

Gibellini, R. (1994). Paths of african theology Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books. \$12.00
paper (out of print). v + 195 pp + bibliography + contributors + index

An alternative title for the book, given the main content, is “Theological Metamorphosis in Africa: Inculturation and Liberation.” It addresses varieties of study areas covered by eleven ecumenical contributors from different theological or denominational background. Ironically, the editor himself is not an African.

Chapter 1 of the book opens the heart of the problem and argued that African evangelization is closely tied to colonialism. This perspective was echoed in Canon Riches own words:

“Christianity came to Africa far more frequently as
colonization than as a servant, and even when it came
as a servant, it was a servant with a preconceived notions
about what services it ought to render and what person
it ought to serve. The servant felt superior to the one to
be served, and therefore deem itself to have nothing to
receive. It had no intention of listening.”

But some indigenous African clergy and theologians disagree with this viewpoint. Justin Ukpong in the third chapter sub-titled “Christology and Inculturation: A new testament approach” implied an exception to the claim of Gibellini in chapter 1. The contributor argued that Christianity moved out of Jewish culture and developed into an independent religion of its own. It can also be argued that colonization came from the British system of governing Africa and that colonization is no longer a problem in present practice of African Christianity. For example, Nigeria obtained its independent in 1960 and has been self-governed both by the Moslem civilian presidents and dictators.

The bible itself does not foster colonialism even though the earlier colonial master used it as a tool for personal exploitation during the colonial era. Jesus himself denounced religious system of his time, which used religion as a means to exploit the common people (Luke 11:37-54). Although slavery was practiced according to Old Testament theology but in the New Testament, Apostle Paul in his epistle to Philemon condemned slavery. Neither is Christianity the religion of the white since it did not originate with the whites but with the Jews. Gibellini lamented

the corruption of true Christian mission “Christian mission in colonial era unfolded in the context of a ‘logic of empire’ and ‘an occidental absolute’ which colonialism’s aftermath is already dismantling.”

The various collections of articles in the book help to avoid the problem of bias or one-sidedness. Some of the contributors take opposing viewpoint. It should be noted however that certain key Charismatic or Pentecostal theologies are left out.

The persistent tone is that there is need for a change in the current path of African theology. The book is quiet old--written over a decade ago. Since that time Christianity in Africa has penetrated some resisting and uncharted territory of North Africa (i.e Egypt). Right now, the fastest growing Christianity religion in any given continent of the World is in Africa. There is a mute point as to whether or not the author and the contributors still retain the same viewpoint at this time.

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