According to recognised statistical sources\textsuperscript{1} the number of Christians in Africa in the year 1989 amounts to about 220,000,000, divided into about 9,000 independent «denominations» (in D.B.Barrett's terminology). There is indeed enough material for research! Even if one takes into account that nine out of ten of these denominations are extremely small and probably very far from established, I mean almost impossible to grasp historically, still larger numbers of Christians remain who certainly look back on a short or long history. The question which I intend to answer in this contribution is whether and how this history led to scientific study in the period 1969-1989. What recent contributions does one find in the field of African church history?

1. Terminus a quo: 1969 as the year zero

I took the date 1969 as a starting-point, because in that year a programmatic article about African church history appeared in a collection of essays in honour of the well-known Swedish missiologist and church historian Bengt G.M. Sundkler. This article is entitled 'Writing African Church History'\textsuperscript{2} and contains a devastating assessment of church historical research done so far: "A bitter pill which the majority of writers on Christianity and missionary activities in Africa should swallow is that they have not been writing African Church History\textsuperscript{3}. The authors, J.F.A.Ajayi and E.A.Ayandele, both of them professors at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria, after their survey of church historical publications concerning Africa, come to the conclusion that African church historiography does not (yet) exist. Only two, perhaps three books find favour in the eyes of these reformers of church history, namely:

B.G.M.Sundkler, \textit{Bantu Prophets in South Africa}. London 1948, 2nd ed. 1961. (Surely a study which was breaking fresh ground at the time.)


What considerations made the Nigerian professors pass their judgement? An answer to this question will help us to formulate our own criteria about structure and limits of African church history.

What is important with Ade Ajayi and Ayandele is the way in which church history is practised. They think that up till now, wrongly, 'normative church history' has been practised instead of scientific church history. Church historians handle (Western) dogmatic criteria to define their object of study; being a church and being Christian is measured by standards and values which themselves are not African. Thus, for example, questions are asked like "How Christian is this or that African church?" In their view an answer to this question is beyond the competence of church historians.

Apart from that, nationalistic feelings play an important part. The Nigerian professors take offence at the patronising remarks of most Western investigators about African forms of theology and religious worship. African churches hardly ever get an objective and fair treatment, but are always measured by Western standards.

These methodological objections seem to me well-founded as such. Less fortunate and without proof, however, in my view, is Ade Ajayi's and Ayandele's supposition of that time that African authenticity and spontaneity could only or preferably be found among the so-called African Independent Churches. In that case African church history would have to be limited to the study of these churches which were supposed to be really "African", in contrast to the so-called historical churches which are connected with world-wide church organizations and therefore are less free to prove their African authenticity. A methodological choice like this one in my view endangers the practice of African church history. In that case the criterium of being African is again derived from a certain orthodoxy, now a cultural orthodoxy instead of a doctrinal one. I would prefer a church history which treats all churches in Africa on an equal basis as soon as and as far as they emerge as historical forces.

2. Survey of surveys

My contribution is not the first attempt to write a review of books about African church history, witness the above-mentioned contribution in the festschrift for Sundkler.

In a special issue of the *Svensk Missions Tidskrift* Sundkler himself gave a short survey of themes and tendencies in African church history but unfortunately I do not read Swedish. The most elaborate, annotated bibliography was published in 1983 by H.L.M. Obdeijn under the title *The Political Role of Catholic and Protestant Missions in the Colonial Parti-