



The Increasing Breadth and Depth of African Christian Theology

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

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The spread of Christianity in Africa is linked with the presence of Western missionaries and colonialism. However, this connection does not extend to the Ethiopian Orthodox *Tewahedo* Church (EOTC) and the Egyptian Coptic Church, as both of these churches existed before the era of Western missionary activity and colonialism. Colonialism is characterized by its exploitation and imposition of cultural practices, which undermines local traditions, customs, and religious beliefs. It is important to note that colonialism, overall, had a detrimental effect leading to their subjugation, humiliation, and exploitation. African theology as a discipline emerges after the liberation of most African nations from their colonial oppressors. Initially, it arises as a response to Western dominance in Africa, particularly in terms of culture and language. African theology seen as playing a role in restoring African identity. Throughout the years, African theology undergoes different stages and experiences various developments. This book recounts these developments and explores the issues surrounding African theology.

The book is divided into four main thematic parts and consists of thirty-two entries. The contributors are distinguished scholars of African origin residing both on the continent and abroad. The handbook explores historical and contemporary issues within the realm of African Theology. The goal of the book is to serve as catalyst for discussion and reference on specific topics in African theology, providing a collection of theological explorations in Africa (3). The editor has made efforts to address the existing gaps in the field of African Theology.

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Africa is home to multiple religious traditions, each with distinct theological perspectives. Theology has a rich tradition on the African continent, having evolved in numerous directions following the introduction of Christianity. The book explores theology from different angles, often with a postcolonial lens. Authors employ various methodologies to delve into the origin, relevance, and development of African theology. They tackle topics such as spoken word and theology, indigenous religions and theology, Pentecostalism, liberation theology, black theology, social justice, sexuality and theology, environmental theology, Christology, eschatology, and so forth.

The chapters comprising Part I of this book explore sources and various methodological approaches to theology in Africa. It features four insightful articles. **Elias Kifon Bongmba's** contribution addresses theology in contemporary Africa, while **Odomaro Mubangizi** investigates the intersection of philosophy and theology within the African context. This chapter scrutinizes key trends and themes in African theology and philosophy, shedding light on their origins and methodologies. It discusses significant sources including proverbs, riddles, mythology, symbolism, and rituals, which are intrinsic components of African philosophy. **Laurenti Magesa's** article explores the theology of inculturation, and **Chammah J. Kaunda** raises critical considerations regarding the sources of African theology. He probes into the sources of theology in Africa, stressing the significance of contextuality as the foundation for a wide array of theological reflections that eschew overarching narratives while affirming the wealth of African resources for theological contemplation. Within the African milieu, the multiplicity of cultures is viewed as an indispensable asset for theological inquiry. Kaunda believes that African Theology must address African realities.

The second part of the book explores into various theological movements in Africa, presenting eleven insightful chapters. The emphasis of this section is on fostering dialogue between Christian theology and African religions. One particularly noteworthy chapter by **James N. Amanze** argues that unless Christian theology is contextualized within Africa, its relevance to the African population will remain elusive. Another contribution by **Alice Yafeh-Day's** focuses on African feminist theology, shedding light on its origins in the struggles of African women for economic and socio-political liberation, as well as their efforts to dismantle oppressive structures.

In addition, this section includes an assessment of four waves of Black theology in South Africa, examining how this theology which emerged from the struggle against apartheid, has affirmed the dignity and identity of Africans within the South African context. Other articles explore themes such as the symbiotic and antagonistic dimensions of political and public theology in Africa, political theology in Kenya, and the role of faith leaders in promoting

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social justice. Two articles are dedicated to the theology of reconstruction, advocating for a shift from liberation to reconstruction in African theology.

Moreover, this section addresses public health challenges in relation to theology, establishing a link between theology and health. The argument is made that “both religious assets of Christian churches and African values tend to promote a vision of public health that does not isolate health systems from other spheres of society, indicating a way of theologizing on health issues as an endeavor which is always related to social arrangements and organizations that determine the course of human existence.” (168–169). Additionally, the author contends that a theology of health encompasses both theodicy and theology of society and culture (187).

The discussion of ecumenical theology, as presented by **Teddy Chalwe Sakupapa**, focuses on conducting theology ecumenically within the African context. This approach advocates for “ecumenical theology as a self-consciously contextual and constructive reflection and search for the common Christian theological heritage in an eschatological perspective amidst diverse theological traditions and Christianity” (210).

Furthermore, this section explores theologies of development in the context of poverty, arguing for the need for theology to address complex social needs. Proposed typologies include a *theology of hope*, a *theology of marginality*, and a *theology of abundant life*, which together offer alternative language and discourse to understand Africa’s social context and provide reasons for hope amid challenges.

The final chapter of this section, authored by **Peter Kanyandago**, examines initiatives and missed opportunities in theological enterprise after Vatican II (1962–1965), with a focus on recognizing and rehabilitating the identity and dignity of the African people. It highlights significant trends and shifts in African theology after Vatican II, aiming to affirm the identity and dignity of the African people.

The third section of the book focuses on specific regional and emerging theological perspectives. The initial article in this section delves into the theology, doctrine, tradition, and practices of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, one of the earliest churches in existence. Additionally, this section explores evangelical theology as it is understood within the African context.

Ernst M. Conradie’s article discusses ecotheology in South Africa, offering hermeneutical reflections on approaches to ecotheology. Moreover, this section comprises articles on holistic soteriology as a catalyst for socio-political engagement, narrative theology, postcolonial theology, the theology of African-initiated churches, faith-based organizations, theologies of sexuality, and the theology of peacemaking in Africa. These articles provide diverse perspectives on theological issues relevant to the African context.

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The final part, which consists of seven chapters, focuses on biblical and doctrinal theology. One of the articles, written by **Lovemore Togarasei**, explores into the doctrine of the Bible and its place in African theology. Togarasei challenges claims made by certain segments of African Christianity that their theology is solely derived from the Bible (401). The article presents the Bible as a valuable resource for theological reflection, analysis, and articulation in Africa, while also emphasizing the importance of considering the context.

Another article in this part explores Christology within the African context, attempting to answer the question of who Jesus Christ is and how he is understood in contemporary African realities. The topic of salvation in Africa is also addressed, highlighting various perspectives on salvation and emphasizing its role in the holistic transformation of human life — spiritually, socially, personally, economically, and ecologically.

The chapter on ecclesiology focuses on patristic ecclesiology in Africa, examining the theological development of early North Africa and discussing influential figures such as Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen, Cyprian, Augustine, Athanasius, and the Bishop of Carthage. Another article explores the Africanized theology of personhood, exploring the philosophical, biblical, and theological foundations of personhood and how the African concept of personhood relates to the socio-political and socioeconomic conditions of Africans today.

The chapter on liturgy theology places liturgy within the African context, placing importance on the ritual while also recognizing the significance of correct doctrine and belief. The final article, written by the editor of this handbook, addresses eschatology in Africa. It argues against a speculative approach to eschatology and instead encourages the ecclesial community to embrace a transformative praxis and ecological responsibility when considering eschatological teachings. Overall, the articles in this part underscore the importance of considering context in theological reflection and emphasize the relevance of theology to the African experience.

The book holds great significance as it provides a systematic documentation of the history of Christian theology in Africa. It serves as a comprehensive and invaluable resource for anyone interested in African theology, making it an excellent reference for students studying this field. Furthermore, the book raises thought-provoking questions, encouraging further exploration and offering a comprehensive survey of the theological landscape in Africa. Thus, it serves as both a launching pad and a reference point for scholars and theologians engaged in future studies. I wholeheartedly recommend the use of this book in seminaries and religious departments across Africa and beyond.