



Religion and Society Research Cluster (WSU)
and
Religious Studies (UQ)
Call for contributors

(Dis)comfort in religious and spiritual places and practices

Wednesday 24 June 2026 (time TBC AEST) | Symposium | Online

Religious and spiritual practices have been historically understood as providing moral comfort. In fact, for Durkheim, comfort is the express purpose of social participation in religious rites. [Sara Ahmed](#) (2014, p.148) describes comfort as a sense of ‘fit’ between the body and its surroundings, that is, “To be comfortable is to be so at ease with one’s environment that it is hard to distinguish where one’s body ends and the world begins”. Conversely, discomfort may come from feeling dis-ease with one’s environment. Certainly, as much as some religious / spiritual communities go to great lengths to create comfortable environments that support belonging, vulnerability and divine connections, the character of many other religious / spiritual rites and practices (such as pilgrimages, fasting and exorcisms) centre around increasing discomfort or even promoting (physical) suffering in the service of piety and/ or spiritual enlightenment.

Moreover, just as religious / spiritual spaces are racialised and classed, so too are experiences of (dis)comfort withing these spaces. Socially marginalised people, such as those who are negatively racialised ([Weng et al](#) 2021, [Chui et al](#) 2020) or those who identify as LGBTQ+ ([Jennings](#) 2023; [Dalton](#) 2023; [Baird et al](#) 2024) can experience discomfort, even harm, in spaces of faith where other’s comfort is prioritised, catered to, or sanctified. Indeed, within religious and spiritual places multifaceted experiences of (dis)comfort are calibrated, embraced, resisted, negotiated, and reimagined.

In this online symposium, we welcome nuanced examinations of (dis)comfort in contemporary religious and spiritual communities.

We are interested in contributions that critically consider:

- How, why and for whom is comfort calibrated in spiritual /religious communities?
- How comfort is materialised, constructed and experienced in places of worship / spiritual engagement?
- How is (dis)comfort experienced physically, emotionally, socially and spiritually in religio-spiritual communities?

- What role do class, gender, race, sexuality, and ability play in experiencing (dis)comfort in religious and spiritual communities?
- How are relationships between religion and non-religion/secularism structured by feelings of (dis)comfort?
- How do researchers navigate personal experiences of comfort and discomfort when conducting research with religious /spiritual communities?

Timeline

April	Circulating call for contributors
10 May	Abstracts due
15 May	Presenters notified
1 Jun	Program finalised
24 Jun	Symposium (online)

Abstracts

We are seeking contributions from scholars across the humanities or social sciences that reflect on (dis)comfort in religious / spiritual places or practices.

Please send an **abstract** (max 250 words), name, affiliation, and **short bio** (max 50 words) to j.cuperus@uq.edu.au before **10 May 2026**.

Convenors: Dr Jerrold Cuperus (University of Queensland) & Dr Kathleen Openshaw (Western Sydney University)

Contact:

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