Diverse Europe*.'

De-churching in the Netherlands has brought with it a crisis in church heritage. Who will care for the historic churches, if the congregations get too small? In 2018, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture launched an ambitious programme of 'church visions' to assure that communities around the country come up with plans to find new uses for their heritage. Elsewhere in Europe, a similar urgency and sense of opportunity is felt. To make sure that all of the diverse religious traditions of Europe are included in future visions for heritage, a call was issued by the conference organizers, which include also two leading Dutch museums, Museum Catharijneconvent and the Jewish Cultural Quarter, and the Future for Religious Heritage (Brussels). The answer to the call was overwhelming and the organizers have been able to design a programme that brings together multiple perspectives to reflect critically on how heritage is communicated and what best practices can be developed.

Conference themes and keynote speakers

There are 23 themes that will be addressed during the conference, among others: Heritage of Antisemitism, Intangible Religious Heritage, Musealization of Religion, Inclusive Heritage, Dialogue

through Heritage, Repurposing & Musealization, Multiple Uses of Religious Sites, and Holy Texts as Heritage.

On Thursday afternoon during the event in the Aa-Kerk, **René Paas, the King's Commissioner (Governor) of the Province of Groningen**, will speak about his views on heritage. The other [keynote speakers](#) during the conference are:

Nicola Green, a globally acclaimed artist and social historian. Green has spent the last decade travelling the world gaining remarkable access to private and public encounters between religious leaders including Pope Francis, The Dalai Lama, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, former Grand Mufti of Egypt Ali Gomaa, and Emeritus Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks. The resulting artworks, *Encounters*, is a series of over fifty ground-breaking portraits of the world's religious leaders. In the context of this journey and her personal experience, Green will discuss the role that art can play in fostering dialogue and how cultural exchange is enabled through the visual image.

Dimphy Scheurs of the Museum Catharijneconvent. She coordinates the national educational programme *Feest: weet wat je viert!* She says of the idea behind Feest: 'Holidays serve as our departure point to talk about each other's backgrounds. We hope that by helping school children understand their own background and that of classmates, *Feest* can help stimulate the process of social inclusion.'

Imam Abdullah Antelpi, Duke University. He is coming from North Carolina to address the relationship he would like to see between the Muslim community and European heritage: 'Religious communities in general, and Muslim European communities in particular, need to develop deeper appreciation of secular cultural heritage, at the same time secular heritage institutions need to improve their ability to tell the stories of religious spaces by partnering with religious communities.'

Other activities

- An international University Summer School with partners Bar-Ilan University (Israel), Duke University (USA) University of Groningen and Reinwarts Academie (NL), Southampton University (UK), and Uppsala (Sweden);
- A pre-university event with three local schools participating;
- Four excursions to local heritage sites.

More information

Press can contact the organizers Professor [Todd Weir](mailto:t.h.weir@rug.nl) (t.h.weir@rug.nl) and Dr. Lieke Wijnia (religiousheritage2019@rug.nl).

The conference can be followed on [Twitter](#) via #RelHer2019.

- [Conference Programme](#)
- [More information Conference](#)
- [Centre for Religion and Heritage](#)
- [Groningen Historic Churches Foundation](#)
- [Museum Catharijne Convent](#)
- [Jewish Cultural Quarter](#)

- [Future for Religious Heritage](#)
- [International Network for Interreligious Research and Education \(INIRE\)](#)



Der Aa-kerk



Nicola Green



Dimphy Schreurs



Abdullah Antepli