

Introduction

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1 *Water naar de zee dragen* or Carrying Coals to Newcastle?¹

The number of publications featuring the term ‘World Christianity’ seems to multiply on a daily basis. The question is therefore justified: why yet another book? There are already countless publications examining the histories and contemporary manifestations of Christianity/ies worldwide, exemplifying translocal connectivities, multiple centers, and integrative forces.

To us as editors, the alacrity with which World Christianity has been embraced as a paradigm is both a cause for joy and a reason for concern. On the upside, the popularity of what Paul Kollman (2014) has called the “world-Christian turn” evidences that the time was ripe for paradigmatic innovation. The wide support for and eager embrace of the concept World Christianity evinces that scholars were keenly awaiting a paradigm that had ingested post-colonial critiques and could methodologically account for the contextuality, and hence inherent diversity, of Christianity/ies in past and present. On the downside however, the rapid popularization of the World Christianity label seems to have impeded a thorough scrutiny of the methodological implications of such a paradigmatic shift. Thus far, few publications have explored the “world-Christian turn” from a methodology point of view. This book intends to do just that.

A brief literature survey can illustrate the type of issues at stake: Justo González (2002) has for example pointed to the prolongation of a Europe-centered periodization of Christianity, a matter raised by Enrique Dussel as early as the 1960s. Arun Jones (2014) has highlighted the persistence of binary thinking (e.g. indigenous versus missionary), whereas Nagy (2010) has raised the pervasiveness of ethnic and national categories in World Christianity research, which, she argues, leads to oversimplifications of Christianity/ies’ complexity and superdiversity. Tinyiku Maluleke (2016) has broached the issue of power, limelighting that the much celebrated changed demographics of Christianity have not produced a change in power dynamics, as much of the literature seems to presume.

1 In order to flag the taken-for-granted hegemony of the English language in the academia (which for neither of us is our mother tongue), we opted for a bilingual title of this section.

Other scholars have flagged that World Christianity scholarship tends to be selective in its representation of Christianity/ties, favoring some trends, traditions, and manifestations over others. Dyron Daugherty (2013) for example has pointed to the absence of Oriental and Eastern Orthodoxy in World Christianity literature, Nagy (2010) to the recurring trope-like references to China's growth and Frederiks (2019) to the highly selective portrayal of migrant Christianity in Europe. In as much as these selective representations are problematic in their own right, they are also corollaries of the theoretical presuppositions and ambitions that drive much World Christianity scholarship, but that are rarely made explicit. Joel Cabrita and David Maxwell (2017: 21) have for example taken World Christianity scholarship to task for its "fetishistic commitment to regional particularity" and its "exoticising reification of the local" and its limited attention for integrative forces within Christianity/ies. This fascination with local distinctiveness however is the logical outcome of a conceptualization of World Christianity enmeshed in theories of translatability and inculturation. Similarly, Frederiks (2019: 326, 333) has argued that the preoccupation with vibrancy and numerical growth of 'Christianity in the global South' in much World Christianity scholarship signals its entanglement with two, often intertwined, theoretical strands: the Church Growth movement which considers quantitative growth a proof of "the workings of the Holy Spirit and therefore its 'possession of the truth'", and postcolonial theory "that promulgates the vibrancy, authenticity and veracity of Christianity in the 'global South' over against European Christianity."

At the heart of these methodological concerns is the notion World Christianity itself, which as Peter Phan (2012: 172) points out, suffers from "conceptual clarity and consistency". For reasons expounded in chapters 1 and 2 of this volume, the editors Frederiks and Nagy problematize trends that conceptualize World Christianity as a subject matter or a field of study, and propose to reserve the term World Christianity for a particular, multidisciplinary approach to study Christianity/ies (Frederiks, this volume; Nagy this volume, Nagy 2017).

The brief literature review above demonstrates the necessity of a comprehensive inquiry into the methodological ramifications of the "world-Christian turn". This volume gives methodology the center stage and aspires to spark the debate on methodology. To that end, we as editors have purposely invited a diverse group of contributors from a variety of academic backgrounds (anthropology, religious studies, history, missiology, intercultural studies, theology, and patristics) as well as of multiple cultural and national belongings. The authors do not share a collective understanding of what 'World Christianity' entails.

As such, the contributions exemplify the conceptual ambiguities, currently endemic in 'World Christianity' scholarship. All contributors were explicitly asked to foreground methodological issues and describe, where possible, how they negotiated the methodological challenges they encountered.

This has resulted in a heterogeneous volume. Some of the chapters are theoretically-oriented, others are case-study based. Some chapters have a historical focus, while others examine contemporary Christianity/ies. Some mainly focus on intra-Christian dynamics, whereas others foreground the encounters between Christians and people of other faith traditions. The diversity notwithstanding, each of the chapters touches on methodological issues relevant to World Christianity debates and draws out methodological issues relevant to delineating a 'World Christianity' approach.

In chapter one Martha Frederiks makes a case for understanding the term 'World Christianity' to signify a particular approach of studying Christianity/ies. In order to make this argument, Frederiks first explores the genealogy of World Christianity and situates prevalent conceptualizations, such as World Christianity as a subject matter and as a field of study, in current academic discussions. Outlining the multiple conceptual and terminological pitfalls of current conceptualisations, she then proposes to reserve the term 'World Christianity' for a particular approach to studying Christianity/ies, referencing a kindred proposition made by Nagy in 2017. Recognising Christianity's inherently plural character, a World Christianity approach, Frederiks argues, "entails the conscious and consistent endeavour to study particular Christian communities, beliefs, or practices in the light of and in relation to Christianity's wider (hi)story, mindful of integrative and globalizing forces as well as of its multiple centers, trajectories, and agents, and cognizant of the diversity of beliefs and practices this has produced across time and space" (Frederiks, this volume). Frederiks then proceeds to describe, in broad strokes, how to operationalize such a World Christianity approach from a religious studies perspective.

In chapter two Dorottya Nagy seeks to further ground the proposal for a World Christianity approach by exploring parallel developments of 'worldling' or 'world-mindedness' in the wider humanities, with particular attention for conceptualizations in world literature, world philosophy, and world history. She argues that such intellectual exercises assist in further articulating the methodology of a World Christianity approach. Building on earlier work in which she identified connectivity, diversity, unity, and locality as central concepts in a World Christianity approach from a theological perspective (Nagy 2017), she concludes her chapter by exploring how 'worldling' in the wider humanities informs these categories.

In chapter three, Raimundo Baretto critically interrogates World Christianity's theoretical underpinnings. Echoing critiques that the dominance of African histories and experiences in the theorization of World Christianity limits its analytical usefulness in other contexts (Cabrita and Maxwell 2017: 22; Mallampalli 2017: 164), Baretto proposes to use critical corrective tools from Latin American Christian historiography, liberationist hermeneutics, and decolonial theory to develop a more comprehensive theoretical approach.

Baretto's chapter is followed by two chapters on historiography that examine how to mitigate World Christianity's partiality to polyphony and pluriformity with biased source materials. In chapter four, Emma Wild-Wood proposes the dual strategies of close reading and triangulation. Wild-Wood argues that a close reading of traditional missionary sources which acknowledges their variety of genre, audience, and content and which is sensitive to the nuances in and between the sources will yield fresh interpretations of well-worn materials. In addition, she proposes to triangulate missionary records with other sources (e.g. newspapers, private archives, or regional sources) to strengthen the quest for multiple perspectivity. Wild-Wood illustrates the effectiveness of these strategies by means of a micro-historical example, drawn from Church Missionary Society materials on Uganda. Her investigation of the motivations of the missionaries and the relationships between missionaries and indigenous peoples shows that the sources give evidence of unequal power relations as well as cultural exchange and also reveals how far indigenous peoples were drawn to a cosmopolitan and universal missionary vision. Thus, the methods proposed by Wild-Wood not merely produce a richer and more complex historiographical narrative, but simultaneously query the historical validity of established binaries of local versus global, indigenous versus missionary.

Also Joseph Lee and Christie Chow, who in chapter five discuss the challenges of historical research in China, question the use of the oppositional categories 'indigenous versus missionary'. Demonstrating the expediency of a critical inquiry into knowledge production, they argue that historiographies of Christianity in China that position an indigenous church over against Euro-American missionary Christianity buy into the post-1949 ideological national narrative. Separating the ties between Chinese and global churches, they maintain, has been part of the political agenda of the Communist state. Lee and Chow also caution against the use of essentialist analytical categories such as 'Chinese Christianity' and 'popular Christianity' that ignore the complex religious landscape, fragmented by doctrinal, liturgical and political disagreements. Mapping and interpreting China's rich and diverse Christian landscape while negotiating the state's control over access to the official

archives and over how Christianity is represented in the official historiography and in public discourse requires a combination of archival research and multi-site fieldwork, Lee and Chow argue. In contexts like China, they maintain, a mixed method approach, is a prerequisite to move beyond the state-centred historical narrative.

The two chapters on historiography are followed by a series of chapters that spotlight religiously plural settings and interfaith relations. In chapter six, Wesley Ariarajah explores the role and place of interfaith encounter and Christian presence in religiously plural societies in the emerging field of World Christianity. While he unequivocally endorses the need to investigate the impact of other religions on Christianity and the impact of Christianity on other religions, Ariarajah takes the discussion a step further by arguing that World Christianity scholarship also needs to reflect on how these encounters have affected or should affect Christian theology and missiology. To set the proverbial ball rolling, Ariarajah takes the World Christianity paradigm to task for not being sufficiently inclusive and makes a case for a paradigm that involves a “wider ecumenism”, encompassing all religious traditions. In keeping with this, Ariarajah proposes that Christian communities in religiously plural settings develop a public theology that is of “service to the concerns of the poor and marginalized masses” and “is open to the participation of peoples of other religious traditions and ideologies who would bring in their own resources to the task” (Ariarajah, this volume).

The volume continues with five case-study based chapters. In chapter seven, Kari Storstein Haug reflects on the role of comparative theology within the field of World Christianity. Her chapter presents two examples of Thai comparative theologizing and examines how Thai Christians within the predominantly Buddhist religious context of Thailand reflect on their faith in light of and as a response to the religious context in which they are situated. The chapter argues that by combining empirical and text-based methods, comparative theology can contribute to the World Christianity project by engendering in-depth knowledge of both the agency of local Christians and of local and contextualized forms of Christian theology and practice in religiously plural settings.

Where Haug studied the effects of interreligious coexistence on the beliefs and practices of individuals, Douglas Pratt, in chapter eight, focusses on the institutional level and examines the origins and development of contemporary Christian engagement in interreligious dialogue during the 20th century. Spotlighting the Vatican and the World Council of Churches (wcc) as key institutional expressions within Christianity worldwide, Pratt uses historical and comparative methods to study the theological dynamics that undergird the

reflection on the relationship to people of other faiths within the WCC and the Vatican and based on the historical investigation develops a typology of five models of interfaith engagement. Pratt's case-study demonstrates the expediency of synchronic studies within a World Christianity approach and evidences both similarities and divergencies in Christian institutional engagement in interfaith relations and interreligious dialogue.

Chapter nine by Lucien van Liere introduces yet another set of methods and demonstrates the value of discourse analysis and memory studies for a World Christianity approach. In a careful discussion of the ISIS video, showing the beheading of twenty-one migrant workers in Libya in January 2015 and of Christian responses to this atrocity, Van Liere demonstrates how all parties evoke frames developed through collective memory in order to ascribe meaning to the massacre: Islamic State by charging a 'global Christianity' with the historic aggression of 'the crusader' and Christian stakeholders (e.g. Coptic Church, Pope Francis, and American evangelical groups) by fashioning a global Christian community around a martyr frame. Van Liere argues that by discursively interconnecting religious communities across time and space and fortifying translocal bonds, each of these representations sculpts a specific interpretation of what 'global Christianity' entails, thus showing how conceptualizations such as 'global Christianity' are fashioned by public discourse as well as by the academia.

Chapter ten, written by Corey Williams, converges on the religiously plural landscape of contemporary Nigeria. In the chapter Williams explores multiple religious belonging and identity in the Yoruba region by researching a 'religious field'. Williams argues that whereas "the study of single traditions can bring attention to polycentrism, pluriformity, and transnational connections within individual traditions, this independent approach lacks a dynamic understanding of what Janson and Meyer term a 'religious field in which several religious groups coexist in ever shifting dynamics of similarity and difference' (Janson and Meyer 2016)" (Williams, this volume). In order to more fully comprehend everyday lived religion, Williams maintains, the analytical frame needs to be expanded to include multiple religions. Williams' case-study of examining participation in the Yoruba Egúngún festival shows the fruitfulness of this 'religious field' approach as Williams is able to detail how lived religious experience cuts across multiple religious traditions, enabling researchers to grasp a more holistic understanding of everyday lived religion. Williams concludes that while every religious field is distinct and needs to be contextualized, the methodological lessons offered on religious belonging and identity, everyday lived religion, entangled religion, bias and hierarchy, and multi-directional

exchange demonstrate that the notion 'religious field' can be applied broadly and productively in World Christianity scholarship.

Chapter eleven, a study of Augustine's changing conceptualizations of heresy by Paul van Geest, demonstrates that trends akin to World Christianity are also manifest within patristics. While Van Geest does not explicitly frame his work as 'World Christianity', his methodological experiment to temporarily bracket out Augustine's standing as the bedrock of the Latin Church, allows him situate Augustine in his contextual connectivities and read Augustine's texts as one voice amidst others, thus offering a window into the pluriformity and multivocality of Christianity's early history. His case-study convincingly shows the fluidity between heresy and orthodoxy in the patristic period, with Augustine constantly rethinking and rephrasing his theological understandings of heresy, both in conversation with different opponents and in relation to changing religious and political circumstances. Thus, the chapter evidences that a World Christianity approach can be fruitful for the study of both contemporary and past Christianity/ties.

In the last case-study chapter of this volume Stanley John grapples with the issue of taxonomy. Reflecting on his fieldwork at a Kuwaiti branch of Heavenly Feast, a Kerala 'New Generation' church with parishes in both India and abroad, John investigates how to categorize new movements such as the 'New Generation' churches in a way that does justice to both their identification with global Pentecostalism and their unique local histories. His review of taxonomies developed in North America brings him the conclusion that these taxonomies and conceptual frameworks fail to capture the complexity and uniqueness of these movements. John advocates that rather than to impose categories borrowed from other contexts on these Indian churches, it is necessary to develop a taxonomy from within their local social and ecclesial contexts.

In the final chapter we as editors revisit the methodological issues raised in the contributions in order to discern how the methods, perspectives, and insights discussed, aid us in further developing and operationalizing a World Christianity approach.

Finally, this volume is a quest for methodological (re)orientation and accountability in 'World Christianity' discourses from across research interests and disciplines. While each contribution to this volume merits reading in its own right, we hope that the variety of methodological perspectives offered by the collective chapters will aid and entice readers from a diversity of disciplinary background in visualizing and operationalizing what we call a 'World Christianity approach'.

In the apiary (front cover)

In the spring of 2010, I had a dream in which I placed the Platonic bodies, the tetra-, hexa-, octa-, dodeca-, and icosahedrons in beehives. Before I could find out what the bees did with the bodies, I woke up. During my wakefulness I applied the thoughts from my dream on a comb-press, this was how I could best transplant my ideas about the Platonic bodies into the world of bees. I wanted to understand as much as possible why the ideal geometry of work in case of the bees is the hexagonal comb building, closed by rhombuses.

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