

# Remembering Ogbu Kalu and Richard John Neuhaus.

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We began 2009 already aware of unusual life-course conjunctions. I'm thinking especially of celebrations centered on February 12, the date in 1809 when the well-to-do Darwins of Shrewsbury in Shropshire and the dirt-poor Lincolns of Hardin County, Kentucky, welcomed sons who left such a mark on the world. Now a conjunction of life endings has made Thursday, January 8, of this year a day to be remembered with sadness, reflection, and gratitude. In New York City, Richard John Neuhaus succumbed to complications from a recurrence of cancer; on the same day in Chicago, Ogbu Kalu died from complications arising from pneumonia.



Neuhaus was better known, at least in North America. Love him or loathe him, this larger-than-life figure had been an unmistakable force for more than forty years—from his efforts in 1964 at founding Clergy Concerned About Vietnam, to the posthumous "Public Square" column in the February 2009 issue of his journal, *First Things*. Since 2001, Kalu had served as the Henry Winters Luce Professor of World Christianity and Mission at Chicago's McCormick Theological Seminary. This Nigerian scholar shared an expatriate status with Neuhaus, who had come to the United States from his native Ontario as a mid-teen. For those committed to understanding the dramatic worldwide spread of Christianity, Kalu's death is as devastating as Neuhaus' decease has been for those who joined him in seeking the right kind of Christian support for the right kind of public life.

Before moving to the United States, Ogbu Kalu enjoyed a distinguished career for more than twenty years at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and he had lectured in many of the world's leading universities. Above all, he was a trailblazing historian of African Christianity defined essentially, primarily, and preeminently as an African story. Kalu earned his PhD at the University of Toronto, where he wrote a dissertation on Puritan church discipline under the unfriendly regime of England's King James I. But the churches that engaged his great life's work were African, and

the discipline he worked so successfully to illuminate belonged to African believers as they defined for themselves the imperatives of the gospel.

When Kalu was inaugurated as the Luce Chair, his McCormick colleague, Ken Sawyer, gave him the charge to serve faithfully in the space between the academy and the congregation. Kalu took naturally to "standing between" because his work had always moved effortlessly across academic disciplines: religion, history, economics, pastoral care, development, ethics, and literature. More particularly, the great achievement of Kalu's scholarship was to remind the academy that responsible accounts of world Christianity—as it has actually come to exist—simply must deal with the supernatural, even as it demonstrated to the church the high value of carefully documented and patient learning. As he taught, so he lived. Even as Kalu was winning world renown for his books, he served the Nigerian Presbyterian church as an active elder; in the United States, he joined Chicago's Progressive Community Center—The People's Church, where he taught adult classes as well as worshiped.

In an interview published in the issue of *Christian History* that examined "African Apostles" (no. 79, 2003), Kalu described forthrightly the scientific racism and the imperialist baggage that infected missionary outreach to Africa. He struck another blow against convention in his inaugural lecture at McCormick, which took on the default naturalism of Western historical practice. After making sure to praise that practice for its judiciousness, Kalu went further: how, he asked, could African Christians be treated as agents of their own destiny if African Christian accounts of supernatural activity were routinely ignored or explained away? Kalu did not condemn the caution of Western Christian historians so much as urge them to seek broader perspectives that could make their scholarship adequate for the realities of lived experience. [1] Most recently, the tide of provocative publication pouring out of Kalu's McCormick office included an impressive work on Pentecostalism around the world. It argues that Pentecostal experiences in Africa must be understood, not primarily by studying what others brought to Africa, but by examining how Africans internalized the gospel in their own cultural terms. [2]

The Kalu perspective that insisted so effectively on open-eyed and open-minded treatment of African Christian experience was also keen to document that experience with the tools of careful scholarship. A long line of books testified to his efforts at simply getting the story down, including among many others *The History of Christianity in West Africa* (1980) and *Power, Poverty, and Prayer: The Challenge of Poverty and Pluralism in African Christianity, 1960-1996* (2000). These efforts reached a high point with heroic editorial labors that led in 2005 to *African Christianity: An African Story*, the first full account of African Christianity written and edited by Africans.[3] Kalu himself recognized that it did not provide the last word, but all who read the volume must realize that the history of Christianity in Africa has entered a new phase now that Africans are fully involved in writing that history.

Mark Hutchinson, of Southern Cross College in Sydney, Australia, had cooperated with Kalu in producing a pioneering book of international evangelical history, *A Global Faith: Essays on Evangelicalism and Globalization* (1998). When he learned that Ogbu had died, he referred again to an identification that, before Kalu's own intellectual labors, simply made no sense. To Hutchinson, Kalu was "my favorite Pentecostal Presbyterian." Richard Neuhaus was neither Presbyterian nor Pentecostal, but he was driven by gospel imperatives, understood in a Lutheran-Catholic framework, as forcefully as Kalu was driven by his African understanding of the faith.

The business of interpreting Neuhaus is going to be a major house industry for years to come. In contests to pronounce the definitive word on this remarkable career, one side is going to follow the lead of the *New York Times*, which in its obituary highlighted Neuhaus' cooperation with Charles Colson in forming the initiative known as Evangelicals and Catholics Together (ECT). To the *Times*, ECT was important because it helped "to cement the alliance which has reshaped American politics." [4] This reading of Neuhaus deserves respect, for it acknowledges how persuasive (or infuriating) Neuhaus' labors were in creating political coalitions, fueling culture wars, skewering political enemies, and promoting political friends. Nowhere is there stronger evidence for this Neuhaus than in the high-voltage editorializing that appeared month-by-month in *First Things*' "The Public Square." For many readers these pages have represented their most thoughtfully educational and thoroughly entertaining regular commentary on American public life—at least until the Neuhaus hammer fell on you or somebody you admired.

But I am going to stand with another camp of Neuhaus interpreters, who view him not as a political operative fortified by religious convictions but as a pastor whose Christian convictions sometimes carried him into politics. This second interpretation points to efforts like the Hartford Appeal of 1975 that, with Peter Berger as co-convener, called Protestants, Catholics, and the Orthodox to recover the virtues of classical Christian theology. This viewpoint will read Neuhaus' move into the Catholic church as base for the superstructure built by *First Things* (also founded that year), rather than the reverse. Evidence for this interpretation comes also from the ECT process that the *Times* and so many others have read as primarily political. Obvious politics notwithstanding, each of the successive ECT documents has expressed ever more clearly the trans-partisan theological agenda that drives this pathbreaking ecumenical venture.

Most of all there is the evidence of what Neuhaus said when he was addressing ultimate matters straight on. In this guise—whether to the poverty-ridden congregations, both Lutheran and Catholic, he served on New York's lower east side; in a surprising portion of what he contributed to *First Things*; and directly in his self-consciously pastoral writing—Neuhaus' Lutheran chiasm shone brightly (maybe even more brightly when it came from Rome than when it had originated in Wittenberg).

Those who with me see Neuhaus the Pastor as the foundational Neuhaus can point to books like the meditations he offered in 1999 on the last words of Jesus from the cross—for example, "Every day of the year is a good day to think more deeply about Good Friday, for Good Friday is the drama of the love by which our every day is sustained." [5]

Brief devotions, as in a recently published Advent volume, often become Chestertonian in their wisdom: "Seekers and searchers of all times have looked toward the heavens in order to find God. Then the gift was given. Mary's searching was interrupted by an angel who promised that soon, very soon, in a matter of nine months, she would look not up but down, into the face of the baby in her arms, into the face of God ... . So it is with all who wake up to find themselves found by Emmanuel, God with us." [6]

Ogbu Kalu and Richard Neuhaus are now at rest. If predictions were worth anything, mine would be that Richard Neuhaus will be remembered most enduringly for words like those quoted here. For Ogbu Kalu, it will be for words that described the new realities of African Christianity so that all might see and be amazed. May they rest in peace.

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1. "Clio in a Sacred Garb: Telling the Story of Gospel-people Encounters in our Time"; published versions in *Fides et Historia*, Vol. 35 (Winter/Spring 2003), pp. 27-39; and Kalu, *Clio in A Sacred Garb: Essays on Christian Presence and African Responses, 1900-2000* (African World Press, 2008).

2. *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2008), reviewed on p. 39 of this issue.

3. Published first in Pretoria (Univ. of Pretoria, 2005) and then in Trenton, N.J. (Africa World Press, 2007).

4. *New York Times*, Jan. 9, 2009.

5. *Death on a Friday Afternoon* (Basic Books, 1999), p. 9.

6. *God with Us: Rediscovering the Meaning of Christmas*, ed. Greg Pennoyer and Gregory Wolfe (Paraclete Press, 2007), p. 19.

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Professor Ogbu Uke Kalu, the Henry Winters Luce Professor of World Christianity and Missions? at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago, died unexpectedly, after a brief hospital stay, on January 7, 2009. He was 66. He is survived by a wife Wilhelmina and four children: Edward, Stella, Jayne, and Patience.

Professor Kalu was one of the most influential Nigerian scholars. He was respected internationally as a towering figure in the fields of Global Missions, African Christianity and Global Pentecostalism. From the early 1970s until his death in 2009, he provided leadership in theological education in Africa and expanded the boundaries of Church History.

Professor Kalu attended the University of Toronto. Graduating with honors in 1967, he began postgraduate studies at McMaster University where he graduated with MA in history (Summa cum laude) in 1968. He began doctoral studies at the University of Toronto in 1968 and obtained his PhD in history in 1972. His quest for education took him to the Institute of Historical Research, University of London between 1970 and 1972. He obtained Master of Divinity from Princeton Theological Seminary in 1974. He was awarded Doctor of Divinity (DD) honoris causa in 1997 by Presbyterian College, Montreal, Canada.

Note must be made of his exceptional academic brilliance. He was awarded the Owuwa Anyanwu Native Authority Scholarship in 1958. Other prestigious awards and prizes include: Presbyterian Church of Canada Scholarship (1963-1967); University Teaching Fellowship, McMaster University (1967-1968); McMaster University Scholarship [Faculty of Arts, (1967)]. He was also nominated for Woodrow Wilson National fellowship at McMaster. At the University of Toronto, he was awarded The Waring Fellowship (1968-1969), University of Toronto Open Fellowship (1968-1969), Province of Ontario

Graduate Award (1968/69-1969-70), and the Canada Council for the Arts Fellowship (1970-1972). At Princeton, he was awarded Princeton Theological Seminary Fellowship (1972-1974), Ecumenical Commission Research Grant (1973), and the prestigious Grier-Davies Award in Homiletics.

He began his illustrious academic career in 1974 at the University of Nigeria where he rose to the rank of Professor in 1978 and was awarded the Vice-Chancellor's Research Leadership Prize in 1986. He has served as coordinator, Humanities section, Division of General Studies (1976-1978), Director, Division of General Studies, 1978-1980, Member, Governing Council (1980-1984), Head of Department of Religion (1984-1986). He became Dean of the Faculty of the Social Sciences in 1980, and Director of Institute of African Studies at the University of Nigeria in 1983 and 1995/96. He had been a member of the University of Nigeria Senate since 1976.

Professor Kalu taught at various institutions as a visiting professor. In 1987, he was Visiting Lilly Professor at Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis, Indiana, USA. The following year, he became the Visiting Professor for World Missions at the Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Seoul, South Korea. Between 1992 and 1993, he was invited to serve as Senior Research Fellow at the Center of the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World and Visiting Professor at New College in the University of Edinburgh, UK. He has served as a Charles Johnston Scholar and a visiting professor at Knox College, University of Toronto (1996/97) as at McGill University's Presbyterian College and Faculty of Religious Studies. In 1997 he became a visiting Professor at Emmanuel College, University of Toronto. In 1998, he was appointed a Visiting Professor at Harvard Divinity School and Center for the Study of World Religions.

In 2001, he was appointed Henry Winters Luce Professor of World Christianity and Mission at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago, USA. As a resident of Chicago, Dr. Kalu was a member of Progressive Community Center – The People's Church, where he worshipped regularly and taught adult education classes.

A prolific writer on a wide range of subjects, Kalu has authored or edited more than 16 published books including *Divided People of God: Church Union Movement in Nigeria* (New York, 1978); *The History of Christianity in West Africa* (London: Longman, 1980); *African Church Historiography: An Ecumenical Perspective* (Berne, 1988); *Embattled Gods: Christianization of Igboland* (Lagos/London, 1996); *Power, Poverty and Prayer: The Challenges of Poverty and Pluralism in African Christianity* (Frankfurt, 2000); *African Christianity: An African Story* (University of Pretoria Press, 2005), *African Pentecostalism* (2008); *Clio In A Sacred Garb: Christian Presence and African Responses, 1900-2000* (2008); and over 180 articles in journals and as book chapters. One of his latest books was *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction*,

published by Oxford University Press in 2008, which is already regarded by many as the authoritative work on the subject.

He served his field as a member of the editorial board of over 15 academic journals including *Journal of Religion in Africa*; *Mbari: The International Journal of Igbo Studies*; *IKenga*; *African Theological Journal* among others. He was also editor of *West African Religion* (1975-1987), *Religion* (1977-1980), and *Nigerian Journal of Social Studies* (1979-1982).

He also served Christianity in many ways. He was the Secretary General of African Theological Institutions (Nairobi, Kenya) from 1970-1981; Chairman, Conference of African Theological Institutions (Nairobi, Kenya). Until his death, he was Secretary and Coordinator, Associations of African Church Historians and Member of the Governing Council, Spiritan School of Theology, Enugu, Nigeria. He was also a member of the Executive Board of Currents in World Christianity, University of Cambridge and chair of the Executive Board section on Evangelism and Globalism in 1998. Ogbu Kalu was respected internationally not only for his scholarship but for his church leadership. He was a man of deep Christian faith and conviction and served as an elder in the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria.

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