

Religion in Political Contention: Religious Dimensions in Social Movements, Rebellions and
Revolutions

A panel proposal for the
Association for the Sociology of Religion
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While religion is often recognized as a social force that maintains, if not legitimates, the socio-political order, religion has also played a role in rebellions, revolts, social movements, and revolutions. Religion, that is, can play a role in contentious politics. Karl Marx famously suggested that religion is the “opium of the people,” a phrase that is frequently taken out of context and misunderstood. In the same passage, he also wrote religion is “an expression of real suffering and a protest against” it, suggesting that religion is also a source and instrument of social change. Indeed, Marx’s collaborator, Friedrich Engels wrote on essay on the German Peasant Wars focusing on the revolutionary movement led by theologian Thomas Münzer, underscoring the latter point on social change dynamics. Similarly, Max Weber showed us how religion is both a source of domination (traditional or bureaucratic) and social transformation (charismatic, which is revolutionary, but also another type of domination). Even Emile Durkheim, who typically is associated with a status quo oriented theory of religion, makes a case for the transcendent power of religious rituals. Today, too many sociologists of religion continue very conventional modes of thinking – religion is either hegemonic or counter-hegemonic -- ignoring how religion is both a hegemonic and counter-hegemonic force in past and contemporary political scenarios.

For this panel, we will invite papers that explore the relationship religion – as a shared cultural system, source of solidarity, and ways of thinking, feeling, and acting – has to social movements, rebellions and revolutions. We are interested in understanding how and under what conditions religion functions as a *progressive* and/or *reactionary* force that compels people to challenge or protect the order of things. We are particularly interested in prophetic and messianic movements, secular religions (e.g., The Cult of the Supreme Being and Science as Religion), and liberation theologies. While we welcome contemporary explorations (e.g., popular religion and evangelism in Latin America, the Arab Spring, and resistance to globalization), we also welcome the exploration of past events (e.g., the English, French, Iranian, and Nicaraguan revolutions; Taiping and Boxer Rebellions in China; and the German Peasant Wars of the 16th century). Special consideration will be given to theoretical treatments on the relationship religion has to *progressive* and/or *reactionary* politics. Papers that focus on contemporary and historical case studies in the U.S. are welcome. Priority will be given to papers that aim to make sense of the institutional, organizational, ritualistic, discursive (e.g., using the Bible or other sacred texts in discussions), ideological, and/or framing mechanisms that give religion its contentious structure.

Deadline for Paper Proposals: March 1st, 2019

Paper proposals should include name, affiliation, email address, title, and a 200-word abstract describing the paper’s research question, methodology, and preliminary results.

Please send them in MS Word by e-mail to the panel organizers:

Jean-Pierre Reed, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, reedjp@siu.edu and

Warren S. Goldstein, Center for Critical Research on Religion,
goldstein@criticaltheoryofreligion.org