

BOOK REVIEW

Adriaan Van Klinken and Ezra Chitando. *Reimagining Christianity and Sexual Diversity in Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021. 256 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$29.95. Paper. ISBN: 978-0197619995.

Reimagining Christianity and Sexual Diversity in Africa can be read as a companion to two earlier volumes edited by the authors, Adriaan Van Klinken and Ezra Chitando, on the topic of homosexuality and Christianity in Africa: *Christianity and Controversies over Homosexuality in Contemporary Africa* (Routledge, 2016) and *Public Religion and the Politics of Homosexuality in Africa* (Routledge, 2016). While those books focused on the recent intensification of political debates surrounding same-sex sexuality across Africa, the present volume engages instead with the diversity of Christian views and activism in support of sexual minorities on the continent. Providing detailed, in-depth analysis of the work of African Christian intellectuals, Christian organizations, and queer African artists, this volume contributes significant insight into the viewpoints of African Christians in ways that challenge popular representations of Christian adherents. The authors seek to trouble the assumption that African Christians are a monolithic group who are, by default, opposed to the acceptance of queer sexuality and sexual rights. The book will be of great interest to scholars of Christianity in Africa because of the detailed analysis of the diversity of beliefs and religious arguments regarding sexuality that currently circulate in Africa.

The first section of the book discusses the work and writings of key African Christian intellectuals, including the South African Nobel Peace Prize recipient Desmond Tutu, the feminist Ghanaian theologian Mercy Oduyoye, Jean-Blaise Kenmogne (a Cameroonian Lutheran minister), and Musa W. Dube (a feminist biblical scholar from Botswana). The selection of scholars is diverse, ranging from well-known to lesser-known Christian intellectuals who hail from different African Christian backgrounds and regions (though the book in general focuses more intensely on Protestant Christians than on Catholics). A running theme of this section details how these scholars deploy ideas about African humanism, framing a rejection of homosexual humanity as a rejection of African ideals of Ubuntu, a shared sense of human belonging and communitas, and related cultural values.

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These chapters provide a strong grounding for the core argument of this book: that African Christians have been actively countering the rising politicization of homophobia on the continent in recent years by deploying human rights and justice arguments that are rooted in distinctly African cultural perspectives and histories. This is perhaps the most valuable contribution of this volume, as it provides a window into the ways Africans themselves—including religious Africans—are resisting and recasting ideas about African sexuality, gender, and rights in ways that undermine popular portrayals of African cultures as distinctly unaccepting of sexual diversity. For scholars of African Christianity, these discussions are especially engaging, as they expose a far more complex picture of Christianity on the continent than is common in many explorations of the recent debates over homosexuality in Africa.

The second section of the book builds on these established themes to explore the work of Christian NGOs committed to the work of defending the rights of sexual minorities. It focuses on two NGOs, the World Council of Churches' HIV advocacy group, and a black Pentecostal organization based in the US that works throughout Africa. Both of these chapters provide a sense of the growth of pan-African activism based on Christian traditions in support of sexual minorities.

The third part of the book offers an analysis of the creative work of queer Africans, especially those who incorporate Christian themes in their works. Similar to the other sections of the book, these chapters highlight the ways religious belief and Christian theology can be used to craft arguments in support of sexual diversity, often in ways that affirm African social and cultural ideals. The authors carry through their argument that Christianity provides a potent space for asserting queer African identities by highlighting how artists deploy Christian themes and Biblical references in film, poetry, and memoir writing.

This book makes an important and timely intervention in the study of African Christianity, especially as it concerns the political role that Christians have played in current social debates on the continent. One potential weakness of the book is that, when read in isolation from the authors' earlier volumes, it lacks much context for the recent rise of homophobia in Africa. Some background to the backlash against homosexuality—its roots and significance—would have made the book more useful to non-specialists interested in religion's role in social movements on the continent generally and as regards issues of gender and sexuality over the last three decades more specifically. But that omission notwithstanding, the volume is a valuable, unique, and much-needed contribution to our understanding of African Christianity and sexuality at the present, contested, moment.

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