



**Campus der Theologien**

Zeitschrift für Theologische  
Studien und Kritik

Lea Schlenker and Lea Stolz

---

# Workshop Report: Making Sense of Interreligious Practices

Perspectives from Theology, Religious Studies, and  
Anthropology (Tübingen, 29–31 March 2023)

## Zusammenfassung

---

Aus Marianne Moyaerts New Horizons Fellowship an der Universität Tübingen im Jahr 2022 ergaben sich mehrere weitere Kooperationsformate. Dazu gehörte ein Workshop für Nachwuchswissenschaftler:innen, zu dem sie im Vorfeld beratend und währenddessen als Dozentin beitrug. Vor dem Hintergrund ihres Fellowships wie auch ihrer Leistungen im Bereich der Interreligious Studies nutzen die Organisatorinnen des Workshops die Gelegenheit, in diesem Sonderheft, das sich Moyaerts Begriff der Religionization widmet, über den Workshop zu berichten. Der Bericht konzentriert sich auf die Vorgehensweise bei der Organisation und Durchführung des Workshops und reflektiert Herausforderungen und Abwägungen, die mit der Ausrichtung eines interreligiösen Workshops verbunden sind.

## Summary

---

Marianne Moyaert's New Horizons Fellowship at the University of Tübingen in 2022 led to several subsequent forms of cooperation. Among them was a workshop for junior researchers to which she contributed as an advisor and instructor before and during the workshop. Given the links to both her fellowship and her contributions to Interreligious Studies, the organizers of this workshop use the opportunity of this special issue on Moyaert's notion of religionization to report about the workshop. The report focuses on the methodology of organizing and delivering such a workshop, thereby offering some reflections upon the issues, challenges and considerations involved with coordinating an interreligious workshop.



## About the Authors

---

Lea Schlenker, born in Ulm in 1992, studied Protestant Theology in Tübingen, Basel and Dunedin (NZ) and Islamic Theology in Tübingen. In her PhD dissertation, she pursues a comparative study of Islamic and Christian devotional texts related to eating and highlights their ›theologies at the table‹. Her recent publications include: (2021) *From Shared Meals to Interreligious Conversations*, in: *Current Dialogue. Special Issue of the Ecumenical Review* 73/5, 702–713.

**ORCID:** 0009-0008-6460-5937

**GND:** 1174332476

Lea Stolz, born in 1992 in Bad Waldsee, studied Protestant Theology in Tübingen, Vienna, and Basel. In her PhD project, she is investigating interreligious relations in social media. She currently works as a research and teaching assistant at the University of Tübingen in the field of Practical Theology.

**ORCID:** 0009-0004-1468-1924

**GND:** 134892991X

## 1. Background

Interreligious (or: Interfaith) Studies is a comparatively young academic discipline which includes a broad range of approaches and research questions. The rise of Interreligious Studies coincides with a renewed academic interest in interreligious practices (e.g. Cheetham 2015; Illman/Sjö 2015; Moyaert 2018). We, the organizers of this workshop,<sup>1</sup> both research specific practices in an interreligious perspective. Among the recurring questions we face in our research is the relation between practiced religion and normative theology. Once we realized that we encounter similar questions despite looking into different material and with different methods, we decided to organize a workshop for junior researchers on interreligious practices and how to make sense of them. The workshop aimed at networking and at discussing fruitful approaches in the exploration of interreligious practices.

The research of interreligious practices is highly complex. It requires a sound knowledge of several religious traditions and experience in engaging them with awareness of contentious issues and structural imbalances between them. Further, while theories are also developed and transmitted in specific contexts, practices show even stronger links to their historical, political, socio-economic, and geographic contexts. Entire disciplines are dedicated to these aspects and bring their own research questions and approaches to the table. Even if these contextual dimensions are not one's key research question, a researcher of interreligious practices needs to engage with them at least to some extent. To add more layers of complexity, both within the research of religion and within the research of practice, we find a broad range of approaches. For instance, one can study religion from an emic or an etic perspective, and one can research practice empirically

---

<sup>1</sup> The workshop was funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and the Baden-Württemberg Ministry of Science as part of the Excellence Strategy of the German Federal and State Governments, as well as by Universitätsbund Tübingen e. V.

or at the level of phenomena and structures, to name but a few. All these factors complicate the research of interreligious practices.

To address the high level of complexity, the research of interreligious practices needs to be genuinely interdisciplinary and international. The more perspectives we gather and engage, the better we understand the many layers of interreligious practices and how they play out. To strengthen such research, workshops are an ideal opportunity to create multidisciplinary networks and to look at the respective fields of research from many different perspectives. Workshops rather than conferences allow the sharing of work in progress, consultation and the opportunity to become aware of one's own blind spots. An international and interdisciplinary cohort of researchers can identify a wide array of perspectives on a research question, which again can help to discern a specific path forward while being aware of other issues at stake. Our workshop »Making Sense of Interreligious Practices. Perspectives from Theology, Religious Studies, and Anthropology« was an attempt to create a space for this kind of research.

Some aspects were key to the success of this workshop: First and more generally, we organized this workshop intentionally, engaging self-critically with patterns of religionization that we saw in our context. At a macro and micro level, from the overall concept to the minutiae of meals and accommodation, we paid attention to implicit Christian norms and highlighted the norms and presence of others. Another aspect of this intentionality was to create a sustained conversation by including varied forms of communication, with active and passive listening, over texts as well as over meals, including time and space for silence in our prayer and meditation room. We wanted to pursue a discussion at eye level, putting everyone at the same level of discussion and conversation. To this end, we had respondents from less represented traditions to reflect on the introductory lecture on the first evening. Before and during the workshop, we sought the advice of our supervisors and of senior researchers to cooperate across generations and learn from each other. Overall, the workshop was geared towards reflective working at various levels. This involved the subject under study, the academic discussion of that subject, the dynamics of the discussion, the conscientious examination of those discussions, the attention to how hegemonic structures are put in motion in the first place and trying to dispel them or, at least, be aware of them in the room. In the following, we reflect on how this intentionality informed the organization, program, challenges, and opportunities of the workshop, with the hope of sharing some of the knowledge we gained in the process and stimulating and encouraging others. In our account, we roughly follow a chronological order while emphasizing how concrete organizational aspects related to our vision of the workshop.

## 2. Organization

Regarding the practical implementation of our endeavor, our first task was to find a date for our workshop. Anyone with experience in organizing academic events knows that this comes with several challenges such as the availability of facilities and speakers. These general issues, however, intermingled with specifically (inter)religious ones: It seemed appropriate to us to respect

weekly days of rest. Furthermore, several important religious holidays such as Passover, Easter, and Eid al-Fitr fell within the timeframe envisaged, let alone festivities from religious minority traditions which we might not even be aware of. Eventually, there was a timeframe of three days left – during Ramadan. In considering how to accommodate for the needs of fasting Muslims, it proved invaluable to turn to Muslim colleagues and workshop participants and ask for their advice. As a result of these consultations, we decided to start the morning program slightly later, to create time and space for prayer and to make sure there would be a possibility for breaking the fast.

With the aim of strengthening international cooperation, we organized the workshop in English. Thus, we distributed our call for participation internationally, sending it to coordinators of universities' PhD programs, to research networks with a focus on interreligious matters, and also contacting particularly suitable participants personally. We asked applicants to send us an abstract of their PhD project as well as a paper-length secondary reading related to their project which they found insightful to advance the systematizations of our project in terms of theory or methodology. As selection criteria, we defined the quality of the project and its relatedness to our program but also put effort into composing a diverse group of participants, considering for instance religious background, gender, ethnicity, or home university. We managed to bring together thirteen PhD students from seven European countries. We requested that the participants prepare a scientific poster presenting their overall project and a short passage for close reading with the entire group.

### 3. Program

With participants and topics confirmed, we started to develop our program. Generally, our aim was to create abundant opportunities for participants to engage in seamless conversation throughout – during the sessions as well as the breaks. Starting in the afternoon on the first day, we kept the introduction of the topic deliberately short but took considerable time to present our vision of working together and for participants to introduce themselves. The following poster presentation allowed the participants to start engaging with each other and familiarize themselves with the projects of their colleagues. The posters remained present on movable walls during the entirety of the event. On the first evening, Martin Rötting (Salzburg) gave a public lecture about »Interreligious Dialogue as an Identity Process: Contemporary Performances, Structures, and Materializations« and thus provided a theoretically inspired framework for the upcoming one and a half days. The lecture was complemented by two responses from a more practical background. To include perspectives otherwise not present in the workshop, we intentionally invited a Hindu and a Jewish respondent. Following the lecture, participants continued the conversation in a more informal environment at the conference dinner. To demonstrate hospitality and appreciation, we had budgeted for a festive dinner that enabled for encounters over nice food.

Starting on the next morning, we scheduled the sessions dedicated to the readings. For this purpose, we grouped similar topics (for example »Interreligious Relationships and Marriages«, »Interreligious Encounters in Historical Perspective« or »Healing in Interreligious Perspective«) which resulted in sessions covering two to three texts. Each participant was allocated thirty

minutes – ten minutes for presentation and reading, twenty minutes for discussion. At the end of each session, we planned another thirty minutes to inquire about similar perspectives as well as divergences emerging from the discussion of the texts. These thirty minutes always started with giving the word to our facilitators Marianne Moyaert and Amina Nawaz to comment on what they had noticed during the presentations and conversations: About what had been said but also how it had been said and what group dynamics this entailed. Concluding at noon on the third day, we asked for feedback and explored further opportunities of working together. Participants were welcome to stay for lunch before starting their return trip.

## 4. Challenges

In designing and conducting the workshop, we faced several specifically interreligious challenges. Some of them have already been mentioned such as the issue of finding a date. Essentially, these challenges center around questions of diversity and representation as well as the hegemonic structures which we can reflect upon but not fully escape. For example, this also includes the question of food which we consider all but a side issue: Food has the capacity to bring people together just as much as to separate them. This applies even more when people with different religious backgrounds come together. Our aim was to cater especially to fasting Muslims but also to respect other dietary rules. Therefore, we decided on exclusively vegetarian and non-alcoholic food and drinks. Besides very special intolerances and personal preferences, our aim was to provide the same food for everyone.

Another issue was money. As the program did not cover travel expenses, more than one of the potential participants to whom we had reached out informed us that they would be eager to attend but could not afford it and had no home university subsidizing such trips. Others came but had to rely on substantially more lengthy and inconvenient ways of traveling in order not to overstretch their financial capacities. Unsurprisingly, these were participants who would have added greatly to the diversity of our group. This made us reflect even further on structural imbalances: there could have been perfectly suitable participants whom we could not even identify as such due to different means of positioning oneself online.

At the same time, the workshop has raised our awareness of how much we relied on and benefitted from hegemonic structures ourselves, such as being able to reserve well-equipped rooms free of charge at the Faculty of Protestant Theology in Tübingen. Although we primarily did so because we were not allowed to rent any rooms from our budget, this was admittedly a far from neutral terrain for an interreligious academic event. In brief: As much as we aimed for an inclusive workshop, we also realized that this endeavor had its limitations – and that ironically these limitations resulted from structures which we also used to our advantage.

## 5. Opportunities

While we faced some challenges, the particular requirements of our workshop also led to new ideas which are especially relevant in interdisciplinary and interreligious settings, but also beyond. These ideas relate to the concept and practical implementation of the workshop, to the role of bridge builders, to intergenerational cooperation, and to the social and emotional dimensions of research. First, we were aware that this workshop was not only about interreligious practices but would itself become a site of interreligious practice. Thus, in the beginning, we addressed this interreligious dimension of the workshop and invited participants to indicate their religious situatedness when suitable.<sup>2</sup> To literally make room for this interreligious dimension, we had a separate room for prayer and meditation. It was equipped with elements from different religious traditions (hymnals, prayer books, prayer rugs, candles) and we received feedback from participants on how much this space positively affected their overall experience of the event.

However, interreligious, international and interdisciplinary settings are not easy. Due to their different backgrounds, participants might find it challenging to understand each other. Misunderstandings may arise because of different scholarly approaches and internal agreements within specific academic disciplines, but also because of different languages or forms of interaction. To facilitate communication and joint research across such boundaries, we found it helpful to have designated ›bridge builders‹ in addition to workshop participants. In the case of our workshop, three senior researchers who themselves have worked and taught in multiple areas, joined the conversation. We had theologians who moved into the fields of religious studies (Martin Rötting) and interreligious hermeneutics (Marianne Moyaert) as well as an interreligious historian involved in theological research (Amina Nawaz). These senior researchers observed our conversations and occasionally commented on a meta level, which significantly improved communication and understanding among participants.

In addition to facilitating interdisciplinary conversations, both the invited senior researchers and our PhD supervisors contributed to the development of our workshop. They advised us about potential pitfalls, discussed practical issues with us and gave useful tips before and during the workshop. We found this to be a great example of collegiality and intergenerational cooperation within academia. Learning from the examples of our advisors, we wanted this gathering to be a positive and fruitful academic experience for all. While comments on the harsh and competitive climate in academia abound, we intended to use this workshop as an opportunity to foster collegial and mutually supportive forms. Already in outlining the program, we included interactive elements such as poster presentations, rotating moderation, and plenty of time to network informally. At the beginning of our workshop, we openly addressed our aim to create a pleasant work atmosphere and encouraged participants to engage with each other critically *and* with collegiality. Effectively, we did not witness any examples of self-aggrandizing or demeaning behavior during our conversations.

---

2 By religious situatedness we mean that people ›orient around religion differently‹ (Patel 2013: 38), be it in a confessional, non-confessional, generally affirmative or negative way, disinterested or with multiple belongings, etc.



The workshop participants repeatedly pointed to the interrelatedness of practice and knowledge, of thinking and feeling, of producing and perceiving. This interrelatedness is crucial not only for how we analyze material and present our findings, but also for how we design academic events. From the outset, we found it important to consider the social and emotional dimensions of doing research. This was also reflected in the two feedback questions at the end of our workshop: »How are you?« and »What do you take home?« Participants wrote their answers on cards and placed them next to the questions where everybody could read them, without elaborating on the answers or questioning them. The silent and anonymous reading of each other's responses allowed for an intentional rounding off of the reflective side of the workshop. Most participants felt »tired but happy« after intense days of working as well as motivated, inspired, and encouraged to continue their PhD research. The main insights on the feedback cards reflected the interdisciplinary workshop design and its networking purpose. Participants pointed to the complexity and multilayeredness of interreligious practices and how they gained insights into new questions and other research perspectives.

Given our initial intentions, we consider our workshop »Making Sense of Interreligious Practices« a full success. It gathered junior scholars from different backgrounds, provided opportunities for networking and furthering research on interfaith practices, and was a learning experience in terms of workshop organization. We are grateful for all the advice and support we received in the process, and for the encouraging working experience with the participants. While acknowledging limitations and hegemonial structures and working to overcome them, we are convinced that there are many opportunities to create academic settings which allow for growth and deeper understanding, both in terms of research and personally.

## Bibliography

---

- Cheetham, David (2015): The Interfaith Landscape and Liturgical Places, in: Pratt, Douglas et al. (eds.), *The Character of Christian-Muslim Encounter. Essays in Honour of David Thomas*. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 544–558.
- Illman, Ruth; Sjö, Sofia (2015): Facebook as a Site for Inter-religious Encounters. A Case Study from Finland, in: *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 30/3, 383–398.
- Moyaert, Marianne (2018): Towards a Ritual Turn in Comparative Theology. Opportunities, Challenges, and Problems, in: *Harvard Theological Review* 111/1, 1–23.
- Patel, Eboo (2013): Toward a Field of Interfaith Studies, in: *Liberal Education* 99/4, 38–43.



## Campus der Theologien

Zeitschrift für Theologische  
Studien und Kritik

### 2/2025: Patterns of Religionization

Sebastian Pittl, Lea Schlenker

Editorial · Patterns of Religionization. A Critical Discussion of a New Perspective on Interreligious Research – with a Response from Marianne Moyaert

DOI 10.71956/cdth002-pref1

Santiago Slabodsky

Indiscretions of a World Order. Christian Imaginations, A Racialized Europe, and a Religionized Latin America

DOI 10.71956/cdth002-art01

Hannah J. Visser

The ›Safe Space‹ as a Symbol of Religionization in Interfaith Education

DOI 10.71956/cdth002-art02

Amina Nawaz

Persistent Patterns. Moyaert, the Moriscos and Muslims in Europe

DOI 10.71956/cdth002-art03

Thomas Jürgasch

»For I have been a stranger in a strange land«. Church-historical reflections on selfing and othering as interpretative categories of early Christian identity formation

DOI 10.71956/cdth002-art04

Claire Gallien

Towards a Holistic Approach to the Study of Islamic Theology in Western Academia. A Response to (Secularized) Christian Normativity by Way of Literature

DOI 10.71956/cdth002-art05

Diana Lipton

Philology – the Oldest Profession?

DOI 10.71956/cdth002-art06

Elisabeth Migge

Comparative Theology – The Risk of Reiterating Patterns of Religionization?

DOI 10.71956/cdth002-art07

Katharina Zimmermann

Women as the Other Within and Towards Christianity. A Variation of Marianne Moyaert's ›History of Religionization‹

DOI 10.71956/cdth002-art08

Marianne Moyaert

Response

DOI 10.71956/cdth002-art09

Lea Schlenker and Lea Stolz

Workshop Report: Making Sense of Interreligious Practices. Perspectives from Theology, Religious Studies, and Anthropology (Tübingen, 29–31 March 2023)

DOI 10.71956/cdth002-art10