It is arguably the case that the major ecumenical challenge of the early twenty-first century is not so much the stubbornly persistent divisions between traditional denominations (important though they are), but the growing diversity of Christian communities across the globe, what the foreword to this volume calls ‘the new ecumene’. As the current tensions within the Anglican Communion illustrate, local culture – be it in New York or Kampala – has a powerful role in moulding the shape of the Church. We find ourselves asking, do the many variations on the Christian theme form, as it were, so many dialects of a common language, or have they diverged into several separate languages, unable to communicate with each other?

This book does not help us answer that question directly. It has more of a social than a theological agenda and aims to provide an introduction to the bewildering variety of world Christianities and the dizzying speed with which they develop. It seeks, according to its editor’s introduction, to supersede the nineteenth-century paradigm of a Christianity centred on the West. It also tries to move beyond the more recent poly-centric paradigm of post-colonialism. Instead, its approach is to treat Christianity as a movement interacting with many varied social, political, religious and cultural contexts. In 280 pages and seventeen chapters its authors provide miniature portraits of Christian churches and their engagement with these contemporary realities. The approach is phenomenological: description and analysis are the main tasks. The tone is, by and large, non-judgemental; there is neither scorn for the missionary enterprises of the past, nor adverse comment on the syncretistic forms of Christianity in contemporary South Asia or the indigenous movements of West Africa. Overall, Christianity is seen very much as a ‘going concern’ with no likelihood of imminent collapse. Indeed, there are frequent references to contemporary points of growth and development: young people join house-churches in Cuba; there has been phenomenal Christian growth in Korea and China; minorities in India often find Christianity a means of asserting their independence.

With a wide-range of contributors, each with a massive field to cover, it is inevitable that they are selective in what they cover and that they interpret their brief in rather different ways. Ogbu Kalu’s chapter on West Africa, for instance, combines a succinct history of Christianity’s development in the region with a five-part typology for the way in which it has related to indigenous religion and culture. Ben Knighton, on the other hand, deals with
The very recent expansion of Christianity in East Africa and gives a critique of what he sees as the failure of Christian leaders to address the corruption and violence in Kenyan politics. On the other side of the world, Timothy Lee's account of East Asia deals more with past history than contemporary development. The ten pages allowed to Western Europe (a chastening small proportion of the whole volume) looks beyond the frequent diagnosis of terminal secularisation and identifies a number of transformations that provide models for Christianity's survival. Jürgen Habermas' assertion that Europe's liberty and democracy depends on its Christian legacy is one indicator that there is a future for Christianity, even where it must now share the public sphere with many other world-views.

The area of the world that I know best (after Europe) is Oceania, so I turned first to the chapters by Ian Breward on Polynesia and Garry Trompf on Melanesia. Each gives an extremely succinct (though reliable) account of the missions that developed the patterns of Island Christianity and both highlight the factors that are now placing those patterns under severe strain. Among these are the movements of population in and out of the islands (immigration and tourism), the openness to global media and consumerism (the internet is everywhere), shifting political relationships (independence, coups and protest) and the growth of charismatic/Pentecostal groups (as separate churches or as transforming movements within churches). Like other authors, they end with a sense of a Christian story that is far from complete.

What is the target audience for a book like this? While the chapters are short and so cannot offer anything like a comprehensive account of Christianity in an area, they are written by scholars (most of them – ironically, given the post-colonial agenda – in European or American universities), are well foot-noted and have selective, but helpful guides for further reading. This would, then, be an ideal text-book for an undergraduate course on contemporary world Christianity. For more advanced students, and for the general reader, it will provide valuable information about the varieties of world Christianities, a discussion of important issues of faith and context and a set of intriguing questions about Christianity's future course. Many chapters paint a picture of Christianity both shaping and being shaped by the context in which it finds itself.

Because this is primarily a book about Christianity as a world movement, it does not major on ecclesiological questions. There is no discussion, even in the helpful concluding chapter, of how these very varied contextualised manifestations of Christianity might hold together as a single ekklesia. That, though, is a vital question for those of us who study or work within the Christian Church. Nevertheless, Farhadian and his colleagues do remind us