

Farhadian CE (ed.) 2012. *Introducing world Christianity*. Oxford: Blackwell. x +280 pages. ISBN 978-1-4051-8248-5. Price \$39.95.

For some time we have been lamenting the absence of historical work which takes serious account of advances in the social sciences. Individual monographs focussing in specific context have appeared but here is the first attempt to apply this approach to global Christianity and as it does so it takes substantial account of the missionary contribution and avoids simplistic conclusions based on unsubstantiated generalisations. Throughout there is strong interaction between history and the social sciences in discussing the contribution of Christianity to the transformation of society. This is a composite work drawing on the expertise of experts in their field mainly from the (north) Americas

The editor introduces the central theme by posing the question ‘What difference has Christianity made in the world?’ (p.3) This is aligned to the development of indigenous forms of Christianity in global perspective. Thereafter, the book is arranged in five parts – Africa, Europe, Asia, Americas and the Pacific. Interestingly, Europe is not dealt with first. Africa may have been chosen as perhaps the earliest prime location of Christian advance. Each part is then divided into sub-sections. Europe is dealt with in only two chapters while almost all the others have four. The balance is certainly skewed in favour of those parts of the world where Christianity has made significant advances in recent history. One thing that becomes immediately obvious is the importance of the role of religion in shaping modern cultures globally. Perhaps the exception is western Europe where religion continues to decline except under the influence of diasporic communities. Foremost among these are Islam and Christianity with a more overt role being assigned to religion in politics, business and the public sphere. Islam’s impact is predominantly among established populations, while Christianity’s is more diffuse and reaches to new lands. While financial power still resides in the West, even media power is being adopted on a large scale particularly in Pentecostal circles. It also becomes apparent that while Islam and mainline Christianity appeal mainly to a middle class culture the rapidly rising Pentecostal brand appeals to a poorer less well educated population and promotes a significantly more conservative evangelical theology especially as it relates to gender and sexuality issues. A concluding chapter by Robert Woodberry brings the volume to a close by evaluating the history, spread and social influence of world Christianity by surveying ancient African and Asian Christianity and its social impact, Christianity during the European colonial period and its social consequences, the social and religious outcomes of missions during the colonial period, ‘postcolonial’ Christianity and its social influence, contextualisation and indigenisation and religious persecution and violence. While it is generally positive in its assessment we cannot help but agree

with the pessimistic conclusion regarding the ‘isolation of European “Christendom”’. Gladly, however, this is a tale of renewal and revitalisation. This book offers an exciting new approach to the history of world Christianity compared with books of an earlier generation which, good though they may have been, simply recounted the narrative events of past church history within an exclusive discipline. It is unfortunate in the choice of writers, few have been chosen from among indigenous scholars. Nonetheless it will become an excellent resource for serious scholars of contemporary Christianity.

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