

**The Christian Mystery. Early Christianity and the pagan mystery cults in the work of
Franz Cumont (1868-1947) and in the history of scholarship.**

Ghent, September 13-15, 2013.

The theme of this international conference, hosted by Franz Cumont's alma mater Ghent University, is the way Cumont and his contemporaries conceived the relationship of Early Christianity to the pagan mystery cults. We will also include predecessors and more recent scholarship on this topic. Cumont was a pioneer of the scientific study of the *oriental religions*. Many of his publications (e.g. *The Mysteries of Mithras*, 1900) fuelled the early 20th century debates about Christianity's dependence on the pagan cults through the similarities they suggested between these religious traditions. Cumont expressed his opinion only indirectly and ambiguously, but other scholars have been more explicit in demonstrating or denying such influences.

This conference serves multiple purposes. The first set of aims is to reconstruct, evaluate and contextualize Cumont's views on this much debated topic in early 20th century history of religions, through the reconstruction of his ideas, as well as of those of his contemporaries. We are e.g. thinking of Cumont's long time friend and correspondent Alfred Loisy, but also of comparative historians of religions, belonging to Cumont's network, like Eugène Goblet d'Alviella, Raffaele Pettazzoni, Nicolò Turchi, James George Frazer, Arthur Darby Nock, Salomon Reinach, Prosper Alfaric, Hermann Usener, Richard Reitzenstein, Carl Clemen, ... We also want to include and discuss the different scientific, social, religious and ideological backgrounds of these scholars, so as to create a nuanced synthesis of the factors which could have influenced the different positions in this discussion.

This conference aims at uniting specialists of historiography of religion, whose contributions will together cover various methodological and geographical traditions, so as to come to a broad overview of this issue within the early 20th century history of science.

The **languages** of the conference will be English, French, and German.

Scholars interested in submitting a proposal for a lecture should do so **by March 31st 2013 at the latest**. Proposals of no more than 300 words should be submitted by sending an e-mail to Annelies Lannoy, at the following address: annelies.lannoy@ugent.be. All proposals should be accompanied by a short CV.

Publication of Acts intended