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The post-modern world may be characterized by both global interconnectedness and instant communication on the one hand and a reassertion of the local cultural centrality in identity formation on the other. This dynamic presents a particularly challenging context for constructing master narratives without privileging one of these local cultures or fragmenting the global character of the story. For the Christian historian, this context provides a particular challenge since the bulk of histories on the shelves were produced by European males rooted in particular confessional, national, and geographical locations. Yet, Christianity is committed by its founder and founding documents to a universal connectedness and respect for diverse cultural expressions. This second of a three volume series is an enormous contribution to the post-Eurocentric, ecumenical, and global context in which Christian history is called to retell its story for new generations.

The volume attempts to avoid the traditional periodization by beginning in the mid-fifteenth century, in what has now come to be known as the Americas. Traditional histories would divide in 1054 or 1517, for example, testifying to their confessional bias. However, these volumes want to find ways of incorporating the neglected accounts, the interactions of other religions with Christianity, and the marginal voices muted by classical historiography.

The nineteen chapters are divided into three sections. The approach throughout the three volumes is to use both chronology and region to organize the material. This organizational systems allows for the possibility of reading the books as a series of side by side histories, with every attempt to balance the European older master narratives with the parallel developments in Africa, Asia and—in this volume—the Western hemisphere.

The first part, covering 1454–1600, includes six chapters on America, Africa, Asia, Europe, and Orthodoxy in the Muslim and Russian empires. A final chapter attempts to summarize the great transformations in the East with the rise of the Ottoman and Russian empires, the metamorphosis in the West with the Catholic and Protestant reformations, and the globalization of Western Christianity with its evangelization of the Western hemisphere and parts of Asia and Africa, including re-encounters in Ethiopia and India. This long century is one of fragmentation, expansion, and revival.

The next two parts are organized by century, providing more levels of details as the Christian movement becomes more global, self-aware, and closer to our own times. The seventeenth century, characterized by both global outreach and the enlightenment, includes chapters on eastern and south Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, South and North America, western Europe, and the Orthodox world. The eighteenth century chapters touch on Africa, Europe, Orthodoxy, Asia, and the Americas, North and South.

The method for writing these volumes, which involved scholars from a variety of confessions, continents, and sub-disciplines and engaged history and theology in conversation, contributes to the balance of the text, as well as to a high level of detail that will be a challenge to the less engaged reader. However, whether used as a text or as a guide to the teacher and the writer of more popular text books, it remains an invaluable resource and a monument to a process quite alien to the competitive, siloed academic culture that has emerged with the modern research university and the seminaries which draw their faculties from them.
The volume should be judged as a contribution to a process that is just beginning. It is therefore a pioneering attempt on which future generations will be called to build as we attempt to construct a differentiated, ecumenically informed, inter-religiously sensitive, and culturally attuned Catholic master narrative. This narrative should lose none of the particularity with which God has gifted the Church in its 2,000 year pilgrimage but be informed by a zeal for the unity to which it is called in service to a fragmented world. We can be grateful to the authors and appreciative to the editors and publishers who have amassed these synthetic threads in the Christian story.