

# Call for Abstracts: "Religious Experience and Description"

## Regional Conference of the Society for the Phenomenology of Religious Experience

October 10-12, 2019 Valparaiso University, Indiana, USA

Conference is co-hosted by the Departments of Psychology, Philosophy, and Theology

<http://sophere.org/conferences/regional-conference-indiana-2019/>

Keynote Speakers: Bruce Ellis Benson (Logos Institute, University of St. Andrews); Peter Costello (Providence College); Lea Schweitz (Lutheran School of Theology, Chicago, and Zygon Center for Religion and Science)

Confirmed speakers: James Hart, Michael Barber, Olga Louchakova-Schwartz, Thomas Ryba.

Presidential address: Martin Nitsche (Institute of Philosophy, Czech Academy of Sciences)

Conference Directors: Jim Nelson, Ph.D., Psychology ([Jim.Nelson@valpo.edu](mailto:Jim.Nelson@valpo.edu)), Aaron Preston, Ph.D., Philosophy ([Aaron.Preston@valpo.edu](mailto:Aaron.Preston@valpo.edu))

The purpose of this conference is to examine possibilities and difficulties, and the theoretical problems and hands-on solutions arising in the description of religious experience. Does religious experience harbor concealed empirical and phenomenological complexity, and how do we address complexity in a focused description which aims at revealing the essence of experience? We invite an interplay between pragmatics of describing religious experience, philosophical and theological issues involved in creation of description, and theoretical models of how religious and spiritual experience may be described. The conference accepts papers dedicated to description of perception, imagination, body-awareness, recollection, social cognition, self-experience, temporality etc. in the context of religious experience. How does phenomenological description of religious experience translates into ecology, history, or natural science? What are cultural influences in the description of religious experience? The papers should provide not just the description of experience *per se*, but an analysis of the process or outcome of description and reflection on what description of religious experience *per se* entails. Such reflections must employ phenomenological philosophy, such as e.g. in the work of Anthony Steinbock or Jean-Luc Marion, but can also draw on contemporary dialogues between phenomenological philosophy and other philosophical and theological traditions, such as we see in the work of researchers like Espen Dahl, Matthew Ratcliffe, Dan Zahavi, Stanley Cavell, or Evan Thompson, to name a few. We welcome paper proposals related to but not necessarily bound by the initial themes which are listed below:

### I. Creating Descriptions of Religious Experience

- How does one actually describe religious experience? What difficulties and delights are in this process? How do we clarify such descriptions?
- How does the process/outcome of describing religious experience differ from of ordinary experience?

- How does one approach the negative (absences) and the positive (presences) in these descriptions?
- How does description capture embodied, affective, and metaphysical aspects of experience?
- What are the relationships between the description and the essence of religious experience. What determines experience as religious, or spiritual, and gives it a unique character, intelligible to others?
- How do the questions of otherness or strangeness play out in description and understanding a description of religious and spiritual experience?
- Who can understand a description of religious experience? Academic researchers? Religious practitioners or authorities? Informed consumers? Contemporaries or successors?
- Can religious and spiritual experience be described by means of natural language, or does it require some kind of special language? Do neologisms clarify or do they obfuscate religious experiences?
- What are the functions of language in description of religious or spiritual experience?
- How does historicity impact a description of religious experience?
- What are the communicological virtues in description of religious experience?
- What are the relationships between the description and the phenomena "in excess"?
- What are the purposes of description of religious experience, and how intentions in communication already presuppose the structure of description of religious experience we find in texts?

## **II. Models for Descriptions of Religious and Spiritual Experience**

- How do phenomenological theories and frameworks influence description of religious experience? For example, would a description intended to serve as a ground of phenomenological analyses along the lines of Husserl's phenomenology be identical with a description of experience in the phenomenology of Jean-Luc Marion or non-intentional phenomenology of Michel Henry? Or can such a description reflect a "view from nowhere"?
- What role do religious beliefs play in religious experience, and can phenomenology provide a clarification of religious presuppositions?
- How, and to what extent, can disciplines other than phenomenology (e.g. psychology, psychiatry, neurology, anthropology, theology) provide person-level descriptions of phenomenological relevance?
- How can the phenomenological description of religious experience change existing models and theoretical assumptions in other fields of knowledge or in phenomenology itself? For instance, can empirical findings in religious experiencing refine and improve classical phenomenological analyses?
- Can religious experience be subjected to constitutive phenomenological analysis, and can a phenomenological account of any given aspect of religiosity provide an accurate or adequate description of religious phenomena? How do claims to presuppositionlessness affect such accounts?
- How does the question of authority play out in first person description and the analysis of second person description in texts? What ethical limitations exist in descriptions or discussions of religious experience from either a first or second-person standpoint?
- Can common-sense metaphysics support the demands in description of religious experiencing?

### **III. Description of religious experience, and ecology, environmental studies, health sciences, natural sciences, history, business studies, etc.**

Scientific Committee: Jason Alvis (University of Vienna), Michael Barber (Saint Louis University), Neal DeRoo (The King's University, Canada), Olga Louchakova-Schwartz (Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University and UC Davis), Kristof Oltvai (The University of Chicago).

**Submission:** abstract of approximately 300 words to [conferencevalpo@sophere.org](mailto:conferencevalpo@sophere.org) [or [olouchakova@gmail.com](mailto:olouchakova@gmail.com)]. You can also enclose a paper of 3000 words (i.e. 30 min reading time). Submissions with ready papers will be given a priority. Session proposals with at least three presentations are also welcome, and must include abstracts of at least three presentations, a clear title of the session, a name of its chair, and a short description of the session. Abstracts have to be written in English. Submission should have two copies of the abstract: a .doc file which includes your name, paper title, affiliation, up to five key words, and full contact information, and a .pdf file formatted for anonymous review. Submission deadline August 1, 2019 (now extended). Notifications of acceptance will be issued by August 10, 2019.

Selected papers from the conference will be invited for publication in the topical issue of Open Theology, De Gruyter, "Phenomenology of Religious Experience IV: The Description", planned for 2020.

For more information on the conference or the OT publication, email Olga Louchakova-Schwartz

at [olouchakova@ucdavis.edu](mailto:olouchakova@ucdavis.edu). This topical issue, *Phenomenology of Religious Experience IV: Religious Experience and Description*, is also open for regular submissions (open access processing charges will apply).

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Olga Louchakova-Schwartz (ed.)

[The Problem of Religious Experience:](#)

Case Studies in Phenomenology, with Reflection and Commentaries,

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