

engagement with African societies that it brought in its wake. Despite these minor reservations, this lavishly illustrated volume remains a towering achievement that lifts mission studies to a level of sophistication rarely achieved in the past.

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## AFRICAN RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES IN AMERICA

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*African Immigrant Religions in America*. Edited by JACOB K. OLUPONA and REGINA GEMIGNANI. New York: New York University Press, 2007. Pp. vii + 352. \$23 (ISBN 978-8147-6212-7).

KEY WORDS: African diaspora, Christianity, religion.

After reading this book one knows a great deal more about African immigrant religions in the United States and Canada. The publication adds to an understanding of the varieties of belief and religious practice in American urban settings and, particularly with regard to the image of Christianity, successfully deconstructs familiar notions of 'big' or 'world Christianity' known from historically more well-researched institutions, groups and their histories. *African Immigrant Religions* shows that to engage with religious groups outside the so-called Christian mainstream means to understand Christianity, as other world religions, in the context of people moving on a global scale.

Jacob K. Olupona and Regina Gemignani, who launched the fairly recent 'African Immigrant Religious Communities Project' and who edited the findings of an ongoing research project, recommended that all the authors should address in their contributions issues of identity, of transnationalism and of global religious movement. In addition, it was suggested that contributors should conceptualize migration as a dynamic and agency-oriented process, and they were requested to provide, if possible, perspectives on civic participation and political expression from a gender-sensitive standpoint. Basing their chapters on ethnographic research in religious communities (often their own religious communities), authors took up these suggestions, and emphasized them, in different ways. To stress the connectedness of the various religious communities' perspectives to the broader environment, some of the articles could have adopted a wider empirical perspective which would have related the detailed and sometimes rather personal inside views to a corresponding world outside the bounded realms of the various religious communities.

A number of articles address the religious communities' interaction with wider society in a highly illuminating manner. Regina Gemignani, for instance, addresses the professional achievements of immigrant women, particularly nurses, who successfully transplant previously acquired skills to the American setting (whereas men seem to be less successful in this regard). In this context religious groups function as social support networks which both enable women's achievements and redirect these to the benefit of the community. As, in addition, churches act as spaces into which numerous matters of private life are transferred, Gemignani challenges conceptions of the private sphere as being one of women's subordination and passivity. Her study breaks with the assumption of religion as distinct, home-oriented and inward-looking (a perspective prevalent in the majority of articles). Hence, she underlines important correlations that link religious

immigrants to struggle and survival on the everyday immigrant terrain, generally fraught by bureaucratic challenges and economic insecurities.

William Tetey, in another impressive article, takes up Ghanaians' translocational positionality in Canada and in their country of origin. In addition to emphasizing the social network and support character of the churches, he brings out the character of some churches as 'niche congregations', which, from their marginal position, display particular concerns with building social capital among the youth. Tetey is one of the few authors who, through focusing on breakaway tendencies under charismatic leadership, address issues of conflict. Through the secessions, Ghanaian communities experience fissures which lead up to politically loaded competition and rivalry.

Mojubaolu Olufunke Okome convincingly argues the case of a mission-oriented immigrant church of Nigerians and their tense relation to the American Christian Right. She highlights the affinities in value systems and the concomitant racial exclusion of the immigrant church's concerns from campaigns launched by the Christian Right. Her point, however, is that, while African churches go unnoticed by the Christian Right and their campaigns to put religious institutions in socially and politically powerful positions, the pastors in particular, whom Okome projects as powerful leaders with a considerable command over their congregations' interests, must be seen as 'interested observers' keen to watch and seize possibilities for the future when the Christian Right may have consolidated the influence it wields over American institutions. Other articles shed light on the multi-faceted expressions of Christianity which today characterize this world religion, in the American immigrant setting as elsewhere. Though the authors refrain from historical perspectives, even the historian gains insights into the different varieties of Christianity, which are, as we know, not only a feature of the present.

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## CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS?

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*Muslim-Christian Encounters in Africa*. Edited by BENJAMIN F. SOARES. Leiden: Brill, 2006. Pp. x + 310. €98 (ISBN 10-90-04-15264-4).

KEY WORDS: Eastern Africa, West Africa, Christianity, Islam, religion.

This book in itself forms in some ways a Muslim-Christian encounter as the contributors to the volume have various backgrounds, from historians and islamologists to jurists, but especially as professing Muslims and Christians. This makes not only for different analysis, but also for different viewpoints. While Patrick Ryan SJ could, from his name, be considered to write from a Christian viewpoint on the origins of both religions in Nigeria, Imam Rashied Omar could be considered to represent a similar style of religiously engaged scholarship in his discussion of post-apartheid South Africa. But in both papers the academic largely prevails over the religious. Referring to poetry and anarchist theory, these two authors seem almost bent on hiding their respective affiliations, despite declaring them in the author blurbs.

The volume is a little unbalanced in its regional focus on West Africa, with four out of eleven contributions dealing with Nigeria and two more on Senegal and Mali, while three papers deal with East Africa, covering Sudan, Ethiopia and