



International Academy of Practical Theology

Coping with crisis:
hospitality, security, and the search for faithful connections

IAPT 2021 Online Conference

8 - 10 July 2021

Conference Theme

Many people around the world consider their lives and the world as threatened. Climate change and global ecological threats are real threats. Old age and widening inequality are impending socio-economic threats faced by many. In some countries, including Belgium, these are compounded by fears of terrorism and racism.

Balancing human rights and privacy with security and surveillance is increasingly difficult and is continuously negotiated. Political and religious movements – fundamentalist, nationalist, ethnocentric – pay attention to the fear and anxiety among many people by supporting their indulgence to fence themselves off from others.

This conference considers the multidimensional phenomenon of ‘crisis’ in both its sense of threat and opportunity. How are people coping with experiences of crisis? In what way does the rhetoric of fear and crisis mobilize people for social action? Does the current sense of ‘crisis’ lead to valuable and effective positive actions or does it overwhelm our senses, paralyzing our ability to act? And what does the experience of ‘crisis’ imply for contemporary theological conversations?

Communities respond to the sense of ‘crisis’ and anxiety in a variety of ways. Through formal and informal discourses, they create a sense of connectedness and belonging among the like-minded. This is true for formal faith communities as well as newer forms of ‘implicit religion’ (such as sports, political parties, groups for social activism). Faith communities try to offer answers to various forms of fear, as they stimulate people’s hope. Such responses are incurably ambiguous, balancing competing demands and values in an effort to both protect and reach out. This leads to many interesting questions for practical theology.

How do we evaluate societal and religious reactions to the ‘sense of crisis’ in our globalized world? Do the reactions of religious groups stimulate connections that empower people to cross social boundaries or do they adopt new forms of tribalism, focused on security, that protect against and thus exclude the other? How do faith communities strike a balance between an ethic of hospitality towards ‘the other’ and an ethic of security, which nurtures and protects treasured traditions and identities? Which religious practices and experiences (of groups and individuals) nurture trust towards others, and what forms of practice (implicitly or explicitly) encourage anxiety and self-protection instead? Who benefits from various approaches, and what are their dangers? How can hope, trust, and faith be nurtured on a micro, meso- and macrolevel in an atmosphere of fear and crisis? How can theology contribute to the flourishing of all species?

In Belgium, we find lots of connections with this theme from the terrorist attacks in March 2016 to the strong forms of populism in current politics. Yet this connection is not new as Belgium currently hosts the EU, core European organizations and NATO which arose as a response to World War II. Belgium wrestles with its current identity among the economically privileged of the world but also with its history as oppressed and oppressing people. These identities have included defense and deterrence as well as peace-making. Visits will be organized which explore the context of this congress among core social and religious organizations and historical sites in Flanders and Brussels.

Keynote Speakers

Nadine Bowers-Du Toit, Stellenbosch University, South Africa

Faustino Cruz, Fordham University, New York City

Celia Deane-Drummond, Oxford University

Kees de Groot, Tilburg University

Isolde Karle, Ruhr Universität, Bochum

Kathryn Tanner, Yale University, New Haven CT

Johan Verstraeten, KU Leuven

Call for Papers

We encourage practical theologians from all subdisciplines to present their thoughts about crisis and adequate responses. The online conference gives you the chance to present your paper in the form of a 10-minute video clip to all participants of the IAPT conference 2021. As a presenter of a paper clip, you will be grouped with four others into a panel and you will take part in one of the live paper panel discussions.

Topics can be related to discourses, practices or communities:

Discourses, views and theories

In what ways would the responses of practical theology enable people to live with risks, insecurity and doubt?

How do biblical-theological metaphors, such as “the family of God,” “the people of God,” “the Kingdom of God” or apocalyptic discourse influence people’s perception of crisis and their strategies for community formation?

How does the sense of crisis impact the value and relevance of our ‘(religious) identity’? What are the advantages (cohesion, security, ...) and dangers (exclusion, abuse of power, ...) of a new ‘politics’ of religious identity? Where and in which practices do practical theologians recognize these tendencies and possible positive or negative answers to these trends?

How can we build trust in relationships with others, while recognizing our difference from them? What is the influence of our theological anthropology, for instance in a conception of humankind as essentially relational?

Practices and experiences

What religious practices nurture openness and generosity towards the other even while acknowledging our fears and insecurities? How do certain practices support people/groups in their coping processes?

How does the rhetoric of crisis influence our motivation and ability to care for especially those who are victims of the crises? How can practices of care be considered as answers to a 'rhetoric of crisis'? How can we avoid the patronizing or exclusive forms of care that a sense of crisis stimulates? What are the dangers and benefits of various strategies of care, and especially also pastoral care?

What is the role of religious language, rituals, liturgy and homiletics in avoiding dangerous reactions towards the sense of crisis or in stimulating faithful connections between people?

What can be done in religious education, in religiously affiliated schools or in a catechetical context where young people are educated? How can trust be stimulated? How to deal with anxiety and insecurity? What are the agencies of people and movement? Is religiosity considered as 'dangerous' or as 'empowering' for young people?

Communities, churches and personal relations

How can local church communities, groups of Christians active in society, persons interested in spirituality act against all too easy reactions? How can we avoid that the Christian message becomes a 'closed story' or an all too easy 'therapy' with a theology presenting only a story from 'woundedness to healing'. How can theologians support the complexity and ambiguity of Christian narratives and also help persons to live with insecurity?

What is the role of religious leaders or those concerned in using this rhetoric of crisis or, alternatively, in defusing it? What are alternative and competing narratives that offer a more comprehensive hope and more inclusive social action?

To submit a proposal, please submit a 200-word abstract via the conference website before 1 December 2020:

<https://www.pastoralezorg.be/page/coping-with-crisis-submit-abstract/>

Registration and Conference Fee

Conference Fee	100 euros
Reduced fee (doctoral researchers)	50 euros

Please register as early as possible before 1 June 2021 via the conference website:

<https://www.pastoralezorg.be/page/coping-with-crisis-registration/>