

***Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa*, by Paul Gifford, London, Hurst, 2015, 256pp, £18.99, ISBN 978 1849044776.**

Paul Gifford is Emeritus Professor in the Department of Religions and Philosophies at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, where he specialised in contemporary African Christianity. He has been observing Christianity in Africa since the quite remarkable period of growth in new forms of charismatic Christianity that started in the early 1980s. From Western commentators, there was talk of 'empowerment' (Marshall, 1993), a kind of African 'liberation theology', or perhaps the first seeds of a new 'Protestant ethic' (Martin, 1990) that would lead Africa on a Weberian path to a new capitalist modernity. Allan Anderson, a South African Pentecostal insider, speculated that it was nothing less than an 'African Reformation' and its consequences were likely to be as significant as those following the momentous 16th century European movement which changed the shape of Christianity forever. Other African commentators wrote of the re-establishment of Christianity as a non-western religion (Bediako, 1995) that would lead to a 'theology of reconstruction' (Ka Mana, 1992) and the rebirth of a new Africa that would, it was argued, bring new hope.

In the early 1990s, the reality was an Africa far from hope that seemed, with the genocidal trauma of Burundi and Rwanda, to be imploding in despair. The expression 'failed states' was in common usage in African political science and the predominant feelings were a deep afro-pessimism and a belief that the continent had reached the nadir of its troubled post-colonial existence. The 1960s dream of independence had become a nightmare in many places less than thirty years later. The symptoms were widespread: endemic corruption, rampant neo-patrimonialism, virtual or actual state collapse, and governments that were really no longer governments at all. To use the grim expression of the late Stephen Ellis, many of the wealthiest states had become nothing more than 'egregious kleptocracies'. From Liberia across to the Great Lakes, hope was in short supply.

A result of this was the opening up of a vast religious market place where a kind of hope was the main commodity on offer. Writing in 2000, the Congolese theologian Ka Mana noted: "From north to south, from east to west, Africa presents itself as an immense land where religious exuberance invites all kinds of spiritualities: from the most respectable to the most delirious, those of venerable old institutions and those of illusion merchants, those of real seekers of God and those of the counterfeiter of the sacred, those of the profound breath of the Gospel and those of the most dangerous terrorists of the invisible." This became an area of growing interest for research and Paul Gifford became one of the leaders. Following the publication of *African Christianity: Its Public Role* (1998), he wrote an important trilogy on Liberia (2002), Ghana (2004) and Kenya

(2009). These books were the fruit of intensive field work; visiting churches in the countries under investigation and reporting on what he found there. Gifford has a deep knowledge of the wider socio-economic and development data, the field of religion and development, and the many religious NGOs that have become integral to many African economies. This approach has always informed his work. It is not to everybody's taste and he certainly has his critics. He is, to say the least, 'rational' in his approach, dedicated to 'the facts' as he finds them, and has little time for the arcanities of the 'enchanted imaginary'. In Gifford's view, this kind of esoteric thinking is precisely what is holding Africa back in its attempts to engage with modernity and find its way out of the mire of cultural, socio-economic, and political stagnation.

In his earlier work, he focused on Pentecostal ministries and churches but this book is an important change of focus as he includes the not inconsiderable role of the Catholic Church in the development and modernisation of Africa. He sets out his position early: 'My view is that Africa's only hope of joining the modern world is to transcend neo-patrimonialism, enforce the rule of law, build institutions and adopt rational bureaucratic structures, systems and procedures in education, health, agriculture, transport and so on. It is the contribution of different forms of Christianity to that agenda that I want to address here' (11). So far, so Weberian!

Phillip Jenkins (2007) has argued that the shift of global Christianity's centre of gravity to the south will have an impact similar to the Reformation, assuring its profound influence, one way or another, on the development of the world's belief and ideological systems. Gifford concurs when he notes that 'Christianity is now perhaps the most salient social force in sub-Saharan Africa' and it is precisely this 'public significance', rather than its theological 'orthodoxy' or otherwise, that is the subject of his inquiry.

Fundamental to the whole reality of Africa, in his view, is its 'enchanted' view of the world. This is the spirit world that is, in the minds of many Africans, in Eliade's term, the '*really real*'. It is the world where real *power*, spiritual power, resides, where life is played out for good and for ill and it simply cannot be ignored. It is a world of spirits and demons, witches and wizards, wonders and miracles, as well as the most dreaded curses. This has been further exacerbated in fraught and deprived urban environments where considerable frustration and social tension has arisen from often thwarted modernity, creating a deep sense of failure and alienation, and often causing extreme poverty. However, rather than turning to the kind of socio-political and economic model Gifford advocates, Africa has turned to the 'enchanted world' in its quest for 'a breakthrough', 'a miracle' that will lead it to 'prosperity', to 'victory', and even to 'glory', as is often claimed in Pentecostal churches and ministries.

In the first of two case studies, Gifford focuses on Daniel Olukoya, founder of the *Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries*, which is 'an almost pure example' of a ministry that caters to, and reinforces, this enchanted worldview. Rather than advocating a real Weberian *Entzauberung*, or disenchantment, they consolidate a magical view of the world and are, far from promoting development and social modernity, part of the forces that prevent it.

The second case study concerns David Oyedepo's very large, and international, *Living Faith Church Worldwide*, better known as *Winners' Chapel*. In some senses, this ministry is very different since it emphasises 'victory, triumph, blessing, dominion' and even a suggestion of hope. In Oyedepo's view, a Christian 'should enjoy victory unlimited and on all sides' because of his/her faith. We are born for victory not for defeat and frustration and, he proclaims, faith will overcome all obstacles (31). *Winners'*, however, strongly emphasises on Oyedepo's personal *power*, a power that appears almost messianic, as illustrated by the belief that people can be healed 'merely by touching his garments' (35). Given the parlous start of Nigeria's economy and the many problems the country faces, Oyedepo attracts a wide audience across the social classes but there is 'an incessant insistence on giving to the church and on the Bishop's anointing.' It is interesting to note that several African Pentecostal ministries have adopted the order of bishop, conferring a particular authority on the holder. While he is less insistent on malefic forces in the world, they are still present as a subtext in a discourse that can strike the outside observer as more than a little sinister. It is, in fact, laden with threat for those who do not follow the Word – as interpreted by David Oyedepo. 'Don't curse God's anointed' he warns, with the suggestion that God has been known to kill those who dare challenge Oyedepo (68).

While several authors have lauded the positive possibilities of Pentecostalism as a vehicle for a Protestant modernity in Africa, Gifford pours a very large bucket of cold water on this putative thesis. While he accepts that these churches may contribute something on three of the 'six registers' he has identified, namely motivation, entrepreneurship of a certain kind and the acquisition of some personal life skills, and positive personal behaviour, he says that adherence to the other three registers is really what is frustrating modernity and genuine development. He sees little of value in a crude *faith gospel* and the belief in '*seed-faith*' (i.e. what one sows/gives to the church one gets back a hundredfold). He is more than sceptical of the personality cult around the '*power*' of the pastor and his rituals. Finally, he is completely dismissive of the underlying *enchanted world of the spirits*, calling instead for rational analysis. Essentially, this kind of thinking can be qualified as anti-modern and, indeed, as sowing the kind of fear and trepidation that makes any kind of genuine hope and

development very difficult as it paralyses people rather than empowering them.

In the second half of the book, Gifford focuses on Catholicism since the Second Vatican Council (1963-65), the moment when the Catholic Church *more or less* came to embrace modernity in what the author describes as an 'enormously messy alignment' (73). The problem of enchantment no longer exists for Western Christianity since the process of *Entzauberung* has long been completed, even in Catholicism which was often seen as the last redoubt of this view of the world in post-Enlightenment Europe. Peter Berger has argued that secularisation was built in to the Judeo-Christian religions and that, as he colourfully put it, 'Christianity had been its own gravedigger.'

As one of this book's blurbs points out: 'official Catholicism, totally disenchanted, long associated with schools and hospitals, is now involved in development of every kind, from microfinance to election monitoring, from conflict resolution to human rights.' While often criticised by secular bodies as anti-modern for its views on reproductive health, the situation on the ground is very different as the church is a fully-fledged member of the wide development project. Effectively, there has been what is described here as the 'NGOisation' (102) of Catholicism as the church has become a favoured interlocutor and agent of secular organisations like the EU and the UN, while also having its own considerable resources. It is seen as having the capacity to provide effective delivery of development aid where states often fail to do so. Gifford suggests that there has been an 'internal secularisation' (157) of the church as its vision has become increasingly 'this worldly' in the Weberian sense. '[T]his Christianity brings not so much redemption as development. It is associated less with grace than with science and technology. It operates with a vocabulary not so much of atonement, sacraments, conversion, as one of micro-finance, capacity building, and women's empowerment. The virtues it promotes are accountability, transparency, and good governance as much as faith, hope, and charity. Its sacraments are as much computer software and SUVs as bread, wine, and oil. Its register is not so much theology as social science. Its level of engagement is as much the natural and the human as the supernatural or the spiritual. The aid flows and what they involve have become increasingly significant for, even constitutive of, the Catholic Church' (103). This may be somewhat overstating the point but it certainly represents an important aspect of the Catholic Church's involvement in Africa.

It is suggested that this comes at the price of failing to address the 'religious' needs of so many African Christians. It can be argued that this is precisely what has opened up the religious market space for those churches who retain and promote a more enchanted view of the world. There is also evidence of this in Latin America where Pentecostalism, it

can be argued, has displaced liberation theology. Gifford notes that while Catholic authors deplore certain aspects of what is happening in the Pentecostal churches, they fail to challenge them seriously and acquiesce in a kind of unquestioning *modus vivendi* that avoids the real issues.

The reality is that popular African Catholicism, as well as other mainline, historical churches, still share in an enchanted view of the world at their grassroots - if only to keep their 'market share'! While doing field work in Africa, I encountered a Methodist pastor involved in a 'healing and deliverance' ministry. When I registered some surprise at this, his response was that he had to become involved 'in this kind of gymnastics' in order to meet the needs of his members who had begun to drift to the newer churches in search of solutions to their existential problems. The Catholic Archdiocese of Cotonou (Republic of Benin, population c. 1m), at the same time, had four exorcists to deal with spirit possession in services bringing together several thousand people every week. While the ecclesiastical authorities had serious reservations, they seemed to be more or less powerless to do anything about it as this was apparently what the religious market demanded and several priests were quite willing to provide it. Gifford looks at this 'enchanted Catholicism' and its consequences noting that despite a strong emphasis on the 'inculturation' and development of a uniquely African Christianity (one of its major themes), African theology still has as its 'main focus precisely the opposite, bringing Africa into the modern world through development.' However, as he points out, the theologians have, to a great extent, left the faithful behind, largely because the debate takes place amongst a certain intellectual, theologically secularised elite and 'entirely ignores the religious imagination' of the majority of the faithful.

As Christopher Clapham of the Cambridge Centre of African Studies has pointed out, Paul Gifford has a 'sober commitment to modernity' *in the singular*. He dismisses any talk of *multiple modernities* and adopts David S. Landes' definition of modernisation as 'something like that combination of changes - in the mode of production and government, in the social and institutional order, in the corpus of knowledge and in attitudes and values - that makes it possible for a society to hold its own in the twenty-first century; that is to compete on even terms in the generation of material and cultural wealth, to sustain independence, and to promote and accommodate to further change.' It is a combination that continues to elude many African states and dog their development.

There is an echo of the famous David Livingstone, missionary and explorer, in Gifford's voice. Livingstone is often accused of being a conscious promoter of European colonisation of Africa in suggesting that the way forward for the continent was 'Christianity, commerce and civilisation', by which, it can be argued, Livingstone meant a genuine

modernisation. The missionary-explorer believed that the key to Africa's future was the stimulation of indigenous development and good governance, which is surely not far removed from what development agencies of all hues claim to be seeking today. Gifford, indeed, is not far from that 'civilising mission' advocated by 19th century Protestant missionaries when he identifies the 'planks of modernity' as 'education, science, technology, meritocracy, democratic reform, rule of law, free-ish markets and trade' (154). It is certainly an argument with a lot of merit. I am curious to know how much new information and communications technology will contribute to this. Working in an internet café in Cotonou (Benin), I once checked the URL addresses to see what sites people were browsing. I was fascinated to discover that they were almost exclusively shopping. My most recent communications with Africa have been almost entirely through social media and, again, the content and exchange of ideas is revealing. Could it be that we have reached that moment when new ideas really take root? There is little doubt young Africans seek to be part of modernity. Having lived in Africa through some of the darkest years of the continent's history (1977-2002) without ever having succumbed to afro-pessimism, due to many of the people I got to know at close quarters in their daily struggles, I can only hope that a new Africa can emerge on its own terms. I like to think that I have seen some green shoots, notably in Ghana and Benin. This book is certainly an important challenge to the churches, and to wider African society, as it seeks a real way forward.

Patrick CLAFFEY

Wallace Adjunct Assistant Professor at the Department of Religions and Theology, Trinity College Dublin specialising in Asian and African Christianity

***Religion, Gender and the Public Sphere*, by Niamh Reilly and Stacey Scriver (eds.) New York and London, Routledge, 2014, 307pp, £95 (hardback), ISBN 0-415-4384-3.**

Situating itself at the intersection of religion, gender, and the public sphere, this book's project is to critically examine established ways of thinking about this volatile conjunction in the contemporary period. Crucial contexts include hegemonic neoliberalism, globalization, major immigration, especially into Europe, multiplying multi-cultural milieus, the post-9/11 conflation of Islam with terrorism, and moral panics about Islam, often focusing on gender binaries. Furthermore, the powerful re-emergence of various religions in recent decades has put significant pressure on gender roles and relations, private and public, and on

women's rights. This has called into question key narratives and theories of secularization as enlightenment, on which both liberal-democratic modernity and contemporary feminisms have been founded. The re-mobilization of the older "clash of civilizations" thesis (West as rational, Islam as irrational other) has also enabled the deployment of stated concern for women's rights as a stalking-horse for underlying prejudices, enabling punitive policies towards migrants, and even the waging of war in Afghanistan.

The collection is an important and timely intervention in contemporary debates on a nexus of vital issues. It ably negotiates the complexities of its theme, maintains the integrity of its project and greatly elucidates the main questions. Reilly's Introduction is an intellectually and ideologically penetrating essay on the intersection of these issues (1-17). Short section introductions and a brief Conclusion by both editors organize the complex strands of the topic. Three to five brief chapters make up each of five sections: I: Identity, Religion, Migration, and Multiculture; II: Contesting Religious Subjectivities; III: Religion, Law, and Human Rights; IV: Religion, States, and Civil Society; and V: Researching Religion, Constructing Knowledge: Theoretical Revisions and Methodological Challenges.

Key imperatives of the book are to interrogate the paradigm of secularism as a core tenet of modernity and to include gender as a category within dominant masculine and bourgeois theorization of the public sphere (Habermas, Charles Taylor), both in the much-altered contexts in Reilly 7-11). Reilly carefully traces a fault line between poststructuralist feminisms (e.g. Joan Scott, Butler) and those maintaining a critical-emancipatory paradigm (such as Nancy Fraser). Her own position, argued with clarity and conviction, favours the critical-emancipatory, though this must be continually reconfigured and actively contextualized, to achieve inclusivity and avoid domination by narrow Enlightenment rationality. Reilly sees an onus on the proponents of the secular democratic state to acknowledge and defend its status, not as inevitable but as a normative political-social ideal, and in the present and future to define its parameters and modalities in non-oppressive ways (5).

The volume offers examples of different approaches to these complex problematics. Many chapters examine concepts of secularity and narratives of secularization; these are variously explored, interrogated, critiqued, and defended. Several contributors deconstruct hitherto dominant narratives representing secularization as synonymous with advancing enlightenment and liberation. Rather, they argue, in globalized postmodernity the self-proclaimed secular Western state with its accompanying values of rationality and purported gender neutrality is in practice co-constituted with ethnic, gendered and religious Others, in a system of racialised difference: a system depending upon the othering of

women, sexual minorities, and - in Europe - immigrants, especially Muslims.

Sarah Bracke's chapter effectively exposes blind spots and ahistorical constructions in the convergence of *laïcité* with *mixité* (diversity, especially co-education) in contemporary France, drawing on Scott's powerful analysis of the politics of *hijab* debates (257-267). Bracke finds that in France the secular is too often affirmed as an unmarked standard (257-67). She draws on Talal Asad's problematization of the secular, arguing that it is itself "an epistemic category as well as a mode of governmentality" and a "set of institutions, ideas, and affective orientations" which intersect with gender (258). She also questions the "ingrained assumption" that secularism is an evident, almost natural, ally to women's emancipation & gender equality, citing Butler, Scott, and Jasbir Puar. She sharply interrogates the normative valorization of co-education in France (actually "rather new"), teasing out its occluded effect of othering Muslims as a threat to social cohesion. She critiques the all-spaces-must-be-gender-mixed advocacy of the feminist organization *Ni Putes Ni Soumises*, running counter to the legacy of positive women-only spaces in second-wave feminism (261-2). In Bracke's view, French secularism merely *seems* to transcend differences with its "abstract individualism" (Scott), while in fact inscribing differences in the nation-state, since the notion of individuality invoked is firmly masculine, bourgeois, and ethnically constituted and works to exclude what is marked as non-French.

Secularity, however, is not a monolith, but varies in character, with different versions of church-state relations in principle and in practice among liberal democracies. As Reilly notes, the containment of religion to a private sphere of personal and family life was a reaction to fears that autocratic religious authority would fuse with state power: fears, one may add, easily understood in twentieth-century Ireland (5). Such containment was incompletely realised in practice, as the visibility of religious actors on national occasions, especially of mourning and commemoration, in many countries, shows. Christianity's presence may be vestigial, but it still speaks of the foundational role of religion in most states, a situation emphasized by the recent inclusion of representatives of several faiths on such stages.

There are robust defences of critical-feminist goals. One is the superb chapter by Yuval-Davis, author of the classic *Gender and Nation* (1997). Hers is the most compelling analysis of the resurgent power of fundamentalist religions in different societies and regions, pinpointing the troubling implications for women's and human rights generally of this power, which she reads as ultimately and emphatically political in character (21-42). Likewise, "disbelief", says Naomi Goldenberg crisply, "has to be cultivated with more dedication" ("Demythologizing Gender

and Religion within Nation-States: Towards a Politics of Disbelief" (248-255). 253). Like other contributors, she insists on the patriarchal character of religion(s) in general, calling for "a revival of healthy scepticism" in feminism about the role of religion in "enforcing male dominance throughout a culture". Yuval-Davis instances, in contemporary Britain and France, the practice of embedding faith organizations within civil-society structures; this accords powerful male religious authority-figures privileged roles in such state contexts, rendering them *de facto* representatives of all persons adhering to specific religions, quite without assuring representativity (38-9).

Goldenberg also critiques a renewed or persisting tendency to accept religion on its own terms and protests the "respectful deference" accorded to religious terminology. This, she observes, permits religions to function almost as "vestigial states", enjoying influence on public governance, especially relating to private, or family, life including sexual behaviour (254). Many chapters exemplify how this bears especially upon women, whose lives and bodies are overseen and regulated by religious leaders overwhelmingly likely to be men. As Reilly observes, "politicized autocratic movements", seeking in recent decades to impose "literalist and ultraconservative versions of religious teaching through state law and policy", most often target "the sexual and reproductive freedom of women and sexual minorities": recent and current acts of "Islamic State" offer appalling examples, as does state policy in Russia, informed by resurgent conservative Christianity.

These arguments complement Breda Gray's well-informed analysis of the prominent role played by religious organizations in migrant integration in Ireland. Gray provides a detailed example of Yuval-Davis' remark that "religious devotion and neoliberalism can be seen to go hand in hand", in the post-Soviet and post-9/11 world (31). Gray illuminates the active functioning of religious-activist groups in Ireland in the postmodern context of "neoliberal rationalities and tactics of governance", exemplified by the "social partnership" arrangements regulating labour in the 1980s and 1990s, founded on concepts of community and, ultimately, patriarchal structures (212). Another specific instance of the long reach of religious authority in the contemporary world is Anka Grzywacz's chapter showing prohibitive Catholic Church power over sexual and reproductive rights in Poland, a power largely established post-1989 and sustained at the highest international level by key Vatican influence at the UN (222-231).

Both Gray and Grzywacz vest signs of hope in activism for women's rights and for gender and reproductive freedoms, Grzywacz focusing on the abortion-reform organization "Catholics for Choice"; Yuval-Davis also notes the positive role of AWID, the Association for Women's Rights in Development, the coalition of activist development

workers in 160 countries which gathers data on women's rights in fundamentalist contexts (41). These moments of optimism echo the positive approach largely shared by contributors in the fascinating "Contesting Religious Subjectivities" section, crisply introduced by Eilís Ward, where alternative paths towards women's empowerment, the validation of transsexuality in earlier Judaeo-Christian understanding, and autonomous forms of spiritual creativity are luminously explored across Christian, Buddhist, and Sikh faiths (71-132).

The law and human rights section includes detailed analyses by Loenen (136-142) Demir Gürsel (155-167), and Stuart (180-191) of the trumping of *women's* human rights in European Court of Human Rights judgements (2008-10) by foundational *national* narratives of states in respect of religion, whatever these may be, even where they are diametrically opposed, as in the case of Ireland on the one hand and Turkey and France on the other: Catholicism and secularity respectively. Seeming paradoxical to the lay eye, this answers to statist structures. In "The Right to Freedom of Religion: Human Right or Male Right?", Stuart shows the "male lens" through which questions of religion, society and law are implicitly seen and therefore presented to the court. In these instances and others, the intersection of religion/secularity with gender is a site of evident anxiety about the sustaining of the social order in a given state. The ECHR's "margin of appreciation" concept has regularly been used to privilege state exclusions, bans and gender arrangements over the experiences and rights of individual applicants seeking to vindicate their human rights and religious or reproductive freedoms. The cases respectively concerned dress and religiously-based state prohibition of abortion.

The "situated gaze" (42) and the study of women as "embedded subjects" (3) are indispensable in understanding the book's topic: accordingly, these perspectives recur throughout the collection, variously phrased and conceived. Tina Beattie, discussing the abortion rights debate in Catholicism, describes the "acute dilemmas faced by religious women... in negotiating a space of human flourishing and ethical accountability" between "secular feminists and religious authorities" (73). Beattie is registering those tensions between "liberal, rights-based understandings of freedom" and respect for women's individual choices identified by Reilly at the outset (3). Sawitri Saharso's chapter illuminates this problem with an intelligent comparison of multicultural feminist perspectives, persuasively preferring Anne Phillips' contextual approach over principle-driven and Habermasian democratic-deliberative positions (24-9). Both liberalism and culture must be contextually understood, with respect for culturally diverse individuals, not reified recognition of "things called cultures". Wherever located, we are all culturally constituted individuals. Yafa Shanneik's tactful chapter on Muslim migrant women in Ireland is

informed by such an approach, focusing on detailed experiential contexts (58-67). However, both Goldenberg and Yuval-Davis perceive a risk of valorization of women's religious practices within male-dominated religious contexts as forms of self-empowerment without sufficient problematization of these contexts. Both question the capacity of a "politics of piety" (in Saba Mahmood's phrase) genuinely to foster women's autonomous subjectivity (40, 253).

It is impossible to do justice to the full richness of this collection, or to describe or even name all the contributors, widely located and speaking from so many contexts, regions, and faith backgrounds. But the editors have done an exemplary job, eliciting a high degree of clarity and cogency from all twenty. The volume challenges one's prejudices, informs one's thinking, and powerfully illuminates its topic.

Patricia COUGHLAN

School of English, University College Cork