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Book review: Paddy Musana, Angus Crichton and Caroline Howell (editors): *The Ugandan Churches and the Political Centre*.

This volume provides an intriguing collection of diverse perspectives to the historical and contemporary relationship between churches and the centres of political power in Uganda. It is inspired by the observation that voices from Ugandan scholars have received much less space in scholarly debates on the volume's themes than have scholars based in the global North. This criticism is well-founded, and the volume is an important step in bridging this divide. The book is the first publication in the Ngoma series, which endeavours to bring together scholars committed to "telling the Ugandan Christian story in all its dimensions" (p. xiii). This is, indeed, a complex story, and a reader less familiar with Uganda would have benefited from a map as well as an introductory overview of Ugandan politico-religious history, and of a bibliography indicating the sources utilised by the volume's authors. The appendix contains a true treasure in the form of a detailed bibliography that lists unpublished theses, manuscripts and conference papers by Ugandan scholars through the decades, and points scholars towards under-utilised archival sources, some of which are magisterially mined in the volume's chapters.

As the editors themselves regretfully note, the volume has a heavy Anglican bias both among its contributors and its topics. The Introduction identifies the contributors as *Christian scholars*, but individual contributions take very different stands vis-à-vis this identification. Most of the authors reflect critically on the legacy of the missionary-colonial enterprise, and on the inability or unwillingness of current religious leaders to engage in productive ways with the political centre. Some authors engage in explicit theological and spiritual reflection, while others attempt to maintain a distance from their own religious affiliations, yet show an implicit and at times quite unreflective commitment to identifying and advancing the positive impacts of Christianity in Ugandan social life.

For a social scientist interested in religion, this makes the book highly interesting, not only as a source of information, but as material to be analysed. The range of political and theological stances that the authors occupy, as well as the styles of analysis that they espouse, tellingly reflects the different tones of debate regarding religion and politics in contemporary Uganda. While parts of the book could well have been published in peer-reviewed social science or historical journals, others could be read out in the pulpits of churches or political rallies.

Some of the analysis in this volume rests on the problematic pre-supposition that the church and state are distinct from one another. Consequently, some of the notions put forth in individual chapters as panaceas to Uganda's problems; nation-building and human rights, for instance; are not problematised. Hence, while part of the chapters undertake careful, analytically grounded and insightful unpackings of the difficulties of religious-political realities in contemporary Uganda, others remain somewhat thin on analysis and heavy on rhetoric. Many

of the authors convey a desire to address Ugandan Christians with a call to work for good things in their society. As a contribution to on-going debates in Uganda on what that good actually is, the book serves a timely purpose.

‘Ugandan Churches and the Political Centre’ should be of interest to theologians and social scientists with an interest in Uganda, but also to a broader audience also. The call for theological and not just political reflection on the relationship between religion and politics in Africa is certainly not exhausted, and this volume can provide interesting insights to the work of religious and political actors alike.

(599 words)

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