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# Book Reviews

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Max Assimeng, *Saints and Social Structures*. (Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1986) xiv + 342 pages

**Kwame A. Ninsin\***

Because of the effect which Ghana's economic crisis had on such leisurely activities as reading, certain publications have appeared on the book market without much attention, even where such books may be dealing with issues of considerable importance and relevance. One such book is Assimeng's *Saints and Social Structures* which was published in 1986. The subject of this book should be of interest to students of social trends in Ghana, and certainly in other black African countries. It is about the missionary work in Africa of "those smaller and newer religious movements of the western world which have issued mainly from the Evangelical Awakening and Holiness revivalism of the last hundred years", p. xii). This at once makes the book extremely pertinent especially at a time when there is a sudden recrudescence of such revivalist and pentecostal movement throughout much of the continent.

The book sets out to assess the impact of the missionary activities of such revivalist and Pentecostal movements as the Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Plymouth Brethren, Moral Re-Armament and the Salvation Army. According to the author, this study is aimed at supplementing existing studies which have focused mainly on the traditional Christian Churches. To that extent, the author succeeds admirably in providing a wealth of information on the origins, growth as well as missionary activities of these "smaller and newer" religious movements. He examines their respective theological positions, their view of the material world and of life in the Kingdom of God. The teachings of these movements with respect to certain African institutions, beliefs and practices - like polygamy and spirit medium-ship, the position of women in society, witchcraft, and in some cases the prevailing authority structure - both traditional and colonial, are analysed. Furthermore, he examines the contributions that these movements made to the development of formal education and the rise of syncretic religious movements in sub-saharan Africa.

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Admittedly, none of these is treated either systematically or comparatively. But the book provides evidence on various aspects of such a variety of subjects as would be of interest to the sociologists, political scientists and students of the history of the Church in Africa.

However, judging by its title, there is something illusive about the book. Contrary to the meaning suggested by its title, the book says very little or nothing about the relationship between the emergence of such religious movements and the social structures in those western societies where they developed. In fact, the book is not about "saints" at all. In contrast with such books as Walitzer's *The Revolution of the Saints* which focuses sharply on the role of 'political saints' in unleashing and consummating the Puritan Revolution in England, Assimeng's book deals primarily with the work of religious movements in Black Africa. Nor does it deal in any systematic and coherent manner with what elements in the social structures of Black African societies either facilitated the missionary work of those movements, or sustained the growth of syncretic movements. The reader has the arduous task of having to search very hard through this thick book before he would stumble over some isolated explanations. For example, one can deduce from sections of the book that the Watch Tower Society and syncretic movements flourished in Southern Africa of the oppressive regimes which prevailed in that region; or that the followers of the Plymouth Brethren in the Lake Mweru area came mainly from sections of society which were poor and also from the children of slaves. Or one would conclude that in Central Africa, (contrasted with West Africa) syncretised Watchtowerism thrived because the "social circumstances (where such that) any avenue for seeking modification in the structure of social relations is not readily available" (pp. 138-39).

It should be evident that such statements do not reveal the precise form of social structures prevailing in the societies concerned. But this is much less problematic than explanations offered for the West African situation. These were formulated in terms of "the trade slump of the early 1930s" for Nigeria, on the one hand and in terms of a political and economic situation for Ghana on the other. For the latter country, the author explains:

*"In this atmosphere of political, economic and emotional uncertainty, Pentecostal forms of religious behaviour may have been accepted by some Ghanaians as a mechanism of adjustment to their social and psychological circumstances", (pp. 156-157).*

For a sociological study, these lapses are least helpful. Indeed, it would have been far more useful if the book had been devoted to exploring the subject which is implied in its title. As the book stands now one ploughs through it in vain for explanations about why there has been a recrudescence of these and many more Pentecostal and revivalist movements on the continent in recent times. Nonetheless, the book is worthy of attention. It is based

on a very rich and extensive research data, and should be found useful by sociologists, political scientists, and students of religious movements in Black Africa.



*The IMF and World Bank in Africa: Conditionality, Impact and Alternatives* - Edited by Kjell J. Havnevik (Uppsala, Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1987) 186 pp. SEK 110).

**Akwasi Aidoo\***

Not so long ago, it seemed that the debate on the role of the IMF and World Bank in Africa had ended, and the intellectual defenders of these international financial institutions had won. Almost all the countries of Africa (from Senegal to Tanzania) had embarked on IMF/World Bank economic "recovery programmes" of one sort or another. Radical critics of the institutions were often and easily dismissed as paranoid ultra-leftists who simplistically saw neo-colonialism behind every international agency. But today, popular experience and history seem to vindicate the critics.

The well-known policy conditionalities imposed by the IMF and the World Bank (currency devaluations, trade liberalisations, removal of subsidies and cutbacks in social expenditures, labour retrenchments, etc.) have wrought a social and political havoc that has not only confounded the apologists of the IMF and World Bank, but also engendered what seems to be the emergence, on the horizon at least, of a popular anti IMF/World Bank movement from the streets of Lusaka to those of West Berlin. There is even an exciting potential here for a "new" wave of popular anti-imperialist struggles and solidarity reminiscent of the 1960s.

This development has undoubtedly contributed to a renewed intellectual interest in the role of the two institutions in Africa. *The IMF and the World Bank in Africa* is clearly a product of this renewed interest. It contains the papers presented at a conference convened by the Scandinavian Institute of African Studies in Sweden in January 1987 to discuss the role of the IMF and the World Bank in Africa, with specific reference to the following objectives:

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