

SACRED PROTEST

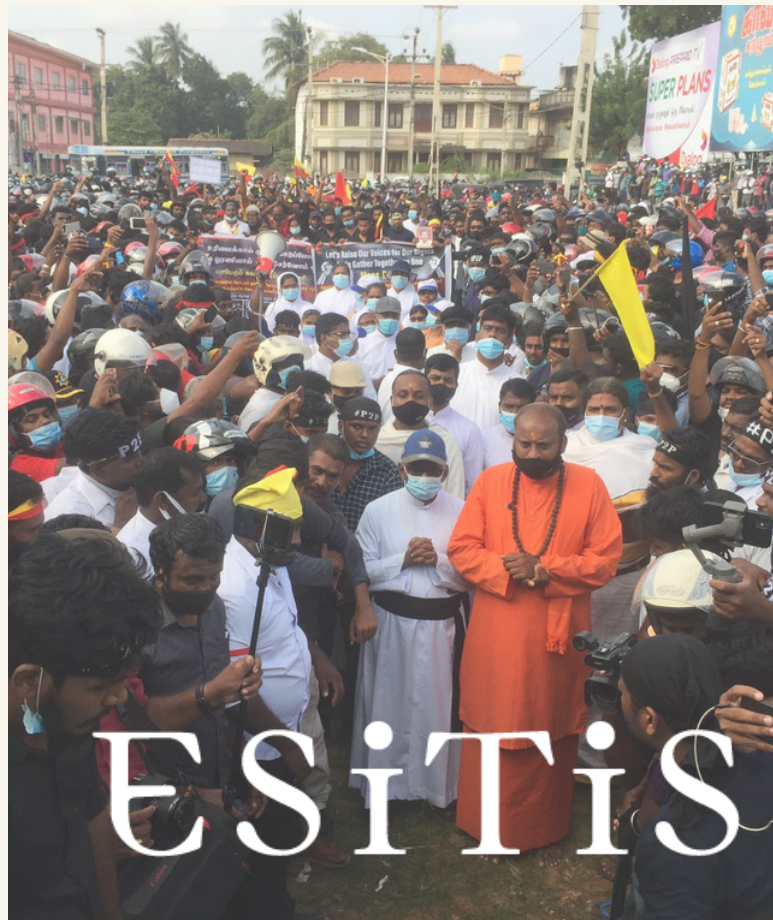


RELIGION, POWER, AND RESISTANCE IN AN ERA OF UPHEAVAL

BONN, GERMANY

23-26 MARCH 2022

Announcing the biennial international congress of the European Society for Intercultural Theology and Interreligious Studies



CONFERENCE DESCRIPTION

Analysis of the complex interrelations of religion and modern protest movements draws attention to the ways that pervasive societal anxieties are taken up in religious, interreligious and transreligious discourses. The last years have seen forms of major social upheaval in the form of protests the world over. These included popular protest movements in well over twenty countries, from Asia and Southeast Asia to Africa to Latin America to North America to Europe. These have led to major policy backdowns and/or governmental crackdown (Hong Kong, Belarus) and even the overthrow of governments (Bolivia, Peru, Sudan, Algeria, Iraq, Malta). Triggers can be seemingly minor (such as bread prices in Sudan and taxes on whatsapp messages in Lebanon) or sudden and shocking (such as in cases of police brutality). In both cases, they often then further develop along predictable sightlines of economic concern and political parties. Recent protests and counter protests have been surrounded by a deluge of disinformation and conspiracy (for example, surrounding the pandemic). In several cases, inconspicuous beginnings led to society-wide or global debates concerning religion, ethnicity, the stability of democratic institutions, fundamental human rights, and even the future of humanity.

Religious contributions and reactions to such upheavals vary widely and can be unpredictable. Across religious traditions, religious communities sometimes engage with social questions citing theological principles of siding with the oppressed or freedom of religion, while at other times this same logic is deemed inapplicable. Some religious leaders remain at a cautious distance from protest movements or even actively side with pro-government crackdowns, appealing to divine sovereignty, while in other situations religious communities have provided field hospitals, water and food. In looking at the relationship of religion and protest, one could almost speak of the emergence of a new rank of politico-religious leaders - including both those actively supporting and those condemning protests.

Keynote Opening Session:

Prof. Dr. Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im

(Charles Howard Candler Professor of Law at Emory Law, USA)

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CALL FOR PAPERS

Religion and protest converge and diverge and in pursuit of various ends, making careful analysis of religion and protest, as a prototypical manifestation of transcultural pressures, necessary.

1. Which religious actors protest, when, why and how?
2. Which traditional resources are called upon in the service of or resistance to protest?
3. Where do conditions for inter- and trans-religious cooperation or horizontal solidarity appear and why?
4. And how are protest and religion to be studied, with which methods, and at what level of involvement?
5. What are the values, emotions and possibilities for renewal in religiously motivated or censored protest?

The conference will yield a volume to be published by Equinox publishers, who also publishes ESITIS's highly-ranked, peer-reviewed journal *Interreligious Studies and Intercultural Theology*.

SUBMIT A SHORT-PAPER PROPOSAL! See the following section descriptions for more details on these five topics. Send your proposal of 300 words, mentioning a specific section, to **Prof. Jude Lal Fernando (fernla@tcd.ie)** by January 21, 2022.

SHARE this Call for Papers on social media and in your professional circles, using the hashtags #ESITIS2022 and #sacredprotest!

Section One: Modes and Contexts of Protest

Some scholars have noted the organizational compatibility of religious institutions and protest movements. Others have sought to explain moral reform movements as a defensive response to attacks on religiously based beliefs and values. Central problems requiring further research include how so-called "internal" factors (that is, factors internal to religious groups such as theological conservatism, clerical nationalism, quietism, ideologies of religious institutions and interpretations of religion, religious identity, etc.) and "external" factors (such as national politics and legislation, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and religious conflicts around the world) affect the attitudes and expressions of religions toward protest movements and vice versa - with characterizations ranging from peace to violence and from faithfulness to fundamentalism.

Section 1 of the 2022 ESITIS conference invites paper proposals on contemporary and historical topics that address any of the following themes:

1. religious institutions and protest movements
2. moral reform movements
3. violent and/or/versus nonviolent means of religious resistance
4. internal and/or/versus external factors driving religious protest
5. majority and/or/versus minority religions taking collective action
6. interreligious protest
7. feminist religious activism and/or solidarity

Keynotes:

Prof. Dr. Carola Roloff, Visiting Professor for Buddhist studies (Hamburg, Germany) and

Prof. Dr. Martijn von Zomeren, Professor of social psychology (Groningen, Netherlands)

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Section Two: Power & Authority in Religious Protest

Religion plays a major role in ensuring that rights and social justice are upheld. Power and authority in religious protest is important, but many questions arise around "representation" and "who speaks for who," in such protests, but also whether religious leaders should engage with social justice issues and attempt to address social issues/failing political systems to enable social change so that a harmonious world can be built in which we have a political and economic system. Reflecting on religious protests in places such as Hong Kong, Myanmar, India/Kashmir or India and the Citizenship Amendment Bill, Iran, Black Lives Matter (USA).

Section 2 of the 2022 ESITIS conference invites paper proposals on contemporary and historical topics that address any of the following:

1. gender, power and authority in religious protest
2. accommodating religious protest
3. dissent, protest and reform
4. religious protest as community revival
5. power and authority in religious protests on environmental change / climate change
6. power and authority in religious protest online

Keynote:

Prof. Dr. Tom Zwart, Professor of law, economics and governance (Utrecht, Netherlands)

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Section Three: Horizontal Solidarity & Interreligious Protest

What is the significance of horizontal solidarity and inter- and transreligious protest? What are the conditions necessary for such protest?

1. At times the relationship between religion and protest can form strictly demarcated binaries, thereby generating a victimhood that lacks power of creativity. Protests against the Easter Sunday attacks in 2019 in Sri Lanka and the persecution of Christians in the Middle East that fuel Islamophobia illustrate this dynamic. Such protest can serve hegemonic agendas that complicate and confound interreligious relations.
2. Protests animated by similar issues and concerns but emerging from multiple locations are often isolated from one another, and this can deepen a sense of hopelessness. Here one might think of Irish faith communities' protests against US troops using the Shannon airport and inter- and transreligious protests against the naval base in Jeju island in Korea and Okinawa, etc.
3. The power of religio-ideological constructs that helps motivate protests can foster selective solidarities which might seem to join groups under common banners but which ultimately reinforce their separation. The suffering of Uighur Muslims being used by the Hong Kong protesters to highlight the latter's case while maintaining Islamophobia in Hong Kong and Buddhists in Myanmar calling Muslims to join the anti-military junta protest while denying recognition of Rohingya people's rights illustrate this point all too well.

Section 3 of the 2022 ESITIS conference invites paper proposals on the ways in which creativity, hope through connectivity and empathetic interconnectivity can be built by horizontal solidarity and inter- and transreligious protests.

Keynote:

Prof. Dr. Claudio Carvalhaes, earth thinker, theologian, and artist (Union, USA and Brazil)

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Section Four: The Scholar, the Activist & the Scholar-Activist

A scholarly study of religion and protest invites strategic engagement with religious leaders and other practitioners. At the same time, careful examination of the positionality of the scholar vis-à-vis social movements and debates at issue is necessary. Both of these points raise: methodological questions concerning scholarly participation, ethical questions about healthy balances of sympathy and critique, and epistemological questions concerning scientific neutrality.

Section 4 of the 2021 ESITIS conference invites paper proposals on contemporary and historical topics that address any aspect of the following question-constellations:

1. What is scholar-activism, and how does it bear on religious life vs./and research on religion? What moments in the history of scholar-activism are definitive, particularly in relation to religion? What principled observations might be drawn from these pasts?
2. Scholar-activists often find they are seen as not scholarly enough for science, and are seen as too academic for the streets. This tension is further compounded when religious actors are involved. What limitations do such overlapping identities create? What opportunities?
3. What might be learned from protest movements about the performance of religious ideas, symbols, conceptions of society, and even of ultimate reality? What methods are suitable for this form/field of analysis?
4. Karl Marx famously suggested that the point of philosophy is not to interpret the world but to change it. Paulo Freire argued that knowledge does not as such "exist" but forms as "know-how". How might these two insights inform and influence scholarly engagements with religion and protest?

Keynote:

Prof. Dr. Vincent Lloyd, Professor of Christian ethics, political theology, and Africana studies (Vanderbilt, USA)

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Section Five: Keeping Hope Alive: Religion as a Form of Protest in a Disintegrating World

Where and how do religions find the resources to work together to contribute to hope? In this session we will examine the hope religion offers both as a form of protest and as providing solutions (hope) to the conditions protested against. The world is increasingly experienced as being in a critical state. Climate change, population issues, continued strife between the West and other political and cultural entities point for many to a world that is losing its bearings. Popular culture (e.g., superhero movies) depicts apocalyptic times in which rescue depends on strong heroes of semi-divine status to rescue the world. The notion of a strong hero creating a new world is not strange, perhaps, to religion. A deep and thorough reliance on (religious) imagination, on the mental construal of a world of justice, of a reality that reaches beyond the one we live in is desperately needed.

Section 5 of the 2022 ESITIS conference invites paper proposals on contemporary and historical topics that address any of the following:

1. What kind of hope do religions provide?
2. While religion and religiously motivated conflicts may cause suffering, how do we restructure or re-present religious beliefs to provide hope in this world?
3. How, given the history of religions, can/does that hope deal with the pluralistic world of today?

Keynote:

Prof. Dr. Nayla Tabbara, Professor of religion and Islamic studies and co-founder of the Adyan Foundation (Adyan, Lebanon)

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