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## Review

### **The Changing Face of Christianity: Africa, the West, and the World**

Lamin Sanneh and Joel A. Carpenter (eds.), Oxford University Press, Oxford: 2005, ISBN 9780195177275, 238 pp.

*Review by Kefas Lamak<sup>1</sup>*

Worldwide today there are uncountable forms of Christianity, especially outside Europe and America. For a very long time, there has been a denial and suppression within Europe and America of other forms of Christianity in an effort to claim that there is only one Christianity all around the world, and that its model is the West, even though Christianity in the West has, in modern times, taken many directions since the Reformation. This book analyses the emergence of Christianities, methodologies, and theologies in third-world countries that de-centre Western missionary Christianity in the age of globalization and post-colonialism (Sanneh and Carpenter, 2005:4-5). Lamin Sanneh and Joel A. Carpenter (2005:4-5) show the encounters of Christianity in modern times with socio-political events such as World War II, colonialism and post-colonialism, slavery, and missionary and post-missionary activities that situate world Christianity differently. Through these encounters, Christianity took a new face to fit into the context and practices of the people.

Sanneh and Carpenter (2005:21) argue that with the progression of Enlightenment thinking and secularism from the late 1700s to the 1800s, the West has witnessed a significant shift from emphasizing faith and tradition to engaging socio-political issues with rationality and science. Religion was challenged in the West such that many people projected the decline of religion worldwide in modern times. This projection turned out to be false. From the mid-1800s, Christianity started growing fast beyond the West during colonialism and missionary activities. Cultures and people who never had Christianity in the precolonial period embraced Christianity in record numbers

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to replace their indigenous religions or to add Christianity to their former religious practices.

The growth of Christianity in Africa, Asia, and Latin America has brought about new projections by scholars of Christian history, such as Andrews Walls, that the centre of Christianity has shifted from Europe and America to the global South; that is, Africa, Asia, and Latin America (Sanneh and Carpenter, 2005:21). Sanneh and Carpenter (2005:3-4) note that this global shift poses a significant challenge to Euro-American Christianity. Although Euro-American Christianity continues to partner with most of these other world Christianities, it no longer serves as their model. Christianity now has no centre and no model in terms of geographical location. Christianity has found a new application in cultures other than western cultures. Depending on the socio-political events of every continent, country, and region, the people who accepted Christianity thought about it differently and practiced it in a unique way that fits their culture and context.

In this book, Sanneh and Carpenter (2005:135-136) discuss multiple examples of how Christianity evolved in Africa, the Caribbean, and Asia. In the Caribbean, the people saw Jesus as a man of colour and constructed hymns, songs, and plays or drama to undo white western Christianity (Sanneh and Carpenter, 2005:34-35). Through the Karen Baptist mission in China, thousands converted to Christianity with little western missionary efforts. Missionary efforts were indigenous (Sanneh and Carpenter, 2005:135-136). In Africa, Christianity metamorphosed from African Independent Churches to Pentecostalism and the prosperity gospel. While church and state are separated in the West, the church was instrumental in nation-building, peace-making, reconciliation, and the freedom movement of post-colonial Africa.

Sanneh and Carpenter give a background to the emerging variant of Christianity in Africa through the post-colonial movement. At the turn of the 1960s, reflecting Africa's fight against the colonial powers, many African scholars and Christians had started calling for a post-missionary Christianity. This was due in part to people's perception of collaboration between western missionaries and colonialism from the beginning. Therefore with the fall of the colonial powers in India and many African countries, indigenous people started calling for an indigenous application of Christianity - a Christianity that

addresses the people's immediate needs through acculturation, adaption, assimilation, racialization, and indigenization (Sanneh and Carpenter, 2005:45-46). According to Sanneh and Carpenter, this calling for an indigenous application of Christianity not only encompassed the African Independent Churches and Pentecostal churches. Baptist, Presbyterian, Methodist, Anglican, Roman Catholic, and SIM churches were all involved in this outcry for independence. And this call did not happen in only one African country; it was a trans-continental call for theology and Christianity that fit the African experience.

The proliferation of Christianity in other parts of the world forced the West to come to terms with emerging changes within the Christian religion. Sanneh and Carpenter show that by 1948, western missionaries and Christians could not continue to live in denial of these emerging Christianities and their calls to de-centre western Christianity. As a result, the West constructed a new missionary model that sought to answer the non-Western people's call through the mission methodology of "contextualization." Western missionaries started making deliberate efforts to learn the language and cultures of the people. They also started by incorporating non-Western people's practices and ideas in their ministering areas (Sanneh and Carpenter, 2005:162-163).

Sanneh and Carpenter's book engages the socio-political changes Christianity has faced from the 1800s to the present. Christianity today is not a western religion but a world religion. With the proliferation of churches worldwide through Pentecostalism and indigenous religious movements, scholars have continued to raise significant questions about the similarities of these new emerging churches and religious movements to the older ones and their difference from them. Can a new religion become part of the older ones with time when newer ones appear? Sanneh and Carpenter's work calls for a critical reflection on the evolution of Christianity in modern times.