

Dale T. Irvin and Scott W. Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement, Volume II: Modern Christianity from 1454–1800*, Orbis, Maryknoll, NY, 2012. 503 pp. \$40.00. ISBN: 9781570759895.

It is only natural to be interested, first of all, in “our” history—the one that explains our own particular context and helps us understand where we come from. Thus, when I began to teach church history survey courses to Baptist students in the former Soviet Union in the 1990s, I worked hard to build up a narrative of Christianity that would give perspective to evangelicals in an Orthodox context whose recent past was defined by official atheism. I flatter myself that I eventually succeeded in picking out a functional path between translated English texts and new editions of nineteenth-century Russian histories. However, in the process I largely ignored the “undergirding insight” of *History of the World Christian Movement*—namely, that Christianity was never strictly a European religion but rather a worldwide movement before 1500. Reading through this second volume, which covers the years 1454–1800 (a third volume on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is planned), I began to wonder whether I have ever actually taught church history at all. Doesn’t any localized version risk distorting the worldwide history of Christianity? Of course, a truly complete historical narrative would be impossible to assemble, much less read; thus the reason why local and specific histories are necessary. Yet I am grateful to Dale T. Irvin and Scott W. Sunquist for showing a way to knit together myriad local stories into a comprehensive whole.

The book is organized both according to centuries and continents, illustrating developments in different geographical areas more or less in parallel, giving sustained attention to the development of Christianity in the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Europe. Protestant readers in particular might feel the tectonic plates shift under their feet a bit, as the authors do not use the sixteenth-century European Reformation as the dividing line between the Middle Ages and the modern era. Instead, their starting point is the development of navigation and shipping in the fifteenth century, which led to the conquest of South America, Africa, and Asia by Europeans and consequently the spread or reintroduction of Christianity. The European Reformation only appears about a quarter of the way into the volume. Indeed, the narrative may feel overly Roman Catholic to some readers, but generally the treatment of different Christian confessions is balanced. I was gratified to note that more space is given to Orthodoxy in its various forms than is usually the case in historical surveys of similar length. The authors do not shy away from the darker conundrums of church history, such as Christian complicity in the slave trade and colonialism. Their “take” on Christian history is far from triumphal. Readers with little tolerance for ambiguity may find some of the narrative unsettling

Along the way, Irvin and Sunquist tell many stories that may be completely new to Anglo-American readers. I had never heard of Yajiro (1511–50), the Japanese

criminal turned Christian, who directed Francis Xavier's steps in Japan (63–65), or of Jacobus Elisa Johannes Capitein (1717–47), a Fante-speaking African slave who was one of the first West Africans to become both a Protestant and a missionary (323). One of the goals of this history is precisely to tell stories about real people, presenting as many details as possible and limiting historical interpretation (xiv). In this, the authors are quite successful. At the same time, interpretation is not lacking, with brief but clear summaries of the effect of navigation, colonialism, slavery, and industrialization on Christianity. The main points are repeated in different contexts, and the result is a concise, accessible narrative that the reader can pick up at any point without having to start at the very beginning. Each chapter closes with a brief but helpful bibliography for those who wish to do further study.

Needless to say, two scholars working all alone could not produce such a comprehensive study. The research and writing was carried out over ten years in both group and individual consultations with specialists. I was dying to know who they are, but unfortunately the authors decided the list would be too long. Perhaps they were afraid of leaving out someone's name. It is also inevitable that mistakes will be made in presenting such an ambitious work. I found two without trying, which makes me wonder what other errors there are. Nevertheless, with so much checking and cross-checking done by other historians and editors, the book is certainly as reliable as most.

I wonder what some Russian Orthodox historians would make of a book like this. Over the past twenty-five years, great efforts have been made to recover the history of Christianity suppressed during Soviet times, but to my knowledge that recovery has not often extended to include other forgotten or threatened Christian confessions. What significance would the neglected voices of Asian or African Christians have for the Orthodox? It is interesting that the only attempt I know of to present a comprehensive history of Christianity in the Russian language was done by a Baptist—Dr. S. V. Sannikov of Odessa (Ukraine). If his two-volume *Twenty Centuries of Christianity*¹ were translated into English and *History of the World Christian Movement* were translated into Russian, both English- and Russian-speaking Christians would be enriched. We cannot do without our local and personal histories, but it is of great value to see where and how they connect to the worldwide Christian movement.

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1 Sergei Victorovich Sannikov, *Dvadsat' vekov Khristianstva*, 2 volumes (Odessa: Bogomyслиe, 2001).