

**PROGRAMME OF
TEYLERS THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY
IN HAARLEM
FOR THE YEAR 2020**

THE DIRECTORS OF TEYLERS STICHTING (TEYLER'S FOUNDATION) AND THE MEMBERS OF TEYLERS GODGELEERD GENOOTSCHAP (TEYLER'S THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY) invite submissions for their essay competition. Deadline: May 1, 2023

Subject: A dialogue between theology and anthropology about the fundamental motives of both disciplines as an impulse for broader academic discussion on this subject.

Further information

In the twenty-first-century Dutch investment climate, the funding of science is under pressure. The emphasis is increasingly on the demonstrable benefit that science should have for society. Of course it is recognized that this cannot always be predicted beforehand. The idea that science should be about questions from ordinary citizens has become generally accepted. The knowledge that science generates must be made more accessible. Academics must learn to explain the usefulness and necessity of their research to a wide audience, which is not necessarily convinced of it. It is clear that in such a climate research of which the outcomes do not seem to be of immediate use is meeting with extra difficulties. This applies to basic research in the natural sciences as well as to studies of dead cultures and their languages or of modern languages that few people speak.

For the discussion about the usefulness and necessity of scientific research, it seems important not to limit the questions of the philosophy of science to the usefulness of the research output. The question of what drives people to do research is just as relevant. What is good curiosity? This essay competition aims to contribute to the discussion about this question. The competition invites you to write an essay on the motives of scientific research inspired by a concrete exchange between theology and (social) anthropology.

The choice to start the discussion at the intersection of theology and anthropology is prompted by the following considerations. Both disciplines belong to the kind of research whose usefulness and necessity are not generally accepted. In 2015 religious scientist and anthropologist prof. Birgit Meyer received the Spinoza Prize, the most prestigious academic awards in the Netherlands. But the importance of research into religion or other cultures is anything but obvious. The closing of theology and religious studies faculties in the Netherlands is a clear sign of this.

A second consideration concerns a possible relationship between the two disciplines precisely as regards their motives. Traditionally, both disciplines have a normative motive, which can be described in short as an interest in 'the other'. Anthropology was mainly interested in other

so-called non-Western cultures. Now that globalization has made societies much more diverse, there is more awareness of ‘the other’ in their own ranks and research is also focusing on ‘the other’ in the familiar social context. Theology is driven by knowing ‘the other’ in the ultimate sense, the divine, however much this may be experienced in the familiar world. In the meantime, this focus on ‘the other’ has been criticized or even exposed, for example as a reflection of colonial relations or as starting self-evidently from Western ideas of transcendence. In both disciplines a turn towards a more descriptive method is visible, in which the normative questions have a less obvious place. Of course, they have not disappeared or are no longer important. Anthropologists and theologians must justify why research into, for example, Pentecostal churches in Ghana or in the Amsterdam area of the Bijlmer is important. This accountability must also be given at the level of the fundamental motives.

A third consideration is that recently, various initiatives have been taken towards dialogue from both disciplines. In addition, theologians are increasingly using anthropological concepts, methods and approaches (ethnography, ‘material turn’) and anthropologists are increasingly emphasizing the importance of reflection on metaphysical or ontological questions (‘ontological turn’). Clearly, fundamental questions are at stake in this dialogue about what drives these disciplines in their research. However, these questions have not been automatically identified and elaborated so far. Often the dialogue takes the form of borrowing from each other’s methods or concepts, without a more fundamental mutual questioning.

This essay competition calls for a fundamental mutual questioning of theology and social anthropology. The rapprochement that has arisen between the two disciplines is an opportunity to initiate a conversation that contributes to critical self-reflection and constructive reorientation within the own disciplines. That conversation is also important for answering current questions from society about the usefulness and necessity of academic research.

Entries should consist of either one extended study, in the form of a text prepared for publication, or of several publications, most of which should have appeared in the three years prior to May 1, 2023. In the latter case, entrants should also submit a hitherto unpublished text, written especially for the competition, in which the earlier publications are placed in a broader academic context.

General Information

Pieter Teyler van der Hulst (Haarlem, 1702-1778) was a Dutch merchant. In his will, he stipulated the founding of an important museum together with Teylers Stichting (Teyler’s Foundation). Part of this Foundation are two learned societies, each of which presents a yearly essay competition. Teylers Godgeleerd Genootschap (Teyler’s Theological Society) is one of these learned societies. It organizes essay competitions in the field of theology, philosophy of religion and religious studies.

Procedure

- In order to qualify for the competition, candidates should submit four copies of their entry to the Directors of Teylers Stichting, Spaarne 16, 2011 CH Haarlem, The Netherlands, before May 1, 2023. Entries received after that date will not be taken into consideration.
- The essays must be in English, French, German or Dutch. Because of the stipulations of Pieter Teyler's will, the essays may not mention the author's name but should be identified only by a motto. The entry should be accompanied by a sealed envelope containing the author's name and address, with the motto on the outside.
- To avoid a long wait before hearing the result of the evaluation, in case an award has not been made, authors are requested to send together with the sealed envelope an open envelope containing the name and full address of a person with whom the Directors of Teylers Stichting may enter into correspondence confidentially.

Evaluation

- The evaluation will be carried out by the members of Teylers Godgeleerd Genootschap (Professor M. Barnard, Professor H.L. Beck, Professor E. Jorink, Professor A.B. Merz, Professor M. Popović, Dr. E.P. Schaafsma, Professor E.G.E. van der Wall).
- The evaluation will be communicated within seven months from the final date of submission in the form of a recommendation to the Directors of Teylers Stichting, who will decide within one month whether or not to give an award.
- This decision is final.

- All candidates will be notified by the Directors as soon as a decision has been made.

Award

- The award consists of a gold medal struck from the seal of the Godgeleerd Genootschap.
- In addition, the Doopsgezind Predikfonds in Haarlem will grant the sum of € 4500 to the author or authors of the winning entries to use as they see fit.
- The medal will be awarded to the winner(s) at a special ceremony in the Teylers Museum in Haarlem.
- Professional journals and the press as well as other interested persons and institutions will be informed of the award ceremony well in advance.

Publication

The authors themselves will arrange for publication of their work, mentioning that it has received an award from Teylers Stichting. If desired, Teylers Stichting and its theological society may consider lending assistance.

Editors of websites, scientific journals as well as other bodies wishing to draw the attention of their readers to the essay competition, are urged to advise interested candidates to consult the program for full details.

The programme of Teylers Godgeleerd Genootschap is available free of charge on request from the Directors of Teylers Stichting, Spaarne 16, 2011 CH Haarlem, The Netherlands, or can be consulted at www.teylersmuseum.nl/en en www.teylersstichting.nl