

Program book: The Calling of the Church in Times of Polarization

IRTI INTERNATIONAL SUMMER SCHOOL
3 - 7th of July 2023, Amsterdam



VU University *Amsterdam*



PThU

Protestantse Theologische **Universiteit**

❖ Word of Welcome

Welcome to the third IRTI summer school in Amsterdam, organized together with you all from the participating institutions! Rooted in a long tradition of summer schools in the Netherlands initiated from New Brunswick Theological Seminary, since 2016 we succeeded in extending the summer school to participation from Hungary, Romania, the Netherlands and some other countries. This year we hope to welcome around 42 participants. I am happy that the summer school can take place now, after we had to postpone it during the covid-19 pandemic.

With various backgrounds in theological and cultural traditions we share our love for theology as rooted in the Christian faith. I trust that this summer school will be a great opportunity for all of us to share our thoughts, contexts and experiences in an enriching and encouraging way.

The summer school is organized around the challenging theme of polarization and the calling of church and theology in relation to all kinds of forms of polarization in church and society. We will reflect on the concept of polarization, various concrete appearances of polarization, and ask ourselves how to engage as theologians in such concrete contexts. We will not limit ourselves to reflection from an academic distance. At several points we may realize that we ourselves are involved. We also hope to experience something of what may be at stake concretely in polarized situations, for instance in the city of Amsterdam. Finally, and probably most importantly, the summer school may be a place to meet each other in good theological friendship.

I wish you all a safe travel to Amsterdam and a pleasant and enriching stay with us!

Dr. Pieter Vos
*Director International Reformed
Theological Institute*



❖ Program and Course Requirements

Theme

In many societies all over the world an increasing polarization between various groups can be observed. Tendencies of polarization extend from the political to the economic and from the religious to the social sphere. Polarization is often motivated by prejudices about differences in ethnicity, race, religion, culture, gender, sexuality, economic or social background. Driven by fear about losing what is regarded as valuable, particular groups become to demonize other groups as cause of imagined or real threats. On the political level polarization becomes manifest in populist movements with the explicit aim to polarize against and distance themselves entirely from any political establishment, as for instance in new political parties in many European countries. In some cases, populists succeed in occupying important positions in traditional democratic countries. In other cases, nationalism is promoted as counterforce to a globalizing world. Different but related is the polarization of groups of native inhabitants towards newcomers, for instance native inhabitants of European countries who fear the arrival of large numbers of migrants from the African continent, often suggestively associated with the worldwide danger of Muslim extremism. In other cases, violence of majorities to religious or ethnic minorities is sanctioned because the minority is regarded as not belonging to the national identity and therefore marginalized, as for instance in Indonesia. Sociologists observe an increasing tension between high-educated people, often living in the cities and with a global orientation, on the one hand, and less-educated people living in the country or poor neighborhoods in the cities and oriented to the local, on the other.

All these instances of polarization affect the church as well. The church worldwide and locally is often deeply divided on highly contested issues, as for instance on how one judges about same-sex relationships, gender or migrants. There is a great gulf between the so-called 'main-line' (or ecumenical) and the so-called 'evangelicals,' a gulf which can be experienced within one church community. The churches themselves are part of, and internally experiencing, polarization.

Given this increasing (or at least ongoing) polarization of various groups within societies as well as within the churches, what may be the calling of the church? How can the church contribute to a viable society or community where people of different backgrounds and convictions live together peacefully? What should be the role of the church in society? How to cope with polarization within and between the churches and their theologians? How may Bible and tradition shed light on these questions?

Program

About fifteen sessions of 90 minutes will be held from Monday evening July 3 till Friday July 7, extended with one optional meeting on Sunday July 9 (visit of a church service). During these days full time presence is required. This includes one excursion, sharing in meals (lunch and dinners) and some additional activities.

Tuesday morning there will be a photographer present to take pictures for IRTI. If you wish to not be photographed, please tell Pieter, Albert or Markus before that time.

Organization

The IRTI International Summer School is organized by the International Reformed Theological Institute (IRTI, www.irti.nl), in cooperation with the following partner institutions:

- New Brunswick Theological Seminary, USA (NBTS)
- Sárospatak Reformed Theological College, Hungary (SRTA)
- Debrecen Reformed Theological University (DRTU)
- Reformed Theological Faculty of J. Selye University, Komárno, Slovakia (RTFS)
- Protestant Theological Institute, Cluj Napoca, Romania (PTI)
- Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, The Netherlands (VU)
- Protestant Theological University Amsterdam, The Netherlands (PThU)

The school will be held in the facilities of the VU/ PThU Amsterdam and students from abroad will stay in residence nearby.

All lectures will be in English.



Monday July 3

Introduction

16:00 - 16:30 Registration

16:30 - 17:30 Lecture 1: Prof. dr. Pieter Vos, PThU, director of IRTI, Welcome and introduction to the theme, *The Calling of the Church in Times of Polarization*

17:30 - 18:45 Dinner at VU Restaurant

18:45 - 20:30 Lecture + discussion 2: Prof.dr. Micah McCreary, NBTS, *Seminaries as Communities of the Prophets!*

20:30 - 20:45 Devotion by student/staff NBTS

Tuesday July 4

09:00 - 10:45 Lecture + discussion 3: Prof.dr. James Jinhong Kim, NBTS, *Rethinking the Pedagogy of Interfaith Dialogue: Church Leadership in the Age of Global Polarization*



11:00 - 12:45 Lecture + discussion 4: Viktória Kóczyán MA, VU, *Migration and the Hungarian Reformed Church (Case studies from 1988 and 2015)*

12:45 - 14:00 Lunch at VU Restaurant

14:00 - 15:45 Lecture + discussion 5: Laura Dijkhuizen MA, VU, *Female Leadership, Source of Polarisation and Division in the Churches - A Case Study*



16:00 - 17:00 Lecture + discussion 6: Dr. Jan Dirk Wassenaar, *Polarization and the Pursuit of Unanimity in the Church: Ecclesiastical Decision-Making in the Dutch Reformed Tradition*



17:15 - 17:30 Devotion by students/staff SRTA

17:30 - 18:30 Dinner at VU Restaurant

Wednesday July 5

09:00 - 10:45 Lecture + discussion 7: Dr. Szilveszter Füsti-Molnár and drs. Gyula Homoki, SRTA, *Polarization in the Church, Case Studies from the Patristic Period (Montanism, Donatism), and Some of the Consequences for Today*



11:00 - 12:00 Lecture + discussion 8: Dr. Binsar Pakpahan, Jakarta Theological Seminary, *Political Polarization based on Religious Identity and the Church's Call to Reconciliation and Unity in Indonesia*

12:00 - 12:15 Devotion by students/staff DRTU

12:15 - 13:00 Lunch at VU Restaurant

13:00 - 14:00 Lecture 9: Dr. Gert van Klinken, PThU, *Jewish Mission and Polarization between Christians and Jews in Amsterdam, 1860-1960*

14:00 - 17:00 Excursion to Amsterdam, Dr. Gert van Klinken

17:00 - 19:30 Dinner at Humphrey's Amsterdam, Nieuwezijds Kolk 23, 1012 PV Amsterdam

Thursday July 6

09:00-10:45 Lecture + discussion 10: Prof.dr. Bernhard Reitsma, PThU, *Spiritual Leadership in Times of Polarization*



11:00 - 14:45 Two sessions of the symposium 'The Future of Theology/Religious Studies' at the occasion of the retirement of Prof. dr. Eddy Van der Borcht, in Agora room 3, VU building, 3rd floor:

Theme 2: The future of confessional theology

11:00 - 11:25 Lecture 3: Robert Vosloo, University of Stellenbosch

11:25 - 11:50 Lecture 4: Henk Bakker, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

11:50 - 12:10 Discussion

12:10 - 13:00 Lunch

Theme 3: Postcolonial theology

13:00 - 13:25 Lecture 5: Binsar Pakpahan, Jakarta Theological Seminary (in Asia)

13:25 - 13:50 Lecture 6: Demaine Solomons, University of Western Cape (in Africa)

13:50 - 14:15 Lecture 7: Welmoet Boender, VU Amsterdam (in Europe, with special reference to Islam)

14:15 - 14:45 Discussion

14:45 Closure



15:45 - 16:45 Valedictory Speech Prof. Dr. Eddy van der Borght, *Dealing with 'a Diseased Social Imagination': About the Future of Theology as an Academic Discipline*

16:45 - 17:30 Reception at VU Aula

17:30 - 18:30 Dinner at VU Restaurant

Fridy July 7

09:00 - 10:45 Lecture 11: Dr. James Brumm, NBTS, *Teaching Theology in the Tension: When a Seminary Chooses Not to Choose*



11:00 - 12:45 Lecture 12: Prof.dr. Henk van den Belt, VU, *Called to be Saints: Sanctification between Adaptation and Polarization*

12:45 - 13:30 Lunch at VU Restaurant

13:30 - 13:45 Devotion students/staff PThU

13:45 Farewell

Sunday July 9 (optional for those who stay)

10:30 Morning service at English Reformed Church Amsterdam (www.ercadam.nl).
Address: Begijnhof 48, Amsterdam

