

Masfa, Gabriel. *Seventh-day Adventism in Africa: A Historical Survey of the Interaction between Religion, Traditions, and Culture*. London & New York: Routledge, 2023. xv + 235 pages, Paper Cover, US\$ 41.24. ISBN 978-1-032-36458-2

Book Review

This volume holds considerable academic value in presenting a comprehensive overview of the history of Adventism in Africa, tracing its development from its challenging beginnings to the remarkable growth observable today. The book contains eight chapters, excluding the general introduction and the conclusion. In chapter one, the author examines the roots of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA) in General and presents its motto: spreading the good news of salvation to the whole world. From Chapters 2 to 6, the author synthesizes the beginning of SDA in all four corners of Africa; the church started in South Africa mainly because of its multicultural and racial diversity. However, the mission fell into the trap of supporting racial discrimination because of the country's political turmoil from 1948 to 1994. Adventist institutions like Claremont Union, known as Helderberg College today, had a concentration of white population for 81 years since its foundation; some other institutions, like clinics and churches, had separate services for blacks and whites. The author highlights that the struggle against racial discrimination was not only happening in Africa; the relationship between blacks and whites was not good right from the headquarters of the church. He illustrates this by exemplifying that till 1950, black people could not eat with whites in the Review and Herald cafeteria. Nevertheless, he underlines that Ellen G White, one of the co-founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, was always against any form of discrimination, as shown in her correspondence with missionaries sent to Africa. Despite the odds, the church grew in the southern hemisphere.

Depending on the region, the Western missionaries had challenges to overcome; in the Southern hemisphere, it was the hot climate, famine, disease, and venomous insects, while in Western Africa, the challenge was fetishism and witchcraft, added

to various diseases. One of the most significant challenges based on their mission was to gain the trust of the locals to show that they were not working for colonial powers, while other missionaries (not SDAs) who preceded them before the abolishment of the slave trade were significantly involved in slavery. Despite the abolition of the slave trade in Africa and all over the world, Africans did not see whites as genuine missionaries because of their past colonial experiences but also the involvement of many missionaries in the exploitation of Africa and its people. The author highlights that the church and first missionaries understood that schools and giving treatment were a way of gaining the hearts of Africans. In some places like central and northern Africa, missionaries were allowed to operate only schools and medical facilities but were not allowed to preach the gospel. However, later on, these facilities became centers of evangelism.

In chapters seven and eight, the Author describes the critical factors of the rapid growth of the Adventist church in Africa and the challenges that Adventism faces in reconciling its Biblical teachings with the practices of African traditional religion. In this session, the Author emphasizes four significant reasons the church is growing fast in Africa: the intentional writings and encouragement of Ellen G White to white missionaries in Africa, the apocalyptic message distinct from other denominations, the sabbath observed before the arrival of white missionaries, and the idea of the remnant ecclesiology. The growth of the Seventh-day Adventist church in Africa brings a high responsibility to African scholars. The theology of Africa, which has been shaped by Western ideology, has to change and put things into an African perspective. From a missiological point of view, the Author has highlighted that teaching the gospel by the early Adventists in Africa and other denominations was taught in a Western way, demonstrating cultural imperialism and cultural spirituality. The writer highlights the difficulties most African converts face in the same line of thought. Not only do they have to become Christians, but also Westerners in their way of living and worshipping. The writer appeals to new scholars to study and make the contextualization of scripture for

Africans. To take what is good in the culture and remove what is not relevant based on the Bible.

One should appreciate Dr. Gabriel Masfa's uniqueness in trying to cover the history of Adventism in Africa with an excellent overview. I recommend that every Christian read this book because it traces the historical relevance of Adventism in Africa. The book demonstrates the failure and success of early missionaries and suggests some approaches to those with the heart of mission. On a special note, I would recommend the book to all African theology students because it opens prospects for research that could be done in all fields of theology for the benefit of Africans and the growth of Africa from its theological perspective. For example, the author discusses the great personalities in the Mission in chapters four and five. The author explicitly says there is good documentation for Western missionaries and very little documentation for Africans who spread the gospel in Africa. In addition, when the author talks about the contextualization of the biblical message to Africans, the author suggests the development of a contextualized theology that responds to the needs of Africans.

On the other hand, I would prefer to have some of chapter three's content, which talks about events that preceded those in chapter two, be in the latter for the chronological order of presenting the story. Secondly, I would prefer the use of Western missionaries instead of White missionaries. This option would avoid the assumption that all missionaries were white but also prevent the misconception that only whites can be considered Westerners. It is imperative to recognize that we have, and have had, white Africans.

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