

Prof. Dr. **William Franke**, Vanderbilt University, USA

William Franke is Professor of Comparative Literature and Religious Studies at Vanderbilt University and Professor of Philosophy and Religions at the University of Macao (2013-16). He is a research fellow of the Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung and has been Fulbright-University of Salzburg Distinguished Chair in Intercultural Theology and Study of Religions. He is named among “arguably the three most distinguished scholars of comparative literature and religion in the world” by Stephen Morgan, *Sacred and the Everyday: Comparative Approaches to Literature, Religious and Secular* (Macao: Orientis Aura, 2021), p. 5. He lectures and teaches regularly by invitation in German, French, and Italian, as well as in English, on four continents.

Franke’s work moves along two central axes. He has developed an apophatic philosophy pivoting on the limits of language as encountered in philosophy, religion, literature, and the arts. These limits are the key to unlocking untold riches expressed in all imaginable registers in each of these domains of human endeavor and all discursive disciplines whatsoever. Works along this axis include *On What Cannot Be Said: Apophatic Discourses in Philosophy, Religion, Literature, and the Arts*, 2 vols., 2007; *A Philosophy of the Unsayable*, 2014; *Apophatic Paths from Europe to China: Regions Without Borders*, 2018; and *On the Universality of What is Not: The Apophatic Turn in Critical Thinking*, 2020.

The other axis is a theory and cultural history of poetry and literature as theological revelation interpreted in secularizing terms. The key here is understanding theology at its source and central inspiration as negative theology based on acknowledging divinity’s transcendence of all possible discourse. This is the limit which authorizes absolute human freedom to express the experience of all modes of existential relatedness to the infinite and unknown as an open whole or not-all to which we cannot help but relate by virtue of the *unlimited* effects and uncontrollable consequences of our thoughts and actions. Works in this vein include *Poetry and Apocalypse: Theological Disclosures of Poetic Language*, 2015; *Secular Scriptures: Modern Theological Poetics in the Wake of Dante*, 2016; *A Theology of Literature: The Bible as Revelation in the Tradition of the Humanities*, 2017; *Dante’s Paradiso and the Theological Origins of Modern Thought: Toward a Speculative Philosophy of Self-Reflection*, 2021; as well as two monographs on Dante’s *Paradiso* and the *Vita nuova* also published in 2021 by Cambridge University Press.

Franke trained in philosophy and theology at Williams College (B.A. 1978) and Oxford University (M.A. 1980) and in comparative literature at UC Berkeley (M.A. 1988) and at Stanford (Ph.D. 1991). He has published philosophical and theological interpretations of epoch-making poets, ancient to modern, including Virgil, Dante, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Blake, Yeats; Leopardi, Manzoni, Montale; Racine, Baudelaire, Jabès; Hölderlin, Rilke, Celan; Dickinson, Eliot, and Stevens. He has also published theoretical essays in hermeneutics and

dialectics, treating such subjects as figurative rhetoric, dialectical and deconstructive logic, negative theology, dialogue, and psychoanalysis as a hermeneutics of subjectivity.

In 2020, Franke was visiting professor (Profesorado Internacional), at the University of Navarra in Spain (Philosophy Department). He has been Visiting Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Hong Kong (Fall 2005). Franke has received international fellowships from the Camargo Foundation (Fall 1999) and the Bogliasco Foundation (Spring 2006, Fellow in Philosophy). He has been Professor of French-in-residence at Vanderbilt-in-France in Aix-en-Provence (2008) and a member of the Dante Society Council by the general election of the Dante Society of America.