

At the start of the twenty-first century Africa is at the heart of global Christianity. An estimated 350 million Christians are found in its 54 countries, it has more recognized Christian denominations than any other continent, and worship takes place each Sunday in the majority of its many languages. Alongside this, Christianity in Africa has a long history that stretches back to the very beginnings of the church, and this history is deeply intertwined in the wider political, social and economic forces that have shaped the continent. This historical depth and contemporary breadth has given rise to an extremely wide diversity of Christian experience and church life on the continent, so much so that some speak of Christianities in Africa. To make sense of this diversity we begin this chapter with a brief survey of the history of Christianity on the continent and then reflect on those elements that offer African ecclesiologies in underlying sense of coherence, earth, water, fire and wind.