



# CALL FOR PAPERS: GROTIUS AND TOLERATION

**International Conference 17-18 June 2027**  
University of Zürich, Switzerland

*You are kindly invited to participate in a two-day conference on Hugo Grotius and religious toleration, organized by the University of Zürich and the Grotiana Foundation*

## CONFERENCE THEME

The Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) is widely regarded as a pioneer of religious toleration. Many readers have recognized in his writings a principled defense of the freedom of conscience and the rights of religious minorities. Moreover, as a policy-maker, he personally contributed to shaping the relatively tolerant policies of the Dutch Republic with regard to Christian and non-Christian minorities such as Jews. In Grotius's view, all human beings were endowed with certain natural rights, which had to be respected, regardless of religious differences. As the Dutch jurist explained, forcing non-Christians to accept the Christian religion was 'judged as improper and unlawful by all people with common sense, as religion should not be enforced.'<sup>1</sup> However, even for Grotius, there were certain limitations to religious toleration. For instance, Christians were not allowed to subject themselves to the authority of non-Christians, as it could lead to apostasy. Moreover, to protect the unity of the Christian state and religion, members of different Christian denominations (e.g., Calvinists and Arminians) could be forced to go to the same churches and accept a number of principal points as necessary for salvation. As Grotius emphasized, religious toleration had to be legally regulated: if necessary, it could even be enforced by the state.

The proposed conference will explore Grotius's ideas about religious toleration and its limitations. Is the general image of Grotius as a pioneer of religious toleration justified? What does toleration mean in Grotius's work and how did his ideas change over time? How can the 'toleration' that Grotius speaks of be described? How does it relate to the idea of otherness? Does he have more than 'Duldungstoleranz' in mind? Does he advocate a conception of toleration aimed at mere coexistence, or at genuine respect for different religious beliefs? And what limitations to religious toleration does Grotius propose to protect the unity of the Christian state and religion?

Grotius was not the first who proposed the distinction between *fundamentalia* and *adiaphora*, often identified as his concept of toleration. In the pamphlettenstrijd ('war of pamphlets', 1609-1621) 'peace' appeared often in the headlines and the idea that there were common concepts that were sufficient for salvation was repeatedly rejected. What exactly was Grotius's contribution to these

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<sup>1</sup> Hugo Grotius, *Remonstrantie of 1615: Facsimile, Transliteration, Modern Translations and Analysis*, ed. David Kromhout and Adri Offenbergh, fol. 10r, pp. 29-94, trans., p. 204.

debates? To what extent were his views on religious toleration informed by a conversionalist logic, aimed at the voluntary conversion of non-Christians, other-Christians or other-reformed Christians to the 'true faith'? Were his views on toleration indeed 'principled,' or were they primarily political, and, for instance, informed by debates on Reason of State? And what impact did his views have on religious practices and policies in the Dutch Republic? Is there a connection between the Republic's relatively tolerant policies and Dutch imperial expansion in Asia and the East Indies? For instance, how do Grotius's proposals with regard to the natural rights of religious minorities in the Dutch Republic (e.g., Jews) relate to his ideas about the rights of non-Christian populations in colonial contexts (e.g., Muslims and 'pagans')?

Apart from the questions mentioned above, we would also welcome proposals on relevant still unexplored materials from the remonstrant/contra-remonstrant controversy. We also invite papers on the context which produced Grotius's ideas on religious toleration, the reception of his ideas by other writers (e.g., in later Arminian writings and by theorists such as Barlaeus, Jean Le Clerc, Locke or Bayle), the relation between the church and the state in Grotius's work, as well as the connection between his theoretical ideas on religious toleration and existing practices, both in the Dutch Republic itself and in colonial contexts.

## INVITATION TO PARTICIPANTS

Those interested to present a paper are kindly invited to send in an abstract of 250-400 words and a short cv of max. 100 words to the conveners, Silke-Petra Bergjan ([bergjan@theol.uzh.ch](mailto:bergjan@theol.uzh.ch)) and Marc de Wilde ([m.dewilde@uva.nl](mailto:m.dewilde@uva.nl)), by 1 June 2026. Please also indicate your affiliation.

Proposals will be selected on the basis of the quality of abstracts and the fit with the program.

The conference will take place in person without online presentations. Participants are thus expected to present their papers on location.

The organization will pay for local costs (contingent on funding) and travel expenses (contingent on funding).

