

Faith, spirituality and art: new perspectives for the twenty-first century?

Context

One of the stated aims of the European Federation of Associations and Centres of Irish Studies (EFACIS) is to enable Irish writers and artists to interact with the rest of Europe and beyond. In [Kaleidoscope 1](#) and [Kaleidoscope 2](#) we presented the ideas of both established and emerging Irish authors on (1) the *craft of writing fiction* and (2) *what Europe means to Ireland*. In this third instalment of Kaleidoscope, we explore views on *spirituality and art*, again from a range of writers from across the island of Ireland and its diaspora. EFACIS combines creative work with research and dissemination. As the website shows, its projects are interlinked. Authors who participate in a Kaleidoscope project are discussed in the Book Club, interviewed in the Irish Itinerary Podcast or travel via the Irish Itinerary (physically or digitally), reaching audiences in over 60 European cities (with its website contents read in all continents). As with the previous two Kaleidoscope projects we hope that this will extend the reach of (Northern) Irish writers and stimulate dialogues with other cultures.¹

Project content

“Faith, spirituality and art: new perspectives for the 21st century?”

It is striking how often contemporary Irish authors refer to religion as being part and parcel of the culture in which they grew up. So while many religious institutions, in (Northern)Ireland and elsewhere, have lost much of their credibility, what other disciplines or arts can help to negotiate the more invisible aspects of our humanity? A quarter of the way into the 21st century seems a good time to look back on the rich variety of ways in which religion has shaped the emotions and ideas of people in Ireland in the last century and in this one, but also to look forward to new approaches to and new perspectives on the sacred and/or the unconscious. Elements from both ancient traditions and many different cultures may offer interesting new ways of exploring the unknown self and building a new sense of community.

You may be inspired by one or more of the following questions, or you may want to take a different approach.

- What does religion (or faith) mean to you, personally?
- How did religion/faith play a role in your childhood? What effect did religious stories, images, objects or rituals have on you? How would you articulate it now?
- Have you had spiritual experiences/ experiences of the numinous? In art, nature, elsewhere?
- Is the climate crisis changing our life and belief systems, and if so, how?

¹ The Kaleidoscope projects remain available on the EFACIS website and have inspired a wide range of people. Some of the texts now feature on the Higher Level Leaving Certificate in Irish schools; some elicited reactions from major European authors (like Claudio Magris, Georgi Gospodinov and others) and all are widely used in book clubs and cultural and educational centres throughout Europe and beyond. The Kaleidoscope website is visited by anyone who wants to see what is new in Ireland, a country of which we appreciate the multifarious faiths, cultures, languages and nationalities.

- Faith, spirituality and art could be seen in contrast with “mihilism” (a term used to indicate a combination of egocentrism and a lack of curiosity about the unknown which is reduced to nothing/nihilism). What can art and/or spirituality do in times of increasing individualism, narcissism and anxiety?
- Which possibilities/dangers do social media bring, or AI, in matters of spirituality or art (authenticity)?
- Were/Are there literary stories, poems, films, art works ...which drastically shifted your perspective?
- At certain points in European history spirituality was equated with psychology, but as authors can, thanks to their well-honed skills with language, be more articulate and suggestive about emotions, can literary language have a function here?
- Traditionally there are three “royal ways” to touch on the unconscious: dreaming (or associative thought/talk), prayer and humour. Is/are any of these important to you?
- Do terms like “forgiveness”, “redemption”, “grace”, “the afterlife” still work for you in any way?

Practical matters

The texts are ideally **between 1500-3000 words**. The form is entirely open: a retelling of an existing text (Old or New Testament, Upanishads, other myths...), a memoir-like scene from childhood, an essay, an analysis of a work of art, a song, a poem, a short story, a drawing or a combination of these, a fictional letter or an interview ...

Timeline:

- invitations to potential participants are sent out
- **Please send a letter of intent before 20 December 2025** at the latest
- **31 January 2026**: deadline for submissions (tbd)
- **March 2026**: publication on the website
- **Mid-2026**: launches in Belfast & Brussels; publication as an e-book

Kaleidoscope 3 is a partnership between EFACIS and the Seamus Heaney Centre. The project will be managed by the EFACIS coordinator Sien Deltour and by Hedwig Schwall who also joined forces in the two previous projects. The fee is 200 EUR.

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We will be delighted if you want to participate. If you have further questions, let us know: Hedwig.schwall@kuleuven.be and Sien Deltour at efaciscoord@efacis.eu