



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA



UNIVERSITY of the
WESTERN CAPE



CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

South African–German Research Hub on Religion and Sustainability

Call for PhD Applications Deadline: 01/11/2021

- Call for applications for 2 fully-funded PhD scholarships.
- 131.250 ZAR per year from 2022 to 2025
- Dynamic and international team.
- Research on religion and ecology in South Africa and Germany and focus either on Islamic eco-theology or on mainline Christian eco-theology.
- Applications welcome!

IN//RCSD

International Network on Religious Communities and Sustainable Development

The South African–German Research Hub on Religion and Sustainability (SAGRaS) seeks to investigate the potential of religious communities for deep societal transformations towards sustainability. It is jointly driven by Humboldt-University Berlin, University of Pretoria and University of the Western Cape in collaboration with researchers and practitioners from other universities and organisations in Germany and South Africa, within the framework of the International Network on Religious Communities and Sustainable Development (IN//RCSD). SAGRaS is funded by the National Research Foundation within the framework of the South African-German Collaborative Research Programme from 2022 to 2025.

SAGRaS will focus on the impact of religious ecological tenets and teachings (eco-theologies) on collective and individual ecological actions. Ecological teachings have drastically increased in religious communities during the past decades. However, the impact of these teachings on religious communities' collective and their adherents' individual actions in the realms of ecology and sustainability remains largely unknown. This is the crucial point to be investigated by SAGRaS: How do religious communities contribute to socio-ecological transition and sustainability?

Case studies

The research question will be investigated through 5 case studies focusing on different religious communities and traditions in South African-German comparative perspective: Engaged Buddhism; Islamic Eco-Jihad and Islamic Eco-Theology; Mainline Protestant Christianity; New Christian Movements; and African Traditional Religions. The overarching aim of the case study work will be to scrutinise ecological theologies to determine what type of ecological values are represented in religious communities and what their impact is.

Sub-questions will involve: What forms of environmental commitment exist in these religious communities and what does their specific commitment depend on? Which theological considerations lead to ecological action? Under which circumstances does ecological theological preaching or interpretation of scripture translate into action by the communities' adherents? These issues will be investigated utilising qualitative empirical research methods, particularly interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation within the framework of a grounded theory guided approach.

The project will put its emphasis on religious leaders, youth, and women to gain nuanced results in triangulated perspectives: Religious leaders are the key decision-makers. Youth represent the group most active in advocating climate justice in social movements such as Fridays for Future. And women represent the group most affected by climate change and environmental degradation.

The research will be conducted by inter- and trans-disciplinary collaborative research teams from both countries made up of academic experts on the respective religious communities, as well as policy and practice partners who are implementing measures to reach the SDGs, in close collaboration with religious communities' representatives to ensure a research design that produces relevant results for all stakeholders involved. The results will be used for knowledge transfer through various academic outlets as well as policy recommendations for governments and international organisations such as UNEP. Moreover, through active engagement, SAGRaS will encourage religious communities to use their "transformative potential"¹ by shaping ecological values and engaging in action for ecological sustainability. It will contribute to augmenting religious communities' actions for ecological sustainability inter alia by highlighting best practices from a multi-religious perspective. SAGRaS will thus not only substantially broaden the state of knowledge, but itself contribute to transitions towards sustainability.

Two doctoral research positions

The SAGRaS research project offers 2 full-time doctoral scholarships over four years funded with 131.250 ZAR per year each for two respective case studies. Travel costs related to the project will be covered and support towards tuition fees will be provided. Candidates are called to apply for one of two available case study research positions:

- Case study 2: Islamic Eco-Jihad and Islamic Eco-Theology (a doctoral project to be enrolled at the Department of Religion and Theology at University of the Western Cape);
- Case study 3: Mainline Protestant Christianity (a doctoral project to be enrolled at the Faculty of Theology and Religion at University of Pretoria).

1. Eisenstadt, S.N. 1968. "The Protestant Ethic Thesis in an Analytical and Comparative Framework." In *The Protestant Ethic and Modernization: A Comparative View*, edited by S.N. Eisenstadt, 3–45. New York, London: Basic Books.

Candidates will be expected to conduct empirical research in Germany and South Africa and complete their PhD projects within four years. The doctoral projects should be conducted within the framework of the SAGRaS' case study guidelines and under the guidance and supervision of the SAGRaS' transdisciplinary case study teams:

Case Study 2 - Islamic Eco-Jihad and Islamic Eco-Theology

Focusing on different Muslim ecological initiatives like “nourEnergy” or “green iftar” and on particular eco-theological concepts, this case study will examine the entanglement between religious practices and normative ethics concerning environmental protection. The scope of this case study is to investigate Muslim contributions to environmental transitions in terms of (1) normative knowledge developed by an eco-theology,² (2) intentions, motivations and objectives in Muslims' environmental actions,³ (3) the performance of Muslim environmental practices⁴ and (4) relation to other Islamic, other religious or non-religious ecological activism. Under the guidance of supervisors on both the South African and German sides, the case study work will be implemented by this PhD candidate across the South African–German spectrum. In Germany, the fieldwork of the PhD candidate will be supported by student assistants and a German language course will be facilitated if necessary.

Case Study 3 - Mainline Protestant Christianity

Mainline Protestant Christianity has since Lynn White's widely discussed article on the religion's role in environmental destruction⁵ come a long way in its development of more sophisticated eco-theologies.⁶ Eco-theologies, in this movement, are mostly based on new interpretations of the biblical creation stories (Genesis 1;2), which also has a substantial influence on the perceived role, responsibilities and the contribution of women with regard to the ecology and “nature”.⁷ Successful ecological networks have been established in these churches⁸ and found their footing in some congregations. This case study will explore how and to what extent well-established churches with long-standing traditions emphasise ecological theologies and how these influence congregations and individuals in terms of ecological action. A particular focus will be on youth, as many of the ecological initiatives in mainline Protestant churches are driven by youth movements. Supervision responsibilities will likewise be shared by project members on the South African and German sides, while student assistants will support the research work. The Green Anglicans Movement in South Africa and the Protestant Church in Germany (EKD) will be key practice partners. In Germany, the fieldwork of the PhD candidate will be supported by student assistants and a German language course will be facilitated if necessary.

2. Binay, S. & Khorchide, M. (ed.) (2019). *Islamische Umwelttheologie. Ethik, Norm, Praxis*. Freiburg: Herder Verlag.

3. Kowanda-Yassin, U. (2018). *Öko-Dschihad: Der grüne Islam – Beginn einer globalen Umweltbewegung*. Salzburg: Residenz-Verlag.

4. Hancock, R. (2018). *Islamic Environmentalism. Activism in the United States and Great Britain*. New York: Routledge.

5. White, L. (1967). The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis. *Science* 155(3767), 1203–1207.

6. Vogt, M. (2009). *Prinzip Nachhaltigkeit. Ein Entwurf aus theologisch-ethischer Perspektive*. München: Oekom Verlag; Meireis, T. (2019). Sustainable Development and the Concept of Culture – An Ethical View. In T. Meireis & G. Rippl (eds.). *Cultural Sustainability*. London, New York: Routledge, 47–59; Pope Francis (2015). *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*. Encyclical Letter, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

7. Van Wyk, T. (2019). Reproductive Health, Deconstructed: A Nonbinary Understanding of the Womb. In M. Kotzé, N. Marais and N. Müller van Velden (eds.). *Reconceiving Reproductive Health: Theological and Christian Ethical Reflections*. Cape Town: AOSIS, 29–50.

8. www.greenanglicans.org; www.umkehr-zum-leben.de

In addition to the scholarship award, the successful applicants will benefit directly from the project funds available for equipment and material, field research, international travel and workshop attendance.

Application Requirements

- Interest in the contribution of religion to ecological sustainability.
- Meet the NRF requirement of an age limit of 32 years for PhD scholarships.
- An excellent (70%+) master's degree in theology or religious studies, environmental sciences or anthropology, sociology, African studies, political sciences, development studies or related disciplines may be applicable (subject to the two universities' postgraduate admission policies). In exceptional circumstances, candidates applying without a completed master's degree may apply but will need to submit proof that they have submitted their thesis for examination and that the degree will be awarded at the earliest graduation in 2022. In those cases, admission will be conditional on the successful completion of the degree.
- A substantially above-average academic profile.
- Cultural and gender sensitivity and ability to work in an interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary and internationally composed research team.
- Ability to work independently and the desire to complete the dissertation within the time frame of 4 years.
- Willingness to spend time in Germany at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin.
- Willingness to participate in all project activities (workshops, etc.).
- Willingness to conduct a PhD on the topic of the abovementioned case studies and under the guidance of the case study team.

Recommended

- Prior knowledge or research in the thematic field of SAGRaS and the research area applied for.
- Voluntary engagement and/or prior work experience in the thematic field of SAGRaS.

Since PhD-funding will be provided by the NRF, the guidelines and requirements of the NRF will apply.

Application documents

Applicants are required to submit:

- A one-page letter of motivation, including an indication of the specific case study area (i.e. one of the above-mentioned two possibilities).
- A full CV, including the applicant's gender (male/female/diverse) and a list of publications (if applicable).
- Transcripts of academic records (including degree certificate if master's has been completed, otherwise proof of current grades).
- A letter of recommendation speaking to the academic qualification of the applicant.
- A concise presentation of preliminary ideas for a PhD project within the framework of the respective case study (not exceeding 1000 words).
- Submission of any academic writing sample (Masters thesis, published article or other piece of academic writing).

Contact and submission

Kindly submit all documents in one pdf file named SURNAME_FIRSTNAME.pdf via e-mail by 1 November 2021.

Submissions for Case study 2 (Islam/UWC) should be sent to Prof Ignatius Swart at igswart@uwc.ac.za. Submissions for Case Study 3 (Mainline churches-/UP) should be sent to Dr Jacques Beukes at jacques.beukes@up.ac.za.

Inquiries can be directed to either or both Dr Beukes and Prof Swart.

Shortlisted candidates will be invited to individual interviews scheduled for 18 November 2021. The successful candidates then proceed to apply for funding through the NRF system, which has already been secured and will be recommended by SAGRaS.