Afe Adogame, Ezra Chitando, and Bolaji Bateye (eds.)


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This two-volume set appears in Ashgate’s *Vitality of Indigenous Religions* series. Comprised of twenty-nine chapters and two original introductions, the collection is published in honour of Jacob Kehinde Olupona, who is recognised as an eminent African scholar and pioneer in the development of African traditions within the study of religion. While each volume contains distinct themes, the raison d’être of this set is the promotion and advancement of the Africanisation of the study of religion in Africa and the African diaspora. Employing Jan Platvoet’s historiographical distinction regarding the shift from studying ‘Africa as Object’ to ‘Africa as Subject’, this work exemplifies the latter—with its commitment to intellectual decolonisation and discourse that cultivates ‘African issues, concerns, and approaches’ (2). As the editors note, this shift has been only partially realised, which is why a work of this nature is essential. As a multidisciplinary project it succeeds beautifully, with scholarly expertise ranging from sociology to history, theology to anthropology, and gender studies to political science. Yet even with this wide scope, the editors have managed to achieve synergy throughout.

The value of any edited volume is the quality of the individual contributions, and the editors should be commended overall for their selections. The first volume is arranged into three parts: ‘Emerging Trends in the Teaching of African Religions’, ‘Indigenous Thought and Spirituality’, and ‘Christianity, Islam, Hinduism’. In Part 1 Umar Habila Dadem Danfulani opens with a historical overview and current state of research related to African scholarship on African religions. Well-known scholars such as Blyden, Kenyatta, P’Bitek, Mbiti, and Olupona are considered. Danfulani then offers recommendations for better preparing and training younger scholars, including more methodological rigour, student field research trips, linguistic and philological training, and better interchange with those traveling from abroad. Adam K. arap Chepkwony continues this critique with an informative section on the prospects for the study of African religions in East Africa. Chepkwony notes that
most students and faculty lack a strong foundation in the field, partly due to a stark absence of resources and a disconnection with their heritage. To finish out the section, Tabono Shoko introduces an explanatory course syllabus from Zimbabwe, Oyeronke Olademo tackles the issue of gender and the teaching of religious studies in Nigeria, and Musa W. Dube brings perspective on the relationship between HIV/AIDS and curriculum within departments of theology and religious studies.

In Part II Anthonia C. Kalu opens with an evaluation of how colonial tools of social invasion have devalued the location, function, and role of African women. Using African narrative traditions, Kalu argues that ‘ignoring ancestral heritage and working in the tradition of colonialism, most contemporary African institutions either openly exclude the African woman or bring her in as an afterthought’ (102). Playing off of Olupona’s suggestion that the spiritual core within African spirituality is found in the ‘noise, dust, darkness and dancing’ of African peoples, in her chapter Lilian Dube proposes that the scholar of religion must take care to investigate cultural avenues like art, music, and dancing. Rose Mary Amenga-Etego compares indigenous systems of governance in Ghana with the concept of decentralisation and suggests that Ghanaian systems can be utilised for the purposes of social cohesion, political harmony, and sustainable development in contemporary Ghana. Elijah Obinna demonstrates the nature and resilience of indigenous healing practices among the Amasiri clan in Nigeria. Obinna argues for a restructuring of healthcare initiatives to include that of indigenous healers. To finish out the section, Dodeye U. Williams explores how Christianity has significantly altered the ritual performance and beliefs surrounding the Leboku and Ledu festivals among the Yakurr in Nigeria.

The initial four chapters in Part III deal with aspects of Christianity. J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu examines innovation among different forms of Christianity and how this has impacted intrareligious relations. Philomena N. Mwaura and Damaris S. Parsitau focus on how Charismatic churches in Kenya have become detrimental to women’s health. Through the theological perspectives of E. Bolaji Idoowu and Byang H. Kato, Victor I. Ezigbo reconsiders the relationship between African Indigenous Religions and Christianity, and argues that the latter needs to listen and interact with the former. Lovemore Togarasei discusses how African religion has been used to study the New Testament within English literature in southern Africa by exploring issues of colonialism, poverty, disease, gender, evangelism, and mission. The final two chapters of this volume consider the role of Islam and Hinduism. Muhammed Haron evaluates Islamic studies scholarship in southern Africa, concluding that it has largely not been Africanised to date. Lastly, Albert Kafui Wuaku gives evidence