

CALL FOR PAPERS 2023
WAR, PANDEMIC, AND CLIMATE CHANGE:
GLOBAL CRISES—PAST AND PRESENT—AND THEIR PLACE IN
WORLD CHRISTIANITY SCHOLARSHIP

Fourth International, Interdisciplinary Conference
co-organized by
the World Christianity and History of Religions Program (History & Ecumenics Dept.)
and
the Overseas Ministries Study Center
Princeton Theological Seminary, New Jersey, USA

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In the last two decades, the study of world Christianity has significantly expanded its horizons. A testament to that is the growth of academic programs, chairs, conferences, and publications devoted to studies of Christianity's kaleidoscopic local and global manifestations. Privileging lived experiences, world Christianity scholarship nowadays mainly focuses on concrete contexts, in the belief that faith should not be isolated from the rest of life. World Christianity scholarship, therefore, encourages approaches attentive to interactions across fluid borders—cultural, economic, existential, political, and religious—to promote embodied interpretations of these complex and interrelated realities. Whereas previous conferences asked questions about theory and methodology, our 2023 conference calls for fresh inquiry into the nature and responsibility of world Christianity scholarship at a time of overlapping crises of such ominous magnitude that the very ecology of life on planet earth looks increasingly imperiled. In short, in circumstances like today's, what should we as concerned public scholars be doing differently, how, and why, with an eye on the past as well as the present?

Global crises such as war, pandemics, and climate change aggravate pre-existing vulnerabilities; reinforce patterns of racial and religious discrimination; and intensify gendered inequalities, poverty, and xenophobia. In times of extreme adversity, all communities may be affected but some more than others, and responses will widely differ: women, indigenous peoples, and the urban poor often suffer the consequences of disaster disproportionately, and our scholarship must make room for the voices of all who are marginalized. Based upon a multidimensional understanding of “the world” of world Christianity scholarship, we welcome local, global, and 'glocal' perspectives, whether descriptive or prescriptive.

While the Russian invasion of Ukraine has for good reasons received extensive coverage from media outlets the world over, contributing to an upsurge of dormant anxieties about a global nuclear war, smaller-scale violent conflict continues to be an everyday experience for millions, especially in the global South. In addition to Ukraine, today's killing fields are found in Ethiopia's breakaway Tigray Province, the Middle East, including of course Israel-Palestine, to name but a few of the most troubled hotspots. War and its miseries are a dominant feature of Christianity's history, almost from its very inception: Jesus and the Holy Family, after all, sought refuge in Egypt from an evil monarch; the first Christian communities lived under Roman occupation; and memories of the crusades still complicate Christian-Muslim relations. Christian ideals are one thing, our histories another—or, as the saying among colonized people went: behind the missionary comes the artillery. While Christian complicity in the crises of our diverse history surely needs to be interrogated, we also invite reflection, grounded in case studies, on counter-examples illustrating the resources, material and spiritual, that Christians bring to bear on the trials and travails of their times, whether in the 1st century or the 21st.

As for pandemics, the whole world has been disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, starting in March 2020, thus far killing more than six million people. In the 20th century alone, the influenza pandemic of

1918-1920 may have caused 20–50 million deaths. Throughout the centuries, diseases have travelled far and wide, afflicting many and sometimes altering the course of history: the Bubonic Plague, for instance, estimated to have killed 25 million in Europe in the 14th century, but also cholera, polio, Ebola, Zika, and AIDS/HIV, to single out just a random sample.

Although climate change may be a more recent—and, in the estimate of some, even more ominous—crisis threatening the planet, a consensus among scholars traces its origins back to the Industrial Revolution in the second half of the 18th century, the burgeoning of the world's population in the centuries since then, and the increase of carbon emissions derived mostly from fossil fuels. Global warming, drought, deforestation (in, for example, the Amazon), melting of the polar icecaps, and the intensification of weather disasters are some of the best-known effects of climate change. Rising sea levels may eventually submerge certain Pacific Island nations, rendering them uninhabitable even before they vanish beneath the waves. The human cost of climate change is, moreover, exacerbated by the environmental havoc of war—including nowadays armed competition for scarce resources—and the spread of diseases, old and new.

While each of these three—war, pandemic, and climate change—has elicited concern in one form or another from Christian scholars ever since the rise of the Ecumenical Movement in the wake of WWI and the influenza pandemic that followed, our key interest is to discern how world Christianity scholarship could be made more cognizant of them as we explore relatively understudied modalities of what it means to be "Christian" in an anxious world beset with crises. Accordingly, we welcome panels and papers on any and all topics relevant to our conference theme, whether contemporary or historical. As in previous conferences, in 2023 the Global South will remain our primary although not exclusive frame of reference. We particularly encourage case-based studies grounded in historical/empirical research, while proposals from ethical, theological, and missiological perspectives will also be considered.