Afe Adogame, Ezra Chitando & Bolaji Bateye, eds.


This is a novel and highly commendable attempt at studying religions in Africa as a “subject” rather than as an “object.” This multidisciplinary project, embarked upon by relatively young African scholars, is timely and apt. This collection of essays—in honour of Jacob Kehinde Olupona—is an eloquent testimony of the fruit of the seed sowed by the earlier generation of scholars, such as Olupona, who pioneered a paradigmatic shift in the scientific study of African indigenous religion and religions in Africa. Olupona should be extremely proud that his students and younger colleagues have honored him with this excellent gift. This volume is yet another demonstration of how “liberated” young African scholars from diverse backgrounds have endeavored to place the study of African religions and traditions within a scientific and scholarly discourse.

The book is appropriately divided into three main parts: part one deals with emerging trends in the teaching of African religions, part two discusses essays on indigenous thought and spirituality, and part three examines Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism in Africa. Part one throws light on major efforts and achievements made by scholars who spearheaded African traditions in the whole enterprise of the study of religions in Africa. Contributors touch on historiographical and pedagogical developments, gender issues as well as efforts at mainstreaming the issue of HIV in African religious and theological discourse. A close study of these chapters would facilitate an excellent appreciation of the contours of what can now be aptly described as ‘African traditions’ in the study of religions. The chapters in this section clearly demonstrate that over the years African scholars in the study of religions have employed sound theoretical and methodological frameworks that form a tradition of solid scholarly work in this field.

In part two, five of the contributors explore new themes and trends in the study of African religions by examining indigenous thoughts, religion and spirituality. Contributions from disciplines such as literary studies, theology, history of religions and political science makes it the most interdisciplinary section of the book. The various approaches beautifully dovetail into what comes out as a coherent and fine volume.

Contributions to the third part (chapters eleven to sixteen) examine how the three main “guest” religions in Africa, namely Christianity, Islam and Hinduism, have thrived. Indeed these religions, particularly Christianity and Islam, are increasingly attracting converts from African indigenous religions. This part
of the book underscores the extent to which Africans have embraced other religious traditions without losing their African-ness, with the consequent coloration of those religions with African cosmological features.

One always needs to put the study of Pentecostal/charismatic movements in its wider context. Nevertheless, readers of *Pneuma* may find the contributions by Kwabena Asamoah Gyadu (chapter eleven), and the joint article by Philomena Mwuara and Damaris Parsitan (chapter twelve) most beneficial. Gyadu discusses aspects of the dynamic changes that have occurred within predominantly African-led movements which are pneumatic in nature, labeled Pentecostal/charismatic. He deals with critical and fundamental issues such as terminologies used to describe the movement, and the prophetic phenomenon with its concomitant emphases on healing. The fast-changing scene of Pentecostal/charismatic movements in Africa demands that researchers employ distinct nomenclature and typology. Therefore a good grasp of the issues discussed by Gyadu is critical to the understanding of all the variegated forms of the dynamic religious innovation that is taking place in African Christianity. Additionally, giving insights into how the older pneumatic movements relate to the contemporary ones, he particularly notes the fact that the neo-Pentecostal movements have sustained some religious ideas from the older African indigenous churches mainly because the importance Africans attach to their faith transcends denominational barriers. Indeed, if this process should continue, doing a strict typology of churches in Africa may not be necessary because the lines that distinguish them are increasingly getting blurred.

Philomena Mwuara and Damaris Parsitan discuss some adverse effects that have characterized the stupendous growth of the neo-Pentecostal/Charismatic movement in Kenya. The authors note in particular the effects the movement has had on women’s rights and their reproductive health rights as well as children. It is disturbing to observe that the neo-Pentecostal movement that preaches purity of life, upholds a holiness code, and promises to liberate and empower women, could in the same vein have such negative effects on the most vulnerable sections of society.

The editors have not been oblivious of the major weaknesses of this publication in acknowledging the fact that many issues could have been addressed in a more comprehensive manner. Clearly, issues such as the Africanization of oriental religions in Africa, African initiatives in Christianity in Africa, and a more nuanced discussion of the Bible in Africa for instance could have been given more attention. This fine book could be expanded into a series of volumes of anthologies of African religious traditions that includes the aforementioned as well as other important issues. Nevertheless, keeping within the constraints of the project the editors and the contributors need to be commended for