


Contesting Hopes: *Navigating between Despair and Optimism in Contexts of Crisis*

CALL FOR PAPERS



Evangelische Theologische
Faculteit, Leuven &
Protestantse Theologische
Universiteit, Utrecht

Leuven (Belgium),
October 29-30, 2026

Hope is a crucial driving force in human life and provides resources we need to cope with crises. It is precisely in adversity that a longing for a better situation often grows, such as restoration of the old or transformation into something new.

This conference focuses on the role of hope in contexts of crisis, in particular those in agriculture and healthcare. Hope in these external contexts is often contested: farmers may hope for continuation of their farm, whereas others living in the same area may hope for a steep reduction in industrial agriculture. But the contested nature of hope is also internal to the individual. A patient facing a terminal

disease, for example, can hope simultaneously for healing, and for good opportunities of closure. These examples show that contested hope is vulnerable, challenged by our ambivalence, other people and external circumstances.

Furthermore, hope may also be contesting, as it energizes people to challenge the status quo. Hope may empower them to seek new solutions to seemingly hopeless situations.

CONFERENCE

On October 29-30, 2026, the Institute of Leadership and Social Ethics (ILSE), of the Evangelische Theologische Faculteit, Leuven (Belgium), together with the Protestant Theological University, Utrecht (The Netherlands) will organize an international, academic conference addressing this theme and focusing on contesting hopes in contexts of crisis (such as healthcare and agriculture).

Leading questions are what role hope, hopelessness, and despair play at 1) the sociopolitical level, 2) the meso-level of communities and groups, and 3) the individual level.

Related questions include:

- How does hope develop over time?
- What are helpful and hindering functions of hope?
- How can one deal well with hopelessness and despair?
- What strategies of hope does one adopt?
- How do people maintain hope, for example, or how and when do they adjust it?
- To what extent is guidance needed, for example, from spiritual caregivers or other professionals, and how should such guidance look?

In light of these questions, the conference encourages presentations from various interdisciplinary perspectives. This exchange will be facilitated by keynote lectures that present distinct perspectives on them.



This conference is situated within the research project 'Contesting Hopes', which is carried out by the Evangelische Theologische Faculteit, Leuven and the Protestantse Theologische Universiteit and is fully funded by stichting Paradosis

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS



Akiba J. Lerner (Ph.D.) is Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Santa Clara University where he teaches on Jewish thought and political philosophy. He is the author of *Redemptive Hope: From the Age of Enlightenment to the Age of Obama* (Fordham University Press, 2015); he also wrote the chapter "Hope in Judaism" in *The Oxford Compendium of Hope* (Oxford University Press, 2025).



Wendy Duggleby (Ph.D.) is Professor Emerita in the Faculty of Nursing at the University of Alberta, where she held an endowed research Chair in aging and quality of life and various leadership positions. Wendy has a program of hope research for over 20 years called "Living with Hope." She and her research teams have developed and evaluated several interventions to foster hope and quality of life in older persons and their family caregivers with national and provincial funding support.



elin kelsey (Ph.D.) is an Adjunct Faculty Member of the University of Victoria School of Environmental Studies and at Western Washington University's School of Environment. She is a recognized thought leader for evidence-based hope and climate justice solutions movement and collaborates on hope research and communication projects in Near East South Asia, the Nordic and Oceania regions, and North America. She is the author of *Hope Matters: Why Changing the Way We Think Is Critical to Solving the Environmental Crisis* (Greystone Books, 2020). Her newest book, *How to Be Hopeful: Empowering Practices to Overcome Despair and Act for Climate Justice* (Greystone Books, 2025). Passionate about bringing timely evidence of hope and multispecies resilience to the public, she is a popular keynote speaker, podcaster, filmmaker, and award-winning children's book author.



Avivit Cherrington (Ph.D.) is an educational psychologist with expertise in community development and system-level programs for mental health and well-being. She has been a Research Associate with Nelson Mandela University since 2020, supervising postgraduate students aligned with the Chair for Critical Studies in Higher Education Transformation (CriSHET). She was senior lecturer and BEdHonours Programme Co-ordinator at School of Education, STADIO Private Higher Education and consults with various private education institutions on curriculum design and research capacity development. Her research focuses on exploring and fostering wellbeing and hope on a relational and social level, through an Afrocentric lens, to better understand how to catalyze meaningful personal development and sustainable social change. Having served two consecutive terms as Chair of the Community and Social Psychology (CaSP) Division, she is currently Deputy-Chair.

DATE & LOCATION

The conference will be held on 29-30 October, 2026 at the Evangelische Theologische Faculteit, Sint-Jansbergsesteenweg 95, 3001 Leuven, Belgium.

Registration information will soon be available on the ILSE website www.etf-ilse.org.

ABSTRACTS AND DEADLINE

Scholars are invited to submit an abstract for a paper that falls within the scope of the conference. Abstracts may be structured (Introduction—Method—Results—Discussion) or unstructured and should be a maximum of 500 words. Each abstract will be double blind peer reviewed by two experts. Abstracts are to be submitted by email to info@etf-ilse.org.

Please attach two separate Word documents to your email:

- *Document 1:* Your paper proposal (max. 500 words). In this document, information identifying the author (references, etc.) should be removed.
- *Document 2:* Your last name, first name, email address, institutional address, the title of your abstract, and a short CV, in which your expertise on hope becomes visible (maximum 350 words).

Extended deadline: March 31, 2026.

Expect to receive a response by April 15, 2026 at the latest.

