

## **Book Presentation of *Handbook of African Catholicism***

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 (Pan-African Catholic Theology and Pastoral Network)  
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### **African Theologians Are Now Writing Their Own Histories and Theologies -- Why the *Handbook of African Catholicism* is Important**

By Joseph Healey, MM

Good evening. Greetings to everyone across Africa and across the world.

I have the privilege to present this very big book [\*Handbook of African Catholicism\*](#) that is 789 pages. Many of you wrote chapters. [Hold up *Handbook*]

There is a famous African proverb with variations in many African languages: *Until the lions have their own historians the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter* (French: *A moins ce que le lion ait son propre narrateur, le chasseur aura toujours la belle part de l'histoire*). Or *Until the lion has his or her own storyteller, the hunter will always have the best part of the story*.

This African Proverb is a good analogy for presenting our [\*Handbook of African Catholicism\*](#) (Orbis Books, 2022 of the Maryknoll Society) and to be co-published in two volumes by [Paulines Publications Africa](#)). There is also an Ebook Version.

Let me go back in time to 1968 when I first came to Nairobi, Kenya to serve in the [AMECEA](#) (Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa) Office. That is before many of you were born! Over the years *I have eaten a lot of salt*. This is a Swahili saying *nimekula chumvi nyingi* for doing something for a long time. Over the years I have been privileged to know personally many giants of African Christian Theology including this deceased cloud of theologian witnesses (alphabetically):

Jacquineau Azetop  
 Peter Gikure  
 Patrick Kaliombe  
 John Mbiti  
 Eglebert Mveng

Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike  
 Charles Nyamiti  
 Tharcisse Tshibangu  
 John Waliggo

And these three living greats: Bénézet Bujo, Anselme Sanon and Peter Sarpong.

This generation of African Theologians was mainly trained in the West. In those days most of the writers of African History and African Theology were Westerners, that is, the hunters.

But now two generations have passed. Now you are the historians and the theologians writing your own African History and writing your own African Catholic Theology. This includes writing African Narrative Theology that is also called African Story Theology. This is connected to African *Palaver* Theology that is also called African *Baraza* Theology and African Conversation Theology. This is part of our distinctive African Theological Method.

Congratulations. You are the lions and lionesses of contemporary Africa. You have passed from being younger brother or younger sister to being equal partners in the exciting enterprise of World Theology and World Catholicism. This book -- *Handbook of African Catholicism* – witnesses to the growth and maturity of African Theology and African Theologians. Christianity's center of gravity has shifted in the modern world from the Northern continents to the South, with Africa playing a dominant role in the resurgence of the faith.

This handbook contains chapters by 50 scholars, specialists and practitioners. It is arranged in five sections: History and Mission; Formation, Education and Communications; Church and Society; The Body, Health and Healing; and Catholic Theological and Philosophical Traditions in Africa.

This book provides a disciplinary map for understanding African Catholicism today by engaging some of the most pressing and pertinent issues, topics, and conversations in diverse fields of studies in African Catholicism. This handbook is a road map for scholars in following the development of African Christian thought, the current state of research in specific areas, and methodological approaches being employed in understanding the Christian movement as it crosses different cultural, religious, theological and social frontiers in Africa.

This handbook is very ably edited by Stan Chu Ilo who led the team at the [Center for World Catholicism and Intercultural Theology](#) at DePaul University in Chicago, Illinois, USA including Bill Cavanaugh, the Director, Mike Budde, the Senior Research Professor and Karen Kraft, the Managing Editor of this project. As many of you know this handbook is the result of many revisions and a great deal of perseverance. Thank you Editing Team. Let's give them a clap.

This handbook will be a vital reference and resource for years to come.

I am privileged to write one chapter in this book -- "[Small Christian Communities \(SCCs\) in Africa: Histories, Themes, Development and Challenges](#)." **NOTE:** There is a rich variety of names for SCCs. The List of "Acronyms" in the *Handbook of African Catholicism* has ten names in English and French. These include English: Small Christian Communities (SCCs), Basic Christian Communities (BCCs) and Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs). French: *Communautés Ecclésiales de Base* (CEBs), *Communautés Ecclésiales Vivantes* (CEVs), *Communautés Ecclésiales Vivantes de Base* (CEVBs) and *Communautés de Base* (CB).

I would like to refer to the section on the "Synodal Theme." Pope Francis emphasizes the theme of synodality that is embodied in the SCCs. He has given impetus to the synodality that was introduced in Vatican II -- the entire Catholic Church walking, journeying, discerning and evangelizing together. This is an on-going process of listening, discussion, dialog, debate, discernment and proposed pastoral responses that builds on collegiality and subsidiarity under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. SCC members participate in this journeying together through the use of the "See," "Judge/Discern" and "Act" method or process and various forms of pastoral theological reflection and decision-making starting from our life experiences.

In a Webinar on "Synodality in Africa" Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) Theologian Sister Josée Ngalula, RSA who is our Vice President emphasizes: "We already have a new and important pastoral structure in Africa on the grassroots level -- the Small Christian Communities (SCCs) or Basic Christian Communities (BCCs). We have to use and consolidate this basic structure to help us listen to the People of God especially laymen and laywomen. SCCs is an ecclesial model of the Catholic Church in Africa. The new language is spiritual conversation, mutual listening and prayerful discernment. SCCs represent the spirit of synodality and the synodal process."

Sister Magdalena Chubwa, CDMT of the Daughters of Mary Religious Congregation from Kigoma, Tanzania says "We are already living the Synodal Process in Africa through our African community and cultural values and our SCCs. The three themes of the Synod -- Communion, Participation and Mission -- have been active in Africa for years. A strong unity and communion built from the family level to the SCCs and upwards in the Local Church allow people to participate fully during this process. Small Christian Community gatherings play a key role during the Synodal Process in allowing the Holy Spirit to be the center of our discernment. This is a special opportunity that provides freedom for small communities of lay people to share their thoughts and not just those in authority as we are used to seeing."

I also represent Africa on the Advisory Committee of Orbis Books of the [Maryknoll](#) Missionary Society who is the publisher of this book. It is noteworthy that in the first 25 years of Orbis Books (1970 to 1995) the authors were almost all expatriate Africanists. Now in the past 27 years (1995 to 2022) most of the authors are Africans. I am delighted to see the large number of African authors of Orbis Books and Orbis chapters here at this congress. An increasing number are African woman theologians. I look forward to meeting personally. If you have a manuscript to submit to Orbis Books I will be glad to discuss it with you.

I end with another famous African proverb that was used by Mumbi this morning: *If you want to walk fast, walk alone. If you want to walk far, walk together.* May this be the spirit and practice of our congress and of our research and writing in the years to come.

To buy the book go to:

1. Orbis Books Website: [Orbis Books](#)
2. Amazon Website: [Amazon.com : Handbook of African Catholicism](#)

Two versions:

1. Paperback. \$65.
2. Ebook (Kindle): \$52.50.

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