

## **Book Review: Anthology of African Christianity**

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**Title of the Book: Anthology of African Christianity**

**Author: Isabel Apawo Phiri, Dietrich Werner (Chief Editors) & Chammah Kaunda, and Kennedy Owino (Associate Editors).**

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### **Introduction**

Anthology of African Christianity gave historical insight into what was termed by the fears for Christianity in Africa, unveiling the prophecy given by some missionaries and church leaders in Europe and America that 'Christianity in Africa was (is) doomed and destined to disappear by the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century'. However, with time, history has proven them wrong despite the decades of colonial rule; it has become a formidable force gaining prominence. History has the record, according to the book, that, in the struggle for political independence, there arose also a parallel but quieter struggle for ecclesiastical independence. The movement of independent churches began in a small way at the end of the nineteenth century but gained momentum and mushroomed in the second half of the twentieth century. However, these churches manifested themselves in Southern Africa, Western Africa, and slowly in Eastern and Central Africa. Hence, it can be affirmed that, with the independent church movement, genuine elements of African Christianity began to germinate and infiltrate missionary Christianity. Other fundamental issues mentioned in the book include African Christianity's search for identity, factors contributing to the rapid expansion of Christianity in Africa, and pilgrim Christianity, just to mention a few.

The editorial section x-rayed African Christianity and Africa as a continent, stating that Christianity had already started in Africa by the middle of the first century. It also noted that contours of early Christian thought were formed in North Africa; early forms of conciliarity and church ministry owe their existence to the influence

of early leadership in African Christianity.<sup>1</sup> The book *Anthology of African Christianity* was born as a result of proper documentation of the history of African Christianity by a group of scholars related to the World Council of Churches (WCC) and its program on Ecumenical Theological Education (ETC) decided in 2013 to embark on a major research project under the title: *Anthology of African Christianity*, in close cooperation with the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) in Nairobi, bread for the World and Churches Development services in Berlin, Trinity Theological College, Accra, and the university of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) in Pietermaritzburg, represented by the Ujamma center. The major aim of this historical encyclopedia, as cited from Kwame Bediako in this manner, is: 'In view of an increasing perception of Africa as marginal to major world affairs, it becomes important to appreciate what, on the other hand, Africa's role may be as privileged area of Christian religions, cultural, social and political engagement in the world. In that respect, Africa may not be so marginal after all in a changing world..... Given Africa's significant place in Christianity's resurgence in the present century, it would be difficult to avoid the conclusion that it has played a major role in the renewal of Christianity as a non-western religion, and therefore as a world faith.'<sup>2</sup>

The cover page picture was the painting of the African—" the three Magi (Wise Men)/Les Rois Mages (Mt.2,1 )," which is part of a series of New Testament scenes of the life of Jesus Christ published under the title "La Vie de Jesus Mafa." This project originated in 1973 in North Cameroon, where Mafa Christian Communities wanted to have an African representation of the Gospel.<sup>3</sup> The Sketches were photographed and then painted. These backgrounds are conspicuously embedded in the book and make it attractive to readers. The book is divided into VIII (8) parts. *Regnum Studies in Global Christianity* explore global churches' issues, focusing particularly on Churches in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe. Also, the book's focus is to help the global church learn not only from past and present but also from provocative and prophetic voices for the future. The list of contributors was also mentioned alphabetically from Aboagye-Mensah, Robert Kwasi Most Rev., PhD from Methodist church of Ghana to Zurio, Gina (USA)

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<sup>1</sup> See the important publications of Thomas C. Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind, and the African Memory of Mark.*: [http:// earlyafricanchristianity.com](http://earlyafricanchristianity.com).(accessed 13<sup>th</sup> September 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: the Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), xlv

<sup>3</sup> Isabel Apawo Phiri, Dietrich Werner And Ahammah Kauda, Kennedy Owino. *Anthology Of African Christianity*.(Regnum Books International.Oxford. Uk.2016).Vii.

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### **PART 1: Introduction to African Christianity**

This part focuses on introducing and surveying recent research in African Christianity by Isabel Apawo Phiri. This is two-fold. First, it introduces the articles contained in Section One of the book, which includes: forwards and words of greetings from John Mbiti, Amos Yong, Thomas Oden, Ofelia Ortega, Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Olav Fykse Tveit, Cornelia Fullkrug-Weitzel, and Mussle Hailu with the Editorial section and the list of contributors). Secondly, it surveys selected research in African Christianity from 1990 to 2015. While reviewing past and current Literature, African theologians and scholars have proved beyond reasonable doubt that Christianity is indigenous to Africa and not an imported faith. Other topics explained in this section by different researcher includes: Early African Christianity by James TengaTenga, African Christianity in Pre-Colonial Times by David Tonghou Ngong, the Caribbean Influence on African Christianity by Roderick Hewitt, African Christianity in Colonial Times by Obed Kealotswe, African Christianity in the Post-Independence Period by Hebron Ndlovu, Growth and Trends in African Christianity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, the role of the Bible in African Christianity by Gerald West, Christianity and traditional African Religions Tabona Shoko, Muslim –Christian Encounters in Africa by Jacob Olupona, the Profile of African-Christianity at home and in the West by Jesse Mugambi, African Christianity and historical Afro-American Churches by Angelique Walker-Smith, African Christianity and African Diaspora Christianities outside the Continent by Afe Adogame, Mission Migration and African Diaspora inside the continent by Asonze Ukah, Gender and the Bible in African Christianity by Musa Dube, Religious Demographies on African Christianities by Gina Zurlo and Todd Johnson, 1970-2023 and Explanatory notes on Religious Data Boxes Used in the Anthology by Gina Zurlo and Todd Johnson.

### **PART II: Regional Surveys of African Christianity**

This part begins with a statistical chart copied from the Center for the Study of World Christianity (CSGC), Boston, Gordon-Conwell TS in French, which focuses on Christianity in Northern Africa written by Bernard Coyault. Other source materials in this part include Christianity in Western Africa by Isaac Deji Ayegeboyan and Samson Adetunji Fatokun, Christianity in Eastern Africa by Alfred

Olwa, Christianity in Central Africa by Jean-Paul Messina, and Christianity in Southern Africa by Philippe Denis.

### **PART III: Denominational Surveys of African Christianity**

Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu begins this section with an introduction to the typology of African Christianity; since the middle of the twentieth century, Christianity has developed as a non-western and non-white religion. He further stressed that: 'Additionally, several writings have emerged that draw attention to the importance of Africa in the fortunes of World Christianity today, with Andrew Walls even suggesting that it is now impossible to talk about Christianity without Africa and to talk about Africa without Christianity.'<sup>4</sup> Other research write-ups in this section include Oriental Orthodox Churches in Africa by Ayalkibet Berhanu, which unveils the facts that there are six Oriental Orthodox Churches, all of which are in full communion with each other. These churches are:

- Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria,
- Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church,
- Armenian Apostolic Church,
- Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch ( also known as Syrian Orthodox Church,
- Indian Orthodox Church, and
- Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church.

Ayalkibet Berhanu specifically stated that these six churches had some similar distinguishing Characteristics and also some differences, which were taken in the first three ecumenical councils of Nicea (AD 325), Constantinople (AD 381), and Ephesus (AD 431). They include the following:

- a. Origins: Each of the six churches traces its origin to apostolic missions of the first century.
- b. Ethos: This implies the originality of Christianity in Africa's way of contextualization.
- c. African Elements in Worship: African elements, such as hand clapping, holding a vigil, and drumming, are included in their service.

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<sup>4</sup> J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "Turning That which is Already There Towards Christ: The Contribution of Andrew F. Walls to understanding Africa Christianity," in William R. Burrows, Mark R. Gornick and Janice A. Maclean ed., *Understanding World Christianity: The Vision and Walk of Andrew F. Walls* (Maryknoll, NY; Orbis Books, 2011), 261

- d. Design of Altars and Place of Worship: According to the writer, "Africans believe that the beauty of the place of worship parallels the celestial beauty and holiness of the transcendent God (Lev 20:26, 1 Pet 1:16)."<sup>5</sup>.
- e. Language: They use ancient languages in their liturgy and calendar. They have developed their forms of liturgy, art, and Literature.
- f. Traditions: They are hierarchically independent heirs to some of the richest and most ancient traditions in Christendom.  
Other factors include:
- g. Doctrinal Issue: These were based on the concept of Christology, which holds that Jesus Christ has two natures: one divine and the other human. The Council of Ephesus (AD 431) rejected these doctrines.
- h. Monophysite Issue: This doctrine is associated with Eutychian Monophysitism, which denied the union of the human and divine and is believed to have taught that in Christ, the human Nature was absorbed by the divine nature.

Unfortunately, it was a misnomer that, at best, represented a gross misunderstanding of the Oriental Orthodox Churches. They also condemned the heresies of Nestorius and Eutyches. Other research works in this section are: Eastern Orthodox Churches in Africa by John Njoroge, the Roman Catholic Church in Africa by Lawrence Iuamadi and Raoul Baziomo, Presbyterian Churches in Africa by Isabel Apawo Phiri, Congregational Churches in Africa by Desmond van der Water, Reformed Churches in Africa by Retief Muller, Moravian Churches in Africa by Karlie August, Lutheran Churches in Africa by Faith Lugazia, Visages Actuels du Lutheranisme en Afrique by Samuel Frouisou, Anglican Churches in Africa by Henry Mbaya, Methodist Churches in Africa by Kennedy Owino and Myume Dandala, United and Uniting Churches in Africa by Jerry Pillay, Baptist Churches in Africa by Hans Longwe, Anabaptist Churches in Africa by Allen Goddard, Quakers in Africa by Esther Mombo, Western Mission Classical Pentecostal Churches in Africa by Joshua Banda, Indigenous Classical Pentecostal Churches in Africa by Opoku Onyinah, Neo- Pentecostal Churches in Africa ('Prosperity Churches') by Kudzai Biri, Interdenominational Churches in Africa by Robert Kwasi Aboagye-Mensah, Evangelical Churches and Movements in Africa by James Nkansah-Obrempong, Independent Churches in Africa (AIC's) by Thomas Oduro, United Aladura Churches (UAC)-White Garment Churches in Africa by Rufus Okikiola Ositelu, Para-Churches Mission Networks and

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<sup>5</sup> Isabel Apawo Phiri, Dietrich Werner And Ahammah Kauda, Kennedy owino. *Anthology Of African Christianity*. Regnum Books International. Oxford. UK. 2016. 272.

Organizations in Africa (IFES) by Kuzipa Nalwamba and the Seventh Day Adventist Church in Africa by Mary Getui.

#### **PART IV: National Surveys of African Christianity**

The focus in this chapter begins with statistical information by Harald Suermann about Christianity in Algeria with different religions faiths beginning from Christians to Muslims to Chinese folk religionists to Buddhists to Baha'is to Jews, and finally, people professing no religion in percentages with population and projections from 1970. His source was from the Center for the Study of World Christianity (CSGC), Boston, Gordon-Conwell, TS. The write-up was in the French language. Other research works in this section include Christianity in Angola by Luciano Chanhelela Chianeque, adopting the same pattern above in analyzing his research findings. We also have Christianity in Benin by Simon Dossou et Omer Dagan, Christianity in Botswana by James Amanze, Christianity in Burkina Faso by Philippe Ouedraogo, Christianity in Burkina Faso from a different perspective by Kinda Tegwende Leonard, Christianity in Burundi by Innocent Iyakareme, Christianity in Cameroon by Sadrack Djiokou, another write-up about Christianity in Cameroon by Samuel Johnson, Christianity in Cape Verde by Max Ruben Ramos, Christianity in Central African Republic by David Koudougouret and another write-up on Central African Republic by Jimi Zacka, Christianity in Chad by Jean-Arnold de Clermont, Christianity in Comoros Islands (Article not available before deadline), Christianity in Democratique Republic of Congo by Lubunga Vianace W' Ehusa, Christianity in Republic of Congo-Brazzaville by Fred O. Biyela, Christianity in Cote d' Ivoire by Simon Dossou, Christianity in Djibuti by Michael Schlick, Christianity in Egypt by Wedad Tawfik.

Another research work about Christianity in Egypt by Andrea Zaki Stephanous, Christianity in Eritrea by Tewelde Beyene, Christianity in Ethiopia by Bruk Ayele Asale, Christianity in Gabon by Ndong Ekouaghe, Christianity in Gambia by Chammah Kaunda and Ralphina de Almeida, Christianity in Ghana by Sylvia Owusu-Ansah, Christianity in Guinea-Bissau by Chammah Kaunda and Luciano Chianeque and another research work on Guinea-Bissau by Joaquim Correia, Christianity in Guinea-Conacry (Article not available before deadline), Christianity in Guinea Equatorial (Article not available before deadline), Christianity in Kenya by Susan Murimi, Christianity in Lesotho by James N. Amanza and Khosi Emmanuel Makubakube, Christianity in Liberia by Samuel B. Reeves, Christianity in Libya by Harald Suermann, Christianity in Madagascar by Laurent Ramambason, Christianity in Malawi by Chimwemwe Harawa, Gertrude Kapuma,

Isabel Apawo Phiri, Christianity in Mali by Yousouf Dembele, Christianity in Mauritania (Article not available before deadline), Christianity in Mauritius by Rodney Curpanen, Christianity in Morocco by Yelins Mahtat, Christianity in Mozambique by Felicidade Chirinda, Christianity in Namibia by Maria Kapere, Christianity in Niger by Issiaka Aboubazar, Christianity in Nigeria by Helen Kunbi Labeodan, Christianity in Rwanda by Tharcisse Gatwa, Christianity in Senegal by Simon Kossi Dassou, Christianity in Seychelles (Article not available before deadline), Christianity in Sierra Leone by Arnold C. Temple, Christianity Somalia by Bob Hadley, another research on Christianity in Somalia by Alex N. Kamtegwendearia and Michael T. Katola, Christianity in South Africa by Graham Duncan, Christianity in Sudan and South Sudan by Chammah Kaunda, Christianity in Swaziland by Sonene M Nyawo, Christianity in Tanzania by Laurenti Magesa, Christianity in Togo by Simon Dossou, Joseph Dake Trimua and Charles Klagba, Christianity in Tunisia by Harald Suermann, Christianity in Uganda by Christopher Byaruhanga, Christianity in Zambia by Teddy Sakupapa and Christianity in Zimbabwe by Molly Manyonganise.

#### **PART V: African Christianity and Ecumenism**

James Amanza opened this section on African Ecumenism and Inter-Church cooperation with a holistic, detailed account of how the ecumenical movement began in Africa from 1990 to the present day. He further mentioned that the missionary factor was the bedrock of ecumenism as a result of the conflict that emerged among missionary bodies, and the need to achieve cooperation and unity among them for the advancement of the Gospel in Africa was inevitable. His reason was that Africa is home to numerous religions, which compete with one another today for membership. In order to buttress his point, he quoted Gabriel Setiloane thus: 'The ecumenical movement in Africa: from mission to moratorium,' has noted that the ecumenical movement and cooperation in Africa has its roots in the missionary factor.....at the beginning of the missionary era there was mutual assistance among the missionaries born out solidarity in the face of a strange and unfriendly environment.<sup>6</sup> Other research write-ups in this section include Ethnicity and African Denominationalism- A Case Study on Kenya by Joseph Wandera, History of National Church Councils in African Christianity by Agnes Abuom, the History and Profile of the AACC by Edison Kalengyo, History and Profile of OAIC by John Njeru Gichimu, the Roman Catholic Church and African Ecumenism by

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<sup>6</sup> Gabriel Setiloane, 'The Ecumenical Movement in Africa: From Mission Church to Moratorium,' in *Resistance and Hope: South African Essays in Honour of Beyers Naude*, eds. Charles Villa – Vicencio and John de Gruchy. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 775.

Peter Uche Uzochukwu, Evangelicals and African Ecumenism by David N.A. Kpobi, Pentecostals and African Ecumenism by Fidelis Nkomazana, the contribution of African student Christian Movements to African Ecumenism by Chammah Kaunda and Albert Bangarani, African Contributions to Global Ecumenism by Setri Nyomi, African Churches and the WCC by Chammah Kaunda and Isabel Apawo Phiri, Notions and forms of African Ecumenism by Ernst M. Conradie, African Christianity and Partnership with European Churches by Fidon Mwombeki, African Christianity and Partnership with Asian Churches by Manoj Kurian, and another research work again on African Christianity and Partnership with Asian Churches by Augustine Musopole, African Christianity and Partnership with North American Churches by David Daniels, African Christianity and Partnership with Latin American Churches by Luciano Chianeque, African Christianity in Partnership with Caribbean Churches by George Mulrain, African Christianity and Partnership with Middle Eastern Churches: The Palestine Kairos Document by Edwin Arrison and the Future and Challenges of African Ecumenism by Andre Karamaga.

#### **PART VI: Issues and Themes in African Christianity**

The section was opened with a write-up by Chammah Kaunda on the subject matter titled Leadership and Education in African Christianity. Her assertion was fundamental and germane. Chammah opined that Leadership formation underscores the educational essence of theological institutions across denominational alliances in African Christianity. Chammah anchors her points on two foundations. First, the history of Christian missions in Africa is the history of leadership formation and education. Secondly, leadership formation and education remained a major concern of the International Missionary Conference (IMC) at a conference held in Jerusalem in 1928. The catchphrase at Jerusalem was, 'transfer of the responsibility and authority to the younger churches.'<sup>7</sup> Other research works in this section include the following: Phenomenology and Politics of Naming in African Christianity by Eliot Tofa, Women in African Christianity by Hazel O. Ayanga, African Church Women's Organisations by Molly Longwe, the Role of Youth in Shaping African Christianity by Malebogo Kgalemang, African Church Men's Organisations by Kennedy Owino, Sunday School Movements in Africa Christianity by Jan Grobbelaar, Urban and Rural Forms of Small Christian Communities (SCC): A Case Study on East Africa by Joseph G. Healey, Pastoral

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<sup>7</sup> International Missionary Council. *The Life of the Church: International Missionary Council Meeting at Tambaram, Madras, December 12-29, 1928*, Tambaram Series Volume 4. (London: Oxford University Press, 1939).

Theology- Its Role and Relevance in African Christianity by Herbert Moyo, Human Sexuality in Africa Christianity in African Christianity by Ezra Chitando, Secularization and African Christianity by Scott Everett Cooper, the Prosperity Gospel in African Christianity by Lovemore Togarasei, the Prosperity Gospel and Economic Growth in African Christianity by Moji Ruele, the Impact of European Racism on Christianity in Africa by Linda Naicker, Decent Work and African Christianity by Rowanne Marie, Migration in African Christianity by Rose Nyirimana Mukansengimana, Martyrs and Witnesses of Faith in African Christianity by Ssekabira Vincent and Brigitte Rabarijaona, African Spirituality and African Christianity by Francisca Hildegardis Chimhanda, African Church Choirs and the Role of African Church Music by Felix Muchimba, the African Christian Family Life by Priscille Djomhouse and Pauline Poucouta and another African Christian Life research work by Kapya Kaoma, Gender Justice in African Christianity by Lilian Cheelo Siwila and African Philosophy and African Christianity by Julius Gathogo.

#### **PART VII: THE PUBLIC ROLE OF AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY**

The section was opened by the write-up by Isaiah Kipyegon Toroitich on the subject matter titled African Christianity and Development: The Case of ACT Alliance. He asserted that the ACT Alliance understands development. Isaiah gave a background of ACT Alliance in 2010 when it was founded. The Alliance's understanding of transformational development is drawn from its theological affirmation that all persons are created in the image of God, with the right and potential to live just, humane, and dignified lives in sustainable communities. It is worth noting that ACT Alliance finds its inspiration from the Christian faith, which challenges all to reject conditions, structures, and systems that perpetuate poverty, injustice, and violation of human rights.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the ACT alliance also uses the Rights-Based Approach (RBA) to development, which is about deliberately and explicitly focusing on achieving the minimum conditions required for people to live with dignity. Other research write-ups in this same section are: development, the Bible and the Role of the African Church by McGlory Speckman, African Christianity and School Education by Levi Ngangura Manyanya, African Churches, Financial Stability and Self-Reliance by Evangelos Thiani, African Churches and Good Governance in Africa by Titus Pacho, African Churches, Conflict Re-Solution, Reconciliation and Peace Building on the Continent by Sam Kobia, Climate

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<sup>8</sup> ACT Alliance is a network of 146 churches and church-based organizations from Protestant and Orthodox traditions, understanding humanitarian, development, and advocacy work in 140 countries. 1077.

Change and Food Security- a Challenge for African Christianity by Jesse Mugambi, African Christianity and the African Union Agenda 2063 by Ambassador Kiplagat, the African Union Agenda 2063 and the Role of African Churches for Development by Obiora Ike, Public Theology in African Churches by Nico Koopman, Health and Healing in African Christianity by Chammah Kaunda and Isabel Apawo Phiri, African Christianity, Public Health and Epidemics by Susan Parry, Healing and Reconciliation as a Pastoral Mandate in African Christianity by Charles Manda, Church and Civil Society in African Christianity by Renier A. Koegelenberg, Religious Extremism in Africa by Hans Spitzack, Religion and Development in African Christianity by Steve de Gruchy (+), the Basic Income Grant in Namibia- a Model for Development in Africa by Claudia and Dirk Haarmann, the Relevance of the Body Theology for Development in African Christianity by Gerald West, the Role and Relevance of Theology for the Future of African Christianity by James Kombo and the Role and Relevance of Theology for the Future of African Christianity by Ian Nell.

#### **PART VIII: Resources for the Study of African Christianity**

This section was compiled by Isabel Apawo Phiri, Dietrich Werner, and Roderick Hewitt. It has the details of the combined Bibliography of all the resource works/write-ups arranged alphabetically from Adamo, David Tuesday, who wrote on Africans and Africans in the New Testament (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America. Inc, 2006), to Yorke, Gosnell L.O.R. (ed.) Bible Translation and African Languages (Nairobi: Action, 2004).

#### **Conclusion**

The books provided well-detailed comparative historical perspectives of the holistic information that is verifiable from a scholarly aspect of African Christianity, with various angles, especially concerning African culture. The research work contained in the book is still relevant to the history of African Christianity in our contemporary times.

It helps to avail the opportunity to read and get information from well-respected historians of great repute, seasoning their research work with contemporary facts and figures to affirm and authenticate their research work with evidence. It also allows an understanding of Christianity from an African perspective. Finally, it helps one read about different historical events related to religion, especially Christianity, from scholars about Africa and African culture. The book did not

provide the theoretical framework adopted for the research carried out despite being a compendium of source material by scholars for academic purposes

### **References**

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