

The Research Network on Christian Churches, Culture and Society ([www.ccsc.eu](http://www.ccsc.eu)) fosters historical research on the interaction of religion, culture, and society in Europe from the second half of the eighteenth-century until the present. CCSCE aspires to a renewed approach to religious history, implementing a broad and transnational European perspective. It aims to develop a durable and multidisciplinary research community on the subject, involving both senior and promising young scholars.

On **6 and 7 July 2020** CCSCE, in cooperation with KADOC-KU Leuven, is organising an international conference:

# Religion, social commitment, and female agency

## Encounters with subalternity and resilience

Research on the interaction between religion, social commitment, and female agency has long been neglected. Theories about a general secularisation in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe and about religion as an exclusively suppressive factor in women's history were the dominant historiographical themes. In recent decades, however, scholars have explored new perspectives on this fascinating but ambiguous relationship. Moving away from an all too exclusive focus on the direct relationship between women, religion, and (political) emancipation, several more indirect and implicit channels of female agency, resilience, and self-realisation have been revealed. They were often embedded within the boundaries of religious structures, but were not necessarily aligned with the restrictions of traditional gender stereotypes.

This conference wishes to foster the historical debate on nineteenth- and twentieth-century religiously inspired female agency in Europe within the specific yet diverse context of social commitment to subaltern groups. The focus will be on care provisions for vulnerable, marginalised, and indigent people (prostitutes,

'fallen' women and girls, migrants, indigent and elderly people, the mentally ill...), initiated and managed by Christian (lay or clerically organised congregations, sisterhoods, deaconesses...), Jewish, and Muslim women. Our perspective on this topic is not primarily institutional. This conference aims at disclosing the motives, nature, and significance of this religiously motivated commitment from the double and reciprocal outlook of religiously inspired women and the subaltern groups under their care. Aligned with the general theme, we particularly invite contributions addressing one or more of the following issues: Did this commitment offer religiously inspired women possibilities and a social legitimisation for female action, self-realisation, and power and how was this reflected in their discourses, strategies, and imagery? How did these women voice and maybe even negotiate the otherness of the groups they targeted? Which (empowering, evangelising, patronising...) goals did they pursue and with what effect? How was this female social commitment perceived, facilitated, or hampered by other (public and private) actors in the field, social and religious authorities,

and especially by the subaltern groups in question? Finally, how did the exchanges with the individuals towards whom they deployed care provisions affect and maybe even change social and religious convictions of both groups? By focusing on this specific topic and by explicitly striving towards a non-institutional perspective/outlook, this conference aims to foster innovative and interdisciplinary historical research connecting the historiography of female religious social commitment with the growing historical literature on subalternity. Subaltern studies apply a bottom-up perspective by focussing on the lives, social backgrounds, and agency of 'subaltern' groups, grasping and analysing the discourses and strategies of individuals who challenge(d) the hegemonic power structures.

The conference invites scholars from different backgrounds in order to foster interdisciplinary interaction and discussion. Contributors are encouraged to embed their case studies within the international literature and contextualize them in a broader perspective.

## Publication

A selection of papers will be published as an edited volume or as a thematic issue in a peer-reviewed journal.

## Organising committee

Kim Christiaens (CCSCE - KADOC-KU Leuven)

Peter Heyrman (CCSCE - KADOC-KU Leuven)

Magaly Rodríguez García (Mosa-KU Leuven)

Kristien Suenens (CCSCE - KADOC-KU Leuven)

## Scientific committee

Martin Baumeister (CCSCE - Deutsches Historisches Institut in Rom)

Florian Bock (CCSCE - RUHR-Universität Bochum)

Kim Christiaens (CCSCE - KADOC-KU Leuven)

Peter Heyrman (CCSCE - KADOC-KU Leuven)

Philippe Portier (CCSCE - EPHE Paris-Sorbonne)

Magaly Rodríguez García (KU Leuven)

Kristien Suenens (CCSCE - KADOC-KU Leuven)

Tine Van Osselaer (University of Antwerp)

Giovanni Vian (CCSCE - Università Ca'Foscari Venezia)

## Proposals

The conference language will be English.

Proposals should be submitted as PDF documents and should contain the following: a clear title of the proposed paper; a summary (max. 500 words) outlining the paper's goals, methodology, and source materials; a short biographical note with contact information, position, and institutional affiliation.

These abstracts should be attached and emailed to the workshop secretary ([kristien.suenens@kadoc.kuleuven.be](mailto:kristien.suenens@kadoc.kuleuven.be)) no later than 1 December 2019. You will receive a confirmation of proposal receipt within 48 hours.

The proposals will be evaluated and selected by the Scientific Committee based on topic relevance, innovativeness, and the degree to which the proposal answers the call. Notification of the evaluation will occur no later than 15 January 2020.

## Venue

KADOC - KU Leuven

Vlamingenstraat 39 - 3000 Leuven [Belgium]

## Accommodation

All participants will be offered accommodation by the organization but with a maximum of three nights (Sunday until Wednesday). Travel expenses will not be reimbursed, but there is a limited budget for travel costs for participants who are unable to find funding at their home institution or at other national instances.

## Timing

- Call for Papers: October 2019
- Deadline for proposal submission: 1 December 2019
- Proposal notification: 15 January 2020
- Workshop: 6-7 July 2020