

Canadian Methodism negotiated its sometimes awkward position as an American Methodist offshoot in a thoroughly British colony. By doing so, Hempton might have found another way to approach the interaction between British and American Methodist experiences. At the very least, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* would have thrown an even more penetrating light on the different ways in which society, culture, and politics influenced and were influenced by the Methodist movement across the North Atlantic world.

Ultimately, however, neither of these criticisms can possibly take away from the overwhelming strengths of this book. In less than 300 pages, Hempton manages to summarize and to expand greatly on an increasingly complex body of scholarship exploring the history of Methodism in Britain and the United States. Whether for academics already familiar with the Methodist movement or students encountering the topic for the first time, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* will prove an invaluable resource.

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ILIFFE, John — *Honour in African History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. Pp. 404.

John Iliffe's distinguished career includes histories of very large topics such as *The African Poor* (1987) and *Africans: The History of a Continent* (1995). *Honour in African History* continues this métier in magisterial form. Its thesis is that African societies traditionally placed a high emphasis on honour ("a right to respect") to guide interpersonal relations and to shape political structures. Colonial regimes and capitalist enterprise then imposed very deep humiliations upon Africans. Yet colonialism failed fully to "tame" or assimilate traditional concepts of honour into a new ethics of modernization. Instead, it gave rise to reactive, bowdlerized forms. The long-term result shows in decision-making by Africans today that often appears dishonourable and is evidently self-destructive — corruption, wars, baby rapes, and denial of AIDS, for example.

Attempting to understand aspects of African culture and history that play a role in frustrating current aspirations for development is an important and timely objective. With new commitments by the G-8 countries to increase aid, it would be a shame if such development efforts were to founder on unexamined assumptions about African society. Iliffe aims to make intellectual connections and to encourage further research that might be helpful in that regard. He weaves together strands of evidence from a wide range of missionary and other early eyewitness accounts, secondary academic literature, and African periodicals, memoirs, court testimony, and fiction. The book is densely packed and copiously footnoted but eloquently written. Whether it works, however, and for whom, is a difficult question.

The first half offers a tour of the major political and cultural regions in pre-colonial

times, beginning with the great equestrian states of the West African Sahel from roughly the 1300s. Chapters then proceed through the Islamic societies of the Swahili coast and Sahel, Christian Ethiopia, the “pagan states” of West and Central Africa such as Asante and Dahomey, stateless societies like the Igbo of Nigeria, southern Africa (mainly the Zulu and Basotho), and the intralacustrine kingdoms of East Africa (mainly Buganda). An additional chapter focuses specifically on honour among slaves, with many of the illustrations coming from the Dutch colony at the Cape (seventeenth and eighteenth century). Iliffe differentiates types of honour codes and ideals, from heroic to householder, from masculine to feminine, and from vertical (elites in relation to commoners and slaves) to horizontal (how respect was achieved among social peers).

A key lesson in this is not to romanticize the pre-colonial past. Iliffe draws attention to the callousness or contempt that defined elites from commoners and slaves. This serves to counter claims about a quintessentially African philosophy of shared humanity (or *ubuntu* in the widely used Zulu term). Likewise, by drawing attention to the many legends of heroic individuals and to institutions that facilitated intense competitiveness and individual achievement, Iliffe counters false nostalgia about an essential communal ethic in African societies. With respect to gender relations, he acknowledges the consensus of feminist scholarship — African societies offered women key protections and dignities but were nonetheless often cruelly patriarchal.

Part 2 deals with the impact of colonialism and neo-colonialism. First, traditional ideals of heroism in battle led to military catastrophe in case after case of direct clash between African and European armies. Other chapters then consider how African men’s pride in enduring physical pain and women’s tough domesticity enabled colonial and corporate regimes to maximize exploitation while minimizing expenditure on African welfare. There are chapters on African mercenaries for colonial regimes, middle-class respectability, the nationalist movements, post-colonial leadership, and the AIDS crisis. The latter attempts to understand why Africans, men in particular, have generally not responded well to scientific evidence about the need to change sexual behaviour.

Iliffe is immensely well read, *au courant* with debates in a wide swathe of historiographies, and clearly sympathetic to Africans’ struggles. He is also generally sensitive to feminist and African critiques of Western scholarship. But it is here, precisely, that there be dragons. Indeed, feminists and African scholars have long warned against generalizing about so huge and diverse a place as Africa. How, then, to justify sweeping together all of Africa south of the Sahara over hundreds of years of time? This might work were the focus kept on a discrete issue, but matters of honour (extending to etiquette, propriety, prestige, reputation) come into virtually all aspects of life. War-making, love-making, fashion, food, faith, bribe-taking, sports, and more are all brought into one over-arching analysis.

The effect is dizzying, especially since the isolated scraps of evidence often immediately call to mind counter-evidence. A paragraph that aims to explain the resilience of polygyny under colonial rule (pp. 266–267), for example, refers, in this order, to 1968–1970 Cameroon, Rhodesia of the same period, a Muslim state in Nigeria form

1900 to the 1960s, apartheid South Africa in the 1970s, Yorubaland in the 1920s, and Buganda in 1895. To give another example, Iliffe makes the bald assertions that “Women adapted better than men to urban working class life” and that African slums are consequently “slums of hope” (p. 297). A footnote to an anthropologist writing in 1934 is not sufficient to support the latter claim, particularly in light of a whole range of studies (and easy empirical observation) of dispiriting conditions in so many African cities today. Yes, there is hope in the slums, but there is also hopelessness and much in between.

There is also the question of methodology. Iliffe rightly points out that cultural studies demand fluency in the language of that culture, including shifts of meaning over time. Yet, where he considers language in so many different times and places, Iliffe relies on missionary or court translations and colonial-era dictionaries. For something so subtle and protean as the concept of honour, this is a major shortcoming.

Specialists in the many fields he skirts will almost certainly be surprised at errors of both omission and commission (my example: John C. Caldwell and collaborators cannot be taken uncritically as authorities on African sexuality, as Iliffe does repeatedly). Generalists will also be confused at times by the cursory treatment of some of the biggest stories of recent times: genocide in Rwanda (accorded half a paragraph and one footnote, p. 353), the implosion of Zimbabwe (virtually nothing), “Africa’s World War” in the Congo (ditto), and the Treatment Action Campaign (no mention at all).

Overall, this is an erudite, provocative book that skirts important issues and does not engage with key critiques of African studies.

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LANGHE, Claude — *L’Église catholique et la Société des missions étrangères au Vietnam : Vicariat apostolique de Cochinchine (XVII<sup>e</sup> et XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles)*, Paris, L’Harmattan, 2004, 261 p.

Centré sur la Cochinchine, solidement étayé par une documentation abondante, l’ouvrage de Claude Lange éclaire, dans un souci de chronologie fine, une période essentielle de l’histoire religieuse du Vietnam contemporain. Fruit d’une longue expérience de terrain (Claude Lange a séjourné 17 ans au Vietnam, de 1958 à 1975) et dédié à « la nation vietnamienne, à son peuple, à son Église » (remerciements, p. vi), l’ouvrage *L’Église catholique et la Société des missions étrangères au Vietnam* est issu d’une thèse de doctorat soutenue en 1980 par l’auteur à l’Université Paris IV-Sorbonne sous la direction du Professeur Jean Delvert. Claude Lange propose une étude, en deux parties, de l’action des premiers missionnaires au Vietnam, aux XVII<sup>e</sup> et XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles : celle des jésuites (comme le père Alexandre de Rhodes), comme celle des dominicains et franciscains relevant du droit de patronage (Padroado) concédé par le Saint-Siège au Portugal sur les missions en vertu du traité de Tordesillas (1494).