It is intriguing that the last two volumes of the monumental nine-volume *The Cambridge History of Christianity* bear the subtitle ‘World Christianities’. Volume 8, edited by Sheridan Gilley and Brian Stanley, covers the history of Christianity in the nineteenth century (c.1815–c.1914) (2006), and Volume 9, edited by Hugh McLeod, that of the twentieth century (c.1914–c.2000) (2006). What happened, one wonders, to Christianity in these two centuries that justifies describing it with the new sobriquet of World Christianities, qualifying this Christianity as ‘world’ and using ‘Christianity’ in the plural? By giving this unusual title only to the last two volumes of the series, does *The Cambridge History of Christianity* imply that the Christianity that is narrated in Volumes 1 through 7 was neither ‘world’ nor ‘Christianities’?

The answer to the above question depends, of course, on what is connotated by both ‘world’ and ‘Christianities’. If by ‘world’ one means that Christianity is universal and open to all peoples and to all regions of the world – another expression for this is ‘catholic’ – and if by ‘Christianities’ is meant that Christianity is variegated in self-definition, cultural and confessional ethos, doctrinal formulation, liturgical worship and organisational structure, then Christianity has undoubtedly been so since its very beginnings. Indeed, the goal of the first volume of *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, entitled *Origins to Constantine*, as stated by its editors Margaret M. Mitchell and Frances M. Young, is to emancipate past historiography from a schematised view of early Christianity as a uniform and invariant institution. Indeed, as the editors put it tersely, ‘the recognition of diversity within Christianity from the very beginning has transformed [the] study of its origins’ (Mitchell and Young 2006: xiii).

While catholicity (‘world’) and diversity (‘Christianities’) are arguably constant features of Christianity as a whole, a persuasive case can be made that Christianity of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is so different from that of the previous eighteen centuries in geographical expansion and internal diversity that it alone deserves to be dubbed ‘World Christianities’. Curiously, neither Sheridan Gilley in his introduction to Volume 8 nor its other contributors use the expression themselves. But the fact that, as Gilley notes, contrary to
most other histories of nineteenth-century Christianity, this volume dedicates nearly a third of its 600 pages to the new Christian churches outside Europe is an eloquent testimony to the transformation of nineteenth-century Christianity into a truly ‘world’, or global, and highly diversified religion.

While still implicit in Volume 8, the concept of World Christianities is elaborated at length in the next volume. Noting ‘the development of Christianity from a mainly European and American religion to a worldwide religion’, its editor Hugh McLeod points out that one of the book’s five major themes is that ‘Christianity becomes a worldwide religion’ (McLeod 2006: 6). Indeed, the entire volume can be viewed as offering a documentation of this global expansion of Christianity (‘Part II: Narratives of Change’) and of the resulting variations and multiplicities within Christianity as it sought to respond to the many and diverse challenges of the modern and postmodern age (‘Part III: Social and Cultural Impact’).

Of course, The Cambridge History of Christianity is not the only work, nor the first, that highlights the global and multiple character of contemporary Christianity. There has recently been a plethora of scholarly and popular studies in church history as well as – and perhaps especially – in missiology, new journals and periodicals, courses and programmes, and centres and institutes at both universities and seminaries that make World Christianities or Christianity in the non-Western world the object of research and teaching.

The immediate impact of the concept of World Christianities is, of course, on the discipline of church history – or, more accurately, the history of Christianity, as evidenced by The Cambridge History of Christianity.1 Another academic discipline that has been significantly impacted by this view of World Christianities is missiology. Works by renowned missiologists such as David Bosch, Andrew Walls, Lamin Sanneh, Robert Schreiter and Stephen Bevans, to cite only a few, have shifted the focus of mission from evangelisation by foreign missionaries to the building of local churches by native Christians, thereby contributing to the indigeneity and variety of Christianities.

In their comprehensive survey of World Christianity, Sebastian Kim and Kirsteen Kim spell out six aspects in which Christianity as a ‘world religion’ can be studied. Topographically, the mapping of Christianity takes into account its local varieties and types throughout the globe. Theologically, Christianity’s claim to be both universally applicable and locally inclusive needs to be taken

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1 On the distinction between ‘church history’ and ‘history of Christianity’, see Phan (2012). On how the concept of World Christianities demands new ways of doing church history, see the insightful and challenging work by González (2002) and Kollman (2004).