

Dyron B. Daughrity

To Whom Does Christianity Belong? Critical Issues in World Christianity. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015, xxii + 302., pbk. USD 29.00, ISBN 9781451472271.

Daughrity's book is a welcome contribution toward "understanding World Christianity" – the name of the Fortress Series it is part of. It raises current significant and contentious issues necessary toward such an understanding, engages current literature from multiple disciplines, and draws from numerous and diverse forms of Christianity from a wide range of historical periods and contexts.

Its introduction describes the phenomenon of World Christianity, especially in terms of its shift toward the global south, and sets up the basic problematic expressed in the book's title. Chapters in the following sections then focus on specific and related themes. The first section devotes chapters to particular fundamental theological loci: what the church is as well as beliefs about Jesus, the Holy Ghost, and the afterlife. The second entitled "The Church and the World" speaks of recent Catholic developments related to hierarchy and authority including Pope Francis' election, the historic tension between dissent and unity in Christianity, the challenge of secularization to Christian churches worldwide, and the impact of migration on Christian mission. The last section discusses contentious issues such as views on sexuality, the role of women, and the diversity of church music.

Section themes and chapter issues are well-chosen and reflect what are often the points of discussion and controversy, though some are discussed better than others. Furthermore, the book is to be commended for its clear delineation of issues within each chapter and its expression in language accessible to academic, church and general audiences. Hence it is indeed an important work for understanding World Christianity today.

Given this confirmation of the overall value of the book, there remains the desire for further critical analysis of its rich and diverse material. With the contemporary irruption of World Christianity, it is understandable that the book's emphasis be on the differences between communities and churches that identify themselves as Christian across time and location. These differences, however, need to be further interrogated.

For instance, in the chapter on Jesus (pp. 59–77), the book rightly points out descriptions of Jesus arising from different periods and places – from the early seven ecumenical councils to the modern quest for the historical Jesus, a German Jesus, the Massai Jesus, the Jesus of Islam and Gandhi's Jesus. Having noted these descriptions, one needs to ask whether these descriptions are contradictory, similar or the same, and whether the genre and language of these

descriptions represent different forms of Christian discourse and therefore require different strategies for analysis. Considering these questions would shed light on the status and significance of these different descriptions. But instead, the chapter simply concludes thus: “Clearly Christ means different things to people, and always has ... Which version of Jesus is the truth? This chapter opened with Pilate’s famous question to Jesus during his trial: What is truth? Our answer determines how we respond to this Galilean Jew whose life so deeply impacted – and continues to impact – our world and our reality” (p. 77).

Here, as with some other chapters, one wishes for more critical analysis of the issues so sharply delineated at each chapter’s beginning. Their concluding sections help in organizing and linking the chapters, but are sometimes too brief as a summary or not sufficiently nuanced in posing either-or questions. The chapter on “Protesters,” for example, concludes thus: “To whom does Christianity belong? To the purists or the ecumenists? To the protesters or to the protested against? To the state-church hierarchies or to the revolutionaries? To the massive cathedrals in Russia or to the underground networks in China? Perhaps it is time for the protesters to protest against Christian division ‘so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them.’ (Jesus’s words, in John 17:13)”

The book’s last chapter, which promises the author’s answer to the title question (p. 15), is unfortunately similar. It reiterates the numeral shift of Christians southward, raises questions about the secularization of North America, the future of religious practice in Eastern Europe, the rise of Christianity in China, and impact of Islamic terrorism, and notes Christianity’s association with those in need. But then, it ends again with a biblical quotation: “To whom does Christianity belong? He [Jesus] answered it thus: ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit ... blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, *for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*’ (Matt. 5:3, 10).” Even prescind from the diverse ways in which the Beatitudes or other scriptural texts have been appropriated by Christians, one misses an articulation of the biblical text’s connection with the contours and challenges of World Christianity so well-documented in the book.

Further critical analysis of the book’s themes could have been accomplished with the help of a fundamental understanding of tradition based on the social sciences as well as theological studies. Such an understanding would include the dimensions of tradition as process and content, modes of transmission and various elements of religious practice. It could then sharpen the analysis of many issues the book raises – continuity and development, authority and dissent, purity and heterodoxy, the institutional and the individual, religious identity and cultural diversity. Perhaps even a cursory comparison with how

other religious traditions like Buddhism and Islam and their diverse forms in different contexts would enrich the analysis of whom Christianity belongs to.

Despite this missed opportunity for further critical analysis, Daugherty's book nevertheless remains a valuable contribution to understanding World Christianity.

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