

## **2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference on Religion and Psychiatry: The Dutch Foundation for Psychiatry and Religion.**

**Leiden, March 17-19<sup>th</sup> 2008**

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Psychiatrists, psychotherapists, pastors and spiritual caregivers all share in the inner life of human beings, like fish in water. At the same time, describing and assessing that inner life requires them to utilise their own, and different, kinds of language. One of the aims of the Dutch foundation for Psychiatry and Religion is to bring professionals and scholars from the aforementioned and allied disciplines together to create a context for a multilevel interdisciplinary and relational meeting, for discussion and the exchange of ideas.

The Dutch Foundation for Psychiatry and Religion held its second International Conference in Leiden, March, 17-19th, organised in association with the Spirituality and Psychiatry Special Interest Group (SIG) of the Royal College of Psychiatrists (UK) and under the auspices of the World Psychiatric Association (WPA, Section on Religion, Spirituality and Psychiatry). Most attendees came from West, Middle and Eastern Europe. Invited keynote speakers came from the USA, UK, Israel, Iran, and The Netherlands.

The general conference theme was entitled *Religious Psychopathology: Explorations at the Interface of Psychiatry and Religion*, descriptive psychopathology with regard to religious psychopathology being a central issue. Professor Sims (UK), well-known for his book on descriptive psychopathology (*Symptoms of the Mind*), presented his in-depth clinical approach and others, especially Professor Gerrit Glas (The Netherlands), suggested refinements, which could be very useful in clinical practice and that could enhance clinical judgment. Such improvements can be derived from philosophical and theological fieldwork. In the meantime this is an important concern, calling for more attention and research in order to refine our assessment and discernment of psychopathology and religious or spiritual experiences.

Measurement approaches and empirical research were presented and discussed, including work done by Michael King (UK), Arjan Braam (The Netherlands), and Alan Apter (Israel).

Why bother – for surely religion is a vanishing phenomenon, especially in Western Europe? But religion has not disappeared; the secularization thesis is now supplanted by the transformation thesis, with flourishing new forms of

religiousness and spirituality. No doubt the secularization thesis has had a huge impact on how religion was viewed in Western psychiatry. But the picture appeared to be far richer and more complex.

This certainly will have consequences for new classificatory systems like DSM V and ICD XI, as well as for the WPA Guidelines, moving toward a more personalized diagnostic approach. In a thought-provoking presentation, Professor Van Praag (The Netherlands) argued that religiousness, understood as receptivity for the 'God-idea', is normal for very pragmatic reasons: the frequency and the utility of this receptiveness. To the left and right of this normal religiosity we see cases of 'hypo-religiosity' and 'hyper-religiosity'. What is normal religiosity? Its characteristics are: open mindedness and a questioning attitude.

This was an exciting program, with fruitful discussions! During the WPA World conference in Prague next September, several symposia submitted by the WPA Section on Religion, Spirituality and Psychiatry will give us the opportunity to continue these exchanges.

For those interested, abstracts and (some) references from the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference of Religion and Psychiatry can be found on [www.religionandpsychiatry.com/congress2008/](http://www.religionandpsychiatry.com/congress2008/). It is anticipated that the lectures will be presented in scholarly articles and publications in 2009.