

World Christianity Studies & Asymmetrical Dependency (WCSAD) Working Group

Monthly Table Talk

Memorializing the Unsung: Slaves of the Church and the Making of Kongo Catholicism with Elochukwu Uzukwu

Date: Tuesday, December 3, 2024

from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. (CET)

Location: Online via Zoom

Co-Host: Dr. Jutta Wimmeler,
Research Group "The Concept of Slavery in African History"

Registration: To register, please email
David B. Smith (dsmith@uni-bonn.de).

For this table talk, we are delighted to welcome Fr. Elochukwu Uzukwu to share insights from his newest monograph, *Memorializing the Unsung: Slaves of the Church and the Making of Kongo Catholicism* (Penn State University Press, 2024). By the time the Capuchins arrived in the late seventeenth century, Kongo had been Catholic for nearly two hundred years. The European mission could not have been about conversion, then, but reinforcement; the Capuchins sought to establish the sacraments and a line to Rome in a lay-led church already suffused with an enduring, creative, and complex theological culture. Uzukwu's new book uses the framework of this 'ancient' Kongo Catholicism to explore European dependence on enslaved Kongo Catholics as well as Capuchin and Spiritan participation in the slave trade at large. Reconstructing the church that missionaries and Kongo Catholics built together on the foundations of local religion, the book contrasts the dignity denied the Kongo Catholics with the freedom they nonetheless performed. In this context, the book also explores the agency of Kongo elites and laypeople, as well as the role of the *maestri* (translator-catechists) from the fifteenth through the nineteenth centuries. By reflecting on the fact that, even while enslaved, the Kongo 'slaves of the church,' as well as eastern African slaves of the Mission served as mediators, co-creators, and reinventors of their world, this table talk promises to shed new light on the relationship between world Christianity studies and asymmetrical dependency research.

Elochukwu Uzukwu is Professor of Theology at Duquesne University (USA). He is the author of



of seven books, which focus on ritology, ecclesiology, missiology, and contextual theology, with particular focus on continental Africa and Africa in the diaspora. These studies consider the intersection of African Traditional Religion and various expressions of Christianity. Fr. Uzukwu is the editor of the *Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology*, a journal published by the Ecumenical Association of Nigerian Theologians. He is also a member of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit (Spiritans), province of southeast Nigeria.

