**COMENIUS Committee**

## The Eleventh Conference of Theological Faculties from Central and Eastern Europe and the Netherlands

**KAMPEN, THE NETHERLANDS**

# Theology in a World of Ideologies: Authorization or Critique?

Ideology in its different forms plays an important role in shaping, maintaining and revising individual and collective identities. In a broad sense "ideologies" can be characterized neutrally as "patterned clusters of normatively imbued ideas and concepts" (cf. P. James, M.B. Steger, *Ideologies of Globalism*, 2010, xii), helping to organize social, political, religious and cultural practices, worldviews and truth claims, today for example relevant in the context of debating globalization, nationalism and multicultural and multireligious society-building. Within the framework of this definition theology itself can be considered an ideology. At the same time, theology claims to represent a specific form of ideology criticism, that is not self-evident.

Questions include: To what extent is there an awareness of the role of ideologies within theology and its disciplines? Are the theological disciplines deployed to provide legitimations and authorizations for existing ideas and concepts, consciously or unconsciously, or are they positioned to critique the ideologies which operate in the different strata of churches, individual lives, culture, and society? Who benefits from ideologies, either from authorizing them or from critiquing them? If there is a difference between theology and ideology, what is it? What can theology contribute to the understanding of ideology in a late- or postmodern context of celebrating the end of Enlightenment-based rationality and ideology?

What follows is an indication of possible perspectives and points of interest, which is not supposed to be exhaustive. Other academic disciplines are also invited to contribute. A proposal will be considered more succesful when it demonstrates how one's discipline makes use or has made use of narratives, traditions, rituals and practices of memory in either authorizing or critiquing ideologies for the purpose of mobilizing and/or controlling people or institutions.

*Biblical Studies (including Jewish Studies)* How can belief in YHWH, the God of Israel become an ideology? What is the meaning and the function of the concept of idolatry? What roles do ideologies play in the functioning of common people and people in different leadership positions, like priest, prophet, and king — both within the bounds of religious communities and across borders — against the background of the ancient Near East and the Greco-Roman world? How is archaeology used to justify claims in contemporary political debates?

*(Church) History* What were and are encouraging cases of critical interaction of Christian churches, communities or groups with existing ideologies, and what are sobering cases of submission to or authorization of ideologies? How did biblical narratives, dogmatic traditions and religious practices shape the ideological imaginary of religious minorities and confessional opponents, and what were the societal effects? How do we determine what factors play a role in either critique or authorization of ideologies or to identify early warning signals?

*Systematic Theology (including Ethics and Philosophy)* What does the biblical item of idolatry criticism mean in contemporary contexts of belief? What are the criteria to distinguish religious authority from authoritarian ideology? What happens with theology, when common ideologies change or disappear? How can theology contribute to the contemporary "distinguishing of spirits" and to the prophetic task of Christians and Christian communities? What role has ideology played and does it still play in developments in systematic theology and ethics, the writing of confessional documents or of scholarly texts for church, academy or society? Where starts, and where ends the political, religious or cultural ideologization of theology?

*Practical Theology* How does an awareness in church and academy and society of the role of ideology in religious, ecclesial and artistic practices manifest itself? What are the main challenges for practical theology within the framework of social and cultural concepts and ideologies? How is theology utilized in contemporary discourse, in the church, in art — can one observe a preponderance of either authorization or critique? Who will benefit from this employment of ideology, especially with respect to power and money?

The conference aims at creating a learning environment. Qualitatively outstanding contributions will be published in the *Beihefte zur Ökumenischen Rundschau*, published by the Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, Leipzig. Research master students are given an opportunity for a poster presentation.

The conference will be held from 18-22 April 2018 at the Theological University Kampen, The Netherlands, a town with a long history of theological education.

***Please send your proposal (approximately 400 words for a paper or 200 words for a poster presentation) together with a CV (of maximum 5 lines, specifying your status and the affiliated institution), in English or German, as a pdf-attachment by e-mail to Prof.Dr. Hans-Martin Kirn, hmkirn@pthu.nl and to Dr. Wolter Rose, whrose@tukampen.nl.***
***Deadline for submitting a proposal: 15 November 2017.***

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