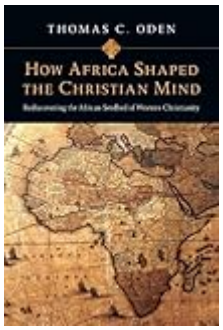
HOW AFRICA SHAPED THE CHRISTIAN MIND

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Categories: Africa, Reviews



How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind is a bit of a mixed bag. It is partly a demonstration of the pivotal role that Africa played in the early history of the church, partly a plea for scholars (especially African ones) to do fundamental research into early African Christian literature and archeology and partly a lament that there has been a conspiracy among Western intellectuals to downplay the importance of Africa to the Church.

Within the book, these three themes are intertwined fairly freely and at times it is rather confused and it can be hard to tell where the argument is going at any given point. Some more rigorous editing would have made all the difference to what has the makings of a fascinating book. As it stands, it is hard to give it an unqualified recommendation.

That being said; I still think that this is worth reading if you have an interest in Church history or Africa.

The author is passionate about the important role that Africa played in the early history of Christianity and his enthusiasm permeates every page of the book. He is obviously extremely frustrated about the way in which he feels that Western historians have downplayed the importance of the African contribution. My problem is that he seems to be complaining about something I have never noticed. Origen, Athanasius and Augustine are among the most important theologians of the church and all three were Africans. I don't think anyone has ever really disputed this. However, perhaps I would feel different if I were African myself, or if I had been exposed to some of the writers and theologians that are mentioned in this book.

To my mind, the most interesting feature of the book is the idea that African Christianity needs to rediscover its own historic roots in the early church. So much of missionary Christianity brings with it the baggage of the Reformation and the enlightenment; neither of which are directly relevant to the African experience. A number of other writers have said similar things, most notably Kwame Bediako in Jesus in Africa: The Christian Gospel in African History and Experience but few have injected as much passion into the discussion as Thomas oden.

There are also some very good suggestions as to how the experience of the historic churches in Africa, which have coexisted with Islam for a millennium, could serve the wider church today.

The book closes with a long review of the major events which occurred in Africa during the first thousand years of Christian history. This is worth the price of the book forÂ Church historians.