CHAPTER 1

Introduction

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The worldwide impact of Christianity that made it the religion of societies and cultures emerging outside the European heartlands came into greatest prominence in the post-World War II and subsequent post-colonial periods. The scale of this post-Western resurgence was surprising, as was its timing. The retreat of Europe from its colonial territories was not, contrary to prevailing predictions, accompanied by the decline of Christianity, while nationalist mobilization and its mixed fortunes in the post-independence aftermath failed to halt the religion’s momentum. Behind the forces of nation building and the integration into the community of nations, Christianity was expanding its reach and strengthening its appeal, thanks to the effects of vernacular Bible translation and the accompanying cultural adaptation that gave the religion the advantage of indigenous credibility.

For the first time, societies and cultures that had been previously non-Christian had their idioms and ways of life increasingly penetrated by Christian ideas and values, commencing an internal process of reorientation and the recasting of the central symbols of worship, ethics, and the aesthetic life. These changes give new meaning to the pace and significance of numerical expansion. It is not simply that membership has increased, sometimes exponentially, but that the meaning of being a Christian has undergone radical change from its Western heartland connotation. In the setting of primal societies where old attachments and plural loyalties continued to carry weight, conversion created an intercultural process of ongoing reciprocal exchange. The old vocabulary was given new promise of meaning and purpose in a fast-changing world, the kind of fulfillment that challenges and assures at the same time.

This is not just the consequence of contemporary global developments since the process originated in the indigenous ferment of mother tongue engagement in Scripture, and in personal dispositions expressed in worship, prayer, dance, and music. Rather, it
is the demonstration of Christianity’s character as a world religion that is not tied to Western cultural delineations but that thrives in the multiple idioms of the adopted societies. These societies are not the heirs to Western Christendom in its Catholic and Protestant streams despite the legacy of colonial rule.

Without abandoning what gives them their distinctive character, these societies have joined the Christian movement on terms amenable to their self-understanding and aspirations, whatever the common overlapping themes with Europe’s own contested heritage. The historical roots of Christianity in Palestine extended almost simultaneously to coalesce with diverse cultures in the Mediterranean world and beyond, with Jewish, Greek, and Roman influences converging with Coptic and Ethiopian materials to create a unique, expansive momentum.

As a religion with a worldwide following, Christianity embraced from a very early stage a kaleidoscopic spectrum of peoples and tongues in Asia, Africa, and Europe, drawing from the urban ethos of Roman civilization as well as from the desert and hinterland orientations of Egypt and Ethiopia a vision and an outlook that are worldwide in their scope. The formative period of Hellenization has its parallels in equally formative movements of indigenization and adaptation elsewhere and in other times.

Today, we see the religion adopted by communities stunningly diverse in their way of life and set in historical circumstances and conditions of life that defy any single uniform rule or standard. World Christianity as a rubric acknowledges this historical and cultural reality along with its resurgent contemporary expressions. We contend that these developments are not aberrations but constitutive of Christianity’s original intercultural impulse as well as with the modern missionary movement that was its primary impetus.

Archbishop William Temple was a perceptive observer when he noted in 1944 that the worldwide appeal of Christianity was “the new fact of our time.” It was not how his Western contemporaries viewed the religion’s future. The ravages of war had taken a toll on morale, and Europe was in no mood to give any thought to the fortunes of a religion that attenuated neither the causes of conflict nor prevented the disaster that followed. But the gospel is not simply a function or reflection of actions undertaken outside its scrutiny and beyond its constraint, and Archbishop Temple’s observation connects with the experience of the past and with growing evidence of the religion’s worldwide appeal. Christianity has not ceased to be a Western religion, but evidence shows that its future as a world religion is being decided and fashioned at the hands and in the minds of its non-Western followers. A post-Christian Europe now must contemplate in post-Western societies an adapted and revitalized version of the faith that Hilaire Belloc boasted was once its distinguished patrimony.

Given the pace at which social, cultural, political, and economic changes are occurring around the world, it should come as no surprise that religious change is occurring as well. What might be surprising, however, is the accelerating pace at which changes are occurring. In many parts of the world, today’s Christianity in its cultural scope differs markedly from its early forms in the high imperial era between 1880 and 1920. Even researchers whose work is focused on these changes may find it difficult to keep up. Perhaps the most obvious change is the rapid growth of Christianity in global regions that a century ago had only a small Christian population, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, and parts of Latin America, and the corresponding statistical stagnation
or decline in the traditional heartlands of Europe, Britain, North America, Australia, and New Zealand. In the twentieth century the two world wars in Europe, the spread of Communism, the rise of nationalism and the growth of secularism in Europe brought an end to the link between Christianity and Western culture.

Following World War II Christian expansion picked up pace in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. With only 4 million Christians in 1949, China had an estimated 117 million Christians in 2013. Moreover, in 2013 conversions to Christianity in China were occurring at a rate of 3.3 million per year, or an average of 9,000 per day. In the twentieth century in sub-Saharan Africa the Christian population mushroomed from about 9 million to 335 million – and the number is at present well over 500 million, with the pace not slackening. In Latin America, Evangelical Protestantism and Pentecostalism have competed credibly with Roman Catholicism as the dominant faith in many regions. During the last generation, millions of Dalits in India have converted to Christianity. While in the year 1900 nearly 80% of all Christians were European and North American, by 2001 the figure had declined to 40%, and by 2013 the percentage had further dropped to 34.5. As a result of these developments, it is now no longer adequate to confine Christianity to its old Western heartlands, or, indeed, to one geographical region.

These recent developments have revealed even more starkly what is true of Christianity from its origin as a religion characterized by diversity of form, style, practice, and territorial spread. The first disciples accepted the mandate of the Great Commission in the terms that embraced the whole world (Mk. 16:15, 20) and all tongues (Phil. 2:11). The time of the final consummation shall be when the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of Christ (Rev. 11:15). The Christian movement resembled what one scholar called “a patched wineskin filled with mixed wine.” The religion bore the imprint of an eclectic cultural heritage. As the Epistle to Diognetus of the second century put it, “The difference between Christians and the rest of humankind is not a matter of nationality, or language, or customs. Christians do not live apart in separate cities of their own, speak any special dialect, nor practice any eccentric way of life . . . For them, any foreign country is a motherland, and any motherland is a foreign country.” Irenaeus, the second-century Church Father of Lyons, declared that “as the sun remains the same all over the world . . . so also the preaching of the church shines everywhere.” Irenaeus pointed out that there were Christians among the Celts who professed the faith “without ink or paper.” In other words, their being illiterate was no barrier to conversion. Justin Martyr, a second-century Palestinian born of settlers in what is now Nablus, assured his contemporaries that the Gospel can boast of witnesses in every race, ethnicity, and mode of existence in which prayer and devotion continue to be made to God in the name of Jesus Christ. The early Christians believed that Christianity is a worldwide faith from the outset, that it is not a faith bound by territorial limits or by language and race. The current surge gives every reason to make that claim more credible now.

In the present post-Western phase, Christianity’s worldwide impact has become more visible with the publication of statistical studies. That fact has taken time to show itself in the consciousness of the modern West. Much of the scholarly work on World Christianity is taking place in Western academic and research institutions even though Christianity’s center of gravity has shifted to societies beyond the West. From the perspective of the West the theatre of engagement remains where scholars are
preponderant and resources available, which is the case in Europe and North America. However justified this attitude may be, it creates the optical illusion of scholarly preponderance looming larger than the conversion momentum now prevailing in post-Western societies.

As the early Christians contended, World Christianity is the movement of Christianity as it takes form and shape in societies that previously were not Christian, societies too dynamic to capture with empty forms and ephemeral concessions. In Africa Cyprian, though brilliant in his own right, became bishop of Carthage at a time of restricted literacy. Political and civic leaders were untouched by the religion, a situation well expressed by the Russian proverb that says that the early church had priests only of gold and chalices of wood. In the world of the early church we catch a glimpse of what has so characteristic of World Christianity in our day, namely, of ‘readers’ who could not actually read bound volumes but instead “use the eyes of the mind to better purpose than many use the eyes of the face.” Cyprian acknowledges the important role of illiterate converts, including illiterate clergy and even bishops in the church. Consequently, the “unnamed graves at Timgad or Souse move us more than the thrones of the mighty.” Along with persecution and repression, Christians had to contend with the challenging world of syncretism that surrounded them. A member of Augustine’s congregation admitted to him, “Oh, yes, I go to idols; I consult seers and magicians, but I do not abandon God’s church. I am Catholic.”

The conclusion to be drawn from encounter with the church of the early centuries is that “Christianity, so far from being foreign, is grounded in the very lives and being of the people.”

It behooves us, thus, to see World Christianity as being not one thing, but a variety of indigenous responses through more or less effective local idioms, and largely without the mistrust, doubt, and reservations of the enlightened mind, what one writer calls “our modern crown of thorns.” Without monasteries to hatch the faith, and monks and hermits to control demons and the supernatural world, and without the magistrate holding sway over Christian domain, as happened in late antiquity and beyond, Christianity has emerged in its contemporary phase without the instrument of political favor or legal enforcement. More often than not, it is political repression and persecution that has accompanied the rise of Christianity, a situation not too different from the condition of the first generation Christians.

A word may be in order here about the expression “Global” Christianity that carries echoes of the root idea that Western economic hegemony is necessary to Christianity, that growing communities of professing Christians around the world are evidence of the political and economic power of the West, and that churches in Asia and Africa are the religious expression of what was once Europe’s political ascendancy, or else a reaction to it. Global Christianity as an expression also carries connotations of parallels with economic and the internet revolution that globalization has fueled, with the same forces of global trade and the electronic revolution leading the spread of a seamless environment of information and exchange without borders.

The idea of “Europeandom” captures well the carry-over echoes that have survived under the term “Global Christianity.” With the decisive shift today into native languages, with the vernacular Scriptures and indigenous music as reinforcement, it is not
credible to persist with the description “Global Christianity,” in the first place because Global Christianity has no corresponding “global” language to channel it as Latin once did the church, and, in the second place, because the vast majority of new Christians have scant access to modern amenities, including electricity and the internet. In the bygone age of European Christendom when crown and cassock shared one purpose, writers justifiably could speak about the Christian discovery of indigenous societies and cultures, working with a top-down model of the religion. Today, we must speak of the indigenous discovery of Christianity with its logic of a bottom-up understanding of the church. It represents a sharp turn away from external direction and control, involving as it does the idea that indigenizing the faith means humanizing its theology and recasting its liturgy, music and hymnody. The new vocabulary of faith is not simply colorful and exuberant; it is expandable to fit the needs of a teeming world of spirit power.

World Christianity has emerged under cultural circumstances today that are little different from the world of miracles, signs and wonders of the gospels, which obviates the need to invent a new name for it such as “Global Christianity” or the unwieldy “World Christianities,” as if the “World Christianity” of one place or time must be distinguished from the “World Christianity” of another place or time. Furthermore, the emphasis in that designation on the variety of cultural expressions of Christianity easily overlooks the central theological idea of the one God in whose name Christianity justifies itself. Two books on early Christianity pushed toward this change in nomenclature: Jonathan Z. Smith’s Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity (1990), and Bart Ehrman’s Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew (2003). The Cambridge History of Christianity (2006–2009) uses the plural “Christianities” in the titles of three of the nine volumes. The perennial intellectual issue of the one and the many, or unity and plurality, seems to be alive and well today in studies of “World Christianity/Christianities.” But this way proceeding makes for a confusing reading of the history of the religion. The developments involved today, however, go beyond merely adding more names to the books; they have to do with cultural shifts that require changing the books themselves. Denominational boundaries have now taken on fresh and urgent intercultural questions that demand a fundamental openness to the spirit of a diverse but common humanity.

Statistical surveys have provided quantitative data and analysis to support the picture of Christianity’s polycentric character. According to the Atlas of Global Christianity (2009), despite the worldwide growth of the church from 2000 to 2010 Christian affiliation declined sometimes by 4% in most of Eastern Europe, and in several Muslim countries. In Europe, Christian decline in terms of active membership was due mainly to the impact of secularization. In predominantly Muslim countries, decline was the result of Christian emigration fueled by Islamist agitation, civil conflicts, and prevailing persecution.

“World Christianity” and Its Alternatives

When we examine the position in the contemporary West, “World Christianity” as a phrase did not appear in the titles of printed works prior to the 1930s, when it appeared
as the title of a journal published in Chicago, and as the title of two substantive works just after World War II—John Joseph Considine, *World Christianity* (1945) and Henry P. Van Dusen, *World Christianity* (1947). During the 1940s the phrase summed up Euro-American hopes for global Christian fellowship in a “World Church.” Henry P. Van Dusen of Union Seminary in New York City looked for a “World Christianity” marked not by multicultural differences but by worldwide, organic unity. Van Dusen predicted that by the year 2000 all Christian churches throughout the world would be organizationally united, except, that is, for “sects” and for Roman Catholics who he expected to remain outside the framework of unity. The ecumenical movement inaugurated by the founding of the World Council of Churches (1948), Van Dusen predicted, would succeed. The emergence of a “World Church” was needed, he thought, to check rising secular influence and international Communism. What Van Dusen forecast did not happen. The fundamentalist, evangelical, and pentecostal “sects” that received only passing mention were able to establish strong new churches around the world. Catholics whom Van Dusen thought would remain aloof and unengaged took a huge ecumenical step toward the “separated brethren” of the non-Catholic churches at the Second Vatican Council. In contrast, in the closing decades of the twentieth century the mainline Protestant project of ecumenical reunion made relatively little progress.

World Christianity “encompasses analysis of the histories, practices, and discourses of Christianity as is found on six continents.” In terms of **content**, “World Christianity” is not a substitute for “Third World Christianity” or “non-Western Christianity.” Yet the field does reflect a particular interest of the West in “under-represented and marginalized Christian communities, and this will necessarily result in a greater degree of attention being paid to Asian, African, and Latin American contexts, and the experience of women globally.” In terms of **methodology**, “World Christianity” is a field-encompassing idea that incorporates the contributions of historians, social scientists, linguists, theologians, area specialists, and various specialized areas of study (e.g., ethnomusicology, linguistics, etc.). World Christianity is therefore “not synonymous with mission studies, and by no means reducible to it.” In terms of **institutional context**, for the most part, World Christianity as a field of study has taken shape during the last twenty-five or so years within the institutional context of departments of religious studies, history, and theological seminaries. Yet this field “is open to but not restricted to theological studies, and neither is it solely the provenance of those committed to the Christian faith.” It embraces “contributions from all disciplines, regardless of religious conviction.”

**Organization of the Volume**

Following this introduction to the volume, the “Historical Section” of the first part is divided into two phases—“The Roots (50–1750 CE),” and “Issues in the Modern Period (1750–2000 CE).” After the “Roots” section and the “Issues” section there is a “Thematic” part. Generally speaking, the “Issues” section presents essays that center on some currently debated or contested topic, while the “Thematic” part present essays that give an overview or survey of a topic. In the “Thematic” part there are essays that
treat the entire history of Christianity (e.g., Dries on “Women in Church, State, and Society”) and others that are confined to recent times (e.g., Freston on “Global Evangelical and Pentecostal Politics”).

The penultimate part is devoted to “Christianity Since 1800: An Analysis by Regions and Traditions.” The essays in this final part approach World Christianity in two different ways – in terms of world geography, and in terms of ecclesial traditions. While the topical and thematic essays in the first three parts may be of interest to specialized scholars and advanced students, the fourth part of the volume takes special cognizance of the educated general reader. The final essays in the volume look to the future rather than to the past, and take up the themes of the transmission of faith (Walls), demographic growth and expansion (Johnson), and secularization vs. pluralization (Martin). The volume includes a number of tables and illustrations, in connection with the essays on music (Schrag), art (Küster), architecture (Bains), Oceania (Ernst and Anisi), vernacular Christianity (Sigg, Pascal, and Zurlo), and demographics (Johnson).

Some essays in this volume provide information that is difficult to find or is accessible only to those with advanced linguistic skills. For example, Souad Slim and Georges Berbary base their account of Christianity in the Middle East on Arabic language sources not accessible to most Western readers. David Bains’s contribution on comparative church architecture breaks new ground, as does Volker Küster’s essay on Christian visual arts around the world, and the triply-authored piece (Sigg, Pascal, Zurlo) on indigenous and vernacular Christianity. Other essays, such as that of Paul Freston’s piece on global evangelical and pentecostal politics, draw on widely available information sources and yet offer a new synthesis and new approach for interpreting the data. By bringing together information that is widely scattered in the literature of different academic disciplines, the *Wiley Blackwell Companion to World Christianity* may serve as a point of departure for students of the subject, and provide direction for fresh research.

Because of the global spread of scholars and scholarship, the multiplicity of languages involved, and the many academic fields, disciplines, and sub-disciplines, researchers in World Christianity may remain unaware of one another’s work. One purpose of this volume is to bring together work taking place in various disciplines and far-flung global locations. Among the academic disciplines reflected in the present volume are: biblical studies (Collins), early church studies (Helleman, Sunquist), medieval history (O’Sullivan, Huffmann), Byzantine studies (Skedros), maritime history (Fernandez-Armesto), history of the book (Ferrell), Reformation history (Klaiber), history of slavery (Schmidt-Nowara), history of medicine and agriculture (Grundmann), educational history (Etherington), colonial history (Stanley), ideological analysis (Buijs), ecumenism (van Butselaar), Vatican II studies (Phan), Pentecostal-Charismatic studies (Anderson, McClymond), Bible translation (Sanneh), interreligious dialogue (Ganeri), women’s history (Dries), liturgical studies (Wainwright), law and religion (Witte, Green), history of music (Martin), ethnomusicology (Schrag), visual arts (Küster), architectural studies (Bains), media studies (Mitchell, Kidwell), political science (Freston), demographic and statistical analysis (Sigg, Pascal, Zurlo, Johnson), and sociology of religion (Martin). This is not to men-
tion the various subdivisions within the history of Christianity that appear throughout the volume.

**A “Word-Cloud” Analysis of the Text**

Figure 1.1 comprises a “word-cloud” that gives a visual representation of the word usage within the entirety of the submitted text of *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to World Christianity*. The more frequently a given word is used, the larger that word appears in the “word-cloud.” Words that did not add anything toward understanding the content of the volume were eliminated. A rather different “word-cloud” appears if one looks not at the chapters themselves but on the chapter abstracts (see Figure 1.2), with the most prominent words such as Christianity removed.

**Ten Themes in the Essays**

*The status of “Europe” within World Christianity*

It is striking to see how frequently Europe is mentioned in the chapters that follow. Although no longer perceived as central, Europe is, nevertheless, crucial to the task of self-definition and re-definition involved in World Christianity. To be sure, since the 1980s the Europe-centered and Reformation-plus-Enlightenment story has to a large extent been displaced by a story of cross-cultural encounters of Europe with the rest of the world in maritime, colonialist, and missiological contexts. Yet even as Europe’s internal reality and conflicts have sunk in importance, Europe’s relationship to the rest of the world has continued to hold importance in the study of World Christianity. While today a smaller proportion of scholars of Christianity focus their primary attention on Europe as such, there is continuing interest in what we might call *Europe-as-perceived*. Among non-Europeans, this means that European Christianity is still a point of reference, though sometimes only as a foil. Where European Christianity did not offer a positive model to be imitated, it represented alienation and inauthenticity and so served to define those ideas and practices that non-Europeans repudiated.

The charismatic movement that became identified as “Ethiopianism” in Southern Africa and “African Independency” in West and East Africa, retained many traits of the historic mission-founded churches, including liturgy, hymns, music, doctrine, and church structure. “Ethiopianism” was a form of proto-nationalism and “an African remonstration against the European captivity of the gospel” (Sigg, Pascal, and Zurlo). We should not, however, draw hard and fast lines in these newer churches. The repudiation of missionary control and domination did not necessarily mean the rejection of everything Western. Similarly, the mission-founded churches often incorporated indigenous religious materials into their worship and music. In most cases, too, what all these churches had in common was the vernacular Scriptures read and interpreted under conditions of mother-tongue appropriation. All of that is part of the primal energy that has propelled Christianity as it cut a path in its worldwide mission.
Figure 1.2
Missionary agency and indigenous impetus

The terms “mission” and “missionaries” and its cognate forms appear more than fifteen hundred times in this volume. There is no way to tell the story of World Christianity without giving extensive attention to mission and missionaries. Yet one must hasten to add that the missionaries of World Christianity include many people who were never acknowledged or recognized as such. In Africa there were many regions in which European missionaries barely touched the hinterland communities, and the great task of evangelization fell to the lot of many catechists, some known to us by name, others not, who set out for rural centers to spread the Christian message. Unfortunately, much of the older missionary literature gave little attention to local contributions to Christian mission. This requires today’s researchers to search out new sources of information, or else to read the old sources in the light of local initiative. The open access online data base of the Dictionary of African Christian Biography (DACB) at Boston University School of Theology contains information on the names and stories of more than two thousand individuals, men and women, many of whom were leaders of the Christian movement in their societies.

The long encounter of Christianity and Islam

Contact between Islam and Byzantium began with the birth of Islam in the seventh century and continued beyond the fall of Constantinople in 1453 CE. Byzantine Christians generally viewed Islam as a Christian heresy and Muhammad as a false prophet. For their part, Muslims claimed that Christians were tri-theists and had expunged references to Muhammad from the New Testament. By the late ninth century, Byzantines had access to Greek renderings of at least certain portions of the Qur’ān, thus allowing for polemical responses to the text. Muslim–Christian relations depended in part on political and socio-economic considerations. Both Byzantines and Muslims interpreted political success and failure vis-à-vis one another in terms of theodicy: success reflected God’s favor, while failure and decline were interpreted by the Byzantines as evidence of God’s disfavor due to infidelity toward God (Skedros). From the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries, Christianity and Islam both showed extraordinary dynamism, penetrating regions they had never before reached, winning new adherents, and thus coming to merit the name of “world religions” (Fernández-Armesto). Yet Christianity and Islam largely operated within separate spheres. Christianity could not compete with Islam in the interior of Africa. As a rival of Islam, however, Christianity had one big advantage: its adherents could carry it by sea. They could outflank Islam in Africa and penetrate areas deep into the heart of the continent. That was how missions gained footholds on the coastline of the Indian Ocean and in maritime Asia. The Ottoman government brought Christians under their imperial control, dividing them into millets as protected people and as subjects (ra’aya) of the sultan. The Millet system meant that each Christian community was given a degree of autonomy in managing its own internal affairs. In this period Christians suffered transfers of populations and abductions of their
children, transfers of ecclesiastical authority to rural areas and monasteries, and ecclesiastical offices being subjected to public auction. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Christians dealt with the new situation as best they could (Souad al-Rousse Selim). The rise of Islamism in the late twentieth century raised a host of new issues for Christian–Muslim relations. In predominantly Islamic regions, the issues for Christians are not just theoretical, but concern their basic personal and political freedoms (Witte and Green).

Slavery and anti-slavery

One of the important though neglected stories of modern abolitionism was that of the slaves who fought on the British side in the American Revolution. Their lives and experiences established a link between Enlightenment philosophy, radical social ideals, and Evangelicalism. They went on mission to Sierra Leone in 1792, before any British missionary society had been founded, and with the intention of establishing a new society under the influence of the Christian gospel. Throughout the Americas, European settlers and colonialists “opposed the evangelization of slaves because they feared that missionaries would preach abolitionism” (Dove). In the context of the early nineteenth-century religious awakenings in the United States, “Finneyite revivalism became closely associated with . . . abolitionism and antislavery, temperance, anti-Masonry, and women’s rights” (McClymond). Oberlin College became “a stronghold of abolitionism” and advocated civil disobedience in the face of the runaway slave laws that were designed to force runaway slaves to return to their masters (McGrath). In Jamaica, abolitionist Baptists founded Calabar College as an institute for theological training (Etherington). In the nineteenth century women began to play a prominent role in the abolitionist movement (Dries). A number of Anglicans were abolitionist leaders: Thomas Clarkson, William Wilberforce, and Olaudah Equiano (Ward). Abolitionists were opposed to the politics of the British Whigs who advocated a gradualist approach to abolishing slavery. Yet a strong counter-narrative existed just below the surface. In Jamaica in 1865, Governor Edward Eyre’s brutal suppression of a local uprising was supported by such prominent British intellectuals as Thomas Carlyle and Charles Kingsley, who both contended that “the abolition of slavery had been a failed experiment based on a false belief in human equality” (Etherington). What is more, “only in the evangelical and non-conformist world of the British Empire did it [i.e., abolitionism] lead to mass mobilization for the suppression of the slave trade and the abolition of slavery” (Schmidt-Nowara).

Colonialism and post-colonialism

The European colonial project had its European detractors at every stage. The sixteenth-century Spanish Dominican Bartolomé de las Casas wrote an impassioned defense of Native souls in which he condemned Spanish enslavement of natives as a sin against Christian charity. Recently Christians have celebrated de las Casas as
an early defender of human rights and advocate for social justice (Porterfield). Yet Brian Stanley notes the case of the Norwegians and Germans who pressed “for British annexation to crack the nut of Zulu resistance to the gospel – another example of Christians backing imperialism for reasons that had little or nothing to do with nationalism.” During the 1920s in China, Christians became “targets of mass nationalism” and were “denounced as agents of cultural imperialism,” an experience “traumatic for missions and Chinese Christians as well” (Bays). Contrary to popular belief, there was no obvious improvement in attitudes toward non-European peoples and cultures on the part of European colonizers from the 1700s into the 1900s and “the inter-war period [1920s–1930s] was marked by the most blatant examples of the permeation of missions by imperial attitudes and ideology” (Etherington). When by the mid-twentieth century it became clear that colonial power in Africa and Asia was in its twilight, European church leaders responded in different ways. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, many Western Christian leaders viewed the growth of nationalism with alarm, while others, such as Max Warren and Stephen Neill, “called for Western Christians to discern the hand of God behind the rising tide of nationalism” (Stanley). One of the surprises of the late twentieth century was the staying power of Christianity following the end of colonialism. “Many observers of the end of empire in the 1960s . . . predict[ed] inaccurately that Christianity, except possibly in the form of the African Independent Churches, would not long survive the era of decolonization” (Stanley). By the 1960s, “the Catholic Church’s *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (*Gaudium et spes*) turned the Church towards the world and especially towards the poor. In the years following the council the emphasis on social justice and the theologies of liberation would find its inspiration in this document” (Rausch).

**New ideologies and social teachings**

In the sociological study of Max Weber, capitalist economics is identified with Protestantism, and especially with Reformed or Calvinistic Christianity (McGrath). Because the shift to a market-based economy did not take place at the same time around the world, the effects of global capitalism have been uneven, have taken place at different times, and have led to different responses. With the full-blown emergence of industrialization in England and in Western Europe in the nineteenth century, a counter-reaction followed. Beginning in the late-nineteenth century, the Catholic Church sought “to address the concern” raised by Marxism while rejecting the Marxist view of society (Buijs). Similarly, the Dutch theologian, politician, and eventual Prime Minister of the Netherlands, Abraham Kuyper, “developed his theological Calvinism into a worldview in which political and social questions could be addressed, criticizing unchecked capitalism without giving in to socialism” (Buijs). In North America, Christianity was a “carrier” of “influential forms of modern individualism, democracy, and capitalism . . . from this continent to other parts of the world” (Porterfield). In Australia, “workers sought to civilize capitalism, first by industrial power in unionism, and then by political power in the formation of the Labor Party” (Piggin and Lineham).
When sixty Catholic priests gathered in 1968 in Golconda, Colombia, and committed themselves to “revolutionary action against imperialism” and to “setting up a socialistic society” (Dove), it ushered in Liberation Theology as a critique of Western imperialism and capitalism.

The ambiguous status of Latin America

How does Latin America fit into the larger narrative of World Christianity? Speaking broadly, there are tendencies in two directions. In one direction, Latin America can be viewed as inheritor of the heritage of European Christendom. In that form the early establishment of churches and other Christian institutions took place among indigenous peoples of the New World as early as the 1500s. In the second direction was the rise of evangelical and charismatic forms of Christianity that brought about a readjustment of perspective concerning the long historical experience of Catholic Christianity in Latin America. In the first instance, Latin American became an extension of Western European Christendom, embodying a New World form of Iberian Catholicism (i.e., Spanish and Portuguese), while in the second instance Latin America resembled the situation in sub-Saharan Africa, in respect specifically to evidence of the uncompleted evangelization of the indigenous peoples of both continents. The rise of Protestant and Pentecostal Christianity in both cases represents the completion of the process of evangelization which Catholic priests and missionaries began centuries earlier. The debate about the glass being “half full” or “half empty” is to a large degree a debate about how one interprets the historical experience of Latin American Catholicism from the sixteenth to the twentieth century.

Evangelical, Pentecostal, and Vernacular Christianity

In its expansion during the twentieth century Pentecostalism has involved “reported healings or other purportedly miraculous occurrences accompanied [by] evangelistic preaching and . . . preludes to rapid church growth” (McClymond). The intense prayer, evangelistic fervor, and openness to the miraculous that characterize the Pentecostals, numbering some 623 million adherents in 2013, might help to set the long-term direction for Christianity around the world.11 In 2015 Catholics numbered 1.239 billion. Africa is listed with a Catholic population of 198.5 million, representing an exponential growth from 27 million in 1960 (“Status of Global Mission,” IBMR, vol. 39, no. 1, January 2015, 29; “The Roman Catholic Church Worldwide (Changes from 2007 to 2012),” IBMR, vol. 40, no. 1, January 2015.) Mission from churches outside the West has been an increasing trend in statistical reports. Korean, Brazilian, Chinese, and African missionaries have been setting out to evangelize Muslims and Buddhists, and to preach to secular Europeans, what Philip Jenkins has called “the empire strikes back.” According to one report, in 2013 there were just under 20,500 Korean missionaries serving in over 160 countries.12 An important reason for the relative success of new Charismatic groups is “their
openness to the forces of globalization” (Anderson), and their ability to employ emerging technologies of communication. In recent years Charismatic Christianity has developed a well-connected network of leaders and preachers.

Writers have called attention to a variety of religious development they describe as “Vernacular Christianity”. In the first generation or two when Christianity came into contact with indigenous cultures in Africa and Asia, a new, fluid situation developed, characterized by lack of fixed structures in worship, doctrine, and decision-making. This stage of conversion is reminiscent of the newly converted Christian Vikings of the ninth century – a phase that more closely resembles the still-emerging twentieth-century churches than do the later Gothic cathedrals and official institutions of the high Middle Ages. Given the status of Christianity as a translated religion, and as such implicated in interpretation and adaptation, Vernacular Christianity can be seen to be only a stage in the progressive assimilation of the religion. The exotic connotations normally associated with the term should not mislead us about its position in the scale of religious profession.

Material culture, the visual arts, and technology

A number of essays deal with material culture. One of these essays speaks of the “soaring, massive gothic cathedrals were built as multi-generational statements of faith in God and in the future” (Huffman). In Christian Orthodoxy, there is a strong supporting theology for the production and appreciation of visual beauty, since “the material world is not something to be despised or conquered, but transformed to reflect God's kingdom” (Kenworthy). Christianity’s material cultures are enduring signs of cultural translation and adaptation. India’s contact with the Portuguese resulted in “a modified baroque style of art and architecture” (Küster) whose vestiges are seen still today in the city of Velha (Goa). Ethiopian Christianity developed its own distinctive forms of icon painting and architecture, involving subterranean churches carved out of solid rock. From a European perspective, one might be inclined to think that the golden age of Christian visual art had ended in the seventeenth century. Yet “the twentieth century saw a remarkable flourishing of ‘Christian art’” (Wainwright). Western missionaries were often wary of the introduction of African traditional motifs into Christian art. In missions around the world in the modern period, “Anglicans erected Gothic revival cathedrals... as a sign of their apostolicity [and] their legitimacy as the true church, independent of the state and of the Church of Rome.” In the African context, “the round church with the altar in the center reflects both the ideology of the liturgical movement and traditional African practice” (Bains). Though Christian mission work is often undertaken in isolation from material factors, yet “indigenous people who found the advantages of European technology easier to grasp than the benefits of abstract learning often welcomed institutions that promised improvements in agricultural productivity, blacksmithing, and wagon making” (Etherington). Modern medicine and agricultural technologies played a key role in the missionary enterprise as a whole (Grundmann), while communication technologies (radio, television, internet, cellphone, etc.) have been important in mission endeavors throughout the last century (Mitchell, Kidwell).
Continuing debate over secularization and Christendom

The issue of global secularization and the future of world religions was a major debate in the 1960s, initially through the work of David Martin, who has reprised and analyzed some of those debates for his essay in this volume. In the 1970s, a number of social theorists had second thoughts about secularization. At present, some of them see secularization as a process that is bound to affect all global cultures (Steve Bruce), while others adopt a more nuanced position (Jose Casanova, Charles Taylor). European secularity might not be the normative standard but, rather, something of a global exception. Earlier debates over what Europe has lost pointed to declining church attendance and diminishing Christian faith and adherence to Christian moral standards. That view has now given way to a fresh assessment of what Europe has kept. Whatever the verdict, the heritage of Christendom is still with us, though widely contested. While in 1900 the word “Christendom” was regularly used in a triumphalist way, by the year 2000 “some . . . thinkers have used the term Christendom to describe a tragic stage in the history of the faith, a curse marked particularly by the church–state alliance, with all the compromises that demanded” (Jenkins).

Yet “church–state” relationships have varied, in terms of “state” no less than in terms of “church.” In colonial contexts “there was equally great variation in the nature of the indigenous and colonial polities” (Stanley). Europe itself shows a complicated pattern. Some Christians there “have reasserted the need for the retention of symbols of the traditional church–state alliance, for example the crucifixes that commonly hang in schools and hospitals in Catholic nations” (Jenkins). Philosopher Jürgen Habermas suggests that for Western cultures “there is no alternative” to the “universalistic egalitarianism” that is “the direct legacy of the Judaic ethic of justice and the Christian ethic of love.” Philip Jenkins suggests the possibility of a “new Christendom,” or “a wave of Christian states which may eventually form an African and Latin American axis in which faith is the guiding political ideology.” Yet Freston questions whether there is any evidence for this, or any clear attempt to create new “Christian” nations or states in the global South. Indications are that World Christianity is unlikely to create the conditions for a return to a discarded past. The challenge it presents, on the other hand, is one of charting a new course for church and society beyond ideas of political entitlement. For once Christianity seems poised today to become the faith of the people and not just the prerogative of polite society.

Notes

1 Ferguson (1967: 19).
3 Ferguson (1967: 27).
4 There are only a handful of book titles with the plural form “Christianities” — prior to 1980. This includes: Adin Ballou, Practical Christianity in Relation to Different Christs and Christianities (1860s); James Frederick Buss, The Two Christianities: Old and New (1890); T. B. Forbush, The Three Christianities (1892); William Blackmore Marsh, Five Christianities and the Jesus Way (1928), and Heup Young Kim, Asian and Oceanian Christianities (1970).
The first three uses of the plural form are from Universalist, Swedenborgian, and Unitarian authors, thus giving the impression that the pluralized term was originally linked to groups that offered a critique of mainstream Christianity.

5 The total number of academic titles using the plural, “Christianities,” is minuscule in relation to the more common “Christianity” — less than 25 instances compared with more than 25,000 with the single form during the last century and a half. Yet the appearance of the plural form is significant as marking a shift in conceptualization away from the idea of a religious tradition or phenomenon that is broadly cohesive or unitary.


7 Roman Catholic Church, Unitatis Redintegratio (Decree on Ecumenism), no. 1 (1964).

8 Kinnamon (2003).


Bibliography


