

Whose Religion is Christianity - the Gospel beyond the West

a book by Lamin Sanneh

Here are my notes from reading this book, which turned out to be useful in my work on [The Alternate Life Collection](#).

1. I liked his differentiation between Global Christianity (aka Christendom or Western Christianity) and World Christianity. It puts a new perspective on how we Christians can view the historic connections between religious and political powers deriving from Europe (and more recently from America).
2. His idea that World Christianity as essentially a post-Western Christianity was helpful, and a very good way of looking at the tremendous rise of Christian faith in Africa, South and Central America, and maybe to some extent in China. Obviously he knows far more about Africa than the other geographies, but it was still of value in thinking about these regions.
3. I was intrigued by his encouragement of using indigenous names for God in Bible translations for indigenous people groups. I'm not sure I agree with all the thrust of this, but I do with most of it. It resonates with the inherent power in scripture to communicate God's word to all kinds of people.
4. I think Sanneh is correct in saying that the West displays an allergic reaction to the return or rise of Christianity and instead considers Christians as irrelevant. Sanneh's conviction that this will not change is disappointing, but probably true.
5. I agree with him that in 3rd world countries World Christianity is a vital element in the rise of liberal democratic states, though this does not happen through a marriage of World Christianity with the politics of a country.
6. His perspective on the Crusades was new to me: that they were a Christian response to a Muslim jihad. Another related item is his observation that we Christians are universally embarrassed by the Crusades, while the Muslims have no similar remorse about their jihads. This implies that the Crusades are an aberration to Christian faith and not representative of its core.
7. And lastly, that the translation of scripture does not coerce/compel. Instead, it puts in place a process whereby people can encounter Christian faith in their mother tongue. It persuades, as opposed to coercing.

by Tim Isbell, 2008