



Jehu J. Hanciles: *Migration and the Making of Global Christianity*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2021, 461 pp.

After Jehu J. Hanciles had written *Beyond Christendom: Globalization, African Migrations, and the Transformation of the West* (Orbis Books, 2008), his audience begged for answers about the broader role of migration in Christian history. To better address this question, Hanciles embarked on a seven-year journey. Its outcome is *Migration and the Making of Global Christianity*, which examines the role of migration in spreading Christianity from its beginnings until around 1500. The emerging colonial era marks a natural shift, as it initiates the age of European rule around the world. Jehu J. Hanciles is Professor of World Christianity at Emory University, USA. He continues the seminal work of Philip Jenkins in discussing global Christianity, something Jenkins notes in his brief foreword to this volume.

Hanciles defines his perspective as follows: ‘This study provides a historical assessment of the global spread of Christianity, with migration as the central lens or explanatory key’ (p. 1). Although he acknowledges that a direct correspondence between migration and the spread of Christianity cannot be claimed, as this ‘would be wildly inaccurate’ (p. 2), he suggests that human migration has been very significant for Christianity, though with ‘mixed results’ (p. 2). The book defines human migration as ‘subject to constant change,

marked by varying degrees of compulsion (or freedom), and shaped by wider structures and historical processes’ (p. 19). Hanciles’ approach is fundamentally theoretical. His sociohistorical premises are three distinct academic areas of enquiry: migration theory; conversion studies; and the theologies of migration and mission.

Hanciles is sensitive to a great variety of types of migration and mobility, including captives, government administrators, and the military, that are not usually the focus of migration studies (pp. 21–29). Moreover, he naturally provides a special note about religious migrants and sojourners like monks, priests, and pilgrims (pp. 29f.). Travel was also time-consuming, as ‘long-distance travel was slow, laborious, expensive, and dangerous for most’ (p. 37). The most common migrants were ‘government envoys, merchants, soldiers, nomadic pastoralists, and religious pilgrims’ (p. 37). Most moved on foot, as animals were expensive, and waterways were not always available.

On conversion, the study relies on the classic work of Lewis Rambo, but as ‘Rambo’s analysis does not attempt a comprehensive historical overview’ (p. 63), Hanciles adds to this approach that of Marc Baer. Baer has identified four main historians’ views of conversion types: acculturation as cultural change; adhesion (hybridity) as the adaptation of new beliefs and practices; syncretism; and transformation as de facto conversion. Hanciles reframes Baer’s types as *Christianization*, relating it primar-

ily to broader societal change. Finally, Hanciles adds agency to the stew by noting the differences between '(1) conversion through voluntary association; (2) conversion induced by political, social, or economic pressure; (3) conversion by assimilation' (p. 73). Altogether, Hanciles builds a multifaceted conceptual toolbox to allow a discussion of cultural and religious change as conversion to Christianity. Obviously, finding the data on historical conversions is more than tricky, but Hanciles has meticulously searched for illustrative examples in the later chapters, while admitting the limits of data availability and the problems in its interpretation.

The final introductory chapter focuses on the theology of migration and mission, providing a perspective that makes this book unique among the other treatises of migrant religion I know. Hanciles discusses at length various Biblical concepts used for sojourners, foreigners, and other related categories, as well as their many interpretations. With numerous illustrations he shows that human mobility is a fundamental feature of the Bible, and that several key myths are embedded in migration. For example, both the Jewish exile and captivity in Babylon and the Israelite Exodus from Egypt to Canaan are central narratives for Jews and Christians. Hanciles notes two differing Christian understandings of migration. First, migration is related to disaster and deprivation and is thereby punitive in nature. Second, migration may also be re-

lated to a better future and is thus redemptive. In any case, Hanciles correctly observes that the Bible's numerous stories are a key repertoire for Christian migrants, by which they make sense of and give meaning to their experiences on the road.

Having presented his overall framework on migration, conversion, and theology, Hanciles examines the spread of Christianity from the Roman Empire to all the points of the compass in six substantive chapters. Refreshingly, the book gives a large role to the Oriental and Orthodox Churches. While crediting conqueror kings and the deeds of religious specialists in spreading Christianity, Hanciles pays serious attention to the grassroots developments – 'bottom-up' in his terminology – especially among merchants, neighbours, slaves, and wives.

Hanciles associates Christian growth during its first centuries with the urban centres in Asia Minor, which afforded plenty of bottom-up opportunities to witness to one's faith, which he assumes was the main way to attract new followers. Elsewhere in the Roman Empire Christianity was a migrant religion, one among others. As today, large cities needed a constant supply of labour, so Christian communities started to emerge around the Empire. As a mobile population, merchants were especially equipped for mission, but so were captives, artisans, and soldiers as the number of Christians increased. Moreover, Hanciles highlights the role of upper-class women as key, first in their own

conversions and later in encouraging their husbands and children to follow their example. He thus also downplays the role of religious specialists, apostles, and others at a time when Christianity was occasionally strongly persecuted. By the turn of the fourth century Jesus's minuscule group of followers had come to constitute some 10 per cent of the empire's population. The church had a presence in all corners of the Roman world. It was then that Constantine I raised Christianity to new prominence.

The following chapters examine the spread of Christianity outside the Roman world and often in a minority position. The emerging division between the Roman and Oriental Churches is noteworthy, as well as the later division between Roman Catholicism and Greek Orthodoxy, including the waning success of the Byzantine Empire and the rise of Islam. In this context 'Christian captives became important agents of the interregional spread of Christianity in the first millennium' (p. 190). With spells of persecution Christian minorities lived in the Persian and other realms, where they could use existing imperial territories to expand through migration and trade. The vast expansion of the third main branch of old Christianity, the Eastern/Persian/Nestorian Church, to Central Asia, India, and China is still less known, mainly because of its later misfortunes, as it has largely been wiped out from its previous lands. The rise and fall of the Eastern Church occupies a prominent place in Hanciles's discussion.

Without going into detail it seems fair to agree with Hanciles that 'the proclivity in Western scholarship for explaining major historical change, including transregional spread of religion, in terms of state action or formal structures of political power and economic self-interest' (p. 269) has been at the expense of a failure to realize how central and formative human mobility in all its aspects has been to the spread of Christianity. It was not only monks, missionaries, and religious specialists who played a role – often much less than expected – but the ordinary man, merchant, and captive were perhaps of even greater salience.

This book is a wonderful and thought-provoking addition to the literature on religion and historical migrations that is both sensitive to social scientific knowledge on migration and theological considerations of human mobility. I highly recommend it to everyone interested in global migration history, as well as those particularly interested in the intersection of religion and migration. Human mobility is essential for church history, and Jehu J. Hanciles has provided us with a perspective that – I hope – will find its readers and be an inspiration for many future studies of the subject.

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