

Migration and the Making of Global Christianity

By Jehu J. Hanciles. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2021, Pp. xvii+461, Hard Cover, \$45.

Reviewed by: Daniel Jeyaraj, Liverpool Hope University, England

Abstract: This book evidences how Christian migrants from the origins of Christianity until 1500 helped establish Christianity as a world religion. Its socio-historical methodology identifies and celebrates the contributions of ordinary Christian migrants in cross-cultural and transnational contexts. It argues that Christian missionary engagements are often incorrectly associated with empire and institutional authorities; in reality, however, most of the cross-cultural missionary work was done by ordinary Christian women and men, who migrated for various purposes. Thus, this book embodies a new historiography based on migration and provides ample evidence to exemplify the reality, complexity and relevance of migration for World Christianity.

Key words: migrants, socio-historical approach, Christianity in Asia and Africa, royal mothers, queens and princess, World Christianity

Reviewer's biography: Professor Daniel Jeyaraj is an Indian Christian; he teaches World Christianity and directs the Andrew Walls Centre for the Study of African and Asian Christianity at Liverpool Hope University in England. He has been studying and publishing on the works of German Lutheran Pietist missionaries in eighteenth century southern India and their reciprocal impact on Europe. His email ID is jeyarad@hope.ac.uk

The setting of this book

This is not a book reporting on the variety of origins, histories, thoughts and expressions of World Christianity beyond the geographical and intellectual boundaries of mainline Christians living in the countries dominated by Euro-American worldviews; instead, it is a book that has already begun shaping the understanding and study of World Christianity afresh from the perspectives of socio-historical analysis. Without neglecting or denigrating the contributions of social and cultural elites to collective Christian thoughts and expressions, this book emphasises the small beginnings of Christianity initiated, nurtured and spread until 1500 CE by ordinary Christians; most of these Christians did not play any significant role within structures of political power and control, social prestige and economic privilege of either empires or nation-states; this book discusses in greater depth the contextual contributions by migrants, women, informally educated people, oppressed tribes and caste groups to Christian practices in word and deed. Its primary focus, however, lies on the significant role of migrants to the unfolding of new forms of Christian thinking, living and witness in diaspora settings.

The author of this book

This book reflects the thoughts, research and teaching experiences of Professor Jehu Hanciles in three continents: he was born, raised and educated in Sierra Leone. He wrote his doctoral dissertation under the guidance of the eminent Professor Andrew Walls (1918–2021) and

Professor Christopher Fyfe (1920–2008) at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland. Both professors were experts in the history of Sierra Leone. Professor Hanciles admired their breadth of knowledge and brought them to bear on his own teaching of Church History and Missiology at the Africa University in Mutare, Zimbabwe (1995–1998). From there he moved to Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California/USA. At that time, he held the chair for Mission History and Globalisation and directed the Centre for Missiological Research. Since July 2012 he teaches World Christianity at Chandler School of Theology in Emory University/ USA. Since 2018, he has been directing the World Christianity Program at this school.

Professor Hanciles acknowledges the influence of his teachers, namely Professor Edward Fasholé-Luke, Dr. Leslie E.T. Shylion, Rev. Emile K. Jones and Dr. Festus Cole, at Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone. He fondly remembers Bishop Prince Thomson, who in the 1980s asked him to classify uncatalogued papers at the Bishop's Court in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Besides them, Hanciles acknowledges the insights that he had received from Professors Andrew Walls and Christopher Fyfe, Wilbert Shenk (1935–2021), Ogbu U. Kalu (1942–2009), Lamin Sanneh (1942–2019), Brian Stanley, Klaus Koschorke, Philip Jenkins, and many others. These scholars taught and wrote on the centrality of non-Western Christianity: for them, world Christianity is contextually conditioned and necessarily polycentric. Non-Western Christianity is not a valueless appendix to the history of Western Christianity. Non-Western forms of Christianity have their contextual identities and individual personalities. Hanciles' socio-historical method analyses these forms of World Christianity and evaluates them through the lens of migration.

Professor Hanciles has been a passionate speaker and writer about World Christianity from his African perspectives. For example, Black Atlantic and its impact on African Christianity in and outside of the continent of Africa have been themes of his essays. Likewise, he has been advocating the understanding of migrants as missionaries and the missionaries as migrants. Both migrants and missionaries cross geographical, theological, and socio-cultural borders. In 2008, Professor Hanciles published his well-recognised work entitled *Beyond Christendom: Globalization, African Migrations, and the Transformation of the West*, which in the words of Philip Jenkins, another famous scholar in the study of World Christianity, “established him as a key scholar in field” (p. xi) of migration and World Christianity. This book advanced the idea that mobility of migrant Christians across geographical and cultural borders facilitated them to sow the seeds of renewal among their host communities; most of these Christian migrants, filled with self-esteem amidst various hardships caused by socio-cultural dislocation and discrimination, came from the countries that were not dominated by West European and North American ways of thinking, living and doing things. Professor has retried the voices and stories of these Christians and highlighted their distinct contributions to World Christianity. This current work expands similar trajectories of approaches, arguments and examples from the beginning of Christianity to 1500 CE.

Throughout his career as a researcher and teacher, Professor Hanciles has been advocating the central role of migrant Christians in disseminating the message of the Lord Jesus Christ as they understood and practised it in their diaspora contexts. This current book exemplifies how Christian diaspora communities, who were often socially dislocated and marginalised,

economically weak and exploited, politically vulnerable, and yet resilient in their faith commitments to the Lord Jesus Christ, maintained their Christian witness and service in unfavourable places and circumstances. Eventually, their attitude to life, their ways of dealing with local needs, overcoming existential problems, and their positive hope about the future impressed their host communities to such an extent that at least a few members chose to embrace the faith of these migrant Christians.

Socio-historical methodology

This book derives its laudable insights not so much from power-based, politics-oriented ecclesiastical, theological, and institutional personalities or groups. For example, influential emperors and bishops of the Latin-speaking, West-European regions convened councils and released creeds and edicts; their apologetics and polemics mirrored the priorities of the elites. All their attempts to solve religious controversies, whose roots lay in various discriminatory socio-economic and political realities, remained at best partial and tentative. By contrast, Hanciles has chosen socio-historical approaches to interpret Christian migrant experiences; They do not deny, for example, the favourable conditions which empires created for their own needs and purposes (e.g. primarily for safe and fast transport of military personnel with their weapons, provisions, captives and war-booty, movement of traders without the fear of piracy along the roads that connected various commercial hubs, communication networks, and the like).

Simultaneously, this new approach questions the incorrect assumptions about top-down, empire-orchestrated conversions of peoples and the indispensability of European missionaries in the conversion of non-Western peoples to Christian faith. It asserts that “state sponsorship or the projection of empire” or their institutional “author and agents” played a “minimal role” in the “cross-cultural expansion of the Christian faith” (p. 420); by contrast, it repeatedly reveals how ordinary Christian migrants, not Christian elites, served as main, active cross-community agents; their thoughts, choices, priorities and actions illustrate the significance and relevance of their Christian faith for their everyday life and worship; as they remained “strangers and outsiders in foreign lands”, they undoubtedly contributed to the “rise of Christianity as a world movement” (p. 420). This new approach is more social and cultural than political and ecclesiastical; therefore, it fittingly represents the pluralistic nature of Christianity by bringing out the “voices, experiences, and expressions of Christians worldwide in all their social, ethnic, and generational diversity” (p. 3). This book readily recognises the limitations (pp. 5–6) of the socio-historical approach such as anti-institutional bias, restraints on hermeneutic coherence and the subjective nature of historical inquiry. Yet, its scholarly depth and analysis of socio-historical details of the chosen individuals and groups are evidenced with integrity for intellectual pursuit, discipline-specific academic conventions, clear explanations, footnote and bibliographic references.

Structure and contents

Besides an introduction, this book contains ten chapters. The introduction sets the tone and trajectory; it invites the readers to free their study of Christianity from the old top-down, empire-based, colonialism-oriented, and institutions-centred historiography; with numerous examples, it

helps the readers to appreciate the contributions made by ordinary Christians like migrants and women to the rise, growth and expansion of Christianity as a world religion. Christian migrants often remained vulnerable strangers among host communities; most of them had nothing to do with local politics, economics and other power structures. Yet, they invigorated existing forms of local Christianity and expanded its outreach.

The first three chapters discuss the conceptual overview of this book. The first chapter discusses existing scholarship on migration and demonstrates its interpretive tools and models to understand human migration; some of these migrants were nomadic pastoralists, military personnel, war captives, slaves, active or disfavoured employees of empires or governments, merchants, religious specialists and devotees, wandering entertainers and professionals. They carry with them their heritages including religious beliefs and practices.

The second chapter focuses its attention on migrant contributions to globalising religions and understanding religious conversions; migrants reckon with basic needs and uncertainties; they use their practical skills to meet these challenges. As they interact with the customs of their host communities, they rearrange their priorities and adjust their ways of life. Their presence and lifestyle often attract others and cause their conversion. In this context, Professor Hanciles discusses and applies Lewis Rambo's understanding of religious conversion to grasp the central role of converts as agents of their own destiny. Likewise, he utilizes the teachings of primal religions by Harold Turner (1911–2002), the translation principle by Lamin Sanneh and Andrew Walls, the theory of social conversion by Jerry H. Bentley (1949–2012), and the notions of religious syncretism by John David Yeadon Peel (1941–2015); he brings these scholarly views to enlighten the multidimensional experiences of the migrants.

The third chapter, entitled “Theologizing Migration: From Eden to Exile”, is rich and core indeed; it covers the key stages of Salvation History from Genesis to Revelation. Its exposition of the narratives about the Tower of Babel is illustrative. It discusses at length the biblical categories of migrants as strangers/aliens, foreigners and sojourners and comes up with captivating insights. For example, migrations have redemptive purpose; the Hebrew Patriarchs were migrants; they experienced “grave dangers, tensions, indignities, and conflicts” (p. 96); yet, they played an important role in the salvation history of their people: God's calling of Abraham included Abraham's entire household; the experiences of the Israelites in Egypt, during their Exodus and at Mount Sinai had missionary dimensions as well: they witnessed to YHWH among the non-Israelites (p. 118). Later, when the Israelites were exiled into Babylon, Prophet Jeremiah exhorted them to “seek the peace and prosperity of the city” (Jeremiah 29:7), which according to Hanciles amounted to a “theological bombshell” (p. 124).

The rest of this chapter examines the importance of migration in the New Testament. It begins with the migration experiences of the Lord Jesus Christ and his apostles. Jesus understood himself as a ‘stranger’; his apostles were itinerant preachers. Migrant Christians of Jewish and Hellenist backgrounds established the bi-cultural Christian congregation in Antioch. They realised the significance of inviting both Jews and Hellenist Greeks to embrace Christian faith. For this purpose, they ordained Paul and his companions. Paul became a migrant preacher; Priscilla, Aquila and countless unnamed Christian migrants played their part in the establishment

of Christian communities in Caesarea and Rome. Thus, Hancile's penetrative insights brighten up the migration-related passages of the biblical texts.

The fourth chapter, entitled "Christianization of the Roman Empire: The Immigrant Factor", begins with a quote from the Epistle to Diognetus (2nd century CE) that illustrates the social life of Christians in the Roman Empire: these Christians viewed themselves as strangers and aliens; they viewed any foreign country as their motherland and their motherland as a foreign country. Their social and religious lifestyle attracted the attention of their neighbours, who either appreciated or denounced or simply ignored them. Some Christians served as official apostles, evangelists, prophets or teachers; by contrast, as most Christians interacted with their non-Christian neighbours, they spread their faith. The Christians in the Roman Empire used the roads for transporting their forms of Christianity to other places. They considered themselves as aliens and strangers; thus they impressed on others.

Roman ideas of citizens and strangers were clear. Christian migrant outsiders introduced their faith to the inhabitants of the Roman Empire. Greek-speaking Christian merchants, for example, moved from the eastern parts to the western parts of the Roman Empire. Christianity appealed more pronouncedly to the displaced foreigners and resident aliens in the Roman cities and towns as Hanciles points out that "Christianity in the Roman Empire was a predominantly immigrant phenomenon" (p. 167). Despite various levels of success or failure in their efforts to attain social integration, Christian foreigners and strangers retained their otherness; sometimes, this otherness sufficiently attracted at least a few Romans to join them. Persecution of Christians scattered them to various places; some of these displaced Christians were captives, refugees, "traders, artisans, soldiers, and church leaders" (p. 169). They spread their Christian faith wherever they went.

The fifth chapter, entitled "Frontier Flows: the Faith of Captives and the Fruit of Captivity", examines how the disfavoured officers of the Roman Empire and the Church were exiled to the border areas of the Roman Empire; there they founded Christian communities. For example, Bishop Ulfilas attended to the Goths at the borders of the Roman Empire; many Gothic groups embraced Arian Christianity.

The sixth chapter is extensive and is entitled "Minority Report: From the Church in Persia to the Persian Church". It examines the multi-layered social, theological and ecclesiastical history of Christians in Persia: they suffered persecutions because Persian rulers and Zoroastrian elites viewed Christians as agents of the Roman Emperor whom they hated. Christians in Persia also suffered under various internal doctrinal controversies; they interpreted and expressed their Christian faith according to their contemporaneous "cultural factors, ecclesiastical power structures, political dynamics, and social tensions" (p. 234). Simultaneously, Persian Christians did not forget their missionary mandate; their theologians like Mar Narsai have given us timeless insights into the divine-human natures of Jesus.

The seventh chapter, entitled "Christ and Odin: Migration and Mission in an Age of Violence", explores the conversion of Western European tribes through various types of migrations: the royal marriages of Clotilda to King Clovis I of the Franks, Bertha to Prince Æthelbert of Kent,

Æthelburth to King Edwin of Northumbria symbolized a powerful type of migrations. Missionary journeys of the monks such as Columba, Columbanus, Willibrord and Boniface typified another kind of migration. Pope Gregory I authorized St. Augustine to work among the Anglo-Saxons. Most of the Vikings astonishingly embraced Christianity. Iceland's lawmaker Thorgeir decided the conversion of his people and promoted the concept of 'one law and one religion'. These and other "tales of dramatic religious change among European kings and chieftains, [...], wholesale conversions, and miraculous occurrences" validate "the triumph of Christ over Odin" (p. 312) primarily for historical, social and cultural reasons (and to violence, as popularly assumed).

The eighth chapter, entitled "To the Ends of the East: The Faith of Merchants", continues the history of Persian Christians from the sixth chapter and highlights how Persian Christian merchants moved along the Silk Roads, established their Christianity along the way and settled in Chang'an, the capital of China at that time. The Xian Stele documents the history of Tang Christianity, which began and disappeared fast: lack of indigenous leaders, resources and liturgical practice kept Christianity as a religion of foreigners that was not needed in China anymore.

The ninth chapter, entitled "Gaining the World: The Interlocking Strands of Migration, Imperial Expansion, and Christian Mission", covers a vast period. It explains the origins and spread of Islam across Asia; it engages with the growth and decline of Mongolian Empire. Christians in Asia and Europe maintained their identity amidst changing political and religious alliances; the proportion of Asian Christians always remained small, but active, especially as queens and princesses of polygamous Khans.

The tenth and final chapter, entitled "Beyond Empire" reiterates the migration factor as the decisive contributor to the spread of Christianity until 1500. During this period, both the institutional representatives of this empire and Western missionaries did little or nothing to promote Christianity among the non-western peoples in Asia. Christian migrants facilitated "the rise of Christianity as a world movement" (p. 420). A detailed bibliography and useful index conclude this book.

An assessment

This book investigates the major turning points in the history of European, African and Asian Christianity and provides a fascinating account. Its socio-historical approach delineates bottom-up efforts of ordinary Christian women and men, merchants, captives, monks and others in establishing their Christianity. This book will enrich the study of Christianity as a global phenomenon by theologians, historians and other social scientists; they can profitably engage with the questions and debates of various Christian groups. From the beginning, Christians developed a mind-set that was both contextual and universal. Their congregations too were contextually diverse: Ordinary Christians acted as agents and architects of their own destiny; some of their non-Christian neighbours received, evaluated and embraced Christianity; they found Christianity more relevant than other religious systems in addressing human need for joy

and its fulfilment; gradually, they learned to manage their life and witness. Theological students and scholars of humanities will find this compelling book enriching, rewarding and reorienting.