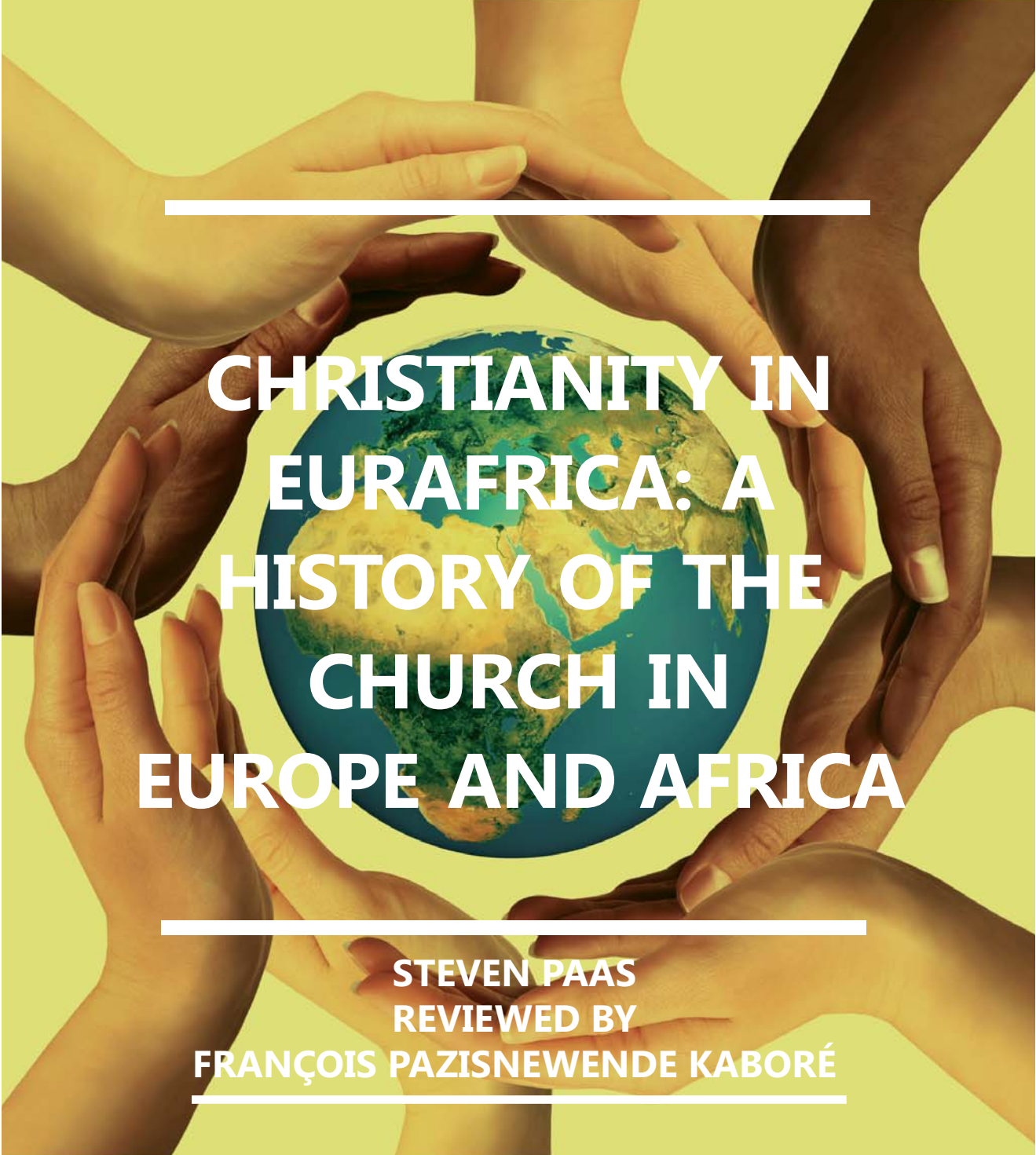


## Book Review



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# CHRISTIANITY IN EURAFRICA: A HISTORY OF THE CHURCH IN EUROPE AND AFRICA

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STEVEN PAAS  
REVIEWED BY  
FRANÇOIS PAZISNEWENDE KABORÉ

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# CHRISTIANITY IN EURAFRICA: A HISTORY OF THE CHURCH IN EUROPE AND AFRICA.

by **Steven Paas, New Academia Publishing: Washington DC (USA) 2017, and Christian Literature Fund: Wellington (South Africa) 2016, 554 pp.**

**Reviewed by François Kaboré**

This textbook covers two thousand years of the spread of Christianity from Palestine to Europe and Africa. The historical accuracy of this research is unquestionable. With art and mastery, the author tells the two-thousand-year-long story of the progress of Christian from Galilee to Africa via the Atlantic. Considering the fact that church history belongs not only to (secular) history but also to theology, the textbook takes a clearly defined position where church history is understood as 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." Thus, the two major parts of the textbook account for the spread of the Word, first from Jerusalem to the Atlantic and, secondly, and second from the Atlantic to Africa, though some parts of Africa were in touch with Christianity from the East. The eagle's-eye view of the approach, coupled with the details of christianisation in some regions and countries in Europe and in Africa, make this textbook an invaluable resource.

Some methodological choices, however, although they have their advantages, could weaken the grasp of the historicity of christianisation in Europe and in Africa. First, as rightly suggested in the textbook, through the study of church history, students should understand why there are various churches, various creeds, various forms of church government, and various alliances and hostilities

against the church. In that regard, an emphasis on "the Church" versus Christianity or Christian cultures favours ecumenism in a post-Vatican II theological context. The different groups of missionaries who visited Africa in the hope of converting Africans did not always share the same ecumenical mindset. In addition, the colonisation of Africa happened alongside the second wave of missionary work Africa, (after the first wave of evangelisation in North Africa by the Church Fathers). Consequently, Africans who were christianised by Catholic missionaries did not experience it in the same way as did those who were evangelised by non-Catholic groups. Of course, those who were christianised by French missionaries did not have the same experience as those who were christianised by the English, German or Dutch. In all these instances, the relations between missionaries (both Catholic and non-Catholic) and the colonial administrations were significant; in some areas, the missionaries did not seem (at least from the point of view of the Africans) to be preaching from the same "church."

Secondly, church history should be done in conjunction with the history of other religions. The treatment of the spread of Islam to Sub-Saharan Africa adds value to the understanding of the process of christianisation. It acknowledges the two major ways Islam spread in Sub-Saharan Africa: first through violence and conquest, and second, peacefully through trade as conquests were not always successful. Although Paas does not share the view that presents Christianity as a continuation of primal traditional African religions, a deeper overview about the state of traditional religions in Sub-Saharan Africa could have been an appropriate addition. For instance, kings, youth, freed slaves, refugees and women were certainly gates through which the Christian faith entered Sub-Saharan Africa. Given the spiritual symbolism of kings, as acknowledged by the author, the short treatment of this key issue does not allow for differentiation of the way in which each category of actors helped in the process of evangelisation. On the one hand, there were very few instances where major kings easily welcomed the Christian faith. On the other hand, youth, freed slaves, asylum seekers and women certainly found refuge and better prospects through embracing the new faith. More importantly, a treatment of traditional religions could have shown evidence of the importance of rooting Christian faith in Africa. Paas provides strong arguments favouring internal weakness and division as a major cause of the easy disappearance of Christianity in North Africa. In addition to this compelling argument, the lack of inculturation (which requires engagement with both the religions

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and cultures of the evangelised people) cannot, however, be stressed enough.

Thirdly, given the relatively linear historical approach used, one would have expected the title of the textbook to mention the exact period covered by the research. Christianity in Eurafrica has quite a compelling argument: "Nothing has bound Africa and Europe more together than Christianity". Would that still be the case in the future? The process of christianisation, as presented, comes full circle, with the possibility of Africans re-christianising Europe, while also being missionaries to their own people within Africa.

This textbook is certainly not suited for anyone in need of a short, quick overview of Christianity in Europe and Africa. However, it would fit very well in any library for students in the history of Christianity in Europe and Africa. Those seeking an in-depth approach to the christianisation of some countries in Central or Southern Africa would also benefit from it. Finally, an invaluable contribution of this book is the extensive bibliography at the end of major sections, although the documentation could be enriched with more non-English speaking sources. As for the illustrations, they capture the imagination of the reader. Scholars in the history of the church, in general, and of the christianisation of Africa and Europe in particular, will have this well-researched textbook on their shelves.

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