

## Call for Paper Proposals: Religion and the Coronavirus Pandemic

The [Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture](#) (JSRNC) is calling for paper proposals exploring the entanglements of religion, the Coronavirus, and socioecological (aka biocultural) systems. We seek scholarly work that explores how the virus, and religious dimensions of the response to it are influencing, and may decisively reshape socioecological systems, including religious perceptions and practices.

Pandemics are nothing new in human and religious history, of course. Indeed, religion and disease have long been entwined as people struggled to understand the mysterious origins of diseases and why they sometimes cause mass deaths and concomitant social and ecological disasters. Unsurprisingly, invisible spiritual beings or forces, which influence if not control environmental conditions, have often been postulated to explain the invisible-to-the-naked eye organisms that precipitate diseases and disasters. Some theorists even contend that the roots of religion may lie in the existential crises precipitated by disease and death.

Although the history of religion is replete with examples in which disease has played an important role, there may be novelty in the current pandemic and fresh insights about the diversity of religion-related responses to it. Indeed, if apocalypse means the end of the world as we know it, the current pandemic may well precipitate profound, destructive changes. Yet as with much apocalyptic expectation, perhaps after its tribulations new and positive ways of being in the world will emerge that were previously hidden from human imaginations – or only envisioned by previously marginalized individuals and groups.

We have provided examples of social phenomena and specific questions that we think would be fitting for analysis under the heading “Further Information for Interested Scholars” below.

By 15 June 2020 interested scholars should send prospective titles, a summary of the proposed paper (300-500 words), and ideally, relevant references, to JSRNC Managing Editor Amanda Nichols via [amnv22@ufl.edu](mailto:amnv22@ufl.edu). Papers will be due 1 October 2020. All manuscripts will undergo the JSRNC’s full editorial review process, including double-blind peer review, before publication. Those requiring a later due date should discuss that with JSRNC Editor-in-Chief Bron Taylor via [bron@ufl.edu](mailto:bron@ufl.edu).

*The Journal of Religion, Nature and Culture*, which has been published quarterly since 2007 by Equinox Publishing, explores through the social and natural sciences the complex relationships among human beings, their diverse religions, and the earth's living systems. Defining religion broadly to include affective and spiritual experiences, the JSRNC provides a venue for analysis and debate over what constitutes an ethically appropriate relationship between our own species and other organisms in the world’s diverse environments, and the environments we inhabit. For more information, see the précis in its inaugural issue, [Exploring Religion, Nature and Culture: Introducing the Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture](#) and the journal’s website at <https://journals.equinoxpub.com/index.php/JSRNC>.

The JSRNC is the affiliated society of the [International Society for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture](#). Those sending proposals may also want to propose a session for its upcoming conference on [Religion and Environment: Relations and Relationality](#), which is slated for 4-7 February 2021, at Arizona State University (USA).

## Further Information for Interested Scholars

In addition to a broad overview of historical research about and theorizing focusing on religion and disease, we seek articles deploying diverse methodologies and disciplinary lenses in ways designed to wrestle specifically with the current pandemic, including phenomena such as:

- ❖ The pandemic is influencing religious pilgrimages, gatherings, and ritual forms. In some regions, religionists have resisted calls to restrict such gatherings, citing religious freedom, duties, or other rationales; and some of these have been arrested for violating orders to restrict such gatherings. Examples include:
  - Saudi Arabia suspended *'umrah* (pilgrimage to Mecca outside of the Hajj season) and is urging potential Hajj pilgrims to hold off on plans for summer 2020.
  - 16,000 Muslim missionaries who attended a gathering in Malaysia spread the virus all over southeast Asia when they returned home.
  - Religious leaders in Russia and Iran have continued to encourage people to assembling in large gatherings, kiss religious objects, and otherwise engage in rituals which medical experts consider dangerous, asserting that one cannot get sick from holy activities or objects. Even after the governments in these countries changed their policies to discourage such gatherings some religionists continued their customary practices.
  - There have been several cases of high concentrations of coronavirus cases in Christian congregations in South Korea, with new spikes occurring as pastors tell their congregants it is safe to come back, despite state officials reporting otherwise.
  - Some Muslim clerics in Pakistan refused to shut down religious congregations and rituals, some of these blamed a lack of piety for the virus; meanwhile the country's prime minister downplayed the coronavirus' threat to his country.
  - The pastor of an Evangelical megachurch in Florida who believes that laying of hands on the ill can lead to healing (and who has laid hands on and prayed for Donald Trump) and who refused to shutter his church, has been arrested for violating a related public orders.
  - Despite the dangers articulated by scientists, and presumably in part to appeal to his Evangelical Christian followers, Donald Trump touted a prospective, 'beautiful' return to full congregations on Easter Sunday as his envisioned return to business as usual.
  - The Israeli city of Bnei Brak has become a viral epicenter in Israel due to the refusal of Ultra-Orthodox Jews (Haredim) to respect quarantine measures, leading to arrests and a concentration of outbreaks and deaths clustered in Ultra-Orthodox communities. Similarly, in the USA, arrests have occurred in New York and New Jersey as Orthodox Jewish groups refuse to respect shelter orders against group gatherings.
  - A week-long gathering at the Christian Open Door church in the French city of Mulhouse in early February 2020 led to a sudden spike of cases, and at least 12 deaths, in France and other countries.

These examples raise questions that prospective authors may explore, including:

- ❖ What political impacts have or might result from state enforcement powers confronting religious practices and claims such powers abridge religious freedom? Have or will laws and policies contribute to political polarization between religious and secular sectors?
- ❖ Is there is a global 'religion of the market' that idolizes economic growth as an end in itself and that requires the sacrifice of people, organisms, and even whole ecosystems as its foremost ritual? Does the rhetoric of politicians and religionists reflect such a priority and worldview, and if so, in what ways? Are there other forms of religious or religion-resembling calls to sacrifice for the commonweal (however understood)?



- ❖ How do environmentalist advocates of ‘degrowth’ view the virus – as a salutary organism that might precipitate the reharmonization of humans in nature due to, for example, the reduction of carbon emissions? What about those who go further, viewing the human species a virulent and destructive organism, and who view the pandemic with hopes it might significantly cull what they consider to be the inexorably destructive human herd?
- ❖ To what extent is there contention surrounding the relative importance of individual versus group rights?
- ❖ Will this pandemic, as have earlier ones, led to longstanding changes in religions (including increasing secularization) and to biocultural systems more widely, and if so, how?
- ❖ How might religions, including religious affiliations, change as a result of this pandemic? One study, for example, found that in Malawi during the AIDS crisis, because caregiving was more prominent among Christian than Muslim communities, significant numbers of people shifted their religious affiliations from Islam to Christianity.
- ❖ In what ways are religionists responding to the refugees who are already on the move, and which may grow substantially, as a result of the virus? In Canada’s Yukon, for example, an indigenous nation asked urban people who had arrived from remote cities to go home, asserting that their oral traditions depend on the teachings of their elders, and therefore, their cultural survival depended on remaining isolated during this time.
- ❖ How do different religionists view the virus itself? Do those who express and promote reverence for all life ethics, of various sorts, extend that to this virus? If not, on what basis do they make exceptions? If so, how do they justify this in light of the threats to human life, and possibly, the life and well-being of other organisms?
- ❖ What are the religious dimensions and dynamics in which patients, health care providers, chaplains and other religious caregivers, family members, and friends, are contending with the virus?
- ❖ If they are, how are religionists using social media and communicative technologies such as Zoom, Google Hangouts, and Skype, to stay in touch, provide religious or other services, and how might this transform the religious landscape?
- ❖ Will it lead to significant changes in religion in general and specific traditions in particular? For example, will the current pandemic contribute to secularism, the growth of “nones,” or to more liberal religious forms more amenable to incorporating scientific understandings than before this pandemic?
- ❖ Will this pandemic lead to more ecologically and socially adaptive behaviors among religionists?

These are a few but hardly an exhaustive list of possibilities for paper proposals.

