



BOOK REVIEW

Bruner, Jason. *How to Study Global Christianity: A Short Guide for Students*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022, xv + 145.

What is World Christianity?¹ What are some important methods and themes that one should know about this field of study? While “World Christianity” pertains to both a field of academic study that focuses on Christians in the Global South and the field’s object of study that “describes an interrelated set of developments within Christianity” (2), Jason Bruner’s *How to Study Global Christianity: A Short Guide for Students* is a well-crafted primer that skillfully focuses on and paints the contours of the academic field of World Christianity. This slim yet noteworthy volume takes the readers into the thicket of World Christianity and serves as a practical and accessible way of approaching this emerging field of study. *How to Study Global Christianity* ranges from addressing the aforementioned questions to offering a comprehensive introduction and analysis regarding the central themes and methods in World Christianity scholarship and “how scholars have sought to understand Christianity globally over roughly the past four decades” (7).

Bruner’s work joins a growing body of literature on the study of World Christianity, such as *World Christianity: History, Methodologies, Horizons* (Jehu J. Hanciles, 2021), *World Christianity: Methodological Considerations* (Martha Frederiks and Dorottya Nagy, 2021), and *World Christianity and Interfaith Relations* (Richard Fox Young, 2022). Yet, this monograph has found a niche that addresses the need for a volume that is approachable to both academics (undergrads to early graduate students) and the lay reader interested in the study of Christianity on a global scale.

¹ The use of the nomenclatures “Global Christianity” and “World Christianity” has been under debate within academic discourse. However, Jason Bruner does not differentiate between the two for this book. This book review adheres to Jason Bruner’s approach and will use the nomenclature “World Christianity.”

The subtitle “A Short Guide” is an understatement, as there is more than meets the eye: over 140 pages that are richly illustrated, a brimful of essential resources for further reading, and discussion questions at the end of each chapter to enrich readers’ reflections and continued discussions about the “highly interdisciplinary [field that draws] from subjects including sociology, anthropology, history, area studies (such as African or Asian Studies), and theology” (3).

The book is organized into two main parts which comprises fourteen chapters. The first part on methods is divided into four chapters (“History,” “Ethnography,” “Theology,” and “Demography”), with each chapter introducing key methodological approaches for researching World Christianity. Here, Bruner meticulously delineates how scholars have employed various methods, their challenges and implications, and, at times, presenting suggestions and know-hows based on his training and experience as an ethnographer and historian researching Christianity worldwide.

A crucial methodology that has gained significant traction among World Christianity scholars and warrants consideration in this review is the second chapter titled “Ethnography.” Here, Bruner poses a fundamental inquiry in this section: How has ethnographic research impacted scholars’ perspectives on World Christianity? Despite the significant contributions of academic disciplines such as anthropology and the sub-field of anthropology of Christianity towards the comprehension of Christianity worldwide, Bruner identifies the objective of World Christianity scholarship to fill the lacuna by combining ethnographic techniques with historical, demographic, and theological inquiry to delineate the nuances of Christian belief and praxis, as well as its development in a specific context. In view of contemporary World Christianity discourse on ethnographic examination of Christianity in the global South and informed by his extensive research experience, the author presents a systematic roadmap and recommendations for novice scholars contemplating undertaking their own ethnographic research.

The second part, which consists of nine chapters, offers an extensive survey of the significant themes that have occupied and shaped the field of World Christianity. From issues such as mission and translation, to topics of gender, sexuality, and decolonization, Bruner discloses how each theme has been scrutinized and its relevance to the diverse contexts in the global South. A notable feature of this segment is the thirteenth chapter titled “Neglected Topics in the Study of Global Christianity,” in which Bruner highlights certain topics that have been overlooked or marginalized in the realm of World Christianity

scholarship. According to Bruner, some of these neglected topics pertain to areas that have not experienced substantial Christian expansion, violence and persecution, power imbalances, Catholicism and orthodoxy, as well as ecology—urging readers to initiate further dialogue on these crucial topics. Among these themes, ecology has garnered significant momentum, with prominent academic conferences on World Christianity, such as the Princeton Theological Seminary World Christianity Conference² and the Yale-Edinburgh Conference,³ featuring global Christian perspectives on the issue of our planet.

Engaging and easy to follow, *How to Study Global Christianity* arrives at a timely moment, making a necessary contribution in response to the growing attention on the field of World Christianity. This book is a refreshing addition to the collection of volumes that privilege region and methodology. To those new to the field of World Christianity, *How to Study Global Christianity* serves as a helpful orientation to the field and is a guidebook for further studies; to those interested in or currently teaching World Christianity, it will be complementary for introducing World Christianity within the classroom setting.

While it is difficult to pack all the pertinent themes of World Christianity into such a short guide, it is still worth critiquing that the book forgoes some crucial themes, such as “interreligious engagement/dialogue” and “rituals/practices,” all highly relevant in the global South, especially in the context of Indonesia. Yet, through this book, the author has still well executed his objective in providing readers with a “thorough working knowledge of the field from which [readers] will be able to analyze existing literature, understand something of the field’s analytical priorities, and identify new questions to pursue” (7).

As someone who situates himself in World Christianity and whose work also focuses on Christianity in Indonesia, the decision to review this book for the reader base of the *Indonesian Journal of Theology* was an intentional one. In surveying the academic journal and book publications concerning the study of World Christianity in the past decade, it is noticeable that Africa remains the principal region for study, with small pockets of Asia and Latin America emerging. More attention is needed on Christianity in Indonesia, as the archipelago provides a wide array of themes and untapped complexities that are substantial

² From March 14-17, 2023, Princeton Theological Seminary held its fourth World Christianity Conference with the theme “War, Pandemic, and Climate Change: Global Crises—Past and Present—And Their Place in World Christianity Scholarship.”

³ The Yale-Edinburgh Group on World Christianity and the History of Mission will hold its annual conference from June 21-23, 2023, with the theme “Creation, Climate Change, and World Christianity.”

for research. As an interdisciplinary field, World Christianity is inviting for scholars who are not only interested in theology and history but who are also welcoming social scientific frameworks into the methodological repertoire when investigating the indigenous expressions of the Christian faith. Readers interested in this academic field can surely benefit from *How to Study Global Christianity* as a way to help jumpstart their understanding of ongoing World Christianity discourse and their exploration of the global Christian phenomenon.

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