

## The History of Christianity in Africa: A Survey of Surveys

Todd Statham\*

\* Dr. Todd Statham is a missionary of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, seconded to the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (Blantyre Synod) as a lecturer at Zomba Theological College. He lives in Zomba, Malawi with his wife and three small children. He completed a doctorate in historical theology at McGill University in Canada in 2011.



Historian Mark Noll imagines a Christian falling asleep midway through the twentieth century, then waking up today to find a church “turned upside down and sideways”:

As [he] wiped a half-century of sleep from his eyes and tried to locate his fellow Christian believers, he would find them in surprising places, expressing their faith in surprising ways, under surprising conditions, with surprising relationships to culture and politics, and raising surprising theological questions that would have seemed impossible when he fell asleep.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps Africa – where Christianity has exploded from twelve million adherents in 1900 to almost five hundred million today – provides the most far-reaching example of what Noll calls “the shifted shape of world Christianity.”<sup>2</sup> Yet Christians in the West remain largely uninformed about African Christianity; African Christians, for their part, often have a parochial understanding of their own history due to lack of access to higher education, scholarly literature, and travel. Fortunately, several English-language introductions to the history of African Christianity have been published in the past two decades. The purpose of this essay is to survey these surveys of African church history to inform students, seminarians, and interested laypeople from

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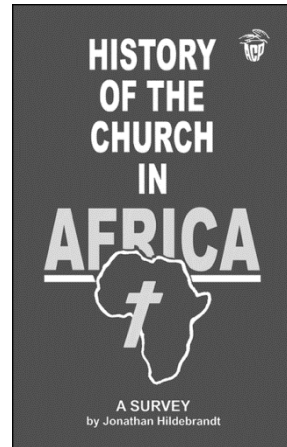
I am grateful to my students at Zomba Theological College for their honest feedback about the books surveyed within this article as well as to my colleague Dr. Hastings Abale-Phiri for his comments.

<sup>1</sup> Mark Noll, *The New Shape of World Christianity* (Downer’s Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 19-20.

<sup>2</sup> These statistics are taken from the *Atlas of Global Christianity 1910-2010*, edited by Todd Johnson and Kenneth Ross (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

both Africa and the West about the options available.<sup>3</sup> Apart from scholarly merit, a number of criteria guide my evaluation of the respective surveys. How available is the book and in what format? How expensive is the book? This, of course, is a critical criterion for African students, as is the level of English comprehension demanded from the book, since English is a second or even third language for many. What theological perspective directs the author's analysis? Is the author an insider or an outsider to this story? It should be noted from the outset that this survey has no intention of endorsing any one book in particular as the best. After all, the ideal textbook for an African seminarian might not be necessarily the best choice for a Western layperson. Simply, it seeks to fairly survey the choices at hand and to let the reader make an informed choice.

**Jonathan Hildebrandt** has served in East Africa with the evangelical African Inland Mission (AIM). His *History of the Church in Africa* was first published in 1980. Leaning exclusively upon secondary sources, above all C. P. Groves' classic four-volume *History of the Planting of the Church in Africa* (1948-1958), this small paperback aims to introduce the subject for African secondary school and college students. Now in its third edition – available at the African Book Collective for £20<sup>4</sup> – Hildebrandt is sensitive to the fact that English is an adopted language for many African students. The vocabulary is simple; sentences are short; the text itself flows like a single story, interspersed with occasional maps. The pedagogical value of the *History of the Church in Africa* is enhanced by the use of concluding summaries at chapters' ends, as well as sets of discussion questions. Suggestions for further reading are attached to the end of each chapter (although the books recommended are often out of date).



Hildebrandt helpfully diagrams the history of African Christianity as a single tree: various confessional or denominational “branches” of the church grow out of the “trunk”, which is the apostolic witness to Jesus Christ (38-42). This reinforces for African students two things often denied. First, the proliferation of churches in modern Africa cannot overcome their essential

<sup>3</sup> Regional or episodic histories fall outside the scope of this essay, like Francois Decret, *Early Christianity in North Africa* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2008), as do books that trace a single theme across the span of African church history, like Ype Schaaf, *On Their Way Rejoicing: The History and Role of the Bible in Africa*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Regnum Africa, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Hildebrandt, *History of the Church in Africa: A Survey*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Achimota, Ghana: Africa World Press, 1990).

<http://www.africanbookscollective.com/books/history-of-the-church-in-africa>.

oneness as the Body of Christ. Second, the younger branches of African Christianity are part of a very ancient tree. Accordingly, Hildebrandt proceeds chapter by chapter through African church history as a single story, from the Copts and Nubians through the Ethiopian and medieval Congolese churches to the missionary-planted churches of the modern era. This is an important corrective to the anti-colonial rhetoric of some African scholars that criticizes Christianity as a foreign import, as well as to the long-established tendency of Western religious scholars to turn African greats like Tertullian and Augustine into proto-Europeans.<sup>5</sup>

For all that is commendable about Hildebrandt's survey, particularly on pedagogical grounds, I hesitate to commend it to either African or Western readers. For one thing, it is peppered with factual errors still uncorrected by the third edition. More substantially, Hildebrandt has an unabashedly Western bias that compromises his study in two areas in particular. First, his treatment of the early church history of Africa exclusively identifies what he calls "true Christianity" with Western dogma. He outright condemns the Coptic, Nubian, and Ethiopian churches for rejecting the Christology of Chalcedon (AD 451) as too the Donatists for their departure from Western ecclesiological norms. Second, his assessment of the missionary factor in modern African Christianity is naïve. No mention is made of how Western missionaries were implicated in the imperialistic scramble for Africa in the nineteenth century and subsequent colonial rule. Indeed, those churches that have since broken away from mission churches in the name of African autonomy are sharply criticized. For example, Rev. John Chilembwe of Nyasaland (Malawi), who led an ill-fated uprising in 1915 against the British, is "not a real Christian" (p. 220). Hildebrandt consistently ignores the collusion of Western missionary churches with colonial authorities (whether intentional or not) as factors for the growth of indigenous Christian movements. In fact, the twentieth-century explosion of what is called "African Initiated/Independent Churches" (AIC) receives only passing attention in the *History of the Church in Africa*.<sup>6</sup> The chief failure of this book is its lack of sympathy with uniquely African incarnations of the gospel, combined with a lack of criticism of the acculturated form of Christianity that Western missionaries brought with them to Africa.

When the Pauline father **John Baur** wrote *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa* in 1994, it was the first history of Christianity in Africa published from a Roman Catholic perspective. Baur has devoted most of his life to

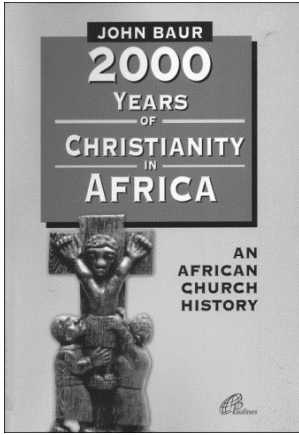
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<sup>5</sup> Andrew Walls, "Africa in Christian History: Retrospect and Prospect", in *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996), 85-115 provides a strong argument for drawing continent-wide boundaries to the study of African Christianity.

<sup>6</sup> See further Allan Anderson, *African Reformation: African Independent Christianity in the Twentieth Century* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2001).

teaching at Catholic seminaries in East Africa, and his lectures form the basis of this book, which is now in its second edition.<sup>7</sup> Baur's love for the Church, for Africa and for Africans shines through in every chapter, as does his many years as a teacher. *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa* is a work of scholarship, drawing upon primary sources from across the historical span of the African church, but Baur's prose is always clear and unadorned by technical words. He sub-divides chapters into manageable parts, and he concludes every chapter with a concise and thoughtful summary – precisely the sort of thing students like when preparing for exams!

Baur typically centers the story of African Christianity on Catholic actors. Protestants might date the beginning of African Christianity by pointing to either the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8, who surely returned to his homeland aflame with passion for Jesus Christ, or perhaps even to the flight of Jesus' family to Egypt (Matt.). Baur dates the African church, however, with the traditional founding of the episcopal see of Alexandria in 62 by Mark. At the same time, he neglects neither Protestantism nor the Coptic/Ethiopian Orthodox churches, and his ecumenical sensibilities make his assessment of traditions other than his own fair. In fact, the Roman Catholic lens through which Baur reads the history of African Christianity has several merits. First, it insists on the continuity of the church through the ages. So



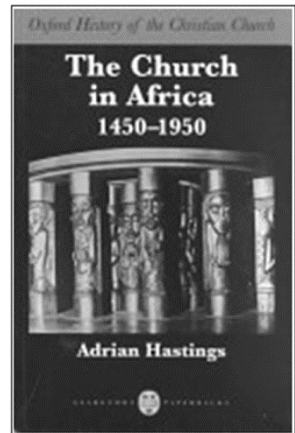
*2000 Years of Christianity in Africa* unfolds chronologically, with ample attention to the ancient churches of the northern part of the continent as well substantial treatments of the Catholic churches of the Congo and Monomutapa (Zimbabwe) in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Second, upon narrating the history of the African church up to the late twentieth century, Baur concludes his survey with a valuable country-by-country overview, paying close attention to the worship and liturgy of the churches therein. These latter emphases are often overlooked by Protestants in our study of church history. This African panoramic of church life and theological reflection is useful for students to grasp something of the variety of Christianity on their continent (even if the section requires constant revision to remain relevant). Not unexpectedly, Baur's account of African Christianity favors the institutional church over popular movements and highlights the agency of missionary orders, priests, and bishops in planting and growing the church in Africa. These preferences could be contested. More problematic is his treatment of AIC – easily the most important fact of modern African Christianity. Complaining in the introduction of *2000 Years* about the “constant influx of new sects” in

<sup>7</sup> John Baur, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Nairobi: Paulines, 1998). [Last reprinted in 2005.]

Africa (p. 18), Baur gives a scant and unsympathetic (pp. 489-98) treatment of AIC as syncretistic and schismatic. This, along with a related oversight of charismatic elements in modern African Christianity is disappointing. Does his commitment to the dogma of the universality of the church leave him unduly dismissive of specifically African translations of the gospel?

In both format and writing *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa* is an ideal classroom text – and a price of around \$15 US dollars only increases its value. While researchers might find the book elementary, lecturers of African church history will find it suggestive for formatting their own teaching. The accessibility of Baur’s book might pose a problem, however: it seems to be readily available only from the Paulines Books in Nairobi.<sup>8</sup>

**Adrian Hastings** (d. 2001) taught theology in Uganda and then at the University of Leeds. A self-described “Protestant Catholic”, his *The Church in Africa: 1450-1950* is a marvelous resource.<sup>9</sup> Wide-ranging and deeply learned – Hastings draws upon primary sources in multiple European languages – and full of astute judgments, *The Church in Africa: 1450-1950* can instruct the ignorant and provoke the scholar. (The bibliographical essay alone is a rich resource for further study.) It must be said, however, that its style and erudition are not for beginners. My own students admit that they leave it on the library shelf – its meaty chapters are simply too much to digest! Sadly, the price of *The Church in Africa: 1450-1950* puts it well beyond the reach of most theological students and institutions in Africa. Even the Kindle version retails for almost \$90.<sup>10</sup>



Hastings approaches the history of African Christianity chronologically, tracing the story from the mid-fifteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, with several chapters functioning as excursions into specific topics. He finds African Christianity developing from an essentially “medieval” conception of Christianity in Ethiopia and the Kongo, through an age of slavery, anti-slavery and mission, to the colonial Christianity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In comparison with other surveys, *The Church in Africa: 1450-1950* is particularly strong in its

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.paulinesafrica.org/history.html>. At the time of writing, I could not locate the book on Amazon.

<sup>9</sup> Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa: 1450-1950* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

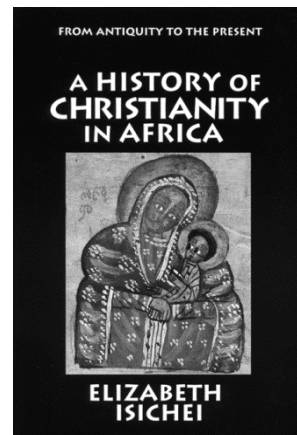
<sup>10</sup> True, e-format books are typically cheaper than print, but the cost of Kindles and similar technology prohibits their widespread use in much of Africa, as does the irregular power supply and inhospitable climate in many parts of the continent. See further Ray Silver, “Information Technology in Missions in the Church in the Majority World”, *Haddington House Journal* 14 (2012): 13-20.

treatment of the Ethiopian church as well as the religious culture of the Victorian era (chapter 7) that so profoundly shaped the missionary movement to Africa and, by extension, colonial-era Christianity. Indeed, for all the legitimate criticism leveled by African scholars at the Western dominance of the church historiography of Africa, this chapter at least shows the benefits for the study of African church history of a writer who understands the Christian heart and mind of nineteenth-century Europe from the inside out. Hastings also has a good grasp of the power and unpredictability for modern African Christianity of the translation of the Bible into the vernacular language and culture.

Africans received the Bible and its authority as good Protestants, but they inevitably read it through cultural and social spectacles different from those of the missionary. The missionary believed in angelic visitations, miracles, and what have you in their biblical context, but had in most cases ceased to believe in any continuity between the biblical and the contemporary, strongly as he will have affirmed his to be a purely biblical religion. It could entirely nonplus the missionary that his African Christians claimed to experience dreams and visions of a revelatory nature (p. 527).

Like others surveyed in this article (Shaw, Sundkler, Isichei, Kalu), Hastings considers the heady 1960s to have ushered in a “new age” (p. 608) in African Christianity, one that is politically post-colonial and religiously post-Western. Frustratingly, to take up the rest of the story, one must look to his earlier volume, *A History of African Christianity 1950-1975*; to learn about the African church before 1450 one must look entirely elsewhere.<sup>11</sup>

For many reasons, **Elizabeth Isichei’s** *A History of Christianity in Africa from Antiquity to the Present* stands out from the other surveys considered in this article.<sup>12</sup> First, Isichei, who worked as a university professor in Nigeria and then New Zealand, writes less as a church historian than as an historian of the Christian religion. She treats the religious beliefs and experience of African Christians over the ages with respect but refuses to limit those experiences to traditional boundaries of doctrine or denomination. Her wider focus makes for a very illuminating survey. Isichei recovers the importance of “outsiders” to the main currents of African church history, perhaps especially women. More so than other



<sup>11</sup> Adrian Hastings, *A History of African Christianity 1950-1975* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).

<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa from Antiquity to the Present* (London/Grand Rapids: SPCK/Eerdmans, 1995). The American publisher, Eerdmans, sells the book for \$36 (USD): <http://www.eerdmans.com/Products/0843/a-history-of-christianity-in-africa.aspx>.

surveys, *A History of Christianity in Africa* is attentive to the *vox populi* in African Christianity rather than just the leaders as well as to the social and cultural impact of Christian conversion on traditional African communities. Second, Isichei approaches the history of African Christianity region by region: after describing the earlier church history of north Africa and Ethiopia, she treats in succession southern, eastern and central, western and northern Africa up to the year 1900, before repeating the cycle through to the present. This format is useful if one is teaching or reading with an eye to a particular region – it is less amenable to a chronological or thematic approach. Finally, Isichei is openly hostile to Western missions (particularly of evangelical persuasion). She explains:

Much writing on Christianity in Africa – my own included – has been shaped by a reaction against a tradition of missionary biography, where the foreign missionary is the heroic actor, and African communities merely the backdrop to her or his good deeds. Often, Africans are depicted as savage and degenerate to highlight the beneficial impact of Christianity. (p. 74)

This is fair. But Isichei's reaction to missionary historiography sometimes overreaches (e.g. p. 76); when describing the evangelical revival and the missionary movement it spawned, her tone can be condescending and her judgments unfair. That said, some of her conclusions (like the following) should make Western missionaries like myself uncomfortably introspective: "It has often been observed that missionaries demanded a spiritual intensity in Africa that they would not have expected in an English parish. In a sense, this is what they came for, in a flight from modernism, and a worldly and increasingly secular Christendom" (p. 241). My personal copy of *A History of Christianity in Africa* is well marked with underlining and marginalia. I often disagree with Isichei but rarely put down her book without being edified.

Isichei writes elegantly and intelligently, but her prose is advanced: words like "autodictat" and "prolificate" transgress the vocabulary of most non-mother tongue English readers. My own students testify to this. Furthermore, Isichei's remarkably compressed narrative presupposes working knowledge not only of the basic flow of Western church history, but also of some significant political and economic events in African history. This might limit the book's accessibility to both African and Western readers (apart from graduate students and scholars).

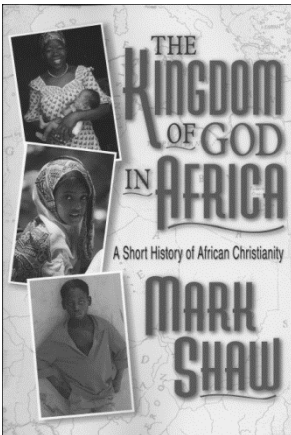
*The Kingdom of God in Africa* by longtime American professor at Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (Africa International University), **Mark Shaw**, is a robustly theological history of African Christianity.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Mark Shaw, *The Kingdom of God in Africa: A Short History of Christianity in Africa* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996).

This book is popular – and with good reason. For one thing, it can be had new or used for a great price and can be purchased on Kindle for under \$10 US dollars. Second, numerous and easily reproducible maps, a well-organized format, coherent argument, and summary conclusions make it ideal for teachers. Third, it is simply and clearly written with English-as-second language students in mind, and its chapters form concise and manageable readings for students.

The distinctive feature of this survey is its organization around the concept of the kingdom of God. Shaw finds this biblical motif prominent in African theology from Augustine right up to the contemporary South African John de Gruchy. Shaw believes that the concept of kingdom of God is not something he imposes on the church history of Africa as a theological taxonomy, for the idea is deeply embedded in African Christianity. Whether he is correct or not, the use of the kingdom of God as a format and focus for the history of African Christianity creates a fascinating survey. The early centuries of African Christianity are covered in *The Kingdom of God in Africa* as the “imperial rule of God”, i.e. a theocratic concept of the kingdom. (Note that this era takes up fully one third of the book!) Shaw then describes the “clash of kingdoms” in the conflict between Christianity and Islam, which led to the decline of the church in Egypt, North Africa, and Nubia. The kingdom of God as the “reign of Christ” in human hearts aptly characterizes the evangelical revival that spawned both the abolitionist and missionary movements in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Finally, the “kingdom on earth” treats both the imperial and colonial context of late nineteenth to twentieth-century Christianity in Africa, as well as the rise of the social gospel movement in the West that refocused mission to Africa as human development rather than spiritual deliverance.



eth-century Christianity in Africa, as well as the rise of the social gospel movement in the West that refocused mission to Africa as human development rather than spiritual deliverance.

A good example of Shaw’s use of the kingdom motif to interpret the story of African Christianity can be found in his evaluation of AIC, which he classifies under the “kingdom on earth” because of its realized eschatology. On one hand, he is critical: “Jesus Christ, the embodiment and essence of the kingdom and its rule, was often obscured by independency. All too often, Isaiah Shembe or Simon Kimbangu become the focus of faith rather than Christ.” At the same time, he recognizes that these churches’ stirring criticism of colonial injustice was a plea for “the coming kingdom of justice and righteousness”. Although AIC sometimes tends to syncretism, Shaw admits their maintenance of traditional African cosmology – specifically the reality of spiritual warfare – gives these churches a profound insight into the redemption wrought by Christ. “The unfolding of the Kingdom is best seen not in elaborate cathedrals or complicated theologies but in the power of the

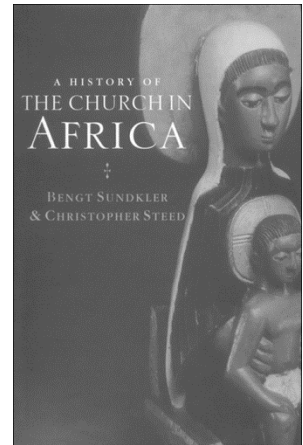


cross producing a people opposed to evil and its forces of racism, demonism, and nominalism” (pp. 256-257).

Interestingly, although the Nigerian church historian Ogbu Kalu sharply criticized *The Kingdom of God in Africa* as both a specimen of “missionary history”, i.e. written from a Western perspective, and overbearingly theological,<sup>14</sup> my own Malawian students prefer this book above all others and, when asked, do not detect any overbearing “missionary bias”. The chief problem with *The Kingdom of God in Africa*, in my opinion as a teacher, is that not all aspects of the history of African Christianity fit equally well under the rubric of the kingdom of God. And if one’s teaching emphasizes these other aspects, or if one chooses to organize the story of the African Christianity around another motif, Shaw’s book proves distractive to students.

The fact that **Bernd Sundkler** and **Christopher Steed’s** *A History of the Church in Africa* costs several hundred US dollars (used!) deprives many African libraries and students of an encyclopedic resource for the study of African Christianity.<sup>15</sup> A work of enormous erudition that was almost twenty years in the making, it is the most comprehensive and detailed survey available: its twelve hundred pages leave no stone unturned. Despite its mammoth size, *A History of the Church in Africa* is rather brief on early Christianity in Egypt and north Africa (c. thirty pages) as well as the ancient Nubian and Ethiopian churches (c. thirty pages). The “middle ages” of African Christianity (1415-1787) is explored in more detail; the bulk of this book covers the long nineteenth century, region by region, before treating country-by-country the colonial and independent eras of African church history. *A History of the Church in Africa* is typically chronological and geographical in its format, but frequent digressions within the text explore significant themes in greater detail (for which the exhaustive index of almost one hundred pages is indispensable!). The perspective of the authors is “unabashedly ecumenical” (p. 5): true to their word, Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant strands of African Christianity are handled respectfully and authoritatively.

The primary author of *A History of the Church in Africa* was Bernd Sundkler, who, before taking up a university post in Uppsala, served as a Church of Sweden missionary and bishop in Zululand and Tanzania, from where he experienced firsthand the mid-century transition of African Christi-



<sup>14</sup> Kalu reviewed this book in the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 22 (1998): 134.

<sup>15</sup> Bernd Sundkler and Christopher Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

anity from colonial and missionary to independent and indigenous. Not only does he sympathize with African voices who have complained that Western Christians liked to write the history of a church that was in Africa but not of Africa, he commits himself to write an African church history that focuses “not on Western partners but on African actors” (p. 3). This is not merely an ideological commitment. For example, drawing on his vast knowledge of African history, Sundkler brilliantly observes how the inter-regional migration of tribes and individuals in the past two centuries due to war, drought, or economic instability was often the catalyst for spreading the gospel from African to African, even before Western missionaries arrived on the scene (p. 84). Another strength of this book is that Sundkler, who was a path-breaking scholar of the phenomenon of AIC, is highly sensitive to how independent churches have embodied the African experiences. While he is aware that the churches of post-independence Africa – whether AIC or not – have sometimes been complicit in oppressive political regimes, he insists:

...we must emphasize the vitality of African Christianity individually and taken together, not least in the present upheaval of certain African states. When state machinery comes to a halt, the churches emerged as countervailing powers in the land, prepared by common effort and enthusiasm to overcome obstruction, hatred and disappointment, carried forward by faith, hope, love – and song. (p. 1039)

*A History of the Church in Africa* is chock full of learned analysis, fascinating anecdotes, and items for theological reflection, but its astonishing size and scope sometimes leave the reader feeling as if they hold in their hands less a coherent story than a smorgasbord of events and figures. Admittedly, I find *A History of the Church in Africa* much easier to consult (via the index) than to read chapter by chapter!

The prolific scholar **Ogbu Kalu** (who undertook his doctoral work in Canada) was one of the most important interpreters of African Christianity of his generation until his untimely death in 2009. He edited the first survey of the history of African Christianity written exclusively by Africans: *African Christianity: An African Story*.<sup>16</sup> “The effort in this book is ideologically-driven,” explains Kalu in the introduction.

It seeks to argue that an identifiable African Christianity exists. It also seeks to build up a group of African church historians who will tell the story as an African story by intentionally privileging the patterns of African agency without neglecting the roles of various

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<sup>16</sup> Ogbu Kalu, ed., *African Christianity: An African Story* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2007). The book is priced on amazon.com for around \$35 (USD).

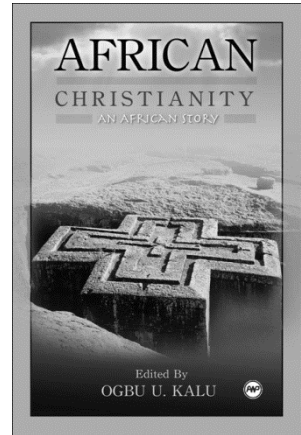
missionary bodies. We believe that if we do not tell our story, other people will tell us our story. (p. xi)

Kalu's team of contributors succeed splendidly in this aim, as they do also in crafting a "general text on African Christianity" (p. xi) for students and laypeople who might lack the background learning or language aptitude necessary to tackle Isichei, Hastings, or Sundkler.

The first two sections of *African Christianity* are chronological. Chapters take up in succession Christianity in Egypt, North Africa, Ethiopia, and Nubia – "the history of the Maghrib is Africa" contends Youhana Youssef (pp. 41-42) – before investigating the significant role of Islam in the early history of the African church. Contributions then address the medieval church in the Congo, the appropriation of Christianity by the slave populations of the New World, the missionary movement to Africa, and the rise of AIC in the early twentieth century. True to the ideological thrust, African initiative and agency are always highlighted. The overall effect of essays like that by the Ghanaian Presbyterian David Kpobi in "African Chaplains in Seventeenth Century West Africa" (chapter 6) or Jehu Hanciles' "Back to Africa: White Abolitionists and Black Missionaries" (chapter 8), is to convincingly demonstrate the significant role that Africans have played in propagating the gospel and planting the church on their own continent. The third section of *African Christianity* is thematic, describing and analyzing some new dimensions of African Christianity, including the charismatic movement, HIV/AIDS, gender, and poverty. Standout essays for me here include the Afrikaner J. W. Hofmeyr on "Mainline Churches in the Public Space, 1975-2000" (chapter 14) and Afe Adogame on the significance for Western Christianity of the massive African diaspora in America and Europe (chapter 19).

Multi-authored volumes often suffer from a lack of cohesiveness. To a degree, this is also true with *African Christianity*, where the thread of the historical narrative is sometimes obscured, especially in the transition from the second to the third sections of the book. However, the consistently expert and "inside" interpretations offered by the contributors make this book indispensable for the study of the history of African Christianity. Further, Western readers will enjoy the African perspectives on questions Western theology has long asked, for example, the relationship between Christianity and culture. J. N. K. Mugambi asks:

What should be the proper relationship between Christian identity and a Christian's cultural identity? . . . Becoming a Christian has nothing to do with adopting the western or any other culture. *Con-*



*version* is not *acculturation*. Conversion to the Christian faith demands that the convert identifies oneself with Jesus Christ and all that He stood for, and that this identification leads the convert to a fundamental change in attitude towards God, oneself, and others. Conversion should help the convert to launch a critical examination of one's own cultural background. . . . But conversion does not demand a wholesale denunciation or rejection of one's cultural and religious heritage. (pp. 454-55, emphasis his)

The “shifted shape” of world Christianity will eventually shift the shape of scholarship on Christianity, which will mean more books, dissertations and articles that make the African church a focal point, including more literature on the history of African Christianity. In the meantime, students in both Africa and the West have at their disposal several excellent – if sometimes expensive – historical surveys of African Christianity. There still remains need for a quality introductory text to African church history that tells the story from an “inside” perspective, is scholarly yet written in relatively easy English, and can still be produced for a price low enough to reach the hands of those very students and pastors who are part of the remarkable story of Christianity on the African continent.