

Review Essay

Briana Wong¹

Gifford, Paul. *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. ISBN: 9780190495732. 198 pages (paper). US \$30.

Magesa, Laurenti. *What is Not Sacred?: African Spirituality*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013. ISBN: 9781626980525. 224 pages (paper). US \$30.

Olupona, Jacob K. and Rowland O. Abiodun, editors. *Ifá Divination, Knowledge, Power, and Performance*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2016. ISBN: 9780253018823. 390 pages (paper). US \$40.

Peel, J. D. Y. *Christianity, Islam, and Orisha-Religion: Three Traditions in Comparison and Interaction*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2015. ISBN: 9780520285859. 312 pages (paper). US \$39.95.

Despite the disparate and, at times, contradictory approaches of the books I will review in this essay,² the four taken together elucidate the complex, fluid nature of African religious beliefs and practices. J. D. Y. Peel's historical anthropology *Christianity, Islam, and Orisha-Religion: Three Traditions in Comparison and Interaction*, published posthumously, champions and masterfully models the comparative method in reflecting on Yoruba history, thereby revealing the incredible diversity that has characterized the religious lives of the Yoruba people over time. The collected volume *Ifá Divination, Knowledge, Power, and Performance*, edited by Jacob K. Olupona and Rowland O. Abiodun, is dedicated to the preservation of Yoruba religion in its many iterations throughout the world and encourages the partnership between ancient traditions and twenty-first century technology to accomplish this purpose. Paul Gifford, in *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa*, prescribes African Christianity's abandonment of its "enchanted dimension,"³ namely, those beliefs and practices that are rooted in the belief in the pervasiveness of the spiritual realm. In *What is Not Sacred?: African Spirituality*, Laurenti Magesa argues precisely the opposite point, pressing for an increased and unapologetic incorporation of African traditional worldviews, including an acute spiritual awareness, into African Christianity. Though all four authors advocate various types of religious change, Peel, Magesa, and the contributors to *Ifá Divination, Knowledge, Power, and*

¹ Briana Lynn Wong is a doctoral student of World Christianity at Princeton Theological Seminary, New Jersey, USA. Email: briana.wong@ptsem.edu.

² A version of this essay was originally submitted as an assignment for a course entitled "Vitality of Indigenous Religions of sub-Saharan Africa," taught at Princeton Theological Seminary by Professor Afe Adogame during the spring 2016 semester.

³ Paul Gifford, *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 105.

Performance all recognize the fundamental equality that exists between the respective cultures of Africa and the West, while Gifford vehemently denies it.

Peel, who served as Professor of Anthropology and Sociology with reference to Africa at the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), bases the theory-rich Christianity, Islam, and Oriṣa-Religion on approximately fifty years of personal research.⁴ His first chapter, "History, Culture, and the Comparative Method: A West African Puzzle," sets the tone for the rest of the book. It raises the importance of comparing the histories of societies, rather than merely their contemporary forms, in order to take full account of the ways in which the societies in question have changed over the course of time.⁵ The remainder of the book, featuring chapters with topics ranging from comparisons of the distinct versions of the cult of Ogun in various geographical locations throughout history, to those between the reception of Christianity during the early missionary period and after the arrival of Pentecostalism, exemplifies Peel's emphasis on the union of historical perspective and the comparative method. In highlighting the constant changing of Yoruba religious experience and the necessity of making historical comparisons, Peel also calls attention to the variegated nature of Yoruba religious traditions; he is sure to note that the Yoruba did not even begin to conceive of themselves as people sharing one identity until the twentieth century,⁶ and that in fact, the beliefs and practices of the Yoruba constitute multiple religions.⁷ One of the primary themes Peel explores concerns the myriad ways in which Christianity, Islam, and indigenous oriṣa cults have all impacted one another. He demonstrates how, compared with the interreligious violence that has been plaguing northern Nigeria in recent times, the southern part of the country has been marked by the "remarkable ... coexistence" of the three major traditions, including a fair amount of interfaith marriages.⁸ Born-again Christianity has affected Yoruba Islam, for example, as can be seen through the development of the Nasrul-Lahi-il Fathi society, in which Muslims gather for services on Sunday mornings and practice their religion in ways that mirror the style of born-again Christian worship.⁹

Olupona's and Abiodun's *Ifá Divination, Knowledge, Power, and Performance* overlaps in content with Peel's book in that its focus is solely on religion as practiced by the Yoruba, although it differs in scope. Whereas Peel examines multiple religions in a single geographical location, this collected volume is centered on one religion—Ifá—throughout the Yoruba diaspora. This volume comprises essays presented at an interdisciplinary conference held at Harvard in 2008, the objective of which was to create an opportunity for scholars and practitioners from around the diaspora to share their knowledge of Ifá divination and to promote further studies on the topic,¹⁰ with the expectation that Ifá epistemology offers something of value concerning the issues the world currently faces.¹¹ Wande Abimbola, the foremost scholar-practitioner of the Ifá

⁴ J. D. Y. Peel, *Christianity, Islam, and Oriṣa-Religion: Three Traditions in Comparison and Interaction* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2015), 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 216.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 187.

¹⁰ Jacob K. Olupona and Rowland O. Abiodun, "Preface" in Jacob K. Olupona and Rowland O. Abiodun, eds., *Ifá Divination, Knowledge, Power, and Performance* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2016), xv.

¹¹ Jacob K. Olupona and Rowland O. Abiodun with Niyi Afolabi, "Introduction," in Olupona and Abiodun, 12-13.

religion,¹² states another of the book’s unifying themes, which is the emphasis on the Yoruba religion as an ascendant and “important world religion.”¹³ Therein lies the most crucial point of departure between this work and Peel’s. Though respecting Yoruba religion—or, more specifically, the multiple orisha cults that together make up Yoruba religion—Peel draws a definite distinction between indigenous religions, which he defines as “preliterate religions,” and world religions, or “religions of the Book.”¹⁴ Peel situates this dichotomy within Harvey Whitehouse’s model of “divergent modes of religiosity,”¹⁵ identifying indigenous religions as primarily “imagistic” and world religions, as primarily “doctrinal.”¹⁶

The scholars who contributed to *Ifá Divination, Knowledge, Power, and Performance* underscore Yoruba religion’s status as a world religion as they discuss its expansion to Europe and the Americas and detail the nuances of the forms it has taken in different contexts. For instance, Stefania Capone lauds the “good’ syncretism” that has arisen between the “sister religions” of Brazilian Candomblé and Cuban Santería, as she believes this admixture can help communities of African descent to reclaim their “lost tradition” and “reconstruc[t]” it.¹⁷ Lest anyone suggest that Ifá religion has changed only because of its geographical expansion and its encounter with the religions of the Americas, Akintunde Akinyemi’s chapter on Ifá in art and culture makes clear that time itself has been sufficient to transform Ifá in Yorubaland through the introduction of modern technology into the religion. Akinyemi evaluates various depictions of Ifá divination in Yoruba videos and argues that depending on the accuracy of such portrayals, these films either help to preserve the tradition for younger generations or project a distorted image of reality.¹⁸ For example, he mentions how, typically, in Yoruba films, the actor representing the diviner controls the divination instrument—whatever it might happen to be in a given instance—in a way that “conforms to that of an authentic Ifá priest in Yoruba society.”¹⁹ The accuracy of the portrayals of this aspect of divination can prove helpful for members of the younger generations who might have grown up in a time in which “the discontinuation of [Ifá] ceremonies” has “led to the loss of the tradition associated with them.”²⁰ On the other hand, most Yoruba films involving divination feature diviners whose “elaborate dress ... is a major departure from the modest dress of [real] Yoruba Ifá priests,”²¹ thereby causing potential confusion through continual misrepresentation to anyone unaware of the present sartorial habits of Ifá diviners. In either case, modern film has the potential to affect the way today’s practitioners of Yoruba conceive of their religion. Filmmakers also frequently capture changes that have already taken place in Ifá divination, such as the recently developed practice of divination clients’ “whisper[ing their] problems to a sum of money, in the form of a bill or a coin,” as a new way of performing the age-old tradition of communicating one’s problems to the deity Ifá.²²

¹² Ibid., 2.

¹³ Wande Abimbola, “Continuity and Change,” in Olupona and Abiodun, 41.

¹⁴ Peel, 75.

¹⁵ Ibid., 71.

¹⁶ Ibid., 75.

¹⁷ Stefania Capone, “*The Pai-de-santo and the Babalawo*,” in Olupona and Abiodun, 240.

¹⁸ Akintunde Akinyemi, “Art, Culture, and Creativity,” in Olupona and Abiodun, 356.

¹⁹ Ibid., 347.

²⁰ Ibid., 356.

²¹ Ibid., 344.

²² Ibid., 345.

Gifford's *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa* is the undeniable outlier among the four books I analyze in this review. Gifford makes no secret of the fact that the change he is proposing involves the decreasing, and possibly the elimination, of indigenous influences on African Christianity.²³ This book delves into two forms of African Christianity—Pentecostalism and Catholicism—and compares them along the lines of their “enchanted dimension.”²⁴ Gifford, a professor emeritus of Religions and Philosophies, also at SOAS, rejects African Pentecostalism as detrimental to the continent’s development and modernity, by virtue of its dealings in the spiritual realm. Although he admits that a fair amount of Catholics also “live in an enchanted world,”²⁵ Gifford does not write off Catholicism outright, because he views the Catholic Church as “the biggest single development agency on the continent.”²⁶ He distinguishes therefore between what he considers the “‘internally secularized’ Christianity of the Catholic professionals” and the “enchanted religious imagination” of many other African Christians, both inside and outside the Catholic Church. Gifford critiques Meinrad Hegba, a Cameroonian Jesuit who “used traditional Catholic prayers, and promoted devotion to Mary”²⁷ but also “identified demons by name, broke ancestral curses, reversed curses and healed AIDS.”²⁸ It is this second set of ministry activities Gifford labels “the problem,”²⁹ as they fall outside his understanding of modernity and development.

Gifford expresses frustration with certain African Catholic theologians, who demonstrate reluctance to live into what he considers an overly spiritual form of Christianity but then stop short of denouncing it.³⁰ In a lengthy engagement with the work of one such theologian, research professor Stan Chu Ilo of the Center for World Catholicism and Inter-Cultural Theology at DePaul University, Gifford’s assessment strikes me as lacking in nuance. While Gifford accurately states that Ilo rejects the abuses of power by certain African Pentecostal leaders³¹ and their claims to have healed AIDS,³² Ilo still, on the whole, expresses support for African Christians’ adopting “African worldviews,”³³ complete with their acknowledgement of “spiritual forces.”³⁴ The irony lies in the fact that Gifford critiques what he sees as Ilo’s willful excision of the “enchanted dimension” from his description of African Christianity, while Gifford himself fails to recognize Ilo’s endorsement of a fair amount of this so-called enchantment in Christianity, simply without the aspects Ilo finds abusive—some, but by no means all, of which overlap with Gifford’s own list of unsettling characteristics in African Pentecostalism. It seems therefore that Gifford unintentionally has placed himself among those at whose arguments Ilo takes umbrage, due to their “not taking Africa seriously or ... not listening to Africans.”³⁵ Gifford does not appear to hear,

²³ Gifford, *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa*, 151.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 105.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 107.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 155.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 124.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 104-106.

³¹ Stan Chu Ilo, *The Church and Development in Africa: Aid and Development from the Perspective of Catholic Social Ethics* (Nairobi: Paulines, 2013), 233 in Gifford, *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa*, 105.

³² *Ibid.*, 170 in Gifford, *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa*, 104.

³³ *Ibid.*, 128 in Gifford, *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa*, 104.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 119 in Gifford, *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa*, 104.

³⁵ Gifford, *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa*, 104.

through Ilo's overt statements, the latter's identification with a form of the same concept—enchanted Christianity—on which Gifford perceives him to be silent.

Some historical context might be helpful in further uncovering the problematic nature of Gifford's line of argumentation. For decades, Gifford has made a variety of broad-based claims about African Christianity, including Pentecostalism, that ignore crucial evidence to the contrary. Gifford claims, together with Steve Brouwer and Susan D. Rose, in *Exporting the American Gospel: Global Christian Fundamentalism*, a book the three wrote jointly twenty years ago, that various forms of Christian fundamentalism originating in the United States, including many genres of Pentecostalism, have been spreading not merely the gospel but also American culture throughout the world. Brouwer, Gifford, and Rose contend that “even as Christian fundamentalism is purveyed by an aggressive international sales force ... the social product that they distribute so successfully around the world is clearly stamped ‘Made in the U. S. A.’”³⁶ They identify the prosperity gospel in particular, already rather widespread, as a “quintessentially American faith.”³⁷ While they acknowledge that “the prosperity gospel [is] so readily received in Africa,”³⁸ at least in part, as a result of African indigenous religion's preeminent concern “with health, fertility, and abundance,”³⁹ they nevertheless insist that “[w]e should not conclude that the Christianity that is evolving is a genuinely African construct.”⁴⁰ The impetus for this argument appears to be compassionate, as the three authors critique the injustice of the perceived imposition of American culture into an African context. Nevertheless, their denial of indigenous agency in the spread of Christianity was met with mixed responses.

Gifford's sweeping arguments have inspired much critique over the years, including, notably, by David Maxwell, the late Ogbu Kalu, and more recently, Afe Adogame. In 2000, Maxwell, responding to Gifford's highly controversial *African Christianity: Its Public Role*, published in 1998, exposes what he understands to be the inadequacy of Gifford's research methodology. While admiring Gifford's use of sources which theretofore had remained in obscurity, such as “a host of tracts, and spiritual biographies produced by the movement's leaders,”⁴¹ Maxwell expresses concern regarding Gifford's tendency to analyze such sources “in a rather literal way as theological treatises and not ... as material objects whose meanings are made in different contexts and which help to shape emergent religious movements.”⁴² Furthermore, according to Maxwell, since Gifford's fieldwork took place primarily in urban settings, in “luxurious hotels and conference centres”⁴³ that “exclude ordinary rank and file church members who are also often too busy earning a living to attend such events,”⁴⁴ the picture Gifford gleaned of African Christianity naturally was that of the wealthier practitioners, upon whom the influence of American culture often was more pronounced. Maxwell opines, “If he had been able to move beyond the urban mega-churches to townships and rural locations, Gifford might

³⁶ Steve Brouwer, Paul Gifford, and Susan D. Rose, *Exporting the American Gospel: Global Christian Fundamentalism* (London: Routledge, 1996), 11.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 172.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁴¹ David Maxwell, “In Defence of African Creativity.” *Journal Of Religion In Africa* 30, no. 4 (November 2000): 468. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed June 17, 2016), 474.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 474.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 475.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 475.

have been reassured to discover that the faith gospel has a different meaning,” one rooted in a desire for “security,” rather than for a frivolously extravagant lifestyle.⁴⁵

Kalu, writing in 2005, agrees with Maxwell’s assessment of Gifford’s treatment of primary sources. Kalu, too, finds Gifford’s approach wanting, as “his evidence is from one segment of cultural production, namely media.”⁴⁶ Gifford’s heavy emphasis on such a narrow selection of sources poses a significant problem, according to Kalu, whose conviction is that a holistic study of the church’s role in the world ought to involve a thorough examination of “its being, saying and doing.”⁴⁷ Gifford, rather than giving equal attention to each of these three aspects of the church’s operations, homes in almost exclusively on the “saying” portion, which raises crucial questions for Kalu, with respect to whether evidence extracted merely from “television, print, and select messages from ... sermons ... is strong enough to carry the weighty conclusions that follow.”⁴⁸ The conclusions to which Kalu alludes—chief among them, “that the new Christianity has failed to perform and is not helping to bring Ghana into the world’s modern economic system”⁴⁹—prove weighty indeed, and the sources used to support them, most worthy of scrutiny.

Adogame, in an essay published only a few years before *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa*, directly overturns Gifford’s claim concerning the foreign nature of African Pentecostalism and, particularly, the prosperity gospel. In this case study of one African Pentecostal denomination, the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Adogame demonstrates that “the strand of argument that privileges ‘ecclesiastical externality’ and ‘extraversion’ in explaining the public role and demographic profile of African Christianities is lacking in depth and scope.”⁵⁰ Adogame showcases how in many instances, African Pentecostal movements are “self-financing” and “demonstrate a high degree of indigenous religious vitality and innovation.”⁵¹ Agreeing with Matthew A. Ojo, who asserts that “Prosperity and success as religious ideas ... are not ‘foreign elements in African Christianity as Paul Gifford (1990) has asserted,”⁵² Adogame explains that “indigenous epistemologies of health and wealth—in other words, the quest for ‘the good things in life’ as local iterations of prosperity—blend seamlessly with external discourses on prosperity.”⁵³ This is to say that the prevalence of the prosperity gospel in African churches ought to be seen as a natural manifestation of indigenous life and thought, rather than as an American imposition. Adogame points out that the “general preoccupation” within African culture with the quest for the good things in life is ... ‘rebranded’ with the label of prosperity gospel within Pentecostal discourse.”⁵⁴ He does not deny that “external social processes” are active in African Pentecostalism but

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ogbu Kalu, “Yabbing the Pentecostals: Paul Gifford’s Image of Ghana’s New Christianity” in Wilhelmina J. Kalu, Nimi Wariboko, and Toyin Falola, eds., *African Pentecostalism: Volume I: Global Discourses, Migrations, Exchanges and Connections: The Collected Essays of Ogbu Uke Kalu* (Trenton, NJ and Asmara, Eritrea: Africa World Press, Inc., 2010), 156. This essay first was published in *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology* 15 (2005) 3-25.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 156.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 157.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 156.

⁵⁰ Afe Adogame, “Reconfiguring the Global Religious Economy: The Role of African Pentecostalism,” in Donald E. Miller, Kimon H. Sargeant, and Richard Flory, eds., *Spirit and Power: The Growth and Global Impact of Pentecostalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 186.

⁵¹ Ibid., 188.

⁵² Matthew A. Ojo (1996) in Adogame, “Reconfiguring the Global Religious Economy,” 188.

⁵³ Adogame, “Reconfiguring the Global Religious Economy,” 194.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 197.

maintains that these processes work “in tandem” with “internal religious dynamics,” without which it would be impossible to understand the “distinctive identities” African Pentecostal churches, and other charismatic churches in Africa, are creating through this combination.⁵⁵

Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa marks a shift in Gifford’s argument, perhaps in response to such critiques as those mentioned previously. If this is the case, it likely is not the first time Gifford has done so; Adogame points out that Gifford’s stance shifted, temporarily,⁵⁶ when the latter conceded a year after Maxwell’s review that “the faith gospel builds on traditional preoccupations.”⁵⁷ Even so, Gifford insists, in the same chapter, that current African Pentecostalism “is increasingly articulated in terms of standardized American form.”⁵⁸ Furthermore, in subsequent years, as Adogame notes, “this shift was not as evident”⁵⁹ in Gifford’s writing.

In *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa*, on the other hand, Gifford makes no effort to claim that Pentecostalism in Africa is not authentically African, or that it is too Western. Instead, he suggests that the “stress on cultural equivalence”⁶⁰ and the desire to retain aspects of African indigenous culture and religion have been thwarting development and therefore preventing Africa’s full entry into modernity. “Is something that is ‘traditionally African’ calculated to bring Africa into the socio-economic and political systems obtaining in the modern world?” he asks rhetorically.⁶¹ He continues, “Would anyone urge modern Scandinavians to organize their societies from the myths of Wodin and Thor? Why should Africa be different?”⁶²

Gifford briefly inquires whether it might be possible for “the two worldviews, that of functional rationality and that of enchanted forces, [to] be combined,”⁶³ but he ultimately comes to the conclusion that no, they cannot.⁶⁴ The reasoning behind this conclusion is that “enchanted Christianity,” which “operates from a belief in pervasive spiritual forces” is located “on a totally different plane,” from the “disenchanted and internally secularized Christianity” of the Catholic Church, which he praises for paving the way for development.⁶⁵ Gifford celebrates the “cultural modification” that the Catholic Church has brought about in Africa through its development efforts.⁶⁶ In promoting new forms of education and health care, the Catholic Church, he believes, has introduced Africans to “characteristics of the modern world,” which are “necessary for any nation wishing to join it.”⁶⁷

⁵⁵ Ibid., 201.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 189.

⁵⁷ Paul Gifford, “The Complex Provenance of Some Elements of African Pentecostal Theology,” in A. Corten and R. Marshal-Fratani, eds., *Between Babel and Pentecost: Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa and Latin America*, edited by A. Corten and R. Marshal-Fratani, 62-79. Bloomington: Indiana University, 2001), 64 in Adogame, “Reconfiguring the Global Religious Economy,” 189.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Adogame, “Reconfiguring the Global Religious Economy,” 189.

⁶⁰ Gifford, *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa*, 130.

⁶¹ Ibid., 141.

⁶² Ibid., 142.

⁶³ Ibid., 155.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 157.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 130.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

Gifford's conclusion here raises concern for two reasons. First, Gifford's vision of the modern world seems to be heavily influenced by Western values, especially relating to a certain type health care and education. Second, even if, for the sake of argument, one were to accept this particular understanding of modernity, it is evident that African Pentecostals have made remarkable strides in this direction, and that they continue to do so. Gifford fails to recognize the numerous and significant African Pentecostal efforts to ameliorate health care and higher education, along with a host of other aspects of individual and community life on the continent.

Many Pentecostal organizations throughout Africa have founded hospitals,⁶⁸ maternity homes, and clinics of various sorts,⁶⁹ in addition to institutes of higher learning. One African Pentecostal denomination, the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA), known around the world as the Forward in Faith Church (FIF), started Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University and also Mbuya Dorcas Hospital, offering both spiritual and physical forms of treatment.⁷⁰ Phillip Musoni, a lecturer at the denomination's university, asserts that the ZAOGA FIF "has outdone the myth that scientific medicine is not God's way of treatment."⁷¹ The RCCG, which has started multiple medical centers of different types, has served to "supplement and challenge the inadequacies of local government health-care schemes" and, in the process, has created "employment opportunities for members and non-members alike."⁷² At the RCCG's famed Redemption Camp in Nigeria, one will find "the Redeemer's Clinic, a maternity center, an orphanage, a post office, security post, a gas station, bookstores, supermarkets, a public market, a bakery, and a canteen," in addition to "five banks," "the Redeemed Christian Bible College, Redeemer's Junior and High Schools, and its own university, the Redeemer's University."⁷³ These are but a few examples of African Pentecostal contributions toward societal uplift.

With respect to higher education in particular, Joel Carpenter, director of the Nagel Institute at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, has written about how private evangelical and Pentecostal universities have been springing up throughout the global South in an effort to intervene in situations in which governments cannot satisfy their populations' demands for higher education.⁷⁴ These new universities intend to mimic neither "the liberal arts college, with broad general education requirements," nor "the comprehensive university, with scores of different concentrations to offer." Rather, they function as what have been called "'boutique' colleges, which offer only a few programs targeted to respond to growing areas in market demand."⁷⁵ Carpenter explains, "The evangelical and Pentecostal movements that are creating these new universities are

⁶⁸ Afe Adogame, "The Redeemed Christian Church of God: African Pentecostalism," in Stephen M. Cherry and Helen Rose Ebaugh (eds), *Global Religious Movements Across Borders: Sacred Service* (Ashgate Inform Series on Minority Religions and Spiritual Movements. Surrey and Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), 57.

⁶⁹ Afe Adogame, "How God became a Nigerian: Religious Impulse and the Unfolding of a Nation," in *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 2., 2010, 491.

⁷⁰ Phillip Musoni, "African Pentecostalism and Sustainable Development: A Study on the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa, Forward In Faith Church." In *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, Volume 2, Issue 10, October 2013, 77-78.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁷² Adogame, "The Redeemed Christian Church of God: African Pentecostalism," 57.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁷⁴ David Cohen, "The Worldwide Rise of Private Colleges," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 9 March 2001, A47 in Joel Carpenter, "Universities on the Mission Field? Part II: New Evangelical Universities: Cogs in a World System, or Players in a New Game?" in *International Journal of Frontier Missions*. Volume 20, Issue 3, Fall 2003, 96.

⁷⁵ Carpenter, 98.

themselves a global phenomenon,” and the universities “are at once the responses of local change agents to urgently felt local needs, and reactions to global economic and cultural trends.”⁷⁶ He describes these institutions as depending on the desires of “the born-again and Spirit-filled of their regions to provide a better life for the eager and aspiring students who enter their portals, to further the welfare of their homelands, and to respond, out of a Christian imagination, to the dynamic forces they see at play in the larger world.”⁷⁷ These new universities are providing opportunities for students who otherwise would have been excluded from the university system the chance to receive an education intended to prepare them to flourish in their respective contexts,⁷⁸ and in so doing, to improve the socioeconomic environments of their respective nations. Despite such efforts, Gifford condemns African Pentecostalism of posing a hindrance to modernity and development, on account of its spiritual emphases.

Magesa, a Roman Catholic priest and theologian from Tanzania, advances an argument quite contrary to that which Gifford proposes. Magesa agrees with Gifford that there is a “spirituality of indigenous black Africa as a whole” that extends to Africans of all religions,⁷⁹ but rather than dismissing this spirituality as backward, Magesa upholds it as deserving of special honor, referring to it as one of the “two parents” of African Christianity, with the other being the Bible.⁸⁰ He spends the first part of the book simply introducing African spirituality to those who might be unfamiliar with its ethos, and in the second part, he moves into a discussion of how this spirituality can—and ought—to be incorporated into African Christianity.

In the vein of Paul Knitter and Peter Phan, Magesa raises the possibility of “double or multiple religious belonging.”⁸¹ He shares a personal story in which he was forbidden, as a Catholic priest, to participate fully in the traditional funeral practices—which would have involved having his head shaved and bathing with his male family members in a lake on the last day of the period of mourning—when observing the occasion of his father’s death.⁸² He obeyed but confesses to the reader that, if he had not had an older brother eligible to fulfill the traditional responsibilities in his stead, “there would have been no choice except to participate in the ritual lest we displease the ancestors and endanger the life of the family and clan.”⁸³ In this way, Magesa, while identifying fully as a Christian and practicing as a minister, still acknowledges the worldview derived from the indigenous religion of his ethnic group and views himself as positioned within that framework as well as the Christian one.

While Gifford interprets a denial of the spiritual realm to be necessary for progress in Africa, Magesa is confident that less progress will be achieved without the acknowledgement of the invisible. Magesa is of the mind that that which is unseen is typically more powerful than that which is seen.⁸⁴ For him, knowing how to relate to the various forces in the spiritual realm is crucial to individual and communal well-being, but he suggests that “only in the traditions of the people” can information be found

⁷⁶ Ibid., 100.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 101.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 98.

⁷⁹ Laurenti Magesa, *What is Not Sacred?: African Spirituality* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), 3. Cf. Gifford, *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa*, 5.

⁸⁰ Magesa, 107.

⁸¹ Ibid., 123-125.

⁸² Ibid., 84-85.

⁸³ Ibid., 85.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 34.

concerning “what these powers are and what level and type of energy they are capable of exercising.”⁸⁵ Not all spirits are the same, according to Magesa, who considers African traditional wisdom essential for determining how to interact with “the spirit of Ubuntu,” of which the fruit is that which is listed in Galatians 5, and how to interact with those that “constitute witchcraft.”⁸⁶

In addition to assistance in the “discernment of spiritual powers,”⁸⁷ Magesa emphasizes the numerous ways African indigenous culture and religion can contribute to the practice of African Christianity. One of the most striking examples he provides relates to the ritual of peace between the Luo and Maasai people of Kenya. As part of the ritual, people from both warring parties gathered on either side of a fence of poisonwood trees, which was constructed to represent “existing hostility.”⁸⁸ After slaughtering a dog, whose blood flowed onto the land on both sides of the fence, Maasai and Luo mothers momentarily lent one another their infants, so that they could each nurse the babies of the other, which “signified the establishment of blood ties.”⁸⁹

Magesa is aware that taking the steps to inculcate Christianity in Africa is fraught with risk. He is not so much concerned with the risk of syncretism but rather with that of personal rejection as communities enter the “uncertain, even destabilizing” process of inculturation.⁹⁰ In response to the reality of this risk, Magesa quotes the Rwandan proverb, “A fetus that is afraid of criticism is never born.”⁹¹ A certain amount of risk is required for redemption, he claims, backing up this assertion with the idea that Jesus himself took a risk in the process of setting humanity and creation free from destruction.⁹²

These four books, when read in short succession, provide an invaluable glimpse into the richness of African traditional spirituality, whether through the practice of African forms of Christianity or Islam or through an African indigenous religion. Peel calls attention to the multiplicity and diversity of the cults that make up Yoruba religion, and to how these have been transformed throughout time. Olupona, Abiodun, and the authors who contributed to their volume demonstrate the transformation that movement in space can add to movement in time when it comes to Yoruba religion, and the ways in which these changes can be fruitful or destructive to the endeavor to protect the integrity of what they see as a growing world religion. Gifford, like Peel, addresses the non-uniformity of African religion but chooses for his object of analysis a larger geographical area—sub-Saharan Africa, rather than just Yorubaland—and a more specific population—only Christians, rather than Christians, Muslims, and practitioners of Yoruba religion. Magesa casts a vision for what it might look like, practically speaking, for Christianity to merge in a productive way with African indigenous spirituality. All four rejected the common misconception of African indigenous spirituality as something static and unchanging; indeed, it is constantly in motion.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 112.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 159.

⁸⁹ John Mbiti, <http://www.upf.org/component/content> in Magesa, 159.

⁹⁰ Magesa, 186.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

With the exception of *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa*, I would recommend each of these books to a different audience. I found *Christianity, Islam, and Orisha-Religion* heavily theoretical but still reasonably accessible; I would therefore recommend it to intermediate undergraduate students of anthropology, history, or religious studies, as well as to more advanced scholars in related fields. *Ifá Divination, Knowledge, Power, and Performance* is interdisciplinary and is composed of chapters at a variety of levels of difficulty. For the majority of the pieces therein, I would suggest the reader have at least a minimal amount of exposure to Yoruba religion. Among the more accessible pieces were Barry Hallen's Socratic "Ifá: Sixteen Odu, Sixteen Questions" and M. Ajisebo McElwaine Abimbola's "The Role of Women in the Ifá Priesthood: Inclusion versus Exclusion." Due to Magesa's explicitly Christian focus and theological orientation, I would recommend *What is Not Sacred?* primarily to seminary students and ministers. While I appreciate Gifford's earnest concern about what he perceives to be destructive elements in certain forms of African Christianity, the dismissive tone and air of cultural superiority I inferred from *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa* give me pause when I consider how enthusiastically I might recommend the book to others.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abimbola, Wande. "Continuity and Change." In *Ifá Divination, Knowledge, Power, and Performance*, edited by Jacob K. Olupona and Rowland O. Abiodun, pp. 32-42. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2016.

Adogame, Afe. "How God became a Nigerian: Religious Impulse and the Unfolding of a Nation." In *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 2., pp. 479-498, 2010.

Adogame, Afe. "Reconfiguring the Global Religious Economy: The Role of African Pentecostalism." In *Spirit and Power: The Growth and Global Impact of Pentecostalism*, edited by Donald E. Miller, Kimon H. Sargeant, and Richard Flory, pp. 32-42. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Adogame, Afe. "The Redeemed Christian Church of God: African Pentecostalism." In *Global Religious Movements Across Borders: Sacred Service*, edited by Stephen M. Cherry and Helen Rose Ebaugh, Ashgate Inform Series on Minority Religions and Spiritual Movements, pp. 35-60. Surrey and Burlington: Ashgate, 2014.

Akinyemi, Akintunde. "Art, Culture, and Creativity." In *Ifá Divination, Knowledge, Power, and Performance*, edited by Jacob K. Olupona and Rowland O. Abiodun, pp. 340-358. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2016.

Brouwer, Steve, Paul Gifford, and Susan Rose. *Exporting the American Gospel: Global Christian Fundamentalism*. London: Routledge, 1996.

Capone, Stefania. "The Pai-de-santo and the Babalawo." In *Ifá Divination, Knowledge, Power, and Performance*, edited by Jacob K. Olupona and Rowland O. Abiodun, pp. 223-245. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2016.

Carpenter, Joel. “Universities on the Mission Field? Part II: New Evangelical Universities: Cogs in a World System, or Players in a New Game?” In *International Journal of Frontier Missions*. Volume 20, Issue 3, pp. 95-102, Fall 2003.

Gifford, Paul. *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Magesa, Laurenti. *What is Not Sacred?: African Spirituality*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013.

Maxwell, David. “In Defence of African Creativity.” *Journal Of Religion In Africa* 30, no. 4 (November 2000): 468. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed June 17, 2016).

Musoni, Phillip. “African Pentecostalism and Sustainable Development: A Study on the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa, Forward In Faith Church.” In *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, Volume 2, Issue 10, pp. 75-82, October 2013.

Olupona, Jacob K. and Rowland O. Abiodun. *Ifá Divination, Knowledge, Power, and Performance*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2016.

Peel, J. D. Y. *Christianity, Islam, and Oriṣa-Religion: Three Traditions in Comparison and Interaction*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2015.