

## A BALANCED ASSESSMENT OF CATHOLIC MISSIONARY ENTERPRISE

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*Cross and Flag in Africa: The 'White Fathers' during the Colonial Scramble (1892–1914)*. By AYLWARD SHORTER. Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2006. Pp. xxxv + 294. \$25, paperback (ISBN 1570756554).

KEY WORDS: Christianity, colonial, missions.

With the appearance of this book following François Renault's important study of Cardinal Lavigerie and his African missionary enterprise (1992, 1994), the historical examination of Roman Catholic missionaries in Africa has been enormously advanced. In 2001 the General Council of the Missionaries of Africa (the 'White Fathers') set in motion a history project having two goals. It was to carry forward the published history of the Society from the death of its founder in November 1892, and 'to make better use of the General Archives of the Society'. Aylward Shorter's learned study, impressively organized and dashed with attractive flashes of humour and a sense of the ridiculous, makes an outstanding contribution to both purposes. It draws in particular on the extensive correspondence of Léon Livinhac, Lavigerie's successor and, throughout this period, Superintendent-General of the SMA; the 'printed extracts from mission diaries' regularly published in the Society's own *Chronique Trimestrielle* (1878–1912, thereafter the *Petit Echo*); and more selectively on the original mission diaries themselves, as well as many other parts of these evidently very rich archives.

Among the major themes dealt with by Shorter is the ambiguity of mission–government relations, especially in the context of the colonial scramble. Likely in any case, this ambiguity was heightened by the international character of the Society, and manifested itself in many ways. It was evident in the conflict between French missionaries and anti-clerical French governments, and in the competition between missions and chiefs for control over women and the family. Catholic missions were viewed with suspicion by British or German Protestant authorities, not least when they resorted to discipline and the use of civil authority where civil power was absent and 'pacification' ineffective. Missions looking in vain to other authorities for security were inclined either to fall back on their own 'city states', or, most extremely, if Lavigerie had had his way, institutions such as the 'armed Brothers'. In creating 'tangible conditions' for the operation of God's grace, the mission station was of the utmost importance. Shorter has much to say, not only on the traditional concerns of communal life and organization, its austerity, and the conflict of rules with the requirements for personal holiness. He also writes of church building, on the stimulus this gave to enormous local brick-making industries, on mission buildings' collapse and reconstruction, and on threatening fires doused with banana beer.

Chapter 5, 'Africa re-invents the Church', offers readers a fascinating discussion of the ways in which missionaries and Africans came to terms with each other, engaging in a continuous process of selective adaptation. Almost all of the Fathers began sooner or later to appreciate African art, music and myths, and scholarly publications from the SMA's members added greatly to the European ethnography and colonial knowledge of their regions. The period 1892–1914 'witnessed the birth of missionary ethnography in the Catholic Church'. 'Virtually all the missions in German East Africa became meteorological stations after 1908', and missionaries in turn were likely to be invested with traditional powers such as those of rain-making. On both sides they adapted their ways of life, their conventional roles, and language to each other, and ultimately evolved a vernacular liturgy shaped by an African clergy. The final chapter is concerned with education, the

evolution of the schools and the growth of seminaries, which together made the SMA arguably the best-educated of all Africa's missionary societies. The value of this hugely informative book is further heightened by the substantial pen-portraits of Society members, African and European, which add greatly to the balanced assessment it provides of Catholic missionary enterprise and colonial expansion before the First World War.

*King's College London*

ANDREW PORTER

## EVOKING THE AFRICAN PAST THROUGH MOVIES

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*Black and White in Colour. African History on Screen.* Edited by VIVIAN BICKFORD-SMITH and RICHARD MENDELSON. Oxford: James Currey; Athens: Ohio University Press; Cape Town: Double Storey, 2007. Pp. ix + 374. £14.95, paperback (ISBN 978-184701-5228).

KEY WORDS: Culture/cultural, colonial, film, identity, imperialism, popular culture, postcolonial.

More than any other continent, Africa is an imagined entity that has been apprehended largely through representations constructed from beyond its borders. It is not surprising, therefore, that images of Africa have become an important subject for critical study in recent years. Historians and other scholars working in the field have generally proceeded along one of two primary trajectories. The first, in an effort to understand visual paradigms of the past and the weight of accumulated stereotypes, examines images (filmic and otherwise) generated in the Western world, largely over the last 150 years. A second line of inquiry, though, looks at the more recent phenomenon of postcolonial African cinema itself, and the struggle to control the means of cinematic production in order to chart a future for a truly indigenous film industry.

One of the strengths of *Black and White in Colour*, edited by Vivian Bickford-Smith and Richard Mendelsohn, colleagues at the University of Cape Town's Department of Historical Studies with a longstanding interest in historical films on Africa, is that it serves to pull these two strands together. Rather than sustaining the conceptual distance between Western 'fantasies' of Africa and the cultural expressions of indigenous filmmakers, the editors have issued a useful text of collected essays that ably engages films from both worlds. While this approach might at first glance seem unmanageable due to the sheer volume of Western and non-Western cinematic productions on Africa, Bickford-Smith and Mendelsohn deftly provide a tighter focus by limiting the study in several ways.

First, the seventeen essays examine only dramatic, historical films produced during the four decades of the postcolonial era, such as *Zulu* (1964), *Ceddo* (1977), *Noir et blancs en couleur* (1977) – from which the book's title is derived – *Flame* (1996), *Hotel Rwanda* (2004) and many others. This strategy allows the individual authors to engage films with a fairly extensive temporal and geographic range, while eliminating colonial-era productions like *Sanders of the River* and *The African Queen* that have received treatment elsewhere.

Second, the films chosen for analysis are not meant to be exhaustive, but rather representative of many of the dominant themes of contemporary African historiography, including the nature of precolonial African cultures, the expansion of