

ADRIAN HASTINGS (ED.)

The World History of Christianity

Szerző: Adrian Hastings (ed.)

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This book caught my attention since I have long wished to get acquainted with the history of Christianity around the globe and not just in Europe. Where can one learn about the history of Christianity in Africa? Where can one learn about the history of Christianity in the world without having to read a whole book about each continent?

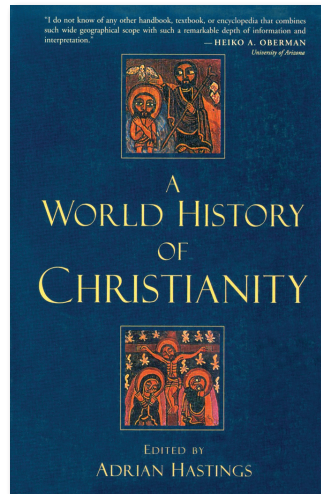
This volume consists of thirteen chapters penned by university teachers from Australia, Great Britain, and the United States. The book is organized territorially. The sections devoted to China (and its neighbours), Africa, Australasia and the Pacific are divided according to continents. South and North America are dealt with in two individual chapters. The largest number of chapters covers the history of Christianity in Europe and Euroasia; the emergence of Christianity, 150–550; the Orthodox Church in Byzantium; the medieval West; the Reformation and Counter-Reformation; Eastern Europe since the fifteenth century; and, Christianity in Western Europe since the

Enlightenment. One chapter is devoted to India, but this denotes the area that today includes the countries known as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan.

Individual chapters give the general lines of the development of Christianity, but they also present necessary details and concrete information. In some cases, the subject is presented more chronologically (as in Latin America), while in other cases it is developed more thematically (as in the long history of the Medieval West).

The breadth of the book's focus invites readers to encounter the great diversity of Christianity as different expressions have evolved

in the course of time and in various geographical contexts (e.g., the section on India starts with the legend of St. Thomas because it is there that the origins of Christianity are rooted). Readers will also observe common traits (e.g., the development of evangelised countries; the coming of Roman Catholic and Protestant missions; the encounter of Christianity and Christian culture



with local indigenous religions and cultures; the coexistence of Catholic and Protestant missions; etc.). In Europe and Byzantium the relation between the Church and political power loomed large and one can follow the course of these relations.

Although the editor announces his pursuit of the non-Eurocentric perspective in processing the world history of Christianity, the largest number of chapters is devoted to Europe (four plus the Slavonic period of Byzantium). It would probably be detrimental to the treatment of the whole subject if the history of Christianity in Europe was limited to only one section—solely for the sake of adhering to the letter of the editor's own law. The development of Christianity in Europe was the longest, and it distinguished itself by the most stages and diverse forms of Christianity. With respect to the space devoted to Europe, a Czech reader would hope—especially in the chapter on the Reformation and Counter-Reformation—to come across at least a mention of the Bohemian pre-reformation Utraquist movement.

There is an apparent disproportion in the number of footnotes. Whereas some chapters contain 40 (Africa 43) or 50 (China 51), some have only a minimum. In the case of the Medieval West (zero footnotes) it is understandable, as Professor Hastings explains in his Preface; but, in the case of India, it is less so (four footnotes).

The editor himself also recognizes some of the book's deficiencies in omitting the history of the Caribbean, Sri Lanka, and Madagascar. But this

does not substantially detract from the book's value.

Knowledge of the history of Christianity is crucial to developing an understanding of global history, since Christianity played an important part in the history of most of the continents and countries of the world. In addition, a grasp of global Christianity – not just that of Europe or the Americas – is a precondition for diverse theological thinking, so that a theologian can be fully engaged in the research on Christianity and Christian theology. An additional pleasant fact about this volume is that one can dip into it at random, not necessarily reading from cover to cover.

To conclude, we concur with the words of one of the reviews on the book's back cover: "It is rare to find a single volume that holds together the history of two thousand years of Christianity with the diversity of political, social, cultural, and theological climate that has accompanied it from the very beginning" – John Mbiti.

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Rev. Adrian Hastings (1929–2001) was professor of theology at the University of Leeds, England (1985–1994). His foremost scholarly interest was the history of Christianity in Africa. He spent several years on that continent as parish priest in Uganda and as professor of Religious Studies at the University of Zimbabwe (1982–1985). Among numerous books he penned are *The Church in Africa 1450–1950* (700 pp) and *The Construction of Nationhood* (1997).