

Book Reviews

Jens Holger Schjørring and Norman A. Hjelm (eds.), *History of Global Christianity, Vol. II: History of Christianity in the 19th Century* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2017), 526 pages. ISBN: 9789004352803; Jens Holger Schjørring, Norman A. Hjelm and Kevin Ward (eds.), *History of Global Christianity, Vol. III: History of Christianity in the 20th Century* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2018), 346 pages. ISBN: 9789004352810.

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These two books are volumes II and III of the three-volume work on the history of global Christianity from c. 1500 to the end of the twentieth century. For a general introduction to the project, see my review of Volume I in *Baptistic Theologies* 10:2 (2018) pp. 129–130. The volumes take a fresh approach in presenting historical research from a global angle, so as to not be constrained by the typical European ethnocentric tunnel vision. Too often Church history was written and prescribed from a Eurocentric perspective, which is as much apparent in its terminology (e.g. Middle East, Near East) as in its proportional selection (more attention for the Atlantic axis). In this regard the series is a ‘Fundgrube’ of data, narratives, and historical reflections not hindered by cultural biases given with the false assumption that modernity and civilisation only started with the wake of Europe.

Nevertheless, the nineteenth century (Vol. II) is called ‘the long century’, because of the leap it takes in processing the aftermath of the Enlightenment into upcoming modernity and secularisation. As a consequence, the century also gave birth to new forms of re-Christianisation, such as revivalism and nineteenth century ‘innere Mission’, as it also had to deal with revolutionary changes in social and economic realms (industrialisation, democratisation, Zionism), and, how sad, with the reinforcement of European colonialism. Very interesting are the sudden challenges the Western Church saw itself faced with in dealing with the results of the changing times it witnessed. The challenges were at least four: (1) ‘All men are created equal’ and are

endowed with ‘unalienable Rights’, stated the American Declaration of Independence in 1776, so what effects did the statement have on churches in the century after?; (2) rapid social changes associated with urban industrialisation yielded into existential issues at the address of Christendom; likewise (3) were the effects of The Great Revolution in France (1789); and (4) the rise of the enslaved people of Haiti against the French rulers (1791), and their claim to have their share in ‘liberty, equality, fraternity’.

So, it is obvious why nineteenth-century Church history focuses for the greater part on Europe and America, because this is where the majority of the world’s Christians still lived. At the same time Christianity was divided in itself, with Roman Catholics and Protestants and Eastern/Western Christianity, and was about to face even more controversy during the nineteenth century. As a matter of fact, Enlightenment and rationalism were prone to erode the privileged positions of most churches in both Europe and the Americas. Christianity stood under heavy intellectual and political attack, and simultaneously was preoccupied in spreading its ideas far beyond its Western boundaries. Moreover, the circumstances under which Christians lived in countries where they formed a minority, were almost the same as those of Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, Hinduists, or atheists living in Christian countries.

McLeod’s first chapter in Volume II on ‘revolutions, the Church, and the new era of modernity’ is in every respect preparatory for understanding the subsequent contributions on Roman Catholicism and the First Vatican Council; the Protestant Missionary Movement; Christianity in Russia, in North America, in Latin America and the Caribbean, in Africa, in the Middle East, in Asia; and Christianity in the context of other world religions. In particular the paragraphs on ‘Ultramontanism’ and ‘Missions and Colonialism’ are illustrative of the disturbing dynamics of the turbulent nineteenth century. For example, for the issue of race, Gospel and colonialism stuck like a fish-bone in the throat of Atlantic churches, because the freedom the Gospel promised did not altogether materialise into freedom in the Church and between Christians.

Volume III consists of three subdivisions: Decades, Themes, and Continents. The first mainly centres around The First World War; The Interbellum; The Second World War; The Cold War; and for that matter concentrates (again) on Europe and North America. As of consequence, the continents have to be covered once again, in the third and last subdivision (Part 3, pp. 273–516). The second subdivision, the Themes, is revelatory as regards the reorientations global Christianity went through during the 20th century: e.g. human rights; socio-ethical reorientations; the Ecumenical Movement; Vatican II; anti-Semitism and the Holocaust; world religions and interreligious dynamics.

The twentieth century was marked by dramatic turning points with far-reaching consequences, such as ‘a thorough revision of the global map of Christianity that is now dominated by increasing diversity’, and in particular ‘a constant movement away from the so-called “first world” towards the Global South’ (p. 1), Schjørring asserts. For that matter, deeper confrontations between socio-political developments and the politics most Europeans and North Americans fostered seemed inevitable. Therefore, Schjørring, Hjelm and Ward have inserted a paragraph on ‘The Church’s rejection of human rights’, saying that ‘the pathway followed by the Christian churches in Europe to the acceptance of human rights as an ethos compatible with the Catholic or the Protestant faith was a long one’, and that it ‘was based on deep-rooted mistrust of the Enlightenment and of the secular notions of freedom since the French Revolution of 1789’ (p. 128). Average Christian churches only reluctantly followed politico-cultural changes and innovations, especially if they dealt with human rights (cf. ‘Protestantism and human rights’, pp. 137–142). Of course, all these burdens and confusions resulted in all sorts of secular reactions, such as the decrease of church attendance, upcoming diversity, and differing perspectives on the place of Christianity in culture and society (pp. 489–498). Surprisingly, Europe does not seem to have a forerunner’s position anymore.

I wholeheartedly recommend this series as a fresh and scholarly approach to Church history for the twenty-first century.