

## Dr Kirk Essary

Director of the ARC Centre for the History of Emotions  
University of Western Australia

### “Erasmus on Emotion Between the Old and New Testaments”

4pm Thursday 18 February (Melbourne)

5am Thursday 18 February (London)

9pm Wednesday 17 February (Los Angeles)

To register: [MEMS.seminar@acu.edu.au](mailto:MEMS.seminar@acu.edu.au)



**Dr Kirk Essary** is Senior Lecturer in History and Classics at the University of Western Australia. Since 2018 he has served as Director of the ARC Centre for the History of Emotions. His research focuses on Christianity in the long sixteenth century, with a specific interest in Christian humanism, the history of biblical interpretation, and the history of emotions. His first book, *Erasmus and Calvin on the Foolishness of God: Reason and Emotion in the Christian Philosophy*, was published in 2017 by the University of Toronto Press. More recently, he co-edited, with Juanita Ruys and Michael Champion, *Before Emotion: The Language of Feeling, 400-1800* (Routledge, 2019). He is currently working on a second monograph tentatively titled, *The Renaissance of Feeling: Emotion in the Age of Erasmus*.

#### Abstract

“The words of the New Testament are better suited than those of the Old to drive away despair and to raise our hopes” (CWE 70, 446). Thus Erasmus of Rotterdam writes in his *De praeparatione ad mortem* of 1534, reflecting on the potential affective divergences of the Old and New Testaments. While not an especially surprising claim given Erasmus’s wider theological proclivities, it raises a few questions that I think are worth considering further. In the quote above, Erasmus implies that the Old and New Testaments *move* readers/hearers differently. What does this mean in the broader context of Erasmus’s affective theology? Does Erasmus’s (admittedly limited) exegetical work on the Old Testament differ from his New Testament exegesis in ways that inform, or are informed by, his understanding of emotions and affectivity? If the New Testament is better suited to drive away despair or give hope, does the Old Testament move any emotions more effectively than the New (e.g., fear of God’s wrath) in ways that are theologically useful for Erasmus? Erasmus was nothing if not a New Testament scholar, and so I hope that considering these questions allows us to see more clearly what role he thought the Old Testament should play, emotionally and otherwise, for Christians. More generally, I will argue that we cannot fully appreciate Erasmus’s biblical theology without understanding the fundamental role emotions play in it.