



CALL FOR PAPERS

**INSeCT Twin Conference**  
**KU Leuven / Ateneo de Manila**  
**University**  
**27 – 30 March 2023**



# Call For Papers

This conference is the third edition in a series of **theological encounters between Asia and Europe**, facilitated by **INSeCT (the International Network of Societies for Catholic Theologies)**. As a twin conference, it will take place in two locations – at KU Leuven and at Ateneo de Manila University. Each day, there will be a shared online session for participants in both locations, with additional conference programme for further reflection in each of the locations.

The goal is to foster dialogue and **shared reflection between theologians from Asia and Europe, on the conference theme and beyond** – there will be the opportunity for junior and senior researchers to present their projects to an **international research community**:

We invite abstracts for 20 min papers.

Please send your abstract to [callforpapers@insecttheology.org](mailto:callforpapers@insecttheology.org)

Deadline for Submission is **July 31, 2022**.

Participation will be possible in Leuven, Manila and online. Please indicate in your abstract submission in which location you would like to participate.

## Conference Theme

Colonial Empires are power/knowledge/being regimes: as the theorists of postcolonial studies have forcefully shown, colonial power is established and sustained through an intricate network of political and cultural, social and economic, intellectual and linguistic discourses, and resistance to colonial power unfolds in practices that take place within these regimes of hegemonic power. And by no means are these regimes a thing of the past – even after former colonies gained political independence, colonial structures continue to persist globally in economic systems, in social discourses and political relations, and in the epistemic practices through which we make sense of the world: the triple violence of colonialism (political violence through oppression; economic violence through exploitation; and cultural violence through negation) reverberates in multiple forms in the overlapping crises we face today: racial oppression, gender injustice, environmental degradation and damaged health. Decolonization is an unfinished project.

Christianity (in its many institutional forms, practices and imaginaries that perform the tradition) has been an inextricable part of these colonial regimes and it continues to participate in the structures and discourses of our postcolonial world. A host of historical and sociological research has demonstrated how Christian institutions and theological practices have shaped, and have been shaped by, the struggle for colonial power – in irreducibly ambivalent ways: a careful analysis of local histories of colonialism and its aftermath shows how the Christian narrative has served both to buttress colonial oppression and to oppose it. How do we theologically account for these complex and inextricable entanglements between Christianity and empire? Simple narratives that *either* subscribe to a wholesale condemnation of Christianity as hegemonic *or* seek to recover and redeem an authentic liberative message at the core of the Christian tradition do not suffice to reckon with this intricate colonial heritage. Instead, we need more nuanced

accounts of how theology is practiced in irreducibly ambivalent ways within the chassis of colonialism.

To find such nuanced accounts of the de/colonizing force of theology, the contributions to this conference will turn to particular instances of the glocal histories of colonialism in Belgium and the Philippines, and its reverberations in some of the intersecting crises of today, in gender injustice and the ecological crisis. We will investigate what kind of theologies emerge from these sites, and interrogate them as to their political effects. Ultimately, what we hope to discern from this interrogation of the entanglements between Christianity and empire, are pathways for decolonial practices of theology that are able to account for the ways in which theology has been shaped by colonialism – together, we seek to understand theology as a way of un/doing colonial power.

### Day One: Local Histories of Colonization – Belgium / Philippines

Manila and Leuven are two sites that each have a particular colonial history that interacts with theology. On the one hand, Manila, Philippines, has been a site of Spanish colonization. Spain ruled the Philippines for more than 300 years and then sold it to the United States of America. Indigenous peoples in the Philippines first learned about Christianity through colonial activity. From then on, Christianity, colonialism, and resistance have continued to interact in contested ways that greatly influence Philippine history and identity. On the other hand, Leuven is a city in Belgium that has engaged in colonial and Christianizing activity specifically in Congo. The controversial impact of Belgian rule in Congo on Belgium's faith and culture invites an on-going discussion about the relationship of Christianity and colonialism. Today, both cities find themselves bringing complex colonial histories and religious narratives that continue to intersect with people's cultures, politics, and religions in a myriad of ways.

## Day Two: Contemporary Crises as Colonial Aftermath I: GENDER

The contributions to this panel will explore the concrete ways in which colonialism, religion/theology and gender are connected by looking both at historical and current day developments. In historical perspective it will be interesting to explore the influence of colonialism to gender norms in the colonialized countries. The colonizers did not only force their political domination on the colonialized countries and people but also a foreign culture, their moral and belief system and with it their gender norms leading to intersectional forms of discrimination based on ethnicity and gender (supplemented optionally with economical status, religion etc.). An influence of colonialism on gender norms can also be detected in the colonizing countries. Discourse about gender norms has been charged with colonial motives and colonial ideology with gendered images. This panel draws particular attention to the role of Christian institutions and theology in providing ideological background for both colonialism and gender norms, spreading the ideas and monitoring their execution. But it also intends to shed light onto the liberating potential of Christian practices and theology which may have already contributed or will be able to contribute in overcoming the oppressive intersections of colonialism and gender norms.

## Day Three: Contemporary Crises as Colonial Aftermath II: ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

The human-made climate crisis is a hot topic at both global and local levels, as its effects are now felt everywhere: expanding desertification in Africa and elsewhere, the threat of flooding of entire island chains, ever more intense destructive cyclones in the Philippines, tornadoes in central Europe ... The climate crisis is the tip of the iceberg of the ecological crisis in which our globalised world finds itself. Economic relations often follow colonial patterns, where one side provides goods and services at favourable prices for the dominant economy with the aim of maximising profits for a few without regard for natural and social

resources. In this situation, ecology seems to be the key science for the future. However, many answers focus on technocratic aspects such as decreasing pollution and resource scarcity through geo-engineering, recycling ever increasing amounts of waste, trading CO2 certificates. This is done without changing the fundamental attitude towards the world, the resources, the people and living beings that produce them. The habitus remains a colonising one of dominance, the narratives are those of appropriation and domination. The dynamics of inequality intensify and often run along conventional colonisational distortions. Environmental degradation and social oppression often went hand in hand with racism and women's oppression. Ecofeminist theology (Vandana Shiva, Ivone Gebara et al.) and decolonial ecology (Malcom Ferdinand) think environmental protection together with political struggles against (post)colonial domination, structural racism and misogynist practices. For Rosemary Radford Ruether (1994) healing the earth means healing the relationships between men and women, communities and nations. This also leads to a critical reflection of theology and how it is fostering narratives of dominance on an ecological level. "Man" as crown of creation being one of the images that are being contested more and more in the face of the ecological crisis.

This panel will address the question of how to initiate a change of habitus towards the world, people and fellow beings and what ecological theology can contribute to this.

#### Day Four: Doing decolonial theology

This panel works on a synthesis of the conference contributions. Building on the reflections of the previous days that have brought the deep entanglements of theology into colonial discourses to the fore, it seeks to develop answers to the question what kind of theological practices can be decolonizing. In whatever context, the question of power is always implicated when one speaks of doing theology. Even the interpretations of both scriptures and tradition and the performances of the Christian faith are always influenced by dominant

cultures and histories. In many cases, alternative but less powerful voices are marginalized and even suppressed.

During the colonial period, religious perspectives were used to justify occupation and perpetuate exploitation and oppression. Pastoral practices and theology were not free from the unfortunate consequences of colonization and the colonial mindset in privileging the discourses and practices of the powerful. Consequently, contextual ways of doing theology and theological reflections from colonized peoples and from the ground have been undervalued. Hence, there is a need to problematize dominant ways of doing theology, to listen to the various voices of the colonized and to be open to diverse ways of understanding the Christian tradition. In this setting, how do we do theology in ways that are truly life-giving for the oppressed and that contributes to human flourishing and the common good? Building on the conference contributions, the panel seeks to address this question in ways that celebrate the diversity of theological methods and voices and that remain rooted in the Christian tradition.