

Book Review

HOCK Klaus, 2005.

DAS CHRISTENTUM IN AFRIKA UND DEM NAHEN OSTEN. Kirchengeschichte in Einzeldarstellungen IV/7, Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt 2005 (257 pp; including ten maps and three tables). ISBN 3-374-02089-5

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Klaus Hock's book about Christianity in Africa and the Middle East presents an overview of the history of the Churches from their beginning to the contemporary period.

The book follows a typical chronological and regional presentation and is divided into six chapters. Emphasis is placed on the development of Christianity and Christian activities in sub-Saharan Africa, with sub-chapters on regional differences. The first chapter presents an outline of the history of the Church in North Africa and the Middle East, followed by a presentation of missionary activities of the Portuguese and the (slow) progress of Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa until the late eighteenth century. The main part of the book (chapters three and four) concentrates on the establishment of missionary churches and their impact during the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century. A lot of space is devoted to the presentation of African initiatives and activities, especially the emergence of African independent churches and African Christianity. Consequently, the geographical focus is on the West African coast and Southern Africa. The fifth chapter presents an overview on the development and condition of Christianity since the 1950s.

Hock's book is based on very solid groundwork and will become a standard introduction to the history of Christianity in Africa and the Middle East for a German-speaking audience. However, being a basic study is also its main weakness. The presentation cannot be anything else but a synthesis of previous research as a result of the sheer range of the book. It forms part of a publication series, *Kirchengeschichtliche Darstellungen* (KGE), in which the different themes in Church history are dealt with. The main target group of the series are students and teachers in academia and educational institutions. The European, if not German, focus of the series is, however, appalling: whereas several themes in German and European church history are awarded a study of their own, non-European history is discussed only in separate volumes. Thus, while Hock has to cover the history of Christianity in Africa and the Middle East before 1800 in some 40 pages, about 22 volumes in the series are devoted to the history of Christianity in Europe.

Another problem of the book is the unbalanced presentation. This, too, is mainly due to the format of the book. Hock, who is an acknowledged expert on the history of Christianity and the relationship between Islam and Christianity in modern Africa, chose to concentrate on sub-Saharan Africa, in particular the colonial period. This decision is not surprising: the process of Christianization on the African continent is closely linked with other European activities on the continent. However, Hock's rich and interesting treatment of sub-Saharan regional – and sometimes even local – developments is not matched by a similar thoroughness in his description of the changes in the Middle East. The end result is therefore somewhat biased: the development of Christianity in Western and especially Southern Africa since 1800 stands out as the two particular events, whereas Ethiopia and the Middle East (including North Africa) are left in the background. The publisher could have chosen another type of concept, given the limited space the author was afforded. Instead of integrating Africa and the Middle East, the publisher could have issued two separate studies: one on the Middle East, the other on sub-Saharan Africa starting from the fifteenth century. Hock makes a case for necessity by including North Africa and Ethiopia in a general synthesis of African church history (p. 24-26), but his argumentation is not really convincing.

On the other hand, the last chapter, Hock's epilogue, is a brilliant – though rather short – discussion and reflection on the past and present of Christianity in Africa: the dynamics of Christianity in Africa, the differentiation and integration of African Christianity, African Theology and the challenges of modern society as well as the intra- and inter-religious dialogue, its possibilities and its limits.

Despite my reservations, Klaus Hock deserves a eulogy for his book. It is the first presentation in German on this subject and will make a good companion in academic courses or as a primary synthesis. The various lists of reference works also deserve to be mentioned: not only does the book contain a general bibliography, but every chapter has additional specialized lists of reference works.