

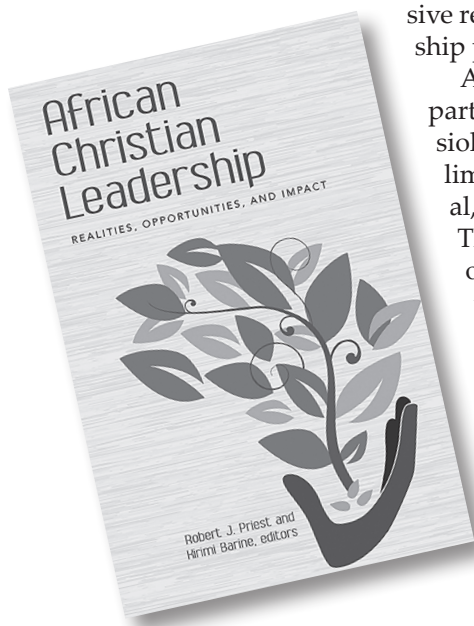
Book Review

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Priest, Robert J., and Kirimi Barine, eds. 2017.
African Christian Leadership: Realities, Opportunities, and Impact.
Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books. ISBN: 9781626982420 (pbk). 299 pages.
\$34.00.

“When leadership programs and courses are offered in Africa, they are often based on literature and understandings acquired by studying leadership outside Africa” (29). *African Christian Leadership* seeks to bridge that gap by reporting on original and extensive research about leaders and leadership practices in Africa.

African Christian Leadership is part of the American Society of Missiology series (No. 54), which is not limited by denominational, national, or disciplinary boundaries (xi). The book reports on “many years of solid qualitative and quantitative research conducted in three countries across a wide range of denominations and ethnicities” (xv). The three countries are Angola (Lusophone), the Central African Republic (Francophone), and Kenya (Anglophone). The fourteen contributors to the book are a good mixture of Africans



and those from outside the continent. The research team for the African Leadership Study (ALS) was composed of persons with “broad Christian leadership connections and experience in and across Africa” (6). They sought to respond to the fact that most research on Christianity in Africa is grounded in “Anglophone Africa” (8). The goal was to broaden participation in the research by conducting it in three languages that are commonly used in education and communication in Africa.

The methodology included two phases. The first was a survey administered to over 8,000 participants in the three countries, which sought to identify “African Christian leaders and African-led Christian organizations that were perceived by African Christians as having an unusually positive impact on their communities” (11). The second phase included interviews with some of these African leaders, both clergy and non-clergy. An unplanned third phase arose when the team had the opportunity to interview African Christian leaders who worked for peace after the coup by rebel groups that led to the takeover of Bangui in the Central African Republic in March of 2013 (21).

The focus of the study was “the opportunities, challenges, and impact of Christian leadership in Africa” (xvi). The study was massive, and the book covers a wide variety of topics. To illustrate, chapter 9 describes a shift in the practice of leadership in Africa towards servant leadership that empowers others. The author of this chapter acknowledges that leadership in African has often been “exploitive and self-serving” (156), a legacy of “African chiefdoms, cultural patriarchy, the remnants of the colonial master-servant model, and later Western rational thought patterns and Western religious models” (155).

However, the move is on to find a better way. The ALS team discovered that another model of leadership is emerging on the continent. Described as *servant leadership*, two key components of this new way are empowerment and downward mobility. Empowerment is about sharing power with others, rather than concentrating it in one person or an oligarchy. The development of others in the church, allowing them to use their gifts and abilities with authority, is seen as vital to good leadership. Downward mobility “refers to empowering those with less access to power” (156). So, for example, servant leaders are developing and deploying women and young people in ministry. This is accomplished through education, international exposure, choirs (that afford leadership opportunities), prayer, and mentoring (157-163). The SAL research discovered that many of those identified as influential Christian leaders in the study were practicing the empowering approach to leadership, and thus pushing to change the norm in the African church.

Chapter 13 describes 16 key findings of the research. To mention one, the researchers found a need for African authors to write for Africans. For example, in Kenya, over 61% of participants mentioned authors from the United States as their favorite, while less than 2% identified a Kenyan author as such. Other findings include: (a) non-clergy are key leaders in a wide variety of roles in the African church, (b) 60-70 percent of church members in African are women, yet they are often not acknowledged or supported in their efforts, and (c) African-led parachurch organizations are key for the evangelistic, discipleship, and social engagement efforts of the church.

African Christian Leadership is a well-organized, well-written report on some very significant research about leaders and the practice of leadership in the African church. The methodology allowed the researcher to hear from a broad spectrum of African Christians. One criticism of the study could be that a sample of church leaders and members in majority Muslim countries of North Africa were not included in the study, but this might be understandable due to the already vast scope of the project. I would recommend this book to anyone who is interested in leadership in the Christian context, and especially as practiced in Africa, where the Christian church is growing rapidly.