

Ogbu U. Kalu, Alaine Low, eds.. *Interpreting Contemporary Christianity: Global Processes and Local Identities*. Studies in the History of Christian Missions Series. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008. xiv + 365 pp. \$45.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-8028-6242-6.



Reviewed by Michael Wilkinson

Published on H-Pentecostalism (April, 2009)

Commissioned by Gene Mills (Florida State University)

The late Ogbu U. Kalu and Alaine Low have given us an important book for understanding a wide range of issues shaping intercultural theology and the globalization of Christianity. The material was originally presented at the University of Pretoria in 2001 as part of the Currents in World Christianity Project. Multidisciplinary in focus, the book examines the complex relationship between the diverse expressions of Christianity and globalization. The editors express the need for a more complex understanding of globalization that recognizes diversity within Christianity as opposed to a view of globalization as a homogenizing process.

The book is divided into five sections and fourteen chapters. The range of topics includes theoretical issues, Christianity as a globalizer, education, Charismatic/Pentecostal expressions, and finally, the political dimensions of Christianity. There is an uneven presentation of material throughout. For example, the first section has four chapters, which give excellent coverage of the issues in the globalization literature, including the

need for intercultural theology to incorporate a globalization perspective, the lack of attention given to religion by globalization scholars, the relationship between the local and the global, and the need for non-Western interpretations of globalization. The next two sections provide good coverage of the topics discussed but have fewer chapters (two in each section). The largest section includes five chapters on Pentecostalism. Part 5 contains only one chapter, which, in my view, is not necessarily a concluding chapter that the volume could have used. In spite of these minor problems, there are some outstanding contributions. I will discuss two of the more significant chapters and then conclude with a focus on the Pentecostal section.

Paul Freston writes one of the most important chapters in this book on the problems of globalization scholarship. Freston argues persuasively that little attention is given to religion and globalization, and when it does it ignores some of the most important developments, like evangelicalism outside of the West. Or when it does treat

Christianity, it is often juxtaposed with secular society in such a way that evangelicalism is presented as an anti-modernizing force or as a fundamentalism. To improve the situation, Freston challenges globalization scholars to do the following: make greater use of the data on religion worldwide, pay attention to the problems of religious freedom, develop global studies of the world's religions, distinguish fundamentalism from evangelicalism, thematize conversion, and finally, develop studies on non-Western mission activity. Freston provides for us an excellent agenda for future studies of globalization and religion.

Another important contribution is made by Jehu Hanciles who argues that African Christianity is the most neglected area of study despite it being the most important center for Christianity in the world. Furthermore, he calls for greater attention to the study of African Christianity, which is often treated as a marginal expression when in fact it is not. By making African Christianity, and not just the African initiated churches or Pentecostalism, a major focus, other representations become decentered, which in Hanciles's view, ought to be done. Employing the dependency perspective of Immanuel Wallerstein, Hanciles points to the ways in which Africa generally and African Christianity particularly is treated as marginal. If the future of Christianity, including worldwide missionary activity, is "African," then scholars must pay attention.

Finally, the book includes a section on Pentecostalism, which needs some comment considering the focus of this audience. First, Pentecostalism is not a homogeneous movement in spite of the attempts by scholars to define it as one that shares a common culture, for example. The chapters in this section illustrate very well the diversity of Pentecostalism worldwide, drawing our attention to the ways in which it is similar and different or, in the words of Roland Robertson, universal and particular, global and local. Further, the chapters in this section implicitly critique the

central place myth of Pentecostalism; birthed in the United States and diffused throughout the world by American missionaries. This is especially evident in the contribution by Edith Blumhofer, an account of Pandita Ramabai and the development of Pentecostalism in India. Blumhofer, accurately in my view, develops these points and argues persuasively for a contextual, local, and global understanding of Pentecostalism. On the whole, this volume makes an important contribution to our understanding of the multifarious nature of worldwide Christianity, calling for fully developed analytical tools in globalization theory and empirical application among Christians of the world.

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Citation: Michael Wilkinson. Review of Kalu, Ogbu U.; Low, Elaine, eds. *Interpreting Contemporary Christianity: Global Processes and Local Identities*. H-Pentecostalism, H-Net Reviews. April, 2009.

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