
*Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa* is the second volume in a series of Edinburgh companions to the *Atlas of Global Christianity*. Edited by Kenneth Ross, Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu and Todd Johnson, the book presents an outline of African Christianity on four levels: demography (3-18), country (pp. 43-235), ecclesial traditions (pp. 239-326) and key themes (pp. 329-457). The core body of the book is preceded by two preliminary chapters (pp. 3-40), one presenting a demographic profile of Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa (Gina Zurlo) and the other an introductory essay to Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa in the 20th and 21st centuries (Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu). An essay by Mercy Oduyoye on the future of Christianity and appendices on demographics by country and on methodology, conclude the volume.

Mainly written by African scholars, the book aims to present the current state of the art of Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa. The book is attractively (though expensively) published in hardback and features an image by the late Cameroonian Jesuit Fr. Engelbert Mveng on the cover. The book is also available as ebook.

The first main section of the book is dedicated to country descriptions. Most of these are well written and give a thorough introduction to the country/region under discussion, though, as is common in edited volumes, the quality between the contributions varies. The emphasis of the country essays is on the contemporary period; recurring aspects in the country presentations include a brief history of Christianity in the area, an introduction to the main churches or denominations, a short paragraph on ecumenical relations, and attention for key challenges in church and society.

The choice of the editors to move beyond the nation state paradigm and cluster several adjacent countries in one chapter works out quite well, but is less effective where these countries have very diverging histories from the colonial period onwards (e.g. the cluster on Senegal, Gambia, Guinea Conakry and Guinea Bissau).

The format used in the various country chapters differs substantially. Where some chapters that discuss multiple countries consecutively, examine the issues country by country, other cluster chapters take a regional approach. Likewise some contributions give an in-depth historical account, whereas others only briefly refer to the history and focus entirely on the contemporary.
This leaves the reader with the feeling that the book could have profited from more uniformity in format.

The lack of homogeneity in composition is also apparent in the second section of the book which features the chapters on ‘ecclesial traditions’. Though each of the chapters is eminently written and well worth reading on its own terms, the chapters show little similarity in structure and content, and few topics feature in all six of the contributions. The chapters also evidence that a continent-wide ‘denominational/ecclesial tradition’ approach is more suited to hierarchical transnational traditions such as Roman Catholicism and Anglicanism, than to Independent Churches, Evangelicals and Pentecostals/Charismatics. Having said this, Nicta Lubaale, who wrote the contribution on Independent Churches has done an excellent job of meeting this challenge by selecting three churches from different parts of Africa (Nigeria, Kenya and Zimbabwe) as windows into the wide variety of African Independent Churches; his exploration how of each of these churches negotiates the delicate balance between preservation of founder’s charisma and change, gives insight in some of the current challenges and dilemma’s faced by AICS.

The third section of the book presents essays on key topics, written by internationally renowned African experts such as Mary Getui, John Pobee, Ester Mombo, Musa Dube and Isabel Phiri. While the majority of these key topics is derived from the themes of the 1910 Edinburgh commissions and are addressed in all the companions, three additional themes, considered salient to the African context, were chosen: the Bible in Africa (Chris Manus), the anthropology of evil (Afe Adogame) and migration (Amélé Adamavi-Aho Ekué).

While one understands and respects that the editors had to make choices as to what to include and exclude, and while the presented material gives an extensive overview of relevant issues in African Christianity, two topics would have merited more prominence. The first issue is the subject of church-state relations, exploring the role of Christianity/Christian churches vis a vis the fragility of the nation state, governance structures and democracy in (a number of) African countries. The second issue is the subject Christian Muslim relations. Germane to contemporary Africa (and beyond) the topic warrants a more in-depth discussion than the current four pages in a more general chapter on interreligious relations, written by an expert on Christian relations with African Traditional Religions rather than Christian Muslim encounters. Considering that the book is meant to serve as a reference-book for further study, it would have been helpful had the bibliographies at the end of each chapter, been more extensive.