

Decolonizing Churches

Ecclesiological Investigations International Research Network's
14th International Conference

June 22 – 25, 2022

to be held at the Universidad Interamericana de Puerto Rico
San Juan, Puerto Rico

in collaboration with
Universidad Interamericana de Puerto Rico
Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico
The Union of Charismatic Orthodox Churches

“Much of the world was missionized from within a definite model of the Church, namely, that of colonialism.” - Leonardo Boff¹

“...decolonizing requires a pedagogy of unlearning coloniality.” - Bradford E. Hinze, referring to Walter Mignolo²

“...if postcolonial theorists and theologians are serious about decolonizing knowledge, they should begin to ‘walk the talk’ ...” - Agnes M. Brazal³

Over the past five hundred years churches throughout the world have been on both sides of the modern colonial enterprise. While some of them have played and continue to play a major role in fostering and expanding global colonial designs, others have been part of the resistance to colonialism, supporting or directly engaging in liberating praxis. Research concerning the critical task of decolonizing churches and decolonizing ecclesiology brings us together in San Juan, Puerto Rico, from Wednesday, June 22, through Saturday, June 25, 2022 for the 14th international gathering of the Ecclesiological Investigations Research Network. Joining us as co-sponsors this year are Universidad Interamericana de Puerto Rico, Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico, and the Union of Charismatic Orthodox Churches

¹ Leonardo Boff, *Church: Charism and Power: Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church* (New York: Crossroads, 1985, reprinted Eugene OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012), 4.

² Bradford E. Hinze, “Decolonizing Everyday Practices: Sites of Struggle in Church and Society,” *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 71 (2016), online at <https://ejournals.bc.edu/index.php/ctsa/article/view/9387/8403>.

³ Agnes M. Brazal, “Postcolonialism,” in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, 2nd ed., William T. Cavanaugh and Peter Manley Scott, eds. (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2019), 527.

The island-nation of Puerto Rico constitutes an ideal location to hold an international conversation on decolonizing churches, our thinking, and our practices. Puerto Rico, notes Luis N. Rivera-Pagán, is the oldest existing colony on Earth today. Since 1493 Puerto Rico has been under two consecutive colonial rules, first Spain and since 1898, the United States of America. In spite of the differences between those imperial powers, both colonization processes share important features regarding the imposition of political hegemony through military, economic, cultural and religious instruments. While Spain imposed its rule by the sword, the plantation, and slavery, it also used instruments of domination like the imposition of the Spanish language and the Catholic religion. The American domination of the island also relies on military, economic and political oppression, as well as the attempts to impose American values, including Protestantism. Although the people of Puerto Rico adopted a constitution in 1952, it was a failed exercise of self-determination. The lack of economic and political powers, supported by social and cultural forces, make Puerto Rican society vulnerable to internal and global challenges. Today, the peoples of Puerto Rico face a severe crisis that has rendered its limited political autonomy incapable of protecting its people from the damages resulting from neoliberal policies, climate change and global pandemics.

We look forward to the San Juan 2022 conference as a time of collaborative learning, reflection, and engagement as we seek to heed the voices of the colonized and their communities and churches. Our goals are (1) to further critical analysis of the role of churches in the ongoing perpetuation of colonialism and associated forms of oppression including cultural imperialism, violence, marginalization, powerlessness and exploitation, in explicit and implicit ways; (2) to foster, celebrate, and advocate for diverse ways of being church that resist and seek to ‘root-out’ colonialism and other forms of violence or oppression whose trauma reaches across generations; and (3) to continue to be engaged in liberating epistemology and praxis.

Call for Papers

“Decolonizing Churches” will be the theme of Ecclesiological Investigations International Research Network’s 14th international conference to be held June 22-25, 2022 in San Juan, Puerto Rico. The conference will be held on the Metropolitan Campus in San Juan of Universidad Interamericana de Puerto Rico (UIPR), with support from Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico, and other regional institutions. Due to the continued global uncertainties of COVID-19, the conference will be conducted in a hybrid mode using UIPR’s Blackboard’s online learning platform. While we look forward to gathering in person, we are aware that some may not be able to travel or may choose not to travel. All plenary and parallel sessions will be conducted with live streaming through Blackboard (registration in advance is required). Papers for parallel sessions may be given online as arranged with the session moderators and planning committee. Requests to present a paper online may be made at the time of the initial proposal, but must be made no later than May 1, 2022, to allow time for printing of the final program.

We invite proposals for papers addressing decolonizing churches and theology in the Caribbean, Latin America, and their diaspora. We also welcome papers dealing with colonization in other

global contexts. Closely related to decolonizing theologies are topics addressing oppressions based on gender, racial, and ethnic identities; economic inequality; social vulnerabilities; climate change and global challenges such as pandemics, neoliberalism, and the role of information technology in modern society, for which proposals are also welcomed. As Ecclesiological Investigations seeks to foster interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary scholarship, we invite proposals for papers from historical, dogmatic, social scientific, and practical disciplines. Fostering an open ecumenism, we welcome proposals for papers reflecting all branches of Christian tradition. Proposals for papers that deal with specific case studies are welcomed, as are those that deal with comparative ecclesiologies or theologies. Finally, we welcome proposals for papers that deal with decolonization in interfaith or pluralistic contexts.

Papers for parallel sessions at the conference may be presented in English, Spanish, or Portuguese. Papers presented in Spanish or Portuguese are to be translated in advance in English and submitted to the Conference planning committee so that they can be posted in advance, facilitating the participation in smaller sessions of those who do not speak these languages. Plenary sessions that are conducted in Spanish or Portuguese will be simultaneously translated.

All proposals are to be submitted in English, or with an English translation (if the full proposed paper is to be in Spanish or Portuguese). Proposals should be in the form of an abstract of 125 to 150 words, accompanied by 3 to 5 keywords which identify central concepts. Please also submit a brief biographical statement of up to 25 words that includes institutional location. Sessions will be organized to allow for twenty minutes for each paper, followed by discussion, so please plan your final paper accordingly.

We will accept proposals both for individual papers or for complete sessions. In the case of the latter, we ask that one combined proposal be submitted with the names of each presenter, a brief description of the planned content of each individual paper, and a brief biographical statement with their institutional location.

Submit proposals online at <https://forms.gle/L8aRXVfPBFBcuhzG9> or through the link found at ei-research.net/sanjuan2022. We recommend submissions as soon as possible as the conference program can only accommodate a limited number of presentations. The deadline for all proposals is February 1, 2022.

All submissions will receive a reply. If you do not receive a reply within one month of your submission, contact us at decolonizingchurches@gmail.com to be sure we received the proposal.

Final acceptance of papers will be conditional upon prior registration for the conference. The registration fee will be \$150USD per person / \$75USD for students. Further information on registration can be found online at ei-research.net/sanjuan2022 Limited financial aid is available for those without institutional support. For information on financial aid contact

decolonizingchurches@gmail.com. Please note that we cannot provide assistance with visa applications other than to confirm the participation of persons who are fully registered.

Ecclesiological Investigations actively supports the publication of papers that are delivered at its conferences. The network has a dedicated academic book series entitled *Pathways for Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue* published by Palgrave Macmillan where selected papers from each conference are collected and published. Papers from previous conferences have also been published in the *Journal of World Christianity* and other academic journals.

We hope it will be possible for you to be part of our gathering and look forward seeing you in Puerto Rico in June 2022!

Pre- and post-conference opportunities

We look forward to providing several opportunities for pre- and post-conference activities in Puerto Rico, including a visit on the morning of Wednesday, June 22, to The Caguana Ceremonial Indigenous Park. Participants may make arrangements with UIPR directly to stay one or more additional days in housing in order to visit more of the island, including Viejo San Juan.

About Ecclesiological Investigations

Ecclesiological Investigations is an international network of scholars that promotes research, dialogue, and collaboration in the study of ecclesiology across the broad spectrum of the Christian tradition. An abiding principle of the network is that the church must be both open and inclusive in character if it is to be true to itself and relevant to the wider world in a positive sense. For more information see us on the web at <http://ei-research.net/>

About Universidad Interamericana de Puerto Rico

The Inter American University of Puerto Rico is a private, non-profit institution of higher education with deep Christian roots. For more than 100 years it has been dedicated to preparing students in all branches of humanistic, social and scientific endeavors; and it has served as a cultural bridge between North America and Latin America.

Housing and Accommodations

Currently UIPR is building a new dormitory facility that is expected to be completed by April 2022. Housing for the conference will be provided by the University in this new facility at a reasonable cost. Rooms come with two single beds. The cost will be per room, not per person, so conference participants can decide whether to take a single room or share a room with another person of their own choosing. In addition to the University dormitory, there are a number of hotels in the area that participants may elect to stay in. Conference participants will be provided with housing information upon registration, including a list of nearby hotels. Participants will be asked to make their reservations in the dormitory directly with the UIPR (information will be provided on the registration web page) while outside hotel reservations must be done directly with the hotel.

All in-person conference participants will be invited to a banquet on Friday evening that will be held in the University and hosted by Ecclesiological Investigations. Seminario Evangélico de

Puerto Rico is donating coffee and other beverages throughout the conference for break times. Conference participants will be on their own for meals other than the Friday evening banquet. The University provides cafeteria services on campus that will be available to participants. In addition, there are a number of local restaurants in the area where people can go. A map of the campus and neighborhood will be provided to participants in advance of the conference, and available in San Juan upon arrival.

Travel to and from the airport is easily available either by taxi or a ride service. San Juan has excellent Uber and Lyft services that one can use. The ride from the airport to the University is approximately 15 minutes. Travel by taxi or ride-sharing services to Viejo San Juan and other parts of the city is also easily available. Travel to other parts of the island usually requires a car as public transportation outside of San Juan is limited. Those seeking to stay additional days for travel should plan on making their own arrangements accordingly.

NOTE: COVID19 Protocols: All in-person conference participants will be required to observe any COVID-19 protocols that are in place by the government of Puerto Rico and by UIPR at the time of the conference, June 2022. Due to the evolving nature of the COVID-19 global pandemic, we cannot say what those protocols will be, but at the time of the publication of this announcement, the government of Puerto Rico requires all persons entering the country to show proof of full vaccination or of negative testing for COVID-19 within 72 hours of arrival. UIPR in addition requires all persons who enter the campus to have been vaccinated, with exemptions for religious purposes as granted by the government of Puerto Rico. Information on the exact protocols in place for the spring semester 2022 will be sent to all Conference participants, with updates provided up to the beginning of the Conference on June 22, 2022.

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