

## Preface

Nothing has bound Africa and Europe more together than the history of Christianity. From Paradise onwards the Church has been the communion of believers. As the Body of Jesus Christ she started in Jerusalem. Through the proclamation of the Gospel the Church reached soon parts of Africa and the Atlantic Coast, from where – after the Middle Ages and particularly in the 19th and 20th centuries – she took deep root in Sub-Saharan Africa. Today, in post-modern times African Christianity is being challenged to re-plant the Church in secularized Europe.

This textbook for learners and teachers of the History of the Church focuses on the West and the South, on Europe and Africa, the continents whose histories have been increasingly intertwined since Antiquity. Since the 1960s the classical dependence of the South on the North has changed dramatically. Kalu, when stressing the growing importance of African Church History, refers to the Afro-American Liberian missionary and statesman Edward Wilmot Blyden (†1912), who ‘foresaw the coming shift in the centre of gravity of Christianity from the north to the south Atlantic, and its import for African Christianity’.<sup>1</sup> I would add that the future of European Christianity largely depends on a much-needed shift to mission-mindedness in the African churches.

The present book is based on two textbooks<sup>2</sup> that I composed before 2007 for theology students in an African context. They have been widely used at various institutions for theological and pastoral training, particularly in Malawi. Their titles are used for the two parts in the present work, *From Galilee to the Atlantic*, and *The Faith Moves South*. The idea was born when I taught at Zomba Theological College, an institute for the training of ministers of the Word of God in South-Central Africa, mainly in Malawi. I arranged the text in such a way that it may be profitable for students at tertiary institutions of theological education. The prescribed curricula of theological colleges in Central Africa were taken into account. However, I trust that the book will also serve students in a wider region within or outside Africa. It is meant as an introduction to the study of the field of Church History from the New Testament era to the end of the 20th century, especially targeting Western Europe and Southern Africa. I am confident it is a tool for (future) pastors who are called to proclaim the wonderful acts of God, who in Jesus Christ, through the Word and the Holy Spirit, planted His Church, and continues to look after it. Moreover, I trust that any individual having an interest in the History of the Church will find the book useful.

Writing a textbook is not possible without using the work of others, which I have profusely done, as can be seen in the footnotes. Bibliographies and footnotes contain literature for further study. In the bibliographies, I have consciously mentioned English titles only, except for a few titles in Chichewa, as this book was originally written for students in South-Central Africa. The illustrations I mainly collected from various free sites at the Internet. Specific sources were only mentioned when apart from the website address more details were given and when copyright-regulations were referred to. If

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<sup>1</sup> Kalu, ‘Ethiopianism’, in: Kalu, O.U. (ed.), *African Christianity: An African Story*, University of Pretoria, 2005, p.272.

<sup>2</sup> Steven Paas, *From Galilee to the Atlantic: A History of the Church in the West*, Zomba: Kachere 2006 [first 2004] and *The Faith Moves South: A History of the Church in Africa*, Zomba: Kachere, 2006.

unintentionally some pictures have not been duly accounted for, please accept my apologies.

Remarks and questions from students throughout the years have helped me to improve the text. Zikomo kwambiri abale!<sup>3</sup>

I am especially indebted to Mr. Andrew Goodson, Head of Classics at *Kamuzu Academy*, in Mtnthama, Malawi. He contributed greatly to the weeding out of writing errors and style mistakes while his critical questions and remarks enabled me to improve the logical flow and content of the text.

I gratefully cite Rev. Mark Thiesen (MA), formerly Director of *Namikango Mission* in Thondwe, Malawi, now Church of Christ pastor in the USA. He carefully checked most of the text and he made various suggestions for correction and clarification.

Rev. Dr. Willie Zeze, Presbyterian minister of the Malawian CCAP, now teaching at *Mukhanyo Theological Seminary* in South Africa assisted by proofreading some chapters and he suggested important additions to chapter 1, on historiography, which I gratefully incorporated.

Rev. Willem-Henri, den Hartog, Director of the Distance Department of the *Namibia Evangelical Theological Seminary* obliged me with some valuable corrections and additions.

For part II, on Africa, I owe particular gratitude to Prof. Dr. Klaus Fiedler, of the *University of Malawi* (now of *Mzuzu University*), who is an experienced teacher of Church History and Missiology, specialised in Africa. He helped by advising, proof reading, and making corrections and improvements, showing his hand especially in sections of chapters 51, 55, 57, and 60.

Dr. Harvey Kwiyani – the Executive Director of *Missio Africanus*, a Journal of African Missiology – contributed meaningfully to the concluding part of the book. I also thank Dr. Gideon van der Watt of *Christian Literature Fund*, the Publisher of this book, for weeding out writing errors and punctuation mistakes.

At early stages of the composition of this work the following persons, mentioned in alphabetical order, read parts of the text, made corrections and gave valuable advice: Ms Elizabeth Ritchie (MA), Rev. David Kawanga (MA), Mr. Frackson Ntawanga, Mr. Arie van der Poel (MA).

Despite these important contributions, of course, the responsibility for the contents and the language of this book is mine.

My brother Wim Paas made the layout of the book and assisted in finding useful illustrations and inserting them properly into the text.

My wife Rita has played an important role. In many aspects she has facilitated my functioning. I owe her much for her love, loyalty and practical wisdom.

We praise God who in Christ, through the Word and the Spirit, is known to us as our dear heavenly Father. In Jesus Christ He revealed Himself by entering human history as the Son of Man, the Alpha and the Omega. His Name be glorified in the lives of the readers of this book.

Steven Paas

Veenendaal 2016

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<sup>3</sup> Chichewa for: Thank you very much brethren!

# 1. Characteristics of Church History

## 1.1. Defining Church History

This book is an introduction to the study of Church History. It is particularly focused on Western Europe and Africa, but the birth site of the Church in the Holy Land and its early extension to other parts of the Near East and later to America<sup>1</sup> have certainly not been left out of sight. Students who are entirely new to the field of Church History may feel like strangers in a foreign land. They need an introduction to the introduction. Therefore, the first chapter provides some preliminary notes and remarks, which will hopefully facilitate a first encounter with the subject.

Definitions of Church History differ greatly, depending on the writer's view of Theology, of the Church and of History. At the outset we should take note that the compound term Church History suggests that the Church unquestionably has a story. Let us look at how some writers have defined the term.

H.M. Gwatkin defines Church History as the 'spiritual side of the history of civilized people ever since the Master's coming.'<sup>2</sup> One would wonder how the word 'civilized people' could be a synonym of the Christian community, because those parts of the world that have become known as civilized often have not behaved in a Christian manner. Therefore, a more neutral definition should be preferred, for example describing Church History as the story of the wider Christian community and its relationship to the rest of the world throughout the ages.

For A.M. Renwick and A.M. Herman Church History is 'an account of a success and failure of the Church in carrying out Christ's great commission to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature and teach all nations.'<sup>3</sup> The use of the word 'account' intelligibly indicates that Church History is both a process and a product of past events, both in and with regard to the Church.

Earle E. Cairns suggests that Church History is 'the interpreted and organised story of the redemption of mankind and the earth.'<sup>4</sup> In this definition, Church History comprises interpreted historical data of the origin, process and impact of Christian faith on society, based on organised information gathered by scientific method from



*Eusebius of Caesarea (c.260-c.340) is called the 'Father of Church History', because of his Ecclesiastical History, which is seen as 'the principal source for the history of Christianity from the Apostolic Age to his own day'.*

<sup>1</sup> For example: the Middle East, Eastern Europe, America.

<sup>2</sup> H.M. Gwatkin, *Early Church History to A.D. 313*, London: Macmillan, vol.1, p.4.

<sup>3</sup> A. M. Renwick and A.M. Herman, *The Story of the Church*, Leicester: Intervarsity Press, 1997. p.7,8; cf. Mk.16:15; Mt.18:19.

<sup>4</sup> Cairns, E.E., *Christianity through the Ages: A History of the Christian Church*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, p.17,18.

archeological, documentary, or living sources. Given this, studying Church History is much more than an analysis of past data, because it is connected to the story of salvation of people through the blood of Jesus Christ.

Philipp Schaff considers Church History in an academic sense, as a theological discipline, a faithful and lifelike description of the origin and progress of the heavenly kingdom, aiming to reproduce in thought and to embody in language its outward and inward development down to the present time. On the one hand, Church History shows how Christianity spreads over the world and how it penetrates, transforms, and sanctifies the individual, communities and societies. On the other hand, it records the deeds of the heroes of faith as well as the acts of agents of the devil against the Kingdom of God. Considering these descriptions, we suggest the following definition.

Church History is a comprehensive description of the past progress of the Church of God, through Jesus Christ in the midst of this world, by the power of the Word and of the Spirit.

Some readers might question the word *progress* in this definition. Perhaps they would prefer the word *development*. We have not chosen *development*, because we want to evade its *evolutionary connotations*. In our view, the Church of the 21st century is not more advanced in quality than the Church of Antiquity. The term progress seems more fitting, because it denotes deployment, expansion or extension, which does not necessarily include qualitative evolutionary progress. Our definition implies that Church History belongs to *Secular History* in general (a), and also that it belongs to *Theology* (b). Let us look at these two aspects.

#### **a. Church History Belongs to Secular History**

Whether history in general should be defined as Secular History is debatable. It cannot be doubted, however, that history in general is intertwined with Church History or the other way round. But first we should address this question: What is History? We follow Elliot, who distinguishes three elements: (1) historical events themselves, (2) communication of historical events, and (3) historiography.

##### *Historical Events*

These are significant events that happened at certain dates in connection with certain persons. Some events have meaning in themselves; other events need to be highlighted and explained for their full meaning to be understood. Among historians, the choices of events and opinions on their effects can be very different.

Which events are significant? Those that influenced, or are influencing people? Those that are recorded and communicated most? Those that produced, have produced or are producing ideas?<sup>5</sup>

Christians are right in saying that History in some way or another reflects God's Providence, i.e. God's acts in the world. But how does God act in the History of the world? Does He act in History only through His Church, or also through other agents? Does God follow or lead events? Is History worked out by Him from a *starting point* in the past, as most historians have assumed? Or is it the reflection of an *aim* in the future?

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. M.W.Elliot, 'The Meaning of History', an address at Schloss Mittersil, August 1997.

Some Church historians such as J. MacIntyre believe that there is in History a *telos* (or purpose) which is being worked out and which is a projection in time of the *eschaton* (the last days), which stands at the end or at the edge of time.<sup>6</sup>

### *The Communication of Events*

This is the written or oral account of events. Its quantity and quality depend on the geographical and chronological place of the teller or describer, and on his or her scholarly abilities. Accounts of events also depend on the researcher's philosophical and religious assumptions and concepts. For example, among scholars there are different expectations as to the end of History. Will all events end by a man-made disaster or by divine interference, or is there no end to history?

Meaningful communication of historical accounts ends when historians are unable to see patterns, an intelligible order. This can happen when researchers are lacking information, because they are too far from events and primary sources. It can also happen, though, when they have too much information, because they are too close to the events. Some researchers are so biased by pre-determined conclusions or outlook that they can relate events only from a skewed perspective and not see other interpretations.

### *Terms Used in Historiography*

Historiography is critical reflection on the way historical events have been studied and communicated throughout history. Elliot describes two extreme views in historiography: *historismus* and *historicism*.

What Elliot calls *Historismus* is the belief that history is essential for understanding human beings and developments within cultures. *Historicism* is the idea that the only meaning we can get from history is what we already think. Historiography has shown the important difference between circular and linear views of history. History writers in Antiquity generally considered the cohesion of events as a circular pattern, in which history is more or less repeated. From Augustine onwards there has been an awareness of continuation from one set of events to another as a linear movement. Historiography also accounts for the many attempts that have been made to divide history into periods.

Here are some examples: (a) the Kingdoms prophesied by Daniel; (b) six periods of 1000 years; (c) three periods of successively: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit of the Law; (d) division according to the centuries; (e) Antiquity (before 500 AD); Middle Ages (Early-/ High-/ Late-, 500-1500 AD); Modern Times (after 1500); (f) division into a period of allegedly uncritical history writing, and the Enlightenment (17th and 18th century) as the beginning of the era of supposedly critical history writing.

Depending on their varying views as to events, communication of events, and historiography, historians have come to very different conceptions of history. We would suggest the following definition:

History is a comprehensive survey of past events and movements in the divinely created reality of nature and humanity, a survey which within the framework of God's providence has significance for our understanding of the past and of the present, and that guides us when thinking about the future.

Let us have a closer look at this tentative definition of the subject of history and assess how its readers can benefit from it.

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<sup>6</sup> J. MacIntyre, *Christian Doctrine of History*, Oliver & Boyd, Edinburgh, 1957, pp.88,89.

*History is a comprehensive survey.* This means that the science of history aims at giving an intelligible story of events, dealing with as many aspects as possible, written, oral, pictorial, image, and even musical.

*History concerns previous facts and movements.* Historians study the events and movements of the past that we are able to know and to assess from the various sources of history. They keep in mind that these sources are varied and also limited. This also applies to the historian's ability to research them.

*History is about the facts of divinely created nature and humanity.* Historical facts derive their significance from God's creation of heaven and earth.

*History presupposes God's providence.* Although often not seen or not acknowledged by man, history happens within the framework of God's plan.

*History aims at understanding the past.* Students of history have to realise that the past has its own right, and that it has to be understood as being detached from the present.

*History leads to understanding the present.* When understood in its own right the past makes the present situation more transparent. Knowledge of the present is inseparably interwoven with comprehension of the past.

*History facilitates thinking about the future.* Without an understanding of past and present, man is blind with regard to the future.

Secular History cannot deny its dependence on the Bible, nor can it deny its connection with Church History. The account of God's revelation in the Holy Scriptures and in nature is the pilot history. There would have been no history without it. All history is rooted in it.

From a Christian perspective, Church History sheds light on other branches of the history of humanity and nature. The significance and place of Secular History in its varied aspects become clearer in the light of Church History. This helps to realise that 'the Church is the cork on which the world floats'. Church History also profits from Secular History. Knowledge of aspects of Secular History is indispensable when describing the history of the Church. In the conception of a Christian Secular History and Church History, both serve the honour of God and His Kingdom. This is not to deny the principal difference between Secular History and Church History.

The Church is a plantation by God in the midst of the world of Secular History. It is the most important reminder of the presence and of the advent of the Kingdom of God. As such, the Church is unique, and so is its history. Secular History, rightly understood, also acknowledges God, but it reflects the Kingdom of God in a less comprehensive and in a more indirect way. In the last analysis Secular History and its many branches and sub-branches, such as political history, cultural history, economic history, history of science, natural history, history of literature and even history of Christianity, have to be distinguished from Church History.

Secular History does not belong to the field of Theology, whereas Church History does. This 'dual home' of Church History is not an unhappy incident; it is of great theological significance. It runs parallel to the greatest fact of salvation: Christ's incarnation made Him to be fully man and fully God. Man's salvation hinges on this duality. The history of God's Church is fully divine and fully human. Only in that way can it reflect the work of Triune God in history.

## b. Church History Belongs to Theology

The Church is God's plantation in this world. It is the product of His revelation through the Word. Theology is the Church's scholarly approach of God's revelation. The main emphasis is on the Church. Church History being part of Theology aims at describing the history of the Church, not the *history of Christianity*, which aims at describing Christian culture, and as such belongs to Secular History. Although Church History and the history of Christianity are related, they differ fundamentally. Christian culture and the Christian Church are not identical; sometimes they even oppose one another. Students should notice the tendency among many writers to underestimate the Church in favour of *Christianity*.

The term Church itself does not appear in Scripture. But the words from which the English 'Church', Scottish 'Kirk' and French 'Église' derive, *kuriakè* (Greek: of the Lord) and *ekklesia* (Greek: *ek-kalein* = to call out), show that it designates the congregation of the people of God, as it has existed since creation in its various modes of existence, militant, triumphant, visible, invisible.

The Church has existed since Paradise. As God's revelation continued to fulfilment in Jesus Christ, there developed a difference in appearance between the Church of the Old Testament and the Church of the New Testament. Since Pentecost, in the *Apostles' Creed*, the Church has come to understand itself as the 'one, holy, catholic, Christian Church, the communion of saints'. This understanding of the Church has been the criterion of Christian faith, and the foundation of theological study.

*The Church is one.* This refers to the unity of the Church, spiritual unity in the first place, not necessarily unity in a geographical, organisational, visible sense. Disunity is caused by sin and error. The Church can be torn by disunity, although it appears as a geographical, organisational and visible unity.

*The Church is holy.* It is set apart; it does not belong to the world, although it is *in* it. It is not man's creation, but it is God's plantation through the Word and the Spirit. The Church is the most important sign of the existence and of the approaching of the Kingdom of God.

*The Church is catholic.* This means that the Church is common to all or universal.<sup>7</sup> As representations of the universal Church, every local church in principle has all characteristics of the Church. This rejects every claim of limitation of the Church to a specific geographical area or to a certain ethnic group of people.

*The Church is Christian.* Christ is the King of the Church. He is the Head and also the Body of the Church. There is no Church without Him being the beginning, the end, the foundation, the top, the inside, and the outside of it.

*The Church is the communion of saints.* The Church is a fellowship, a brotherhood of saved sinners, an unbreakable bond between men and women, rooted in fundamental relationship with God, that is to say in God's covenantal promises through Christ.

The scholarly study of God's revealed relationship with His creation and with His people comprises the various branches of Theology, including the study of Church History. Like all Theology, Church History is connected to the Bible in a special way. The Bible contains history. God has revealed Himself in two ways, in a particular sense by using history as recorded in the Holy Scriptures, and in a general sense in nature. The

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<sup>7</sup> 'catholic' contains the Greek word *holos*: whole.

Bible contains the history of the revelation of God's plan with world and humanity, the *historia sacra Divinae revelationis*. This includes the history of salvation. Church History overlaps with salvation history, is rooted in it, and continues describing it in the post-Biblical era. At the same time, Church History and salvation history are different.

The Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit, and is therefore holy, infallible (trustworthy), authoritative, the highest rule for life and faith. This does not apply to Church History, nor does it apply to any history described by man. Written and oral accounts of Secular History and Church History can even oppose God's revelation. At best, they are guided by the Scriptures and enlightened by the Holy Spirit. This is also true for studies in any other field of Theology.

All other branches of Theology have historical aspects, although they remain distinguished from Church History.<sup>8</sup> However, the fact that all branches of Theology are embedded in history should not be confused with the position of the subject of Church History itself, which specifically deals with the history of the Church in all its aspects. The scholarly subject of Church History can be broken up into various fields and sub-fields. Some examples of the branches of Church History are:

the histories of Dogma, Ecclesiology, Old Testament research, New Testament research, Biblical archaeology, Mission, Preaching, Historiography (the history of writing Church History), Church art (e.g. iconography, painting, sculpture, architecture), State-Church relationships, Denominations, Awakenings, Schisms, Church music, Church leaders, Church Fathers, Popes, Monasticism, Reformers, common church members.

## 1.2. African Church History

### a. Southern Christianity

In terms of *Historiography* I have consciously tried to avoid bias and to honour *African Church History* in its own right. I am inclined to follow Verstraelen, who uses the term *Southern Christianity* for a great variety of churches and Christian cultures that came into being east and south of the *Roman Empire*. In the title of Part II of this book, *The Faith Moves South*, I have expressed this sentiment. Verstraelen stresses that 'Christianity was not an exclusive phenomenon in the *Roman Empire* in the North, but struck roots in different socio-cultural contexts in the Southern Hemisphere'. He pleads for 'new modes of rethinking and rewriting Christian History' by telling the full story of this non-Roman and non-Greek Christianity, 'and making it part of Christian history as a whole'.<sup>9</sup> Extending this thought, other historians derive from the flourishing

<sup>8</sup> The other main branches of Theology include: the Bible itself (Old Testament and New Testament), Biblical Languages, Dogmatics (Systematic Theology), Ecclesiology (knowledge of the organisational structures and offices of the Church), Missiology, Exegetics, Hermeneutics, Homiletics, Pastoral Theology.

<sup>9</sup> F.J. Verstraelen, 'Southern Perspectives on Christian History', in: *Neue Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft*, 53-1997/2, pp.100,101; F.J. Verstraelen, 'The Teaching of Christian History and Ministerial Formation Today', in: *Association of Theological Institutions in Southern and Central Africa (ATISCA)*, Bulletin 2, 1993, pp.3-25. Verstraelen developed the ideas of his deceased wife, published in: Gerdien Verstraelen-Gilhuis, *From Dutch Mission Church to Reformed Church in Zambia: The Scope for African Leadership and Initiative in the History of a Zambian Mission Church*, Franeker: Wever, 1982, pp.13-21: 'Recovering the African Perspective of Mission History', and 'Written and Oral Sources': Gerdien Verstraelen-Gilhuis, *A New Look at Christianity in Africa*, Gweru: Mambo Press, 1992, pp.77-98: 'Rewriting the History of Christianity in Africa'.

Christianity of today's Africa the idea that the epicentre of Christianity has critically 'shifted from the North to the South'.<sup>10</sup>

**b. Received from the Outside**

An important consequence of this observation is that African Christianity should not be considered as an appendix or an extension of Western Christianity. It is rightly stressed that 'Christianity was a non-Western religion in the first place'. For that matter, it is a non-Southern religion too. However, some historians have developed their ideas to the opposite extreme, suggesting that the beginnings of Christianity are in Africa, geographically and religiously. They have come to adhere to a completely 'new historiography' in which African Christianity is presented as 'an extension of African primal religion'. This approach is not helpful, because, as Kalu admits, it is 'based on many unarticulated assumptions'.<sup>11</sup> It distorts the picture of the course in history that Christianity took. But there is nothing wrong in emphasising that the Gospel of the joyful events of salvation went from Jerusalem either directly to the North and the North East of Africa, or much later, indirectly to sub-Saharan Africa through the churches in the West. After all, Christians, anywhere in the world, have received the Gospel from the 'outside'. The Church is rooted in a message that is imparted from the outside, spiritually, and for most of the Church geographically as well.

There is need to remember that the Christian Church did not start in Africa or the West, but in Jerusalem, and its foundation is located even outside history, it is not possessed by any world view, however primal it may be. Through Christ God has shown his love for the world, so that people of all nations, world views and religions may realise the superiority and the uniqueness of the Gospel of salvation, join together in His Church, and be saved, now in principle, and presently, after the *Parousia*, in perfection. This – in my view – is the perspective for the Historiography of Church History.

Given this, I need not apologise that this book is shaped in a European mind that is groomed by classical Biblical beliefs as re-iterated in the 16th-century Reformation and in the ensuing reformed and evangelical awakenings in the 18th and 19th centuries. My starting point is that Church History is not only part of Secular History, but that it is also an aspect of Theology, and that in both cases, from the perspective of divine Revelation in the Holy Scriptures, it shows the deployment or progress of the Church as herald of the ever approaching Kingdom of God. Elsewhere I have explained this view in more detail.<sup>12</sup>

**c. Textbooks**

African Church History is part of the discipline of Church History in general. Therefore, at the same time, it is a branch of Theology. To its descriptions belong the older works

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<sup>10</sup> Chukwudi A. Njoku, 'The Missionary Factor in African Christianity 1884-1914', in: Kalu (ed.), *African Christianity: An African Story*, p.220. He refers to David B. Barrett, 'AD 2000: 350 million Christians in Africa', in: *International Review of Mission*, 59 (1970), pp.39-54, and to: Kwame Bediako, *Jesus in Africa: The Christian Gospel in African History and Experience*, Akropong-Akuapem: Regnum Africa, 2000, pp.3,4.

<sup>11</sup> Ogbu U. Kalu, 'Ethiopianism in African Christianity', in: Kalu (ed.), *African Christianity*, p.259.

<sup>12</sup> Steven Paas, *Digging out the Ancestral Church: Researching and Communicating Church History*, Zomba: Kachere, 2006<sup>3</sup>, pp.11-22.

by Latourette<sup>13</sup> and Groves,<sup>14</sup> written in the period 1935-1960. They are still valuable secondary sources, but as pre-independence literature, they are limited in that they perceive *African Church History* largely from a European or American angle. They were important sources for Hildebrandt, who first published his concise survey of the history of the Church in Africa in 1981.<sup>15</sup> Hildebrandt tries not to neglect the African contribution to Mission. He is apparently sympathetic to the object of his survey, the Church. His main focus is the loyalty of the Church to Jesus Christ as reflected by classical Christian teaching. Didactically his book remains a helpful tool for beginners, because of its brevity, its clarity and its well defined Biblical position.

Recent textbooks have increasingly tried to consider *African Church History* in its own right. Six volumes have drawn special attention, Kalu (2005), Sundkler and Steed (2000), Shaw (1996), Isichei (1995), Baur (1994), and Hastings (1994). Some of them, Sundkler and Hastings followed at some distance by Baur, are fat handbooks constituting rich sources for finding details on practically all missions and churches. They try to be neutral from a scholarly point of view, although they cannot always hide their respective Protestant (Sundkler) and Roman Catholic (Hastings, Baur) preferences. Shaw and Isichei are not lacking interesting details, but they are smaller and concentrate more on the general lines of African Church History. Shaw looks from an Evangelical angle and operates from the interesting idea that *African Church History* can be grasped by kingdom concepts. Kalu's book takes a special position. He serves as the editor. Except for his own contributions, the book consists of valuable studies by 18 other writers, almost all of them Africans.<sup>16</sup>

#### d. Ideological bias

Kalu explicitly defends a way of writing Church History that excludes histories written from an institutional or denominational angle, or written by 'missionaries and their protégés'. Probably that is why he only mentions Shaw's book once, in a rather depreciatory manner, and even does not include the title in his bibliography of 32 pages.<sup>17</sup> Hildebrandt's book stands perhaps even lower in Kalu's hierarchy, because it is not mentioned at all! Kalu thinks it is possible for a church historian to eliminate in his mind the images of the Church going 'beyond the Biblical images' in the myriad denominations and the 'unique claims of Christianity'. He also claims that this position

<sup>13</sup> Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, 7 volumes, Exeter: Paternoster/ Grand Rapids: Zondervan, New York: Harper and Row, 1971 [first 1935-1946; on Africa parts of all volumes, except 4]; Kenneth Scott Latourette, *Christianity in a Revolutionary Age*, 5 volumes, Exeter: Paternoster/ Grand Rapids: Zondervan/ New York: Harper and Row, 1970 [first 1955-1965; on Africa: parts of volumes 3 and 5].

<sup>14</sup> Charles P. Groves, *The Planting of Christianity in Africa*, 4 volumes, London: Lutterworth, 1948-1964 [vol. I: before 1840, vol.II: 1840-1878, vol III: 1878-1914, vol. IV: 1914-1954].

<sup>15</sup> J.Hildebrandt, *History of the Church in Africa, A Survey*, Achimota (Ghana): African Christian Press, 1990 (first 1981).

<sup>16</sup> Ogbu U. Kalu (ed.), *African Christianity: An African Story*, Pretoria: University of Pretoria, 2005; Bengt G.M. Sundkler and C. Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000; Mark R.Shaw, *The Kingdom of God in Africa: A Short History of African Christianity*, Grand Rapids: Baker,1996; E. Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa: From Antiquity to the Present*, London: SPCK, 1995; J. Baur, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa: An African History 62-1992*, Nairobi: Paulines, 1994; A. Hastings, *The Church in Africa: 1450-1950*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1994.

<sup>17</sup> Ogbu U. Kalu, *African Christianity*, Preface, p.xi: 'Shaw's [book] is rather marred by the extreme application of the kingdom motif, but the maps are very helpful'.

makes it possible for him to write a history of the Church that is genuinely 'ecumenical', showing the 'unique Christian perception of reality'. In Kalu's idea of ecumenicity not only individual church traditions are excluded; he also seems to exclude the outward-derived and uniquely imparted character of the Christian faith, by suggesting that there is 'continuity' between the traditional non-Christian religions of Africa ('primal religions') and African Christianity. According to him, this idea of continuity does not pose the danger of opening the door to *syncretism*. Yet it is not clear how Kalu can evade this danger when he wants Christians to 'engage the interior of the non-Christian worldview and reclaim it from Christ', which to him is 'not merely breaking with the past'.<sup>18</sup>

Kalu says that he is 'ideologically-driven' to 'tell the story as an African story'. Of course, in the descriptions from European and American angles we are dealing partly with African history. But accepting and honouring this reality does not need the help of an ideology. The conclusion about the character of African Church History must be the result of scholarly deliberation, by both Africans and non-Africans, without limiting the study to any particular group. People who forget this are failing to heed Ki-Zerbo's warning that historians should go for historical truth in a scholarly way in order 'to be sure of not exchanging one myth for another'.<sup>19</sup> Kalu seems to take a new position on the line of 'Africo-liberal ecumenism' (cf. chapter 54.3.a), which finds it difficult to admit to its own disposition to bias. While I appreciate the important issue Kalu is raising, I do not think that Scripture requires church historians to erase denominations and to accept that 'African Christianity is essentially rooted in primal religion'. It certainly would run against the ideas of Byang Kato, the 'founding father of African Evangelical Theology'. Kato is convinced that African Christian self-identity, which is rooted to any extent in pre-Christian or non-Christian religious tradition, will not be able to maintain itself because it compromises the Gospel.<sup>20</sup> I am of the opinion that the History of the Church of Christ can be accounted for in a genuinely catholic spirit that does not first denounce the histories of denominations and institutions, but describes and evaluates them in the light of the Gospel, just as the writing of Church History involves and evaluates the meeting of the Church with traditional non-Christian worldviews and religions. This may be in disagreement with Kalu's view. Yet I have gratefully used information in the volume by Kalu and his co-writers, in order to balance possible over-representation of the Western element in my account and in the descriptions by other authors that I have used.

### 1.3. The Sources of Church History

How do students of Church History obtain knowledge of the facts and developments of the past? Definitely, they search for sources and study their contents. A student should look at any source from two angles (a) the kind of source, and (b) the person who created it.

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<sup>18</sup> Ogbu U. Kalu, 'The Shape and Flow of African Church Historiography', in: (ed.), *African Christianity*, 2005, pp.2-23.

<sup>19</sup> J.Ki-Zerbo (ed.), *General History of Africa*, p.3 [through: Verstraelen Gilhuis, *A New Look at Christianity in Africa* pp.4,84].

<sup>20</sup> Byang Kato, *Theological Pitfalls in Africa*, Kisumu: Evangelical Publishing House, 1975. See also Keith Ferdinando's DACB article on Kato [Internet].

**a. Categories of Sources**

Sources can be (1) written and non-written, or (2) primary and secondary, or (3) direct and indirect.

*Written and Non-written Sources*

Written material consists of any written witness of historical events. Examples of written sources: manuscripts, letters, memoranda, laws, books, questionnaires, etc. Written sources can be found on modern paper, papyrus, parchment (vellum), clay-tablets, potsherds (= fragments of earthenware), walls, and rocks. Written materials are often kept in libraries, archives, museums.

Non-written historical material is transmitted orally, in music, in drawings and paintings of the landscape, of buildings, of roads, of customs, and of all other things that humanity has made or done. The characteristics of nature (such as the presence of deserts or mountains) must also be taken into account when studying history.

Writing African Church History largely depends on oral sources. There is a growing consciousness of the need to collect information that has not yet been reduced to writing. Many accounts given by Africans themselves or other people’s accounts about agents of African Church History are in the process of being recorded. A commendable work is being done by the organisers and writers of the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography* (DACB). Their accounts of recorded oral history, some of which I have gratefully used, are not published in books, but digitally on the DACB-Website.<sup>21</sup>

DACB is not the only source facilitated by the Internet. Fortunately, the number of useful websites is growing. This is important in view of the factors that limit the possibilities for studying African Church History: time, money, and distance. These factors especially limit the availability of books, libraries, and archives. That is why students in an African context increasingly resort to websites on the Internet.<sup>22</sup>



*Coin with the image of Emperor Titus, who occupied, and destroyed Jerusalem in the year 70.*

*Primary, and Secondary Sources*

Primary sources are the contemporary witnesses of historical facts, and movements. Secondary sources are later accounts of the same. For example, a letter, a drawing, or carved wooden objects made by your late great-grandparent are primary sources for his life, whereas a story, song or description made by your mother about that parent are secondary sources. However, a song made by your great-grandmother and recited by your mother is a primary source for the former’s life! Church Father Augustine’s

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.dacb.org>

<sup>22</sup> The number of helpful websites is growing rapidly. See: Bibliography, Africa, ‘Various countries’, after chapter 56.

biography *Confessiones* is a primary source; later books on his life are secondary sources.

*Direct, and Indirect Sources*

Direct Church History sources comment directly on the things of God, the Church, and the Christians. Indirect Church History sources are provided by other disciplines.

Examples of *indirect sources* to the student of Church History: the various branches of Secular History, the other branches of Theology, chronology, geography, archaeology, linguistics, numismatics (the knowledge of coins), heraldry, genealogy, graphology, the sciences of books, libraries, archives, and manuscripts.

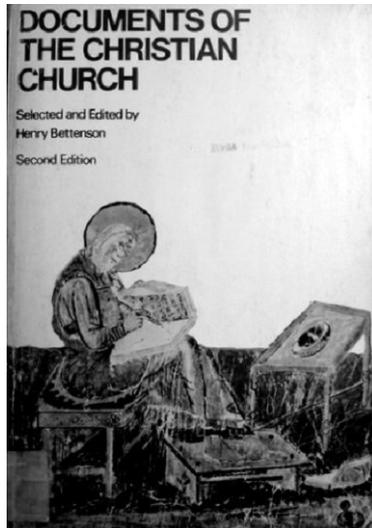
From this survey of categories, it can be concluded that there is a great variety in the sources of Church History. This especially applies to the category of books. There are handbooks (often in more than one volume), dissertations, theses, editions of manuscripts, monographs, biographies, topical books, popular books, schoolbooks, novels, television/radio scripts, collections of newspaper and magazine articles, and/ or archived manuscripts. They differ in various aspects. Let us look at some criteria.

*Size.* Handbooks are often fat, popular books are not. A lengthy dissertation or thesis is not necessarily a good one.

*Scholarliness.* Scholarly works are based on independent research of primary sources. The writers acknowledge their sources, mostly in footnotes.

*Organisation of the contents.* The table of contents of a book should be studied first. It shows the order, or lack of order, and reflects the *what – when – why – how* of a study or a story.

*Intended group of readers.* Books differ greatly depending on the category of readers that the writer had in mind, for instance: age group (children or adults), professional group (theologians or non-theologians), students or holiday-readers.



*Title page of a much used collection of important original documents.*

**b. Writers of Source Material**

New students of Church History mainly work with written, secondary or direct sources found in textbooks, teachers' handouts, published texts of lectures, and documents on the Internet. Students have to realise that the writers of these texts (1) reflect differences in faith and abilities, (2) are not necessarily Christians, and (3) if they are Christians they still may have differing opinions.

*1. Writers differ in Faith and Abilities*

A writer cannot create an intelligible survey of previous facts and developments without a certain faith. Moreover, writers have a certain level of natural abilities and experiences, and they differ in knowledge and expertise.

This inevitability or necessity of having a basic faith or starting point and natural skills is not only true for history writers but for any writer of scholarly or scientific work. Work by any Church History writer reflects openly or indirectly belief in certain truths, values, ideas, stances, cultural, ethnical, and political views, and also a degree of natural giftedness. It is of great importance that the student of Church History is aware of this. Students should assess the Christian character, the scholarly level and the practical use of a Church History book. Good Christians are not necessarily Church History experts, nor are they necessarily able authors who write intelligibly. A Church History book that has no scholarly pretensions can be very useful at times, especially if it is the only available record.

### *2. Non-Christian Writers*

A Writer of Church History is not necessarily a Christian. Many writers of Church History denounce the essentials of the Christian faith or even belong to other religions. Some are Muslims, Buddhists, African Traditionalists, Liberalists, Socialists, and Communists. They are not able to write Church History in faithful loyalty to the Church of Christ and they often aim to undermine the Church. Nevertheless, students of Church History should not neglect their work. Here are some reasons:

Non-Christians can be excellent experts, and well-informed sources of information concerning aspects of Church History. Non-Christian writers sometimes very ably show weaknesses and faults in Churches, Christians, and Christian Church History writers. The study of work by non-Christians can strengthen the apologetic character of Christian Church History writing. In order to defend the true Church, Christian students and writers need to know what the opponents of the Church write and from what angle they operate.

### *3. Disagreement among Christian Writers*

Christian Church History Writers do not necessarily agree with one another. Parallel to the differences in Christianity there are a great many differences among Christian Church History writers. These differences apply to the basic beliefs underlying their work, to the method of their research, and to their ways of communicating. Here are some examples.

*Roman Catholic* writers, especially those who formed their views before Vatican II, tend to look upon Church History as the history of the Roman Catholic Church. Hence, they emphasise antique and medieval developments of papacy, hagiography, and monasticism, the spread of Roman Catholicism in Southern Europe, Latin America, and Roman Catholic mission to other parts of the world. Protestant writers tend to emphasise certain negative aspects of the Medieval Church, the positive significance of the 16th-century Reformation, and the developments caused by subsequent Awakenings and Schisms.

*Pentecostal and Anabaptist* writers often look upon



*Aurelius Augustine (354-430). He changed the way of history writing from applying a circular principle, which is circulating different facts around the same theme, to writing from a linear angle, looking upon history as a movement from a starting point to its fulfilment.*

the event of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in *Acts 2* as the beginning of Church History, whereas others are of the opinion that essentially Church History begins with the Creation of Man in *Genesis 1*. This arises from a different view on the unity of Scripture. Pentecostal and Anabaptist writers also tend to emphasise, more than others do, the History of the 16th-century Radical Reformation and its consequences.

*Eastern Orthodox* writers tend to accept the hegemony of the State over the Church, and often serve nationalistic aims, whereas Roman Catholic writers stress the supra-nationality of the Church.

Most *Protestant* writers emphasise the independence of State and Church from one another.

*African, Asian, and Latin American* writers have gradually come to describe the history of the Church from a different angle than Western writers. They realise their churches are not imitations of the churches in the countries that first sent missionaries there or colonised them.<sup>23</sup>

*Ecumenical* Church History writers tend to underestimate the differences between Churches because they envisage a growth in the global unity of Churches. In the opinion of some scholars, Church History can only be written in conjunction with the histories of other world religions. However, such a radical ecumenical approach runs against the authority of Scripture and Christ as the only Way of salvation, and therefore does damage our conviction of the uniqueness of the Christian faith.

### 1.4. The Branches of Church History

Church History has various departments, corresponding to the different branches of secular history. It is an account of the aspects natural life in their relationship to the scriptural imperatives, especially where Jesus commands his followers to be the salt and the light of the world<sup>24</sup> and make disciples of all nations.<sup>25</sup> Some principal divisions of Church History are:

#### a. History of Christian Missions

The history of missions concerns the development of the spread of Christianity among unconverted nations, whether 'barbarous savages' or 'civilized'. The history of mission traces the outward expansion as well as the penetration and the transforming power of Christianity. Through the history of Christian mission we have access to information about the conversion of the elect remnant of the Jews, the Greeks and the Romans in the first three centuries; the conversion of the barbarians of Northern and Western Europe, in the Middle Ages; and last but not least the combined efforts of various churches and societies for the conversion of the heathen peoples in America, Africa, and Australia mostly before 1900, and of the semi-civilized nations of Eastern Asia in our own time. The whole non-Christian world, including the Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and secularized Western agnostics and atheists, is now open to missionary labour. Domestic or home mission work embraces the revival of Christian life in corrupt or neglected

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The impact of Culture on Christian Theology in the 2nd century*; F.J. Verstraelen, 'Southern perspectives on Christian History', in: *Neue Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft*, 52-1979/2, Immensee, Switzerland.

<sup>24</sup> Mt 5:13-16.

<sup>25</sup> Mt 28:16-20.

portions of various communities, societies and countries. Here it also includes the planting of a purer Christianity among the Christian sects and cults.

**b. History of Persecutions**

This concerns the story of the persecution of Christians by hostile peoples, religions and ideologies. For instance, the anti-Christian activities of Judaism and Heathenism in the first three centuries, and by Islam from the Middle Ages onward. This is another important branch of Church History. Persecutions on one hand proved a purifying process, bringing out the moral heroism of martyrdom, and thus means for the spread and establishment of Christianity: 'The blood of martyrs is the seed of the church.' On the other hand, the persistent persecution has crushed and rooted out the Church in parts of the world.

**c. History of Church Polity**

The Church is both the invisible communion of saints and a visible body, which needs office bearers, laws, and structures to regulate its activity. To this branch belongs the history of developments of various forms of church government: the episcopal, the congregational and the presbyterial, and the history of the law and the discipline of the Church. Various systems of governing the Church have generally resulted into the serious strife and division within Christendom. The question that we need to ask is whether there is a system of governing the Church that is as close as possible to the teaching of Scriptures, or is such a system just a human invention?

**d. History of Church-State Relationship**

Throughout the history of Christianity, the Church has been either under or above the state or at par with it. All these relationships have had great impact on the work and the influence of the Church. Thus, this branch sheds light on how the Church and the State have been relating to each other and how they have influenced one another. Also included in this branch are the reforms of civil law and of government with regard to Christianity and the Church, the spread of civil and religious liberties, and the progress of civilization under the influence of Christianity.

**e. History of Church Praxis**

This branch is the history of the development of Worship and of how the Church celebrates, revives, and strengthens her fellowship with Jesus Christ. Among its subdivisions are the histories of preaching, catechismal training, liturgy, rites and ceremonies, and religious art, particularly sacred songs and music.

**f. History of Christian Life**

This branch of Church History concerns the development of Christian morality and the role Christians in the society, for instance the exhibition of the distinguishing virtues and vices of different ages, of the development of Christian philanthropy, the regeneration of domestic life, the gradual abolition of slavery and of other social evils, and the mitigation and diminution of the horrors of war.

### **g. Histories of the Branches of Theology**

Each branch of Theology has a history of its own: Biblical studies (Hermeneutics, Exegetics), Systematic Theology or Dogmatics, Christology, Pneumatology, Ecclesiology, Practical Theology, and even the study and understanding of Church History itself (Historiography). The history of doctrines or dogmas is most important, and its object is to show how the Church has gradually found and unfolded the divine truths of revelation. This branch describes how the teachings of Scripture have been formulated and shaped into dogmas and grown into Creeds or Confessions of Faith, or how systems of doctrine have been stamped with public authority. The history of dogmas shows the growth of the Church in the faith and in the knowledge of the infallible Word of God in a continuous struggle against error, misbelief, and unbelief. For that reason, the history of heresies is an essential part of the history of doctrine. Every important dogma now professed by the Christian Church is the result of a severe conflict with error. For example the doctrines of Trinity, the Natures of Christ, the Person and work of the Holy Spirit, the structure and government of the Church, the doctrinal symbols of the various churches, from the Apostles' Creed down to the confessions of Dort and Westminster, and the more recent standards, embody the results of the theological battles of the Militant Church. As such, they reflect sub-divisions of Church History.

## **1.5. Reasons for Studying Church History**

Many students have studied Church History only because it is one of the core subjects of the curriculum. Some institutions of theological training have completely neglected this subject, for various reasons. But there is great value in studying the subject. Let us look at some reasons why studying Church History is important.

### **a. Understanding the Present**

The first reason is that Church History helps students to understand the events that led up to the present situation. Through the study of Church History they understand why there are various churches, various creeds, various forms of church government, and various alliances and hostilities against the Church.

### **b. Noticing God's Providence**

The reading of Church History enables students to see how God operates in his providence toward the Church. This is another value of Church History and reason for studying it. The subject greatly enriches our spirituality, increases our faith and comforts us when facing discouragements, for they provide us with a wide and a long perspective.

### **c. Seeing Satan's Attempts**

The third value is that Church History assist students to clearly see how Satan has attempted to destroy the Church. It is very true to assert that the current situation is the result of how the Church responded to attacks by the Devil. In addition, the discipline of Church History will help the Church to avoid surprise, to be prepared for assaults and to recognize evil forces within its environment.

#### **d. Examples for Present Training**

The fourth reason for studying Church History is that it provides rich material for training of church workers and church leaders. Students encounter the life and struggles of great heroes of the faith. They particularly learn how these Christians of the past faithfully constituted and led the Church and rigorously defended Christian truth.

#### **e. Source of Tools for Learning**

The study of the subject offers students some important practical tools of evaluating methods of Christian work, observing failures and successes of those who served the Lord before us, assessing root causes and results of their strengths and weaknesses.

#### **f. Guide for Exegetics**

Finally, the study of Church History is necessary for the explanation of Scripture and the formulation of doctrine. Some theological topics cannot be thoroughly grasped without a knowledge of Church History. Unless a student has ample information about the Council of Nicaea (325), the Council of Constantinople (381), and the Council of Chalcedon (451), he or she will not understand the theological development in the doctrine of Trinity. Behind the number 666 in *Revelation* 13:11-18, there is the history of persecution of the Church in the first century as well as the vision of future suffering of believers.

In this brief introduction we have tried to locate Church History by defining it, and by indicating its sources. For further study of definitions and the use of sources, students will find more details in the introductions to other textbooks, and also in handbooks.<sup>26</sup> After some progress, students will discover the need for knowing about methods of researching and communicating Church History. We refer them to the existing literature in this field.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> E.g. E.E. Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996<sup>3</sup>, pp.17-35; T. Dowley, *The History of Christianity*, Oxford: Lion, 1990<sup>2</sup>, pp.14-54; S. Paas, *Digging out the Ancestral Church: An Introduction to Researching and Communicating Church History*, Blantyre: CLAIM, 2000, pp.9-46.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Paas, *Digging*, pp.47-64, where I describe a workable plan for research-projects, and a survey of widely accepted notation and lay-out for writing theses. I also summarised some other writers on methodology.

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