

World Christianity

HISTORY, METHODOLOGIES, HORIZONS

Edited by

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ORBIS BOOKS
Maryknoll, New York

INTRODUCTION

World Christianity Interrupted: Green Shoots and Growing Pains

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In October 2019, an international group of twenty-five scholars (representing a diversity of specialties and institutional affiliations) convened in Atlanta, Georgia, for a two-day consultation to examine core issues and debates central to the relatively new field of world Christianity. The event was preceded by months of preparation and lively scholarly interaction. Like any major international consultation, the planning, preparation, and scheduling complications produced many plot twists. Invitees from different parts of the world, for instance, were forced to pull out very late due to schedule conflicts, and one attendee from Asia was unable to board his flight at the last minute due to new visa regulations. Yet, gloriously, about the time the meeting convened, Gina Zurlo (co-director of the Center for the Study of Global Christianity), one of our participants, made the BBC's list of one hundred inspiring and influential young women from around the world for 2019.¹ With the benefit of hindsight, and a bit of imagination, it is possible to view this constellation of occurrences as evocative of the breakthroughs and breakdowns, the entanglement of promise and predicaments, that constantly attend the growing field of world Christianity.

In Dale Irvin's now familiar and insightful definition, the field of world Christianity "investigates and seeks to understand Christian communities, faith, and practice as they are found on six continents, expressed in diverse ecclesial traditions, and informed by the multitude of historical and cultural experiences in [the] world."² Scholars of world Christianity

1. "BBC 100 Women 2019: Who Is on the List This Year?", *BBC News* (October 16, 2019), www.bbc.com/news.

2. Dale T. Irvin, "World Christianity: An Introduction," *Journal of World Christianity* 1, no. 1 (2008): 1–26, 1.

vigorously challenge Western-centric approaches and models that still pervade academic discourse. They invariably utilize interdisciplinary methods of inquiry and fresh modes of theoretical analyses to re-envision Christianity as a global religion that from its inception grows and recedes across multiple centers.³ The study of world Christianity is not always collaborative; but it lends itself, in the words of Emma Wild-Wood, to “a synthetic and collective approach to studying Christian peoples, practices, thought and environment across the globe.”⁴ A shared commitment to the study of Christianity as a worldwide (polycentric) phenomenon also means that world Christianity scholars are particularly attentive to marginality, show a predilection for a bottom-up analytical framework, and take seriously the dynamic interconnections between seemingly dominant global flows and frequently subversive local forces in the worldwide spread and establishment of the Christian movement.⁵

All this points to the fact that the world Christianity approach is not one thing but a plurality of emphases, models, and interpretative assumptions—all wrapped in a peculiar propensity for boundary-crossing and for exploring intersections in a way that calls master narratives and universalizing constructs into question.⁶ Inevitably, however, the field’s wide-ranging scope and purview generates its own questions and dilemmas, especially as it becomes more widely accepted.

3. On the field’s interdisciplinarity and accommodation to plural methods, see Lamin O. Sanneh and Michael J. McClymond, *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to World Christianity* (Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), 6; Irvin, “World Christianity: An Introduction,” 2, 11. See also Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 30.

4. October 2019 World Christianity Consultation notes; see also Emma Wild-Wood, “What Is the Study of World Christianity?,” Center for the Study of World Christianity, October 23, 2019.

5. The critique, in a recent publication, that world Christianity scholarship is preoccupied with “the study of Christianity in very particular territories and locations around the globe, rather than the unitary phenomenon that is usually suggested by the use of the word ‘world’”—i.e., that it fails to attend to global connections or ecumenical fellowship—is based on a selective and quite narrow reading of the discourse. It also construes “local appropriation” as an insular process rather than as an integral element in processes of globalization and as indispensable for multidirectional impact. See Joel Cabrita and David Maxwell, “Introduction: Relocating World Christianity,” in Joel Cabrita, David Maxwell, and Emma Wild-Wood, eds., *Relocating World Christianity: Interdisciplinary Studies in Universal and Local Expressions of the Christian Faith* (Boston: Brill, 2017), 20.

6. Indeed, Irvin insists that “World Christianity as a field of study is at its best when studying . . . crossings and interstices.” Dale T. Irvin, “World Christianity: A Genealogy,” *Journal of World Christianity* 9, no. 1 (2019): 18.

Based on the most cursory assessment of the last decade or so, the field of world Christianity is flourishing. World Christianity programs have been established in academic institutions across the United States and Europe; new faculty positions appear to be on the rise; journal articles and book series by major academic publishers devoted to the field of study have increased markedly; academic conferences devoted to the field enjoy robust attendance and attract strong international participation; and the number of graduate students seeking to enroll in world Christianity programs (from diverse entry points) shows no signs of diminishing. These developments, however, have generated significant questions about the nature and scope of the field of study; including whether it is indeed a “field of study,” or a “discourse,” and how such nomenclature fits into existing guilds or academic training structures.⁷ Simply labeling world Christianity a discipline is clearly unsatisfactory; since, as noted above, world Christianity scholarship is not only inherently interdisciplinary (or boundary-crossing), it also accommodates a plurality of methodologies. This all but ensures a proliferation of modes of enquiry and approaches that portend constant flux and potentially trouble a clear identity. Indeed, its far-reaching horizons means that the field’s proponents and practitioners often have the sense of building a train that is already moving.

In any event, as the field of study expands and attracts a new generation of scholars from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds, some cogent questions can no longer be ignored: Who are world Christianity scholars? How is either the field or its practitioners different from other specialties in the academy or religion departments? And what constitutes preparation or competence for new graduates interested in teaching world Christianity or advocates keen to incorporate its theoretical models? Even the label “world Christianity” worries some because of semantic issues or the limits of translation into other languages. Meanwhile, others are persuaded that the use of “world Christianities” (plural) is more accurate or compelling,⁸ not only because it correctly depicts the great multiplicity of strands, traditions, and expressions that characterize the faith globally but also because it repudiates claims of universality or normativity for Western Christianity.⁹ This plural designation appears to be most appealing

7. For a recent assessment, see Martha Theodora Frederiks and Dorotyya Nagy, eds., *World Christianity: Methodological Considerations* (Boston: Brill, 2021).

8. For a helpful overview of the conceptual issues, see Martha Theodora Frederiks, “World Christianity: Contours of an Approach,” in Martha Theodora Frederiks and Dorotyya Nagy, eds., *World Christianity: Methodological Considerations* (Boston: Brill, 2021).

9. Proponents include Vietnamese-born Roman Catholic scholar Peter Phan, who argues that the plural designation is particularly important for systematic theol-

in non-Western contexts where the entrenched dominance of the Western Christian tradition foments the need for counternarratives, such as the pointed rebuttal that “[Western Christianity] is only one among other Christianities, no more no less.”¹⁰ Chinese scholar Pan-chiu Lai makes a similar point in his chapter in this volume.

Increasingly also, longstanding concerns around the predominantly Protestant orientation of world Christianity scholars (though with notable exceptions) are being overtaken by the thornier issue of whether the study of world Christianity is an insider undertaking shaped by confessional persuasion. How institutional structures (ranging from graduate seminaries to university-based departments) shape world Christianity programs in terms of methodologies, curricula, and academic preparation is another major question—one closely related to the ambiguity surrounding what counts as training in world Christianity or even how competent world Christianity faculty are identified. These questions and more are addressed in this volume.

The wide-ranging impact of institutional structures or settings on the study of world Christianity gets some attention in a few chapters (esp. chapter 3). But this central issue deserves focused treatment for a number of reasons. This volume provides a comprehensive review of the field of study and detailed analysis of a wide range of critical issues, but it also aims to shed some light on pragmatic or strategic elements that have significant bearing on the field of study’s development and impact. Moreover, many of the more serious issues considered in the pages that follow are inseparable from the particular institutional environment in which world Christianity programs are designed or developed. In other words, the institutional dimensions of the study of world Christianity are central to any meaningful appraisal of its progress and prospects.

ogy. Peter C. Phan, “Doing Theology in World Christianities: Old Tasks, New Ways,” in Joel Cabrita et al., eds., *Relocating World Christianity*. Critics point out that the argument overstates one side of the global-local dialectic and that the Christian movement was marked by great and increasing diversity from the earliest beginnings (in keeping with the faith’s universalist vision). Indeed, world Christianity scholars have increasingly rejected the tendency to see the field of study as confined to non-Western realities or a post-Western Christendom era. See Klaus Koschorke, “Transcontinental Links, Enlarged Maps, and Polycentric Structures in the History of World Christianity,” *Journal of World Christianity* 6, no. 1 (2016): 29, 32; Dale T. Irvin, “What Is World Christianity,” in Jonathan Y. Tan and Anh Q. Tran, eds., *World Christianity: Perspectives and Insights* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016), 12; Sanneh and McClymond, *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to World Christianity*, 3.

10. Phan, “Doing Theology in World Christianities,” 121.

The Institutional Question and the Complexities of Incubation¹¹

It goes without saying that there is considerable variety in academic institutions that support the study of world Christianity not only in profile, conception, capacity, or setting (e.g., university, seminary, or center) but also from one region to another. The great diversity in institutional contexts, even within the same country, translates into resource inequities (size of faculty and range of expertise, among others) and potential divergence in outcomes (especially in doctoral research and preparation). These and related issues raise questions about what constitutes world Christianity scholarship and how the next generation of scholars is being trained. The point at issue is not that there is need for a central accrediting authority or a homogenization of design and construction material; rather that greater comprehension of the varieties of institutional contexts, designs, and experiences is urgently needed, if only to grasp the fluid contours of academic formation.

Actually, the establishment of world Christianity programs in academic settings is often an indicator of institutional evolution or, as Dana Robert suggests, “a revitalization movement in academic culture” (chapter 1). On occasion successful initiatives are the unanticipated product of new strategic needs, fresh clamor for diversity (in curricula and recruitment), faculty retirements, or even global economic trends. Often, this state of transition and flux is discernible only after the fact. But it means that world Christianity scholars occasionally find themselves in the middle of internal faculty struggles. One consultation participant who had worked in a variety of institutional settings in the United States (including a free-standing seminary, a school of theology, and a religion department in a Christian university) recalls disparate understandings of world Christianity in different institutions, wide variations in openness to new courses (from resistance to active encouragement), a range of attitudes to the intellectual resources of the non-Western world, turf fights over curricula design or course distribution, and contradictory expectations in the wake of a world Christianity appointment.

Transitions and Innovation

The varieties of institutional experiences and challenges received considerable attention at our consultation. By the nature of things, how-

11. While I draw mainly on personal experience for the examples and evaluation presented in this section, the overall assessment benefited from the critical insights and views shared by participants at the consultation; in particular, the consultation papers presented by Elias Bongmba, Lalsangkima Pachuau, and Daryl Ireland.

ever, the most concrete examples include private or confidential content and cannot be shared in a publication such as this. However, the issue does deserve attention. The appraisal provided here is more illustrative than exhaustive, in part because it is limited to the U.S. context. It is also framed around my own personal experience, with the subjectivity and limitations that this implies.¹² Of course, concrete examples are snapshots in time; which is to say that the issues or situations have in many cases been resolved or continue to evolve. My ultimate objective, however, is to highlight and analyze the relevance of institutional structures and parameters for the study of world Christianity more broadly, in a way that illuminates the significant bearing of institutional structures on the field of study's progression.

In 2009, while a faculty member in the School of Intercultural Studies (SIS) at Fuller Theological Seminary, I conceived of and spearheaded the founding of the Center for Missiological Research (CMR). By then I had been immersed in the world Christianity discourse and international projects for well over a decade—dating back to my studies under Andrew Walls at the Center for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World (now Center for the Study of World Christianity) at the University of Edinburgh. The establishment of the CMR reflected the determination by a handful of faculty, with the full backing of the dean, to create an academic structure based on a vision for doctoral-level missiological study and research that took seriously new global realities (a “post-American” world in which, for instance, American evangelicals had become a minority) as well as the radical shift in foci, topics, and training necessitated by the emergence of Christianity as a non-Western religion. In terms of programs and function, the center was specifically designed to advance the study of world Christianity through PhD studies, public lectures, symposia, postdoctoral fellowships, and partnerships with institutions in Asia and Africa. It also absorbed a preexisting “Global Research Institute” at Fuller that provided postdoctoral writing fellowships for non-Western scholars.

The use of “missiological” in the center’s name reflected the institutional environment in which it was conceived and created. A few years earlier, the (then) School of World Mission had changed its name, amidst much debate, to the School of Intercultural Studies. The name change attracted considerable attention and controversy (and probably cost the school some donors). More discerning minds recognized that the old designation was outmoded and emblematic of an American imperial world-

12. Since these concrete examples reflect my own personal view and understanding, the names of valuable coworkers (and not a few co-conspirators) are withheld.

view. But the move was ultimately rooted in pragmatism. The “world mission” imprimatur on websites and graduation certificates increasingly jeopardized or constrained employment opportunities for graduates and alumni whose education was specifically designed for service in organizations and ministries throughout the world. (For more on this, see chapter 3.) In naming the new center, however, the key word was “research.” Use of “missiological” reflected this concept’s embeddedness in the school’s DNA, an identification that remained a major source of attraction to prospective graduate students. In essence, “missiological” served the new center’s purpose, even though CMR’s objectives clearly invested it with a more expansive meaning and application.

The establishment of the Center for Missiological Research exemplifies institutional initiatives that occurred at a time when the transition from mission studies to world Christianity was still underway. This is not to validate the assumption that “world Christianity” is essentially “mission studies” in new clothes. The reality is more complicated than that.¹³ But, as Lalsangkima Pachuau noted in a consultation paper, mission or intercultural studies do tend to be important precursors to the study of world Christianity in seminaries. In any case, even though the center’s vision adhered to a world Christianity framework, the term “world Christianity” was less in vogue when the CMR was founded than it is today.

Interestingly, the inherent tensions in CMR’s “world Christianity” vision were evident from the beginning. They included being Western-based and resourced while promoting an explicit agenda for nurturing scholarship that moved beyond Western perspectives and categories; mining the rich contributions of the discipline of missiology but producing research that is deeply critical of its norms and categories; and the challenge of cultivating a focus on non-Western contexts and experiences (in institutions dominated by Western needs, priorities, models of inquiry, and students) without reinforcing the “us and them” dialectic or feeding an intellectual appetite for the exotic among American students. Navigating these issues required scrupulous programming and policy making. Above all, as is invariably the case for such initiatives, the fact that it took place in an auspicious and enabling environment made a ton of difference. But even that goes only so far.

13. There is some truth in this, but it is also simplistic. I agree with Dale Irwin that world Christianity has multiple roots, of which missiology may be one of the most significant; Dale T. Irvin, “World Christianity, a Genealogy,” *Journal of World Christianity* 9, no. 1 (2019). See also, James Strasburg, “Creating, Practicing, and Researching a Global Faith: Conceptualizations of World Christianity in the American Protestant Pastor and Seminary Classroom,” *Journal of World Christianity* 6, no. 2 (2016).

The fact that Fuller Theological Seminary is nondenominational mattered (in the U.S. context), since this eliminated preoccupation with a narrow constituency or the training needs of a particular polity.¹⁴ Fuller boasted a large and diverse student population (with a sizeable Korean program) and was also invested or embedded in global partnerships and networks that represented a wide array of ideological commitments. Academic programs were wide-ranging, and the existence of a School of Psychology (among other factors) ensured robust connections to the world outside the church or institutional Christianity. Incidentally, the global financial crisis (ca. 2007–2008) fostered even greater receptiveness to new academic initiatives that emphasized the needs of the global church and called for recruitment strategies with a wider lens. But Fuller's prominence within the evangelical academic constellation, combined with the School of Intercultural Studies' international reputation, all but ensured widespread interest and enrollment.

Yet, for a new center with an innovative academic vision, there were impediments aplenty. Limited financial resources for scholarships and increasingly inhospitable (post-9/11) American immigration policies translated into low international enrollment from countries or regions in the non-Western world¹⁵—despite strong partnerships with institutions in Asia and Africa. All too often, non-Western applicants who had sponsorship lacked the academic requirements; and, in a time of purse tightening, many American donors (organizations and individuals) were even more skittish than usual about funding non-Western students who in many instances failed to return to their home countries after costly education in the United States. Moreover, opportunities for graduate/postgraduate theological education were growing rapidly in parts of Asia and Africa, where prospective students could study for a tiny fraction of the cost of an American education and avoid the severe disruptions and dilemmas of relocation to the West. (The study of world Christianity in the United States and Europe continues to face significant challenges in these areas.)

Furthermore, even in a favorable environment, organizational structures and ingrained academic traditions troubled the CMR game plan. Fuller comprised three schools (Theology, Psychology, and Intercultural Studies) with distinctive academic profiles. The tensions and discon-

14. Though it maintained strong commitment to an evangelical ethos, an evangelical identity was not a prerequisite for student enrollment.

15. In the 2003–2004 academic year, the number of foreign students in the United States declined for the first time in thirty years, with a corresponding decline in foreign applications to American graduate schools; see "A Survey of Higher Education: Wandering Scholars," *The Economist*, September 10, 2005.

nection between the schools of theology and intercultural studies were longstanding. This state of affairs meant that, though widely celebrated, the CMR initiative (and, by extension, the study of world Christianity it promoted) was perceived as a special project associated with the unique interests of an individual school. A mere handful of faculty members in the School of Theology were associated with world Christianity scholarship. Quite simply, intra-institutional silos and programmatic “lanes” (fortified by decades of mutual resistance and misunderstandings) rendered the wider interdisciplinary collaboration and cross-fertilization envisaged by the CMR initiative largely aspirational—at least in the short term. Change came over time, facilitated by farsighted leadership, new interpersonal alliances, and (to be honest) a few faculty retirements!

However, as many know all too well, such positive change in institutional dynamics is not a foregone conclusion. In many institutional settings in the United States and elsewhere, the interdisciplinary or multimethod approach that the study of world Christianity calls for are constrained or impeded by traditional academic divisions or entrenched curricular demarcations.

Modules and Nomenclature

If missiology or intercultural studies provide a natural transition point in many seminaries and university-based schools of theology/divinity, the study of religion frequently serves the same purpose in secular or “nonsectarian” university settings. Elias Bongmba, who led the effort to create a graduate track in “Global Christianity” at Rice University (a private liberal arts research institution in Houston, Texas), reports in his consultation paper that the new track was rooted in the historical study of religion and heavily linked to historical studies. Since the history of religions approach is somewhat modular, in the sense that it treats Christianity as one of the religions of the world, faculty collaboration is essential. As such, in departments of religion with strong capacity and diversity, the study of world Christianity readily draws on faculty with expertise in a wide range of related disciplines, perspectives, and regional contexts (see also chapter 3). It is easy to imagine that the establishment of world Christianity programs in different institutions around the world draws on available resources in similar fashion, allowing world Christianity practitioners and close allies to craft courses and concentrations with new interdisciplinary approaches or methods in innovative ways.

The recently established Global Christianity program at Emory University is distinctive in at least one respect: it is based on cooperation between the Candler School of Theology (which has a separate world

Christianity program at the master's level) and Emory's Department of Religion in the College of Arts.¹⁶ This setup reflects the fact that all PhD studies in religion at the university are housed within the Graduate Division of Religion (GDR), which is comprised of faculty from both the School of Theology and the College of Arts and Sciences. With some fifty faculty and close to twice as many students, the GDR constitutes one of the largest PhD programs in religion and theology in the United States, with great resources for studying religious cultures around the world and a strong interdisciplinary academic culture. Emory's Global Christianity program is accessed in one of two ways: as "a field of emphasis" within the Historical Studies in Theology and Religion course of study (one of nine¹⁷), or as a "GDR concentration." The latter allows PhD students in units across the GDR to incorporate world Christianity approaches and theoretical models in developing their research projects and to work closely with world Christianity faculty. This multi-unit architecture and multimodular approach maximizes use of resources but also adds layers of complexity that are unlikely to be present where the faculty and students of the program are all located in one center or department.

The descriptors "world" and "global" are used interchangeably by world Christianity scholars and are treated as synonymous in the relevant literature.¹⁸ In some university settings (in the United States), however,

16. This is noteworthy only because strong or systematic collaboration between schools of theology and departments of religion within the same university is rare in the U.S. context. At Boston University, to cite one example, the study of Christianity was removed from the Graduate Program of Religion and confined to the School of Theology.

17. Changes to the structure of these nine courses of study are imminent. At the time of this writing, they are American Religious Cultures; Ethics and Society; Hebrew Bible; Historical Studies in Theology and Religion; Jewish Religious Cultures; New Testament; Person, Community, and Religious Life; Theological Studies; and West and South Asian Religions.

18. A major exception was eminent world Christianity scholar Lamin Sanneh, who viewed "global Christianity" as synonymous with Western imperial expansion, and interchangeable with "Christendom"; in sharp contrast with "world Christianity," which he associated with "the spontaneous coming into being of Christian communities" and "the variety of indigenous responses" among populations that had not been Christian. See Lamin O. Sanneh, *Whose Religion Is Christianity?: The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 22 (see also pp. 75, 78, 92). This conceptualization has several weaknesses: the failure to recognize that Western Christianity is itself rooted in indigenous responses; the unhelpful notion that "world Christianity" is a post-Christendom phenomenon (which Sanneh himself refutes elsewhere); and the once common, but now widely challenged, understanding of globalization as a one-directional, Western-controlled process. As noted below, others are equally convinced that "world" (not "global") is laden with imperialistic or hegemonic intent!

the establishment of world Christianity programs inadvertently activates contentious claims that one term or the other is symbolic of Western hegemony. This appears to have fostered a divergence in institutional usage. In seminaries and divinity schools (in the United States), both labels are used; whereas in university (religious) departments, the “global” nomenclature is widely favored.¹⁹ The predilection for “global” in university religion departments is possibly rooted in deep aversion to phrases like “world religions” or “world mission,” an aversion that is generally absent or muted in divinity schools or schools of theology, even within the same institutional setting.²⁰ At Boston University, renowned world Christianity scholar Dana Robert chose to use “global” when she founded the Center for Global Christianity and Mission in order “to fit in better with university nomenclature.”²¹ This, interestingly, made her the Truman Collins Professor of *World Christianity* and History of Mission, and Director of the Center for *Global Christianity* and Mission, at the same institution (italics added)!

The “world” versus “global” argument perhaps exemplifies the many parochialisms of Western academia. In reality, either term can be used with hegemonic connotations. What matters, as Dana Robert notes, “is *how* they’re being used, rather than *which* is being used.”²² But even if such debates act as a lightning rod for latent misperceptions, they do alert world Christianity scholars to the heavy ideological baggage that the field of study carries, at least in the eyes of outsiders (or even sympathetic colleagues). They also showcase the kinds of institutional concessions and trade-offs that world Christianity programs must still make in some institutional settings in order to be taken seriously or even to get out of the starting gate.

19. Examples include Boston University, Duke University, Emory University, Rice University, and the University of Washington. Whether the same is true of the European context, where world Christianity programs or units are relatively fewer but linguistic differences are a factor, is difficult to say. It is, however, interesting to note a similar contrast between the Center for the Study of World Christianity (linked to Edinburgh University’s Divinity School) and the Global Christianity and Inter-religious Relations program in the Centre for Theology and Religious Studies (at Lund University).

20. Thus, while “world Christianity” is the nomenclature of choice within Emory’s Candler School of Theology (used for a named academic chair and the relevant program), “global Christianity” is strongly favored within the department of religion.

21. Dana L. Robert and Aaron Hollander, “Beyond Unity and Diversity: A Conversation with Dana Robert on Mission, Ecumenism, and Global Christianities,” *Ecumenical Trends* (June 2019): 3.

22. *Ibid.*, 3.

Some Answers, More Questions

It bears reiterating that the institutional realities that shape the study of world Christianity (in the United States and elsewhere) vary greatly. Many more factors are undoubtedly at play in institutional settings outside the North Atlantic world. From a certain perspective, the diversity of institutional arrangements conceivably adds to the strength of the field. At the same time, the differences often translate into disparities and inequities that increase as the field of study spreads globally. But should it? Do genuine efforts to promote world Christianity, as an academic field or scholarly discourse, outside the North Atlantic world in which it originated, raise ethical questions related to acute disparity of resources and the risk of captivity to Western academic models and structures? Questions of this nature are coming more fully into view as the field of study grows in appeal and acceptance (see chapter 2).

“World” as construct and concrete reality has been integral to world Christianity discourse from its inception. But the prominence of Africanist scholars in the development of the field of study means that the African context can feature prominently in its formation. For this reason, few areas of development promise to be more fertile or fascinating than the increasing contribution by scholars located in, or immersed in the study of, other regions of the world. Still, on a larger canvas, scholarly involvement and contribution from the non-Western world (or Global South) remains relatively limited. The study of world Christianity, at least in terms of academic profile and programmatic initiatives, is largely confined to (and dominated by) Western-based institutions or entities. In fact, as things stand, there is increasing likelihood that the field will become wholly captive to North Atlantic (Anglophone) academic structures and intellectual categories. This raises the undesirable possibility that a field of study attentive to marginality and “committed to engage with Christians worldwide” might end up as an embodiment of the inequities it seeks to confront: a fixation with Western academic priorities, or a propensity to settle for extraction of research data and knowledge from non-Western contexts in place of meaningful collaboration and exchange with non-Western voices. Whether or not this is realized, the mere prospect is worrisome.

All of this is not to suggest that the field of world Christianity is in a state of crisis or, for that matter, at an inflection point. As noted above, it is flourishing in the North Atlantic world. As such, the pressing issues mentioned above can be perceived in one of two ways: as either the fruits of prosperity or as representing growing pains (or both?). What matters is that they cannot be dismissed as inconsequential. Most indicate areas of persistent confusion or potential disruption. Disruption is not necessarily

a bad thing in academic discourse. World Christianity scholarship is itself disruptive of Western paradigms and disciplinary boundaries that insulate intellectual production. But disruption is not a goal or grand design. The field of study must tend to shared commitments and core frameworks or risk loss of (intramural) congruency. An ingrained penchant for boundary-crossing makes for provocative analyses and exciting findings; but without conceptual parameters of its own, however flexible, hermeneutical coherence is likely to erode over time. In any case, these issues require serious attention and debate. For this reason alone, an appraisal of this rapidly shifting terrain promises to be a vital resource for both experienced and emerging scholars.

Overview of the Book

The chapters in this volume (divided into three sections) provide a critical reassessment of the field of world Christianity in a way that connects historical developments to emergent dilemmas (or incipient debates) and promising trajectories. The contributors, who comprise an international and diverse group of world Christianity scholars, explore topics that range from basic questions of conception and North Atlantic lineage to more complex issues pertaining to institutional life, intersection with an expanding array of established academic fields and specialties, and the critical issues raised by fresh intellectual engagement and exchange with different regions of the world. The treatment aims not to resolve all questions but to deeply scrutinize their significance, elucidate what is at stake (pitfalls and possibilities), and appraise the issues in a way that moves the conversation forward.

The three chapters in section one cover issues of conceptualization and institutionalization. In chapter 1, **Dana Robert** draws on her extensive experience in the world Christianity field of study to provide a front-row view of its evolution since the early 1990s. This intriguing review includes useful accounts of critical milestones and major debates. The rich details are enlivened by a personal narrative that often gives a “behind the scenes” vibe that many readers will relish.

In the first of two collaborative chapters (chapter 2), **Emma Wild-Wood**, **Carlos Cardoza-Orlandi**, and **Dyron Daugherty** reappraise the complex strands that shaped the rise of the study of world Christianity in the Global North, primarily as a “corrective to an understanding of Christianity as a Western phenomenon.” The authors describe and evaluate major aspects of the field of study’s origins and ongoing development. Among other things, they outline recent critique (of early concepts, emphases, and glaring limitations), examine new challenges that

lie ahead as world Christianity becomes more established within Western institutions and spreads globally, and make a case for an approach that is expansive, inclusive, and relational.

In chapter 3, **Kirsteen Kim** probes the key issues of how the interdisciplinary nature of the study of world Christianity might impact student preparation and employment prospects. This detailed assessment draws on her considerable international experience and intimate familiarity with institutional structures. Taking a different approach to the genealogical question, she identifies six major disciplines that are foundational to the rise of the field of world Christianity. She evaluates the approach that each provides to the study of world Christianity and briefly reviews implications for program design and curricular development.

The second section of the volume focuses on methodology and interdisciplinary approaches. Which core elements constitute training and preparation in world Christianity scholarship is an increasingly urgent question, especially given the field of study's growing scope. This query forms the centerpiece of **Paul Kollman's** contribution (chapter 4), in which he scrutinizes the value of world Christianity as a theoretical framework and proposes certain "scholarly dispositions" that he considers vital for world Christianity scholarship. The strong interdisciplinary (or integrative) character of the study of world Christianity is greatly valued but seldom evaluated. In chapter 5, **Kwok Pui-lan** and **Gina Zurlo**, two scholars from different disciplinary backgrounds, diagnose the benefits and challenges of using multiple methods and theories (beyond history and theology). Drawing on sociology of religion, gender studies, and migration studies, they examine the complications and contributions produced by the intersection of world Christianity scholarship with a growing number of disciplines, and call for more South-to-South engagement.

In a manner that incorporates elements of both methodology and conception, **Shobana Shankar** interrogates the two concepts that comprise "world Christianity" in chapter 6. She makes the case that the use of "world" as a verb—hence, "*worlding*"—is more capacious (as method) because it conveys the boundary-defying nature of lived religion; and this, in turn, exposes tensions with "Christianity," which is associated with confessional particularity and bounded existence. This tension, Shankar argues, inhibits world Christianity scholarship in terms of its ability to address religious phenomena that occur in "in-between" spaces, where Christian and non-Christian intersect for instance. Using historical examples from Northern Nigeria, she explains how a "*worlding*" approach can reshape understanding of world Christianity and its capacity to contribute to studies of religion and globalization more broadly.

The volume's final section is devoted to the study of fields or regions that have not typically received strong attention in the study of Christianity and exemplify the rich fruits that await fuller engagement or interaction. While many acknowledge that failure to fully incorporate the perspectives, histories, and debates of the diverse regions of the Global South impoverishes the study of world Christianity, few make the case as forcefully or insightfully as **Gemma Tulud Cruz** does in chapter 7. Her assessment focuses on Asia, a region where Western Christian influences remain dominant (despite the region's status as the birthplace of the Christian movement). She calls for comprehensive and creative (re)engagement with Asian experiences (encompassing the massive Asian diaspora) within world Christianity scholarship, but also cautions that this requires confronting many challenges, such as the politics of scholarship, imbalances in academic publishing, and the marginalization of non-Western contexts and epistemologies.

Despite growing interest in Latin America among world Christianity scholars, writes **Raimundo Barreto** in chapter 8, the field of study has had minimal engagement with Latin American scholarship or its academic world. Reasons for this include the predominantly Anglophone and Protestant character of world Christianity scholarship and the focus on Africa that marked its early development. In forthright terms and compelling analysis, Barreto explains why full interaction with Latin America's history, religious world, and intellectual traditions is urgently needed in the study of world Christianity. Despite the language barriers, he notes, vital areas of intellectual convergence between the two and recent developments in Latin America's academic realm portend copious rewards for mutual engagement.

In chapter 9, the focus turns to China. **Pan-chiu Lai**, a Chinese Christian theologian and world Christianity scholar based in Hong Kong, has long promoted the world Christianity approach and methodologies in his teaching and writings. Here, he examines crucial ways in which the world Christianity discourse can equip Chinese Christian scholars not only to address the misleading but entrenched conception of Christianity as a "Western" religion in Chinese academia, but also to make distinctive contributions to the study of Christianity "as a cross-cultural and multilingual movement." Central to his analysis is a theoretical model that makes full use of the Chinese cultural, philosophical, and religious heritage to enrich theological discourse and the study of religion.

Inadequate attention to the Christian traditions of the Middle East in historical studies of Christianity, as **Deanna Ferree Womack** notes (chapter 10), is commonplace; and this marginalization is evident, though

perhaps to a lesser degree, in the study of world Christianity. In this fascinating overview, Womack analyzes the reasons behind the neglect of Middle Eastern Christianity (past and present) in the relevant literature and offers explanations for the dearth of scholars of Middle Eastern Christianity who identify with the world Christianity field of study. She advances persuasive arguments for world Christianity scholarship to give substantial attention to Middle Eastern Christianity and engage its scholars more fully.

Depending on one's perspective, the study of world Christianity is now attracting a third generation of scholars, who bring their own unique and pressing issues or questions to the field of study. In some respects, the process will be disruptive; especially because, as **Helen Jin Kim** observes (chapter 11), new scholars engage the field from a greater multiplicity of academic disciplines, regional focus, and methodologies. In this final essay (one that fittingly connects past, present, and future), Kim reviews the field of study's progression and emphasizes the rich and enduring intellectual legacy of its pioneers. She demonstrates how critical insights advanced by early Africanists (with regard to empire and mission, for instance) furnish important analytical tools for a transnational approach to the study of multidisciplinary field of transpacific Korean Christianity.

Only two of the chapters in this volume are multi-authored. But the volume as a whole showcases the collaborative approach of world Christianity scholarship insofar as most of the chapters benefited from wider conversations and reveal the considerable gains of an in-person consultation.²³ In the final analysis, the volume explores important and pressing issues with a depth of coverage and multiplicity of perspectives that a single-authored monograph is unlikely to achieve. By combining the input and insights of both seasoned and rising scholars it also presents an intergenerational dialectic that is often absent in such treatments. The deeply pragmatic nature of some of the issues under consideration also encouraged a framework that combined scholarly appraisal and pragmatic evaluation. The result is a rich and instructive trove of material that will be a valuable resource and reference for both experienced scholars and entrants, as well as the growing cadre of interested inquirers eager to find out more about this growing and exciting field.

23. In addition to the authors of the chapters in this volume, the list of consultation participants include (in alphabetized order): Afe Adogame, Elias Bongmba, Joel Cabrita, Virginia (Ginny) Garrard, Daryl Ireland, Dale Irvin, Arun Jones, Klaus Koschorke, Joy McDougall, and Devaka Premawardhana. (Dana Robert is the only contributor to this volume who was not present at the consultation itself.)