

Ogbukalu, U. (Ed.). (2005). *African Christianity: An African Story*. Pretoria, South Africa: Department of Church History, University of Pretoria. ISBN: 0-620-33647-1

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For those familiar with African Church history, there is no gainsaying that the quest towards redefining African Christianity is a current and most prominent challenge facing church historians. The basis of this is renaming the brand of Christianity bequeathed on the continent by the various *colonial masters* and *colonial missionary masters* who came to reintroduce Christianity in Africa. This book through the efforts of the authors of its chapters attempts to present a non-parochial, impartial, and contextualized African Christianity. It recognizes the roles of both foreign missionaries and the *native agents* that lent their assistance to its definition. It further puts into consideration the culture of the Africans and assesses their feelings towards the “new religion” (Christianity) in Africa in its formative period. The authors who participate in this text are like harbingers of history for African Christianity in the 21st century as there had been many works written by 20th century scholars such as Adrian Hastings, Mark Shaw, and Bengt Sundkler which these writers make reference to. They attempt to identify the key subject matters in African Christianity, which other researches in the new millennium could refer to.

The first chapter traces trends and issues in African Church history, the misjudgment, marginalization, and misrepresentations exhibited by the Western Missionaries about Africa, with Africans in relation to knowing God on the soil of Africa, when they came with the Christian gospel. The author detests the unfair manner the foreign missionaries relayed the story of Africa’s Christianity and decries their exploitation, and immeasurable maltreatment of the primal religion of the people of the continent at the expense of establishing their ‘bride’ i.e. western Christianity on the soil of Africa (5,6,&7).

Chapters two, three through four examine the history of Christianity in North Africa, Sudan, and Ethiopia. Chapter two argues the opinion that Christianity first developed in Europe before Africa by mentioning that the religion’s first home after jettisoning its Palestinian root was Africa. It further tells the story of African Christianity in four sequences namely Iberian Catholicism, Early Christianity in North Africa, Resilient Vision: Abolition and Evangelical Revival New Dimension in African Christianity: Power, Poverty, and Prayer. Chapter three traces the Judaism and Christianity in Egypt, and the contributions of Egypt in the theological discourses that rocked the religion in the first few centuries of its emergence (26). It is however a bolt from the blue to observe that contemporary Egypt has lost its savor and place of leadership, which it assumed during this early period. The fourth chapter discusses Christianity in Sudan and Ethiopia, the Nubian enthusiasm about Christianity and why Islam failed to thrive in Nubia, the relationship between Christianity and the state and the eventual collapse of the church in Nubia. The great roles that Picture plays in teaching Christian truth and worship are also discussed here (91). Some pictures were discovered in Faras, the capital of lower Nubia e.g. pictures of the Nativity, the three

men saved inside the fiery furnace and so on. This emphasize why pictures are so important in churches today. Picture in Christian church today is a means to an end. It's only when it becomes an end to a means that it becomes idolization.

Chapter five analyses the various patterns of Christian/Muslim encounter vis-à-vis the patterns of Islamization and the variety of ways Christians have responded to its challenges in Africa. It gives tips and some aids toward better interaction between the two religions in Africa. One of the reasons he claims for the spread of Islam is because Islam touched the grassroots and influenced it tremendously. Islam allowed converts to continue with some old practices such as polygamy and it also identifies to indigenous religious beliefs (123). This approach really had a lot of advantages over the existence of Christianity in Africa. The question remains; is contemporary Christianity benefiting the grassroots and how much is African Christianity doing today to influence the lives of the Proletarians?

Chapters six, seven, and eight look into the contributions of the Catholic Mission in Africa (especially the Iberian Catholic Mission), African clergies in southern Africa and the works of notable African chaplains who waded into the dangerous terrains and worked towards Christianizing the continent but were not recognized as their foreign counterparts. The chapters further discuss the trends and politics played towards the abolition of slavery in Africa and the various missionary enterprises in colonial Africa. It is important to note the unfairness meted out to the indigenous Africans who served as; assistants to the colonial missionaries, cleaners, and the traditional chiefs of towns and villages who received these people wholeheartedly. Also, the shortcomings of the *native* Africans especially the chiefs and titleholders who sold their people into slavery over some bottles of gin need to be reflected on. We still need to ponder on how much African Christianity is still being enslaved today by foreign cultures and think over when African Christians will fully realize this and make effort to redeem the values.

Chapter nine ponders on the methods of conversion employed by some of the missionaries and refers to them as *far from holy*. These include trading insults, casting aspersions, defamation of one another, downgrading of rival denominations through derogatory songs, drama, tracts, leaflets, and sermons. They were done to consolidate missionary territories (238). This method still exists in churches today. The game of outwitting one another is the game of indirectly stealing members of other churches or denominations into a particular fold. This is the current method of conversion or should we say current trick of gaining memberships today.

Chapter ten and eleven introduce the beginning of the efforts of Africans toward liberating themselves from the *shackles* of the foreign missionaries. Though the *Ethiopian churches* were politically motivated, the chapter sees better things in it than to just refer to it as *rebellious or revolutionary churches* that the foreign missionaries called it. It says that Ethiopian churches came as a result of the racial discriminative tendencies and superiority complexities of the missionaries. The Africans rose from the quagmire of humiliation of the whites to *contest* for better recognition. The description of the revival movement in chapter eleven is about how the indigenous churches were introduced into the faith atmosphere. One of the good things that the indigenous churches brought into the scene then was that it elicited the emergence of genuine African Christianity that cannot be compared with the foreign mission Christianity. This has made the indigenous churches able to survive the harshness and struggle of Africa's pre-independent era. However we need to ask whether the candor of the early African

indigenous church fathers still exist in indigenous Christianity today. It appears indigenous Christianity is already losing its savor to the modernity that defines the modern Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity.

Chapter twelve makes a comparative reconstruction of the African Indigenous Churches in a historical perspective. It shows that though there are many similarities in the African Indigenous Churches, they also have a significant complex variety in terms of their foundation histories, the charismatic personality of the founders and leaders, their belief patterns and ritual structures and distinctions, organizational policies and geographical distribution (310). The ritual dimensions that characterize the AIC are such that make them appear like typical African ritual cults. These include the types of music, drumming, dancing, spiritual songs, and hymns that resemble African traditional ritual cultures. Also, sacred and exoteric languages during liturgy and the use of concrete objects such as water, spiritual regalia (Sultana) typify them classically. These enhance the devotion of members of such churches. However, some indigenous churches and leaders today make use of these qualities to exploit their members. There are swindlers and cheats among them who indulge in these cultures to perpetrate evils. What is the Church doing about this?

While tracing the era of the Church from the World War to Decolonization in Africa in chapter thirteen, the author of this chapter expands some of the themes that shaped the emergence of African Christianity during the turbulent years of 1914-1975. He did this by attaching importance and curiosity to categorizing the events of the period in relation to the time they occur and attempting to cover the regions involved meticulously. He provides a synopsis of African Christianity's emergence through the First World War, which hampered the structure and moral economy of the missionary enterprise in Africa (339). The beauty of the period of decolonization in Africa and its effects on indigenous Christianity was that African expression of faith boomed without the interference of the *foreign missionary warlords*. The *Precious Stone Society* which formed in Nigeria after World War II and the miracles that followed their prayers gave the African Christians, who were neglected by the missionaries, some level of confidence that Africans could also pray to God and He would hear.

Chapter fourteen examines the Mainline Churches in the Public Space between 1975 and 2000. The roles of the Church in the democratization process during the last quarter of the 20th century i.e. 1975-2000 are identified. These roles include helping to catalyze the process of good governance and seeing to the successful overthrow of dictators, combating racism and apartheid in areas like Zimbabwe, Namibia, and South Africa and engaging in new cooperative ventures and investing in tertiary education, for example, building church related Universities. Coming to Nigeria, the question asked: What role did the Church play during the military regime of the country and how worthwhile and contributory was their participation in seeing to the end of military administration. Just as some churches and church leaders proved their mettle in resisting the military dictators, others actually compromised and became cults and prophets of a kind to those military juntas, feeding fat on their tables at the expense of the suffering populace.

Chapter fifteen discusses the rise, growth and impact of Pentecostalism in African Christianity since the middle of the 20th Century. It traces the major historical development, identifying the different types of development and discusses some of the salient theological orientations of Pentecostal and charismatic renewal movement in Africa. Special focus is given to

describing specific African initiatives, appropriations and contributions to the growth, as well as significance and impact of Pentecostalism on the continent. However as much as this kind of Christianity has influenced many positively, the eyes of several people are not closed to the negative influence it has tolerated especially among the youth members. Fashion, gorgeous appearance and indecent dressing have taken over the psyche of Pentecostal Christians today. Many of them find it difficult to answer the question; is it possible to be born again and be “fashionable”? A ‘yes’ answer is quite contrary to official evangelical opinion and a ‘no’ response is unacceptable to some members of these churches who believe that God himself is beautiful and fashionable.

Chapters sixteen and seventeen reflect on the unrecognized feminine perspective, impact and prowess in African Indigenous and Pentecostal churches. They lament that women are less spoken of in the annals of Church History and that the Church has been so patriarchal in nature that women’s contributions have been labeled ‘trivial and irrelevant’. The chapters notice that a little literature has been written by African women on themselves yet their fundamental importance in defining, developing, and shaping the course of modern missionary movement cannot be overlooked. The chapters further think that a thorough analysis of women missionaries, mission strategies and theologies should be reviewed. Also, the authors of the chapters feel those women’s efforts at interpreting and propagating the good news in African context should be brought to limelight considering women’s invaluable contribution in Christendom. However the author of chapter sixteen appears to have been carried away by advocating women involvement and recognition in ecclesiastical matters. It is correct that women should participate usefully and actively in the church. It is also true that their roles cannot be trivialized. However, are they likely to faithfully combine their motherly roles in the family with leadership roles in the Church and will the family not suffer if they assume full leadership roles? Chapter seventeen further identifies those cultures that affect women negatively in Africa and the need to address them relatively. The cultures include marriage, inheritance, and fertility (bareness) in African context, which white women do not suffer from. How does our culture address these problems in Nigeria? It is evident that many women suffer daily from ill-treatment after the death of their husbands. They are not allowed to take possession of the property after their husbands’ demise. A barren woman in the society is a stigmatic and a girl child does not inherit anything in the family as she is referred to as a minus.

Chapter eighteen explores fifty years of African Christian theologies. It identifies some element of African theology in the Twentieth Century. While focusing on the various articulations of African theologies since the 1950s, the author designs an outline of the emerging/formative identity of the theology in the Twenty-First Century. He views African Christian theology as a conceptualized theology well connected to African Christian life and primitive Africa theologies. He thus thinks that it should not be approached and worked on by every theologian without making a preview of past effort and works.

Chapter nineteen looks into African Christian communities in Diaspora and examines the importance of religion for the African Diaspora and its role in the formation and consolidation of African Diaspora groups. It does this by making use of some earliest African churches as a case study. It also shows the nature of the impact in regards to religious, socio-cultural, and political/economic variables of the specific host communities on the mode of operation and world views of African churches in Diaspora. What attracts our attention here is the reverse mission adventure where missionaries leave the soil of

Africa for Europe and America as against the pre 1960 trend. Though through this process, African Pentecostalism is being exported to the lands of those who brought Christianity to Africa, the abuse that follows it is alarming. Many Pentecostal pastors prefer to travel to Europe and America in the name of foreign mission and even establish churches there when their home churches are suffering from lack of attention. There are many souls in Nigeria yet to be won and unattended to. These pastors take delight in running after foreign currencies and amassing recognition for themselves at the expense of the home missions. This appears unsuitable.

Chapter twenty examines the relationship between culture and religion. It posits that culture cannot be separated from religion and that Christianity cannot be practiced anywhere in isolation of the prevailing culture of the host environment. Culture is the medium of communication of Christianity i.e. Christianity rides on the back of the culture that accommodates it thereby making it the product of the culture. This takes us to a question: What impact should conversion to Christianity have on a culture? Should the Christian faith separate the faithful from his culture? The church appears divorced from the world, which it is attempting to influence. She ought to understand the world and save it from imminent doom, by really “moving” into the world but not getting unnecessarily influenced by it. Should African Christianity be separated from African rituals and symbolism? If there is anything that the two entities can share from one another, then to what extent should this relationship exist? These are questions that the emerging African Church history and theology need to look into.

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