LAMIN SANNEH: 1942-2019

Posted on January 8, 2019 by Eddie

One of the most important Christian thinkers and influencers in the world died yesterday. Sadly, most evangelicals in Britain will not even have heard of him.
Category: Church: World

Lamin Sanneh, who died yesterday, was a gracious, thoughtful man who did a huge amount to revolutionise our understanding of the nature and importance of African Christianity. Born in The Gambia, Sanneh grew up in a Muslim family, but became a Christian (despite a methodist missionary discouraging him from taking this step) as a young man. His autobiography, Summoned from the Margin (reviewed here), tells the story of his life and is a book that anyone interested in world Christianity should read.

People more qualified than I will write proper obituaries, but I just want to put on record my debt to this remarkable and gracious man. You can tell the influence he has had on me by the number of posts on this blog which make reference to him (you can find them all here).

I've put links to some of his books below. Anyone who has an interest in Bible translation MUST read, Translating the Message, it isn't an easy book, but it is absolutely essential reading for anyone who wants to understand the importance of Bible translation and its impact across the globe. I would also argue that anyone who is interested in understanding Christianity in the world today (and that includes people whose focus is purely in the West) MUST read Whose Religion is Christianity? This is a much easier book, presented as a series of questions and answers and one which should be considered essential reading by pastors, teachers and missionaries.

Let me close with one of my favourite quotes from the great man.

> *Because of its concern for translations that employ the speech of the common workaday world, Christian proclamation has had a populist element. In many traditional societies, religious language has tended to be confined to a small elite of professionals. In extreme cases, this language is shrouded under the forbidding sanctions of secret societies and shrines, access to which is through induced trances or a magical formula. The Christian approach to translatability strikes at the heart of such gnostic tendencies, first by contending that the greatest and most profound religious truths are compatible with everyday language, and second, by targeting ordinary men and women as worthy bearers of the religious message. This approach introduced a true democratic spirit into hitherto closed and elitist societies, with women in particular discovering an expanded role.*

From Christian Missions and The Western Guilt Complex.