

# Call for Papers

ESA-RN34 Sociology of Religion Biennial Conference  
"Religion in an unstable world:  
Challenges, transformations and future prospects"  
13-15 July 2022, Groningen, The Netherlands

Deadline for abstract submission: 31 January 2022

Organised by:



Religion is often depicted as an anchor in an unstable world: amidst uncertainties, it offers community, guidance, consolation, or hope. However, the role of religion and its place in society also changes. Religious institutions and communities face uncertainties related to climate change and the environmental crisis (Schipper, E.L.F., Eriksen, S.E., Fernandez Carril, L.R., et al., 2020): for instance, in 2015 Pope Francis published an encyclical *Laudato Si'* addressing the issue and commenting on the role of the Roman Catholic Church in its ethical and moral dimension, and in 2021, along with numerous other religious leaders, drafted a document to be presented at the COP26 Summit. Furthermore, the rise of right-wing populism and authoritarian rules throughout the world raises questions about the role religion plays - or should play – in these contexts, especially regarding political involvement of the clergy or defending civil and human rights (Haynes, 2021; Guadalupe & Carranza, 2020; Herbert, 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic has shown how various governments use religion and religious institutions to support their own agendas, but also when they need allies, as in the case of promoting vaccines among senior citizens. The health crisis also shed light on a variety of ideologies around the role of religion and science in providing answers and solutions to unsettling circumstances. Conspiracy theories, scientific explanations and religious ideologies have competed for legitimacy and trust.

During the pandemic, the importance of digital technologies has also become apparent: for weeks or months, religious gatherings, just like some segments of work and education, relied on digital media. For some institutions, the lockdowns and restrictions resulted in a rapid need to adapt: buy equipment and software, learn how to use it, etc. But an ever more profound change is just around the corner, as Artificial intelligence and machine learning become more advanced and widespread. What is the place of religious authority if a robot can replace a monk, as in some Japanese Buddhist temples? What is the meaning of religious ritual, if it is performed by a machine?

These and other pressing issues contribute to the experiences of instability and uncertainty, posing new challenges for religions worldwide. The conference explores this context, and invites scholars who study religion on all career stages to submit papers focused on, but not limited to, the following topics:

- 1) Religion and politics, especially in the context of populism
- 2) Religion and the environment, climate change, and climate activism
- 3) Religion and human rights (gender rights, refugee crisis, border control, civil rights, etc.)
- 4) Religion, science and health, especially in the context of the pandemic

- 5) Religion and the media (media use and media presence, particularly in digital media)
- 6) Religion and technological innovation: challenges, transformations, future prospects
- 7) Religion and conspiracy theories in an unstable world
- 8) Religion and ethnic and cultural diversity (migration, refugees, mobility)

We are pleased to announce that we have two confirmed Keynote Speakers:

- **Dr. Lisa Schipper**, Environmental Social Science Research Fellow - Environmental Change Institute, University of Oxford
- **Dr. Beth Singler**, Junior Research Fellow in Artificial Intelligence, Homerton College, University of Cambridge

We invite individual paper abstracts as well as panel proposals with a maximum of four papers per panel. Individual paper abstracts should be between 200 and 250 words, including references to the theoretical framework, research question, methodology and main findings. Panel proposals should include the title and a short description of the panel (200 to 250 words), the name and affiliation of the convener(s), and the title, author's name and abstracts (200 to 250 words) for each of the proposed papers. All proposals should be submitted to [esarn34-groningen2022@rug.nl](mailto:esarn34-groningen2022@rug.nl) by **31 January 2022**.

It is also possible to organise an author-meets-critic or book launch session instead of a regular panel. In this case, please submit a short description of the session (200 to 250 words), including the names of the convener(s), the name(s) of the critic(s) and the proposed book to be presented during the launch to [esarn34-groningen2022@rug.nl](mailto:esarn34-groningen2022@rug.nl) by **31 January 2022**.

\*\*Please note that the conference is planned fully **on-site**. We will closely monitor the COVID-19 safety regulations, and in case international travel is restricted or local regulations do not allow big events, the conference will be held **online only**. If that is the case, conference fees will be refunded.

Key dates	
Submission of paper and panel proposals	31 January 2022
Notification of acceptance	15 February 2022
Opening of the registration	15 February 2022
Registration deadline	30 April 2022
Publication of final programme	15 May 2022
Conference	13-15 July 2022
Summer school	11-15 July 2022

For further information, please visit the [conference website!](#)