

UNIVERSITY OF
LUCERNE

FACULTY OF THEOLOGY

PROFESSORSHIP FOR
PASTORAL THEOLOGY

INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH COLLOQUIUM
FOR EARLY-CAREER RESEARCHERS

CONSTRUCTIVE THEOLOGY & QUEERING THEOLOGY

WITH PROF. DR.
SUSANNAH CORNWALL

FRIDAY, 19 JUNE 2026
ONLINE



Register here



INVITATION

We warmly invite early career researchers to join an international colloquium with **Prof. Dr. Susannah Cornwall**, focusing on **Constructive Theology** and its intersections with **Queering Theology**. The colloquium provides a collegial and supportive environment to discuss current theological questions, explore innovative approaches, and broaden international academic networks. It aims to offer space for:

- networking and exchange with researchers from diverse contexts
- presenting research and receiving constructive, academically grounded feedback
- deepening understanding of Constructive Theology and Queering Theology as dynamic fields of inquiry

PROGRAM

The colloquium will take place online via Zoom.

THURSDAY, 18 JUNE 2026, 16:00 – 18:00

Optional collective reading course led by Mara Klein

FRIDAY, 19 JUNE 2026, 09:00 – 17:30

09:00 Welcome

Part 1: Constructive Theology & Queering Theology

What characterizes constructive theological thinking? We will explore the specific approaches and methodologies that define constructive theologies

09:30 Keynote Susannah Cornwall

10:00 Discussion

11:00 Break

Part 2: Work on specific research projects

How can we understand “queer” as a lens for theological inquiry? We will examine concrete examples to define what constitutes queer thinking in interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary contexts, and explore the forms it can take in research practice.

11:20 Presentation 1

11:45 Feedback & Discussion

12:30 Lunch Break

13:30 Recap morning session

13:45 Presentation 2

14:10 Feedback & Discussion

14:55 Break

15:15 Presentation 3

15:40 Feedback & Discussion

16:25 Break

16:40 Synthesis and Conclusions

17:30 End

PARTICIPATION

The ecumenical colloquium is open to scholars already working on queer theological topics as well as those interested in the potential of constructive theology. Participation is limited to 15 participants. You may participate with or without a presentation.

The colloquium will be held in English. Presentations may be given in German, provided an English script is submitted in advance.

REGISTRATION

Please register by **18 May 2026** via our [Registration Form](#). As part of the registration, we kindly ask you to submit a brief description of your research interests and current projects to help us shape the program.

OPTIONAL COLLECTIVE READING COURSE

On the evening before the colloquium, an optional Collective Reading Course led by Mara Klein will take place. The session is designed to:

- introduce the thematic field
- foster ease with reading and speaking in English
- generate shared questions for the colloquium

All texts will be sent to participants in advance.

PRESENTATIONS

Each presentation (max. 25 minutes) will be followed by time for collective feedback. These sessions aim to explore how the theoretical content discussed can be applied in practice. They are intended to be valuable not only for presenters but for all participants engaging with the themes.

We look forward to your participation and inspiring discussions with Prof. Dr. Susannah Cornwall and colleagues from different contexts.

PEOPLE INVOLVED

Prof. Dr. Susannah Cornwall: Professor of Constructive Theologies at the University of Exeter, expert and mentor in the colloquium

Mara Elijah Klein, M.Ed.: research assistant and doctoral candidate (University of Münster), Preparation and leading of the Collective Reading Course

Mag.a Stephanie Bayer: research assistant and doctoral candidate (University of Vienna & University of Lucerne), organisation and initiator

CONTACT

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OUTLINE OF TOPICS

In *Constructive Theology and Gender Variance: Transformative Creatures* (2022), Susannah Cornwall, Professor of Constructive Theologies at the University of Exeter, describes humans as transformative beings called to shape their world and traditions. Central to her constructive theology is the conviction that human capacities for change and critical reflection – especially regarding gender, body, and identity – hold theological significance (Cornwall 2023, p. 10).

Cornwall's work is particularly relevant for understanding how constructive theology can reframe traditional theological categories in light of contemporary issues around gender. She argues that constructive theology is well suited to queer concerns because it can “conceive difference and otherness non-sensationally,” grounded in mutual recognition between God and humans and among humans themselves (Cornwall 2023, p. 76). This raises the questions of how “otherness” and “non-sensationally” should be understood, what such recognition entails, and how constructive theologies can offer criteria for engaging queer issues.

To explore this, it is helpful to clarify the concept of constructive theology. Joerg Rieger defines it as a dynamic, open discourse that interacts with other forms of knowledge, including the natural and social sciences (Rieger 2013, p. 483). Constructive theologies (in the plural) examine how doctrines relate to concrete expressions of life (Rieger 2013, p. 484), moving beyond closed systems toward open reflection.

The term has been in use since the 1980s, though it remains less common in German-speaking theology. In the United States, however, several prominent professorships – including Rieger's at Southern Methodist University – identify with constructive theology. The term is closely linked to the American Workgroup on Constructive Theology, founded in 1975 at Vanderbilt University as a center for developing the field (Wyman 2017, p. 312).

Jason A. Wyman argues that the workgroup's history is essential for understanding constructive theology as it developed into an academic category. He emphasizes that it recognizes the discursive role theologians play in shaping Christianity and is interdisciplinary and oriented toward progressive, justice-focused aims (Wyman 2017, p. 312). Rieger likewise stresses justice as a central concern: Constructive theology engages other forms of knowledge in the service of life-and-death questions (Rieger 2012, p. 484). It thus refuses to be merely descriptive; rather, it seeks to imagine life-giving faith for the present (Rieger 2012, p. 485). The Workgroup underscores this existential dimension by noting that religious beliefs can destroy or sustain societies, making theology itself a life-and-death endeavor (Jones & Lakeland 2005, p. 1).

This existential dimension becomes evident in approaches to queer issues. For many queer people, theology is not an abstract matter but affects real experiences of injustice. For example, the Roman Catholic Church often perpetuates structures that harm queer people (Bayer 2025, p. 382). Cornwall therefore insists that constructive theology must incorporate diverse embodied human experiences if it is to be truly formative (Cornwall 2023, p. 10).

Visibility of queer experiences has contributed to a significant rise in theological research on

sexual orientation and gender diversity in German-speaking contexts over the past decade. Much of this work is interdisciplinary and intersectional, aiming to do justice to both the topics and the people involved. In this light, constructive theologies offer promising methodological and thematic synergies, encouraging self-reflection, awareness of positionality, and fresh insights.

Finally, engagement with constructive theologies from English-speaking scholarship is not only theologically enriching; it also offers perspectives on differing academic cultures as U.S. professorships in constructive theology often organize their work around distinct thematic emphases.

Based on these considerations, an international ecumenical research colloquium for early-career researchers is the appropriate format for an initial exchange. Also providing networking opportunities between individual researchers and faculties. We are delighted that Prof. Dr. Susannah Cornwall, Professor of Constructive Theologies at the University of Exeter, will supervise the colloquium as an expert and mentor.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bayer, S. (2025). Seelsorge und Allyship: Lebensrealitäten von trans* Menschen als Anstoß pastoraltheologischer Reflexion. *Wege zum Menschen*, 77(5), 378–393.

Cornwall, S. (2022). *Constructive theology and gender variance: Transformative creatures*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108866828>

Jones, S., & Lakeland, P. (Eds.) (2005). *Constructive theology: A contemporary approach to classical themes*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Rieger, J. (2013). Constructive theology. In A. L. C. Runehov & L. Oviedo (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Sciences and Religions* (pp. 483–486). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-8265-8_263

Wyman, J. A. (2017). Interpreting the history of the Workgroup on Constructive Theology. *Theology Today*, 73(4), 312–324. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040573616669565>