

A Mosaic of Margins: Ethnicity, Religion and Belonging

(Sofia, Plovdiv, Rhodopa Mountains, Bulgaria)

July 4-July 18th, 2011

The International Summer School on Religion and Public Life (ISSRPL) is a unique, global initiative providing an annual international, inter-religious summer school of approximately **two weeks**

. Each year the school explores critical issues around religion and society that impact the nature of community. It combines

pluralistic perspectives on religious thought with social scientific research on tolerance, civil society and an open, dialogic, approach to pedagogic practice.

The 2011 ISSRPL will be centered in Bulgaria and devoted to the different types of margins that we encounter in our social life. We will look at **people, places, families, ethnicities, religions and practices,**

all from the perspective of our received notions of society's centers and its margins. Together we shall explore issues of poverty and its role in the marginalization of certain populations. Through our unique combination of lectures and more experiential learning, we shall also study the situation of the Roma in the areas where we visit, as well

as of the Bulgarian Pomaks (ethnic Bulgarians who converted to Islam during the Ottoman period) and of both traditional and emergent Muslim communities (and identities) in Bulgaria.

The international nature of our group and pedagogy will provide a crucial comparative perspective on these issues and their attendant challenges.

By approaching the problem of belonging through society's most marginal sectors, we hope to gain new understandings into the changing nature of politics, of religious and ethnic identities and of the terms of civic commitment and belonging. Twenty years after the end of communism the boundaries of society have entered into a state of seemingly permanent flux and reconfiguration with ethnic and religious groups playing new and important roles in setting social agendas and defining social desiderata. The historical role of the Orthodox Church in the formation of Bulgarian national identity, has for example taken on a new saliency and importance, playing out in multiple (and highly contested) political forms. Membership in (and indeed the expansion of) the EU has also played a critical role in redefining both centers and peripheries, margins and their boundaries, in multiple realms; political, social, religious, ideological, economic, etc. and these too will serve as an important locus of our study and time together.

Our local hosts in Bulgaria for the 2010 program are: the [Plovdiv University](#) "Paisii Hilendarski", Association on Refugees and Migrants, etc.

As in the past, the ISSRPL combines pluralistic perspectives on religious thought with social scientific research on tolerance, civil society and an open, dialogic, approach to pedagogic practice. Its goal is to transform both the theoretical models and concrete practices through which religious orientations and secular models of politics and society engage one another. Its guiding principle is that in order to build relations of tolerance and understanding between groups and to shape a civil society, the perceived barrier between secular, modern and more traditional religious values must be broken down. Political orientations and social practices must be developed that will draw on both religious traditions and the insights of secular modernity in new and creative ways. The program is centered on three academic courses together with intense processes of group building and the construction of working relationships across religious and ethnic identities. The didactic goals of the conference are social as well as cognitive. It is expected that, as a result of attendance at the school, fellows develop and operationalize programs in their home countries.

We look forward to a small but select group of international fellows who may include, religious elites, NGO leaders, school teachers, major actors in the non-profit and third-sectors, as well as political leaders and members of the business communities of different countries. Fellows will be joined by an international faculty and so comprise a cohort from the Americas, the Balkans, Central and Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa, Western Europe and elsewhere. The success of the school has always depended on the wide range of people, commitments and views presented. It is through the intense encounter with the truly different that we are forced to rethink our fundamental assessments and so break-through to new ways of knowing, thinking, feeling, and hence, acting.

Please join the summer school.

The deadline for receiving applications is **25 March 2011**.

HOW TO APPLY

All applications should be sent electronically as a Word document to the Admissions Office at admissions@issrpl.org.

International summer school on religion and public life

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Any questions or problems should also be directed to
admissions@issrpl.org.

Documents to Be Attached:

Curriculum Vitae

Short Essay

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