

RELIGION

in Peace and Conflict

Master
Programme

Alumni Newsletter Spring 2023

Short News

Did you take a chance to return to your alma mater for the **Faculty's first Alumni Day on May 12?** In the beautiful Humanistiska teatern, the dean and department head welcomed the audience. Between lively coffee breaks, mingles, and dinner, where old friends and new friends and potential colleagues could be met, there were presentations of current faculty programs, courses and ongoing research, a tour of the campus, popular science lectures, and much more!

Alumni Day



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Alumni association

If you were unable to attend the alumni day, you can still sign up for the Theology Department's **alumni network** here.

If you are already registered to an alumni association at UU, you simply need to:

1. log in to alumnatverk.uu.se/profile
2. click on the tab "Alumni associations"
3. click on the button "+Apply to join associations"
4. Select "Humanities and Social Sciences".
5. click on the plus at "Alumni: Department of Theology"
6. scroll to the bottom and click on "Save"
7. Your application to the association is now complete.

Awards to two teachers

Brian Palmer Awarded

Brian Palmer was awarded honorary mention by Human Rights Committee in memory of rector Martin H:son Holmdahl **for his unique pedagogical ability** to explain "the importance of civil courage to generations of students".



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Maria Klingenberg Awarded

One of our teachers, Maria Klingenberg, was awarded the 2023 Distinguished Teaching Award in Theology, Humanities and Educational Science.

Alumni News

Our alumna **Linnea Roman** conducted an exhibition on Albino people in Tanzania in Skogås, which she wrote about in her master's thesis, based on seven months of fieldwork in Tanzania.

You can read about it here:

https://www.teol.uu.se/digitalAssets/696/c_696576-l_1-k_uppsalatidningen-om-linnea-roman-1.pdf

Linnea is an artist, advocate for people with albinism, photographer, ethnographer and entrepreneur. She graduated from the RPC in 2022 and currently works for Oxfam Sweden as digital fundraising manager.

You can read much more about her on her web page

[Linnéa Román \(linnearoman.com\)](http://Linnéa Román (linnearoman.com))



Food for Thought

Pausing Democracy in Sweden

A recent study shows that the pandemic and other social issues have prompted Swedes to consider options for pausing democracy. Read more here:

<https://www.uu.se/en/news/article/?id=20676&typ=artikel&lang=en>

Zombie Churches or Living Legacy?

Read the PhD dissertation of Henrik Lindbland about the possible future of churches in Sweden as cultural heritage:

<https://www.uu.se/en/news/article/?id=20472&typ=artikel&lang=en>

Artificial intelligence as a substitute for a life partner

Want to know why humans can't marry Artificial Intelligence?

Read an article by our teacher Oliver Li (in Swedish):

<https://fof.se/artikel/varfor-ska-man-inte-fa-gifta-sig-med-en-ai/>

Directions of the Muslim world

Professor of Islamic theology and philosophy at the Department of Theology Mohammad Fazlhashemi, answers the question Where is the Muslim world heading? (in Swedish):

<https://www.uu.se/nyheter/artikel/?id=20500&typ=artikel&lang=sv>

Events

Climate Existence Conference 2023 in Sigtuna (Sweden), August 16-18

CEMUS and the Sigtuna Foundation invite you to join them for an exciting ClimateExistence conference. It will be a meeting place between artists, activists, academics, faith practitioners and anyone interested in the existential aspects of climate.

<http://www.climateexistence.se>

Culture Night in the Botanical Garden Uppsala, September 9

The Botanical Garden provides an ambient setting for moving meditation, Japanese culture and martial arts, classical music, and a traditional fire show. Explore the Tropical Greenhouse and hear the frogs sing. If you are lucky, the giant water lily will show you its flower.

www.kulturnatten uppsala.se

Lecturer's Corner

Getting to know our Teachers

Meeting one of our professors, **Andreas Önver Cetrez!** You can read more about his research here <https://www.katalog.uu.se/profile/?id=N96-5719>

As a professor in the psychology of religion, could you share with us your path from a master's degree in the social sciences of religion to this interesting field? Why and how did you choose this path?

As many students during the 90s, I was fascinated by the courses of Professor Owe Wikström, mainly the psychology in the writings of Dostoyevsky, as well as the critical theory and ritual studies teaching by Professor Valerie DeMarinis. Starting with the theoretical knowledge I gained through their courses, I also

noticed the focus and explanations were very much limited to mainstream or monocultural cases. Not surprisingly, with my own background, I tried to bring in experiences of minority populations with migration background, which at that time was limited to issues of acculturation or integration. Using theoretical perspectives from object relations theory, meaning-making and ritualization, I wanted to understand ethnic and religious minorities in their migration experiences.

One of your research interests includes the Psychology of Religion in Peace and Conflict, could you explain in a few words what this field studies and how relevant it is to our students today and those who may decide to choose this path in the future?

Peace and conflict in religion are two sides of the same coin, where religiosity is being studied and understood in different cases, times, and contexts. The psychology of religion has approached this field by using classical theories to understand contemporary events of violence. It has been either using Freudian understanding of human nature as both constructive and destructive, terror management theory, deprivation theory, individual characteristics, or the need of authentic identity, always adding with cultural context to understand religiosity and violence.

Thus, it is a topic always present and relevant, as **human nature always seeks both sides** of religiosity.

In 2007-2008 you were the coordinator of the master's programme "Religion in Conflict and Reconciliation". Does that programme have any connection with the current RPC? If yes, why did it change and what was changed? If not, do you know what happened to that programme after your coordination? Religion in Peace and Conflict" and "Religion in Conflict and Reconciliation" - what is the main difference between the two programmes?

Yes, I started this as a young scholar, with some senior professors at the faculty. Initially, the program brought a strong part of its content from the psychology of religion and theology. But, as the interest in this topic grew, we also brought in



perspectives, tools and cases from other disciplines. With new teachers adding to the program, it grew and expanded with many new topics and courses. I think the differences in the programmes reflect different focus and interests, at times being the two sides of religion – peace and conflict, or peace and violence – and at times also paying attention to the post-conflict situation, that of reconciliation. Thus, I believe the **programme needs to be flexible and open for changes and interests in society.**

What do you currently teach at the RPC and what is your opinion of distance learning? Is it the future of education or one of the options available?

During the last years, my teaching in RPC has been limited to theories and methods from behavioral sciences and some thesis supervising. This is mainly because I have been occupied with other research projects, mainly international projects on migration and resilience. I believe distance learning is as good as any other teaching and opens up opportunities for many students who work and study under different conditions. I believe there is much to gain of it also in the future, but I also believe opportunities to meet is fruitful and beneficial.

You have a long list of publications, you teach a lot and work on different projects in different roles. Good time management skills should not be the only explanation for such productivity 😊 What is the secret to finding time for all your activities and succeeding?

Collaboration with scholars from different disciplines is probably one of the secrets. That way we add with new knowledge to the old problems. We also learn from each other in a practical and constructive way.

A second one, is perhaps **finding meaning in what I do.** The topic of conflict and peace or reconciliation has always interested me on a personal level. Having experience of minority background, these processes have always been at the foreground and characteristic of those practices I have faced. Thus, finding a personal and meaningful approach to a topic helps one also developing the academic skills and results.

Summer is approaching, and with it a time for reading something really interesting. Do you have a good book in mind that you would recommend reading this summer?

There are so many books to be read, and as an academic I feel time is never enough, to also read those books that are more fictional. But, one book I hold in my hand is “Who Gets Believed? – When the Truth Isn’t Enough” by Dina Nayeri. The book consists of stories by refugees who are not believed, who are discredited, or being unjustly treated, just because the way they tell their stories are different from the mainstream way of telling one’s story. These examples are presented and interwoven with the author’s own experiences as a refugee and researcher.

How do you like to spend your summer holidays apart from reading good books?

I don’t really read so much summer time. One book, but no more. I spend more time with my children - playing. I learn a lot from their way of seeing things, which is both simple and straightforward, but also challenging and complex. And as they grow, these dynamics change. Just, as with religiosity, peace, and conflict 😊

Meeting our Alumni

RPC as lifelong learning with Chrysi

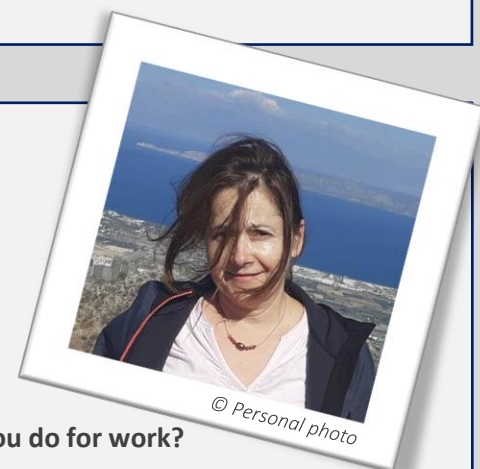
Today we meet Chrysi Strulia, an English literature and language teacher from Greece, who graduated from RPC in 2020 at the height of the pandemic and wrote her master's thesis on Religious and spiritual resources as coping strategies of Greeks with the threat of a pandemic during Easter 2020

Thank you for taking the time to talk to us, Chrysi! Before the programme, what did you do for work?

I have always been an English teacher, with some very brief intervals when I was younger I did other jobs. But my main job is as an English teacher. When I started the programme, I was already a pensioner. And at the same time I was working as a tutor.

Why did you choose this programme? What was the reason for choosing RPC and becoming interested in religious issues?

I thought there was something here for me, something that moved me. And when I was searching for Masters programmes online, I saw Religion in Peace and Conflict, it was a click, and I thought, “**This is meant for me!**”



Did the programme meet your expectations?

When I got there [campus week], I was impressed by Brian Palmer, his personality [smiles and thinks for a moment I see the point of including this nonverbal part, but possibly it will look odd since it is the only one?]. When I met him in person in Uppsala I was impressed by his personality, his knowledge, his academic professionalism, his eloquence, his ability to communicate with us. I will always remember the walk around the monuments and Brian telling us the stories relating to them. But I also had a fear that everyone was younger than me! People were from all over Europe, a few people from the USA, and there was fear, what am I doing here? But all of you, all the teachers, the professors we met during that week, I was struck by your professionalism. And I don't want to flatter you or anyone else. But I was really struck by the degree of professionalism of the academics. When the programme started, **I was thrilled that creative writing was involved**. I had joined a creative writing course in the past and enjoyed every moment. In fact, it was a bit like psychotherapy. So the fact that the Master's program embedded creative writing meant so much to me and I was so impressed. It was such a surprise to me. I mean, those Brian Palmer's assignments, that was the best surprise ever, I was speechless! I'm very grateful to Brian Palmer for giving us the opportunity to get involved in it.

Were there any difficulties in the programme?

I have encountered a lot of difficulties because I am not good at theory. This was the most difficult part for me. When we did assignments where we had to put together a theoretical framework or comment on fellow students' theory choice, I wasn't very good at it. So that was a problem for me. Yet, it has been a great learning experience with different people from different countries, I can see the difference in education systems, even when we talk about 'Europe' it's still quite different!

Based on your experience of moving from English literature and language to RPC, what do you think of your experience?

It was somewhat different in the sense that there were very different courses, which also differed one from the other. So I would say that this programme is unique because the subjects vary a lot, they were based on sociology, anthropology and research into world problems.

Do you remember a course or something that you found most interesting and exciting and something that you still remember?

I think the most exciting course for me was Brian Palmer's assignment to interview the guy, the journalist who covered the Watergate scandal. I can't remember his name. Another assignment I remember very well was done by Håkan Bengtsson on India. I knew nothing about India. I started reading about it and realised I knew so little! And that became a real hindrance for me. That I didn't know, wasn't aware of what was going on politically in those countries. So I had to start from scratch. You know what I mean? But at the same time, that's the purpose of education. Right? Then you come in and really learn something. It gives you a lot, I'd say, **broadens your horizons**.

You were among those who wrote your thesis during the pandemic lockdown and it was a topic at COVID. So, speaking of your topic, how did the pandemic affect the religious life of the Greeks?

To start with, I would like to say how much I regret not including interviews in my thesis, like I had originally planned. No doubt it would have taken so much longer to accomplish and would have meant a great deal more work on my part, still, I'd have gained a lot more. Coming back to your question, yes, I think that Greeks, here I mean those who are not very religious, who didn't go to Mass every Sunday, such people, I think, are drawn away from church. I hear a lot of people say, "I feel much better in a little chapel in the countryside where I can go and pray. Even if there is no church service there, I want to go there and pray alone or maybe with other people, and I don't have to attend a service at church, on Sundays or on religious holidays." This is my impression, but I don't know how accurate it can be.

The pandemic has also brought us a new habit of being online more often, so now it's even easier for us to stay in touch with anyone around the world. Do you keep in touch with anyone from the programme or not so much?

We exchange some messages via Messenger [on Facebook] with a colleague. All my fellow students have WhatsApp, but I don't use it here in Greece. When I found most of them on Facebook, I deleted the WhatsApp we used during the campus week. Perhaps I should create an account again as I want to stay in touch with them!

Thank you Chrissy! Since it's summer and time to read good books! Do you have any good books in mind that you recommend that we read over the summer?

One book that truly left its mark on me was "Creatures of a Day" by American psychotherapist Irving Yalom. I would describe it as man's struggle to come to terms with the loss of loved ones and our perpetual effort to make our life meaningful despite it. Yalom's honesty, boldness and directness has always struck me, he thinks nothing of exposing himself to the reader and I love it.

Would you like to share your story as an RPC alumni? Get in touch with us!

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