

Book Review

A Multitude of All Peoples: Engaging Ancient Christianity's Global Identity.

By Vince Bantu. Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2020. Pp 256. Paper, \$31.50.

This highly informative and challenging book is very much worth the purchase and read. It differs from other recent books on 'global' Christianity in its richness of historical depth and scholarship including primary sources. But that said, it also presents a degree of frustration in a lack of coherence and temptation towards anachronism.

On pg. 1, the author rightly notes 'Christianity is and always has been a global religion...it is important never to think of Christianity *becoming* global.' (Italics from author). And on pg. 2, 'the 'typical Christian of the 21st century is not a white man but an African woman.' These statements and the following chapters that unpack them carry depth and context far beyond the prevailing understanding of the Christian faith in many circles today.

If Bantu had written his book primarily on 'engaging Ancient Christianity's Global Identity' as promised in the sub-title, well and good. As noted above, the depth in the chapters between the Introduction and Conclusion are worth reading and digesting. But the author also desires to emphasize the complexity of issues in Church identity today. On pg. 6, Bantu states that the Church 'has two interrelated and indispensable tasks going forward 1) the deconstruction of the Western, white cultural captivity of the Christian tradition and 2) the elevation of non-Western expressions of Christianity.' In the concluding chapter on pg. 225, he makes the rather sweeping conclusion that the 'Western, white cultural captivity of the Church is the single greatest obstacle for people coming to faith in Christ.'

A danger of anachronism is to attribute ideas or concerns from the contemporary period to centuries before. While this reviewer has great sympathy for viewpoints Bantu expresses about contemporary issues of identity in the Western and Global Church, there could be greater coherence if the Introduction and Conclusion had been more tightly woven in the chapters to follow/precede, and more caution exercised in the use of present terminology projected back in history. At times I felt almost as if there were two books in one presented here: one describing present global contextual challenges, the other narrating the history of the ancient Churches and their importance for today.

Having noted those points, I again would highly recommend this book. The reader will learn at least some things new, besides being introduced to sources unfortunately still so relatively unknown in the teaching of Church history, especially on Asia and Africa. The final historical timeline is also worth the price of the book! It is the best and most complete timeline I have ever seen for including European, African, Middle Eastern, and Asian church history together over the first 1500 years.

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