

RELIGION AND MEDICINE:
HEALING THE BODY AND SOUL FROM THE MIDDLE AGES TO THE MODERN
DAY

Birkbeck, University of London, 15-16 July 2016

Convenors: Katherine Harvey, John Henderson and Carmen Mangion

In the contemporary Western world, religion and medicine are increasingly separated, but through much of history they have been closely interrelated. This relationship has been characterised by some conflict, but also by a great deal of cooperation. Religious perspectives have informed both the understanding of and approaches to health and sickness, whilst religious personnel have frequently been at the forefront of medical provision. Religious organisations were, moreover, often at the heart of the response to medical emergencies, and provided key healing environments, such as hospitals and pilgrimage sites.

This conference will explore the relationship between religion and medicine in the historic past, ranging over a long chronological framework and a wide geographical span. The conference focus will be primarily historical, and we welcome contributions which take an interdisciplinary approach to this topic.

Four main themes will provide the focus of the conference. The sub-themes are not prescriptive, but are suggested as potential subjects for consideration:

1. Healing the Body and Healing the Soul

- Medical traditions: the non-natural environment and the ‘Passions of the Soul’.
- Religious traditions (for example, the Church Fathers, sermons and devotional literature).

2. The Religious and Medicine

- Medical knowledge and practice of religious personnel, including secular and regular clergy.
- Nurses and nursing.
- Medical practitioners, religious authorities and the regulation of medical activity and practice.

3. Religious Responses

- Religious responses to epidemics, from leprosy to plague to pox and cholera.
- Medical missions in Europe and the wider world.
- Religion, humanitarianism and medical care.

4. Healing Environments and Religion

- Religious healing/ miracles/ pilgrimage.
- Institutional medical care (including hospitals, dispensaries and convalescent homes).

Proposals, consisting of a paper abstract (no more than 300 words) and a short biography (no more than 400 words), should be submitted to religionandmedicineconference@gmail.com by 30 October 2015. We will respond to proposals by early December.