

Crossing Borders, Transgressing Boundaries: Religion, Migration, and Climate Change

2025 Conference of the International Society for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture (ISSRNC)

June 23 – 27, 2025 | University of California, Santa Barbara (USA)

The [ISSRNC](#) is a multi-disciplinary society dedicated to studying the relationships among human beings, their diverse religions, and the earth's living systems. Papers are not limited to the conference theme; we enthusiastically welcome research addressing any area of the religion-nature-culture nexus.

Over the past decade, the impacts of anthropogenic climate change have become immediate and severe. Scientific models predict that these effects will intensify as we approach and exceed the threshold of 1.5° C above the pre-industrial average global temperature and other projected planetary boundaries. The struggle of living beings around the world (human and otherwise) to adapt to rapid changes raises urgent questions about migration and mobility, questions which are deeply interconnected to social, political, and religious controversies over physical borders and ethical or moral boundaries. Yet, these projected boundaries are themselves “imagined” by humans, raising additional questions about how they are constructed. In that sense, “planetary boundaries” share something in common with other kinds of borders: they are human articulations of where the limits of one kind of life ends and another begins. These discourses are often mired in Western-centric and colonial ideologies that silence the lived realities and knowledge systems of non-Western peoples and nonhuman animals. Moreover, these discourses often fail to consider the long geologic history of the earth and the various thresholds that have been exceeded in that history. Such discourses function as a means of adjudicating which lives are worthy, where, and on what terms.

This call invites scholars to critically assess and rethink how we imagine, control, and defend borders and boundaries—and relatedly, how migration shapes, and is shaped by, religious and ecological lives and worlds—in a time of rapid environmental change.

While proposals need not address the conference location, California is an appropriate place for a discussion of these themes. California is a site of nature-based religions and spiritualities, where a variety of new religious and social movements have emerged. Bordered by Mexico to the south and the Pacific Ocean to the west, California has long been home to the largest number of immigrants in the United States, a history dating back to the arrival of European colonizers in the 17th century and the troubling legacy of the Spanish mission system along the coastline. California has also seen historic destruction and displacement from climate-driven wildfires and drought, the effects of which, combined with severe housing inequities, are spawning an exodus from the state. For tens of thousands of years, what is now called California has been home to numerous Indigenous cultures whose traditional land practices shaped the landscape and are currently informing efforts to restore native ecosystems and mitigate climate impacts. Beyond human migrants, California is witness to numerous, imperiled animal migrations, ranging from the millions of birds that migrate annually along the Pacific Flyway, to dwindling Chinook Salmon populations whose massive migrations once set the patterns of Indigenous lifeways, to Western monarchs that overwinter in (non-native) Eucalyptus groves along the central and southern coast. The extractive industries driving the climate emergency are profoundly entangled with California's history and prosperity, and deeply engrained in its infamous car culture and associated values of fossil-fueled freedom and mobility.

We welcome proposals from scholars across the arts and humanities, sciences and social sciences, inviting all researchers broadly engaged with the nexus of religion, nature, and culture.

Following the conference theme of “Religion, Migration, and Climate Change,” we specifically invite paper or panel proposals on the following:

- ***Borders***
 - Theological, ethical, geopolitical, and decolonial critiques of borders, borderlands, ‘border thinking’ boundaries, categorization, etc. (e.g., settlement, legacy, empire, extraction, colonization).
 - Political theologies, political ecologies, and other critical reflections on the environmental and cultural impacts of religious lands, borders, boundaries, and territories.
 - Challenges to settler boundaries, land rights, and sovereignty, especially from Indigenous and traditional ecological knowledge perspectives.
 - Critical analyses of systems of globalization and knowledge production, naturalistic and religious worldviews, and perceptions of the universe and biosphere.
 - Perspectives from the new materialisms, which take seriously relationality and complexity (Barad 2007; Bennett 2009) and the decolonial notion of “border thinking” (Anzaldúa 1987; Schulz 2017), which emphasizes subjugated knowledges and re-frames cultural and political imaginaries.

- ***Migration***
 - Religious and spiritual aspects of migration, movement(s), mobility, taxonomy, and identity.
 - Considerations of environmentally induced migration, religious and spiritual responses to “climate refugees,” climate-migration as a driver of geopolitical instability, and populism.
 - The benefits, challenges, and ethical considerations of changing relationships with plants and non-human animals in relation to non-human migration, de-extinction, assisted evolution, geo-engineering climate solutions, synthetic biology, and space exploration.
 - Perspectives that consider how habitat fragmentation, encroachment, adaptation, migration, boundaries, fencing, or border crossings impact non-human animals.
 - The growth of right-wing and ethno-nationalist movements in response to climate induced migration.

- ***Boundaries***
 - Perspectives that consider boundaries and categorizations related to “native,” “non-native,” and “invasive” including and especially those that consider the ethics of selective elimination or extinction of non-native species and invasive organisms, or the impacts of invasive organisms on native and/or endangered species (e.g., sudden oak death and pine bark beetles).
 - Religious and spiritual dimensions of planetary models (e.g., Gaia, Earth System Science, and biosemiotics) especially those that consider planetary boundaries and thresholds.
 - Compatibility or conflict of current and emerging technologies with spatial and temporal boundaries, especially those that consider environmental justice, Indigenous rights and perspectives, religious/ethical perspectives on animals or nature (e.g., extractive, nuclear, surveillance, cloning/de-extinction, geoengineering).
 - Critical reflections on the role of the media in establishing, creating, maintaining, reinforcing, or policing the boundaries of discourses related to global climate change, extinction, refugee crises, and climate-related weather events.
 - Reflections on the evolutionary and ecological contexts of life which suggest that embodied life is entangled, transitory, and bounded.

- ***Crosscutting Investigations***
 - Inquiries into the intersection of religion, gender, sexuality, ability, and embodiment with the conference theme, especially considering erasure, silencing, and absences.
 - Reflection on theories and methods in the study of religion and the environment; barriers to interdisciplinary inquiry; and discussion of methods and practices for engaging across disciplines; trans- and post-disciplinary understandings; reflections on the scholar’s role in a warming world.
 - How boundaries of knowledge that mark modern epistemologies have created social and ecological problems and the ways these boundaries might be shifting.
 - Specific case studies that examine forced migration due to climate change and conflicts over resources as a result of climate change.

Proposal Submission and Deadlines:

Proposals may take any of the following forms:

1. **Individual Paper Proposal**

Submission must include a paper title, a 150-word abstract, and a 500-word description of the paper that indicates the methods, argument, and findings as well as the relevant literature engaged.

2. **Full Panel Proposal**

Full panels will consist of either three presenters and a respondent or four presenters and a moderator. Submissions must include a 500-word panel proposal and a 150-word abstract for each presenter paper that indicates the methods, argument, and findings as well as the relevant literature engaged.

3. **Roundtable Panel Proposal**

Roundtable panels will consist of 4-6 discussants who speak on a shared theme. Submissions must include a 500-word proposal and a brief description of each panelists' planned contribution to the discussion.

4. **Alternative Format Session**

In addition to the traditional paper and panel proposal format, we welcome proposals for alternative format sessions, including from artists, musicians, poets, and filmmakers to showcase their work related to the conference themes. We also encourage proposals that engage the borders between academic audiences and the general public. Alternative format sessions may also include, but are not limited to, working group meetings, interactive sessions, fireside chats, and book panels. Externally funded groups working on larger projects related to the conference themes may also apply for open or closed seminar style sustained conversation and reflection meetings at the conference.

Please submit your proposal [here](#) by **30 September 2024**. Papers will be anonymously peer-reviewed by an international committee of scholars, and decisions will be communicated by **1 November 2024**. All presenters will be required to [join or renew](#) their membership to attend the conference. Presenters and session organizers are encouraged to submit their articles for publication, or their sessions for special issues, to the official publication of the ISSRNC, the [Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture](#) (JSRNC).