

**22<sup>nd</sup> Biennial Symposium of the International Medieval Sermon Studies Society**

**“Conversions and Life Passages through the Mirror of Medieval Preachers”**

**Casa de Espiritualidad y Ejercicios, Virgen del Camino, León**

**17 July to 21 July 2020**

**Host**

Linda G. Jones, Vice-President of the IMSSS

**Organizing Committee:**

Linda G. Jones (Pompeu Fabra University)

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The past few decades have witnessed an extraordinary boom in the scholarship on inter-religious conversion. The old dichotomous models that privileged either the inner, subjective, affective, or psychological experience of the individual convert or the social, institutional, or ritual aspects of religious conversion have given way to more nuanced approaches that recognize not only that narratives of the experiences of individual converts must be historically and socially contextualized, but also that they play ideological and symbolic roles within society (Szpiech, 2013). Ideally, sociological and biographical or psychological perspectives should be combined since no one approach or discipline alone suffices to comprehend fully the phenomenon of conversion (Jindra, 2014). Conversion studies scholars have increasingly moved toward introducing comparative and global perspectives, acknowledging that the processes, experiences, and contributing factors of conversion differ from one religion to another, change over time or in response to inter-religious interactions, and are inflected by other factors such as gender, ethnicity, or social status (Fox & Yisraeli, 2017; Jindra, 2014; Rambo & Fardahian, 2014; Kimber Buell, 2005; Hames, 1995). Traditional images of passive converts and of conversion as a sudden radical change have given way to considering the convert as an active agent, and conversion as a lengthy process (Rambo & Fardahian, 2014). Finally, new themes have emerged as foci of study: alongside inter-religious conversion, scholars are paying more attention to phenomena such as intra-religious conversion, the intensification of one’s own faith tradition, forms of resistance to religious conversion, “deconversion,” and conversion as a transition from one life passage to another—as opposed to one religious tradition to another.

These advances and new perspectives in conversion studies call for a reconsideration of the role of preachers, preaching tools, and the content and impact of their sermons. The 2020 IMSSS Symposium seeks to contribute to the new trends in conversion studies by adopting a comparative approach exploring the various modalities of conversion, deconversion, and life passages in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. We invite papers that explore medieval and early modern Jewish, Christian, or Muslim preaching and

sermon literature relevant to conversion, as well as other texts reflecting preachers' life choices in relation to existential conversion or passages from one identity or stage of life to another.

Approaching these topics from the perspectives of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim preaching and of sermon literature from the medieval and early modern periods will allow us to illuminate and problematize the changing nature of conversion as an individual and a collective phenomenon. It will also shed light on the homiletic strategies different religious traditions employ to encourage or resist conversion.

We invite papers on the following topics:

- Preachers as agents of conversion or converts as preachers
- Preaching and external conversion (i.e., from one religion to another or from a normative religion to a religion deemed heterodox or heretical)
- Preaching and internal conversions (e.g., from a secular existence to a more profoundly religious one within one's own religious culture; from one group to another within the same religion [e.g., Catholicism to Protestantism; Shi'i to Sunni Islam or vice versa]; from one religious order to another [e.g., from one monastic community to another, from a monastic community to a Mendicant order, or vice versa, etc.]
- Preaching and rites of passage from one existential stage of life or social status to another (e.g., from the single to the married life, from childhood to adult manhood or womanhood, from life to death and the afterlife, etc.)
- Preaching, homiletic tools, and strategies of conversion and proselytization
- Preaching, homiletic tools, and strategies of resistance to conversion and proselytization, or as a motivator of "deconversion"
- Reception of and reactions to conversion preaching and proselytization campaigns
- Preaching, conversion, and gender (e.g., distinctions in conversion and proselytizing strategies when targeting men or women; gendered responses to conversion preaching)

The symposium will take place at the Dominican Casa de Espiritualidad y Ejercicios de la Virgen del Camino in León. The Dominican presence on that site dates to the 13<sup>th</sup> century and it is located on the historic pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to present papers in English or French. Papers delivered in Spanish must have an accompanying PowerPoint presentation in English or French. Please send a paper title, an abstract of 300 words, and an abbreviated CV in English, French, or Spanish to the Organizing Committee at [imsss-2020@upf.edu](mailto:imsss-2020@upf.edu) by September 30, 2019. Applicants will be notified by November 15, 2019. A small number of bursaries will be available for students and young scholars. The Call for bursaries will be published shortly.