

# Chapter Two

## African Christianity: An Overview

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### INTRODUCTION

Since the conversion of Emperor Constantine, the story of Christianity has increasingly appeared to be the story of a western religion. Appearances can be deceptive precisely because there are communities in Africa that could claim an involvement in the Jesus movement from its inception till today. When Christianity abandoned its Palestinian roots, its new home in the Graeco-Roman world included North Africa (Maghrib), which was the breadbasket of Rome, and shared extensive commercial and cultural relations with Palestine and the Levant. Before the story of Judich, the treasurer to Candace (Queen Mother) of the Nubian kingdom of Meroe, who met Philip en-route from a pilgrimage to Rome, geographical contiguity had made it possible for the infant Jesus to take refuge in Africa. The Coptic Orthodox church celebrates this event annually. Later, Christianity shifted its center of gravity yet again into barbarian Europe where every effort was made to domesticate and repackage it in western imagery. Recently, commentators have observed another shift from the northern hemisphere into the south. David Barrett's annual statistics in his *World Encyclopedia* (1982, 2000) reads as follows:

YEAR	WORLD POP.	XTIAN	XTIAN %	NON-WEST %	WEST %
1900	1,620M	558M	34%	14%	86%
1950	2,510M	856M	34%	36%	64%
1970	3,696M	1,236M	34%	44%	56%
1990	5,266M	1,747M	33%	56%	44%
2000	6,055M	2,000M	32%	60%	40%

He shows that the number of Christians in Africa grew from 8.75 million in 1900 to 117 million in 1970 to 335.1 million by mid-2000, and projects a figure of 360 million for mid-2003 and 600.5 million for 2005.<sup>38</sup> Thus by 1999 most Christians in the world lived in Latin America, Africa and Asia in that order; that out of 1.87 billion Christians in the world, 1.11 billion are non-white. Africa looms large again. Out of 210.6 million Evangelicals, Africa tops the list with 69.5 million; out of 423.7 million Pentecostals/Charismatic Christians in the world, 126 million live in Africa.

Given the growth rate, these figures are much larger now. There are more Anglicans in Nigeria (with a Christian population of 49 million) than in England and Europe put together. The significance of Africa's role in the formation of Christianity was remembered in 1971 when the All African Council of Churches convened an emergency session to reflect on an indigenous confession of faith in Alexandria, because the Alexandrian School was prominent in the task of consolidating Christian theology and identity amidst the constraints of Roman imperial culture. When the doctrines, polity, liturgy and ethics of Christianity were still being formulated, African voices were powerful. Alexandria and Antioch constituted the dominant and competing schools in Christian apologetics. St. Augustine and Tertullian were not Italians! The Islamic scourge in the seventh century gradually dismantled certain aspects of African Christianity as it retreated into Coptic villages as a symbol of nationalism and as it struggled in Nubia (till the fifteenth century) and in Ethiopia to witness amidst the harassments by various Muslim dynasties. Ken Sawyer and Youhana Youssef argue strongly that this story is a part of Africa's history just as Akin Akinade urges that Islam is also important in Africa's religious journey and must not be perceived as hostile religions dividing the communities.

In the fifteenth century, Europe abandoned the crusades and initiated a more creative response to Islamic economic, cultural and political challenges. In this attempt to use sea routes to circumvent the Muslims, new efforts were made to evangelize Africa but both the slave trade and colonization combined to stunt the vigor of evangelization. Christian presence in Africa retreated into the *feitoras*, trading forts, of various European nations until the large-scale missionary enterprise commencing

<sup>38</sup> BARRETT, D.B., KURIAN, G.T. & JOHNSON, T.M. (eds), *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 25.

in the nineteenth century created a resurgence into the hinterlands of the communities that lived south of the Sahara Desert. This enterprise laid the roots of the numerical explosion and maturity of the modern period. The poignancy of this is buttressed by the fact that at the World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh, 1910, no African was present; Asia including Japan occupied more of the interest of the conferees. Significantly, contemporary Africa is the laboratory of Christianity in the twenty-first century. Its story could be told in four sequences.

## I. THE FIRST TIME:

### EARLY CHRISTIANITY IN NORTH AFRICA

There is little certainty about the date of entry of Christianity into Egypt and much of the regions to the west such as Cyrenia, Numidia, Africa and Mauretania. The story of the Pentecost event indicates clearly that people from this region were present at the crucial launching of the church; they were both diasporic Jews and non-Jewish proselytes. Indeed, the Coptic Orthodox Church claims that both Thomas and Mark were in Egypt during the persecution of the Jesus movement; that Thomas moved from here to India and that Mark was the first of the over 100 *abunas* of the church. The pattern of vertical expansion of Christianity indicates that there was an insignificant Christian presence in Egypt in about 239AD, and that from 274AD the percentage of Christians in the population grew at a significant rate, more than the percentage growth rate for the rest of the Graeco-Roman world.

A number of reasons have been adduced: the first relates to the political and social forces that shaped the movement, especially the shift of the class structure of membership as upper class women joined and provided facilities for the predominantly lower class votaries. Equally crucial was the conversion of some Jews; their social and commercial prominence protected the fledgling movement in its early days because Judaism was the only non-Roman *licita religio* in the sprawling empire. The measures of suppression and repression against the new religion ironically benefited the new subversive religion; the intermittent persecutions, such as the Decian, Severian, Valerian and especially the long-drawn Diocletian, strengthened rather than weakened the confessors, and as they escaped the onslaught they spread their belief. From this perspective, those debates about purity and against *traditores* betrays the degree of commitment by ordinary believers who served as everyday evangelists. Committed agency was the core of Christian survival and martyrdom became a means of witnessing. The power of the message of

Christianity was important but the indigenous worldview was equally crucial as traditional Egyptian religion contained much that resonated with the new: notions of salvation, eschatology, ethics and liturgy could find parallels in the Osiri-Horus myth; so did the intellectual environment that comprised gnostic thought forms—preserved in papyrus manufactured in ancient Egypt. Alexandria was the intellectual capital of the Mediterranean and paraded Egyptian contributions in writing, philosophy, art and architecture. The catechetical school in Alexandria under famous leaders such as Pantaneus, Origen and Dionysius used both allegorization and creative syncretism, known as “spoiling the Egyptians” to interpret the Christian faith to a less educated populace and for the consolidation of the new religion amidst competing prescriptions about the way to heaven.

In this fluid period of the Jesus movement, theological debates were rife about the nature of God, Jesus and the character of the Holy Spirit. It was often argued whether Jesus was truly human or only appeared to be so; had one nature; two natures (human and divine); or two natures in one person; whether the Holy Spirit issued *from the Father* or *from the Father and the Son*; and how both were related to God. Such theological issues have not been resolved until this day. Whoever had the power to uphold their views, would declare the opponents as heretics. The canon did not have clear boundaries as many manuscripts circulated with the semblance of authenticity. These same manuscripts are fuelling the denial of the speech of God and repudiation of canonicity in Western Christian traditions such as in contemporary feminism and the Jesus Seminar. Power politics in the church became the tradition partly because Constantine’s conversion that removed persecution thrust Christianity into the center of the public space and created more opportunities for ecclesiastic politics, debates and conciliarist posture that was bereft of consensus. The councils held at Nicaea and Chalcedon created more warring parties. Constantine’s conversion may have weakened the tensile strength of the Jesus movement. Yet the period yielded many doctrinal confessions that have stood the test of time and brought Africa into the center of World Christianity.

For some, the indigenization of the message was achieved through the vernacular translations of the Bible into Coptic languages such as Sahidic (Upper Nile), Boharic (Nile Delta) and Bashmuric (Middle Nile). The use of the Coptic language in the liturgy and Bible domesticated the message and aided personal witnessing, which was the most powerful form of evangelism in this period. Evidence of deep religious consciousness was betrayed by the proliferation of Christian art especially the distinctly embellished genre of icons. Indeed, the indigenous culture was reshaped as evident in the funerary artifacts found in a tomb excavated at Antinoe in

Upper Egypt; however, mummification persisted as indigenous religion proved resilient. Another lasting contribution of this region was the eremitic tradition as hermits of various types and numbers built their retreats in the deserts and mountains. The Pachomian regulation was adopted by many hermitages in due course. These enclaves contributed in nurturing Christian spirituality, sense of mission, and served as havens for the persecuted or for those who got tired of the virulent politics of the day. In later years, as the gilded Christianity in metropolitan Alexandria was emasculated, monasteries would prove to be the surviving centers of the Jesus movement. It should be stressed that Christianity in Egypt flourished amidst resilient ancient mystery religions that would later enjoy a renaissance.

At some point in time, the movement flowed west and exhibited a character typical of those who are far from urban centers and its flaunt of learning and scholarship. Two types of Christianity developed in Africa and Numidia: one was the ascetic tradition typified by the Donatists. They mixed Christianity with nationalism and saw the Romans, whether clerics or merchants in agricultural goods, as exploiters. By this time, this region had replaced Egypt as the granary of Italy. A particular group, the Circumcellion, became pirates who terrorized the upper classes. The socio-economic and class dimensions were as important as the insistence that those who did not stand faithful during the persecutions had no business in leadership roles in the church; after all, translation ensured that the lower classes understood the Scriptures. Similarly, the conflict between Gospel and culture troubled the Montanists who emphasized the pneumatic tradition in Christian life and despised the tango with Roman idolatrous culture in the philosophical theology of the Alexandrian school. Yelling that they had Jesus and did not need the schools, they rejected the “spoiling of the Egyptians”, a method that sought to express the fundamentals of Christian faith in the idiom of Rome’s imperial religion. The vitality of this Christian movement breathed through the ardent apologetics in Tertullian’s *Ad Uxorem* as well as his treatise on baptism. As fishes they lived in the water of the new birth. They enlarged the space for women and challenged the patriarchal tradition of the period. Needless to add, many of these issues dominate contemporary theology on the continent.

The tendency has been to argue that the virulent debates, arid philosophy and the lack of a vibrant evangelism among the indigenous Berber, Tuareg and Kworaraffa people embedded a weak Christianity that could not survive the fiery test of Islamic onslaught. The story is more complicated. Christianity in Africa was only gradually becoming African Christianity. The Maghrib passed through many foreign rules; each left its

imprint on the language, racial composition and sense of community. As the Roman Empire declined, Byzantine rule was riddled with heavy taxation, doctrinal controversies, competing claims between Rome and Constantinople over supremacy, before the period of rule under the Vandals privileged Arianism and more financial burden. The re-conquest of Africa by the Byzantines was carrion-comfort relief and naturally the populace mistook the arrival of Islam as a welcome. Quite important is the fact that the early Muslim dynasties did not try to wipe out Christianity. Their victory over the Christian territories was so rapid and extensive that they lacked the human resources for governance and needed Christian bishops of all doctrinal persuasions to serve as civil officials. The early Caliphs themselves were not secure; assassinations boiled their political pots; and they were still close to the tolerant teaching of the prophet towards “the people of the book”. Christianity enjoyed growth until the period of the fourth Caliph when new leadership and new political conditions compelled an intensified the program of Arabization.

William B. Anderson, who worked for many years in Sudan, has contributed an aspect of the research on Sudanese Christianity that he did with Wheeler and Werner. The cultural flows between Egypt and its southern neighbor included the spread of the gospel. South of the first cataract was the region that Egyptians called the Kush Kingdom, a reference that included both Nubia and Abyssinia or Ethiopia. It covered the region between Egypt and central Africa and its mineral resources and commercial potentials allured the Egyptians. The relationship remained rife with ambiguities as the warlike Blemmyes (the ancestors of the Beja people) constantly raided the Egyptian towns around Thebes; yet the Nubians pilgrimaged to the cultic center at Philae. Egypt occupied parts of Nubia at certain points in time; for instance, in retaliation against Nubian attacks they sacked the ancient Kush capital of Napata and Nubians retreated to the second cataract and founded the rich kingdom of Meroe, whose court is referred to in the pages of the Bible. This fact and other archeological evidence shows that Christianity had moved down to this region before Empress Theodora of Byzantium subverted her husband by dispatching a Monophysite priest, Julianos in 543AD.

First, vast commercial and cultural contacts introduced Christianity to the Kush; second, Judich’s story suggests familiarity with the Septuagint within a few years after the resurrection; third, archeological evidence shows that a church existed at Farah in the fourth century; fourth, Jewish communities at Elephantine and the evangelistic bishops of Philae must have introduced the Hebrew Bible and Christianity into Nubia; and fifth, many who escaped from the various persecutions took their Christianity

down the Nile. Julian's enterprise in the sixth century reflects on the new political context when the Nobadian rulers who benefited from dismantling the Meroe kingdom, sought political alliance with Emperor Justinian. The fall of Meroe was brought about through a combination of raids by the king of Ethiopia and the incursion of Kush communities from the interior into the Nile basin. Both Julianos and Longinus, who came later, actually evangelized the Nobadian court and initiated the spread of the gospel further down the Nile to the Alowa though the other Nubian community, Makuria had a Melkite (pro-Chalcedonian) version of the gospel.

The spread of Christianity gradually moved from the courts as churches took over the temples of indigenous gods; Episcopal sees with cathedrals were built in Faras, Ibrim, Sai, Dongola and other places. Egyptian influence continued to hold sway as the Patriarch of Alexandria supplied the leadership and personnel with monks from Egypt, Syria and a muscular corps of indigenes. Eremitic tradition planted the gospel into the soil such that Christianity in Nubia survived Islamic onslaught until the fifteenth century. The unification of the northern kingdoms of Nobades and Makuria after the seventh century meant that the whole of Nubia acted in concert as a Christian kingdom. But state-driven Christianity tends to privilege an institutional character and archeology does not leave much evidence of the level of the conversion of the people or the appropriation of the charismatic resources of the gospel for everyday life.

Further down the fourth cataract, Ethiopian (Abyssinian) Christianity has survived from the early period to the present. Ogbu Kalu tells the story from two perspectives: the insider and outsider versions of the history. Court influence was equally the key to the survival. The reference, Ethiopia, only became the designation for the entire region when the translators of the Septuagint in 300BC mistakenly translated the Hebrew "Kush" into Greek *Aithiopia*, a word that the Greek used for any country south of their known world, and derived from their word for "black face", *aithiops*. Inscriptions confirm that King Ezana converted as a child and imaged himself as a Constantine whose victories over the straw houses of the Nobia and the stone-built cities of the Kush came from God. Two young Syrian Monophysites, who were captured on the Red Sea port of Adulis, became creative evangelists in the Aksum court located a hundred miles inland. They were brought to the court when it was under a regency. Frumentius not only reared the young king but was enthroned as the first bishop. This stamped the power of the state on the character of the church as various kings sustained the church: Digna-Jan in the ninth century, Dilna'od in the tenth, and Amda-Siyan who restructured the church extensively in the fourteenth century, Yohannes IV (1872-1889) and

Menelik II (1889-1913) left indelible imprints on the modern face of Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The kings built many churches and monasteries while Egypt supplied the *abuna*.

The Nine saints or *Sadaqan* (Syrian Monophysite exiles) not only extended rural evangelization, but established monasteries that became important in rooting the gospel and an identifiable spirituality. Soon rival abbots of monastic houses, standing on the precedence of their foundations, turned church politics around the tripod of king, *abuna* and abbots. When the power of Aksum declined and the center of Ethiopia shifted south from the Tigre, the story remains one of inculturation of the gospel within the vernacular: retention of Jewish traditions of the early church; liturgical innovations that utilized ingredients of traditional culture; and virulent debates on Sabbath observation and other finer points of theology. Ethiopian contributions to Christian art, architecture, music, literacy and liturgy have remained enduring. The Ethiopian church, with its large number of aesthetic crosses, remained in splendid isolation and served as an ingredient of the national culture, until Europe rediscovered it in the fifteenth century in the quest for the mythical kingdom of Prester John. This contact saved it from the jihadist attacks of the imam, Ahmed Gran (the left-handed), but it exposed it to disruptive foreign influences especially efforts to annex it to Rome. A combination of soft state and foreign influences created more internal debates that weakened the church by the nineteenth century.

The story of Islam and Ethiopia is a long one, because just as Jesus was sheltered in Egypt so also was the prophet Mohammed in Ethiopia, when the king refused to repatriate him in spite of all blandishment from his enemies in Mecca. He instructed a tolerance that his followers reneged. The survival of Christianity once again was linked to the recovery of the state due to two able monarchs, Yohannes IV and Menelik II, who dealt with the problem of foreign influence, held off the Mahdists from Sudan (1899), defeated Italian colonial endeavor in 1896, and recovered the impetus from the Muslims who had gained high political positions as supporters of Gran. Yohannes revitalized the church through four Coptic bishops and evangelized the Galla who had clung tenaciously to traditional religion through the years. Menelik established the structures of modern Ethiopia which was inherited and developed by Emperor Haile Selassie. This story will be important for reconstructing the anti-structural agency of those dubbed as "Ethiopians" in the nineteenth century.



## II. THE SECOND CHANCE:

## IBERIAN CATHOLICISM

Two scholars, David Kpobi and Paul Gundani deal with the extensive Iberian presence started when a new style of European response to the challenges of Islam was signaled by the recapture of Ceuta in 1415. Imaged as a crusade, its immense significance included the recovery and retention of the source of grain supply from Muslims' clutch; the information about the extent of Arab trans-Saharan commerce in salt and gold that extended into western and central Sudan or the Senegalese Futa Jallon region. Psychologically, it released a daring temper and maritime exploits. Prince Henry's nautical school at Sagres experimented with sails, keels, compasses and astrolabes. The Portuguese could dare sail the Atlantic in the quest for a sea route to the source of the spices, encircle, circumvent and cut into the Arab trans-Saharan gold trade from the south. Couched in Christian idiom, they sought to reconnect with the empire of Prester John and convert the heathens. In the combined motives for gold, glory and God, the Christian motif fitted into the rhetoric of the period while the commercial drive remained privileged. Papal bulls offered the *padroado* rights to the Portuguese monarch to appoint clerical orders for evangelization and to fend off competing European interests.

Iberian Catholic presence in Africa from the sixteenth through to the eighteenth centuries was characterized by certain facts: Portugal was a small country and did not possess the manpower to control and evangelize the large territory that was "discovered" between the years 1460 and 1520, and stretched from Cape Blanco to Sumatra and Java. They chose to stay on the islands and coastal regions of their shoe-string empire. Iberian Catholicism was a social ornament, a religion of ceremonies and outward show; thus in the islands and a few areas where they established Christian presence on the mainland, adherence supplanted strong spiritual commitment. Court-alliance used religion as an instrument of diplomatic and commercial relationship. A missionary impact that insisted upon transplantation of European models remained fleeting, superficial and ill-conceived. In the islands of Cape Verde and Sao Thome, the Portuguese built prototypes of Lisbon and established churches and cathedrals that also formed the pastors for interior ministry. In the Gold Coast of the Atlantic Ocean and at Kilwa in the Indian Ocean, they built their first forts, but the only serious evangelization was among the *mestizo* children of the traders. The incursion into the Kingdoms of Benin and Warri soon failed as the Portuguese found more pepper in India. The enduring presence only

occurred in the Kongo-Soyo kingdoms until the eighteenth century. Here they priested some indigenes, especially the children of Portuguese traders and gentlemen and some of the servants of white priests, but the force of the ministry weakened with the changing pattern of trade, internal politics and the disbanding of the Jesuits.

Celebrated cases, such as the conversion of the *Monomotapa* of Mashonaland, central Africa, soon faded in disasters, while the Iberian presence in *Estado da India* or East African coast was riddled with competition against Indians and Arabs. The thirteen ethnic groups of Madagascar warred relentlessly against the Portuguese while the Arabs of Oman re-conquered the northern sector of the eastern coast. Finally, other European countries challenged them for a share of the lucrative trade, which then turned primarily into slave trading. Iberian hegemony collapsed; broken statues in certain parts of Africa betrayed the missionary exploits of yesteryears. In the Gold Coast, a syncretistic religion that uses crosses and candles is aptly named *Nana Antoni*, perhaps in faded memory of St Anthony. By the end of the eighteenth century, twenty-one forts dotted the coast of West Africa; some had chaplains and many did not. These were poorly paid in compromising trade goods. The Dutch and Danish experiments that employed indigenous chaplains equally failed. The fleeting encounter with Christian presence in South Saharan Africa after the debacle on the Maghrib collapsed as the gospel bearers concentrated on enslaving prospective converts.

### III. RESILIENT VISION:

#### ABOLITIONISM AND EVANGELICAL REVIVAL

In the twilight of the eighteenth century, two forces combined to regenerate the evangelization of south Saharan Africa: abolitionism and evangelical revival. Spiritual awakenings occurred in many nations from the mid-eighteenth century into the nineteenth century. Its register included an emphasis on the Bible, the cross-event, conversion experience and a proactive expression of one's faith. Their connection with abolitionism was through the social activist component of evangelicalism that proposed to stop slave trade by involving the chiefs who controlled the supply side. Through the establishment of legitimate trade, a new administrative structure secured, with agreements and the use of Christianity as a civilizing agent, an enabling environment. This was established for combating slave traders. A network of philanthropists and religious groups prosecuted the abolitionist agitation across the Atlantic Ocean. As Jehu Hanciles argues, the crucial dimension in the story is the role of African

Americans, including liberated slaves, Africans in diaspora such as Cugano and Equiano (who wrote vividly about their experiences), and entrepreneurs such as Paul Cuffee, who spent his resources in creating a commercial enterprise between Africa, Britain and America. Motives varied: religion; politics; commerce; rational humanism; and local exigencies.

In England, the Committee of the Black Poor complained about the increasing social and financial problem caused by the number of poor liberated slaves. In America, an educated African American elite became concerned over the welfare of the race and drew up plans for equipping the young with education and skills for survival. Meanwhile, those slaves who took the dangerous option to desert their masters and fight on behalf of the British forces in the War of Revolution complained about their excruciating conditions. They had perceived the revolutionary war as an opportunity for their liberation; absorbed the liberal constitutional ideology and struggled against odds in Nova Scotia and the West Indies to create a space for the practice of their ideals. Anglican patriots had emigrated out of America with their racism intact. Indeed, the next century would witness many rebellions in the West Indies over liberation from slavery. The liberated slaves also created a link between abolitionism and mission by weaving the intriguing link between de Tocqueville's liberal philosophy and Henry Alline's New Life Evangelicalism; between Enlightenment ideas and Christianity. They shared the same ideals of individual enterprise, personal responsibility, equality before the law, and freedom to practice one's religion, as the Republicans against whom they fought.

As Jehu Hanciles shows, when the British philanthropists chose Sierra Leone as a haven for liberated slaves in 1787, the experiment nearly foundered because of the attacks from local chiefs and the lack of adequate provisions for the new settlers. At this point, the Nova Scotians and West Indian maroons were dispatched to Sierra Leone. From their own perspective, they went out on mission to Sierra Leone in 1792, before any British missionary society was founded and with a clear vision to build a new society under the mandate of the gospel, and one that avoided the indigenous chiefs who had been compromised through the slave trade. Indeed, they advocated a separation of church and state so as to de-link the missionary enterprise of redeeming Africa through religion from the patronage of the Governors of trading companies. They set the cultural tone of industry and religion that nurtured thousands of recaptives in Sierra Leone between 1807 and 1864. These freed slaves became agents of missionary enterprise throughout the West Coast. The liberated slaves who returned to Yoruba land served variously as educators, interpreters,

counselors to indigenous communities, negotiators with the new change agents, preachers, traders and leaders of public opinion in many West African communities. Adjai Crowther, who was made a bishop in 1864, signified their achievement. Furthermore, the Colonization Society recruited enough African Americans to found Liberia in 1822 and from this period until 1920s, African Americans were a significant factor in the missionary enterprise in Africa. Specifically, their Methodist and Baptist spirituality created a form of appropriation of the gospel that endured.

But other crucial factors determined the patterns of Christian presence in nineteenth century Africa. The resurgence of the missionary enterprise enlarged in the scale of number of missionary bodies, individuals, theologies, motives and vocations, and modes of funding and training. In spite of wide acceptance by denominations, the significance was its popular appeal as all classes of society in various countries voluntarily sustained the enterprise. By mid-century, the faith movements encouraged individuals to foray into mission fields without institutional support. Many women used the opportunity. Biblical roots and the general optimism of the century set the tone, perhaps to the chagrin of Western Europeans who had started missions in the eighteenth century before England and America became engaged. Education, translation of the Scriptures into indigenous languages and charitable institutions such as medical/health care delivery and artisan workshops domesticated the message and equally changed the character of Christian presence. These bred loyalists.

Evangelicalism accomplished certain functions in the resurgence: it reconciled the developed consciousness of individual responsibility to the Christian faith; by developing a close fellowship of believers, it served as antidote to atomistic individualism; and its distinction of nominal/formal Christians from real Christianity yielded a corps of committed personnel that could be mobilized and deployed into mission. Through its network, an organization emerged that could recruit, train, fund and network with global centers. Logistics, access to indigenous people and organization changed the face of Christianity. The bands of evangelicals of various hues were able to extend the campaign for a life of holiness from the boundaries of the individual to family and society; radical discipleship and personal decision meant responding to a call to save the heathens. As America warmed to foreign missions, it brought enormous energy, optimism and vigor and human resources. It was felt that the development of technology and the strength of North Atlantic powers created a viable environment for missions; that there was civil and religious liberty at home and that popery was diminishing. Other racial theories, such as chosen people, covenant, burden, responsibility, civilization, manifest destiny, and other Rudyard

Kipling ideas, came later and linked missions to the imperial idea. It is important to understand the development of these ideas as well as their impact on the character of Christianity in Africa. Emphasis changed through time and each phase compelled different rationalizations.

The Roman Catholics revamped their organization and fund raising strategies for missions such that the rivalry with Protestants influenced the pace and direction of the spread of the gospel. However, these changes coincided with new geopolitical factors. Competing forms of European nationalism changed the character of the contact with Africa from informal commercial relations into formal colonial hegemony by mid-nineteenth century. The Berlin Conference of 1884/5 partitioned Africa and insisted on formal occupation. It introduced a new spirit that overawed indigenous institutions and sought to transplant European institutions and cultures. Collusion with the civilizing project diminished the spiritual vigor of missionary presence and turned it into cultural and power encounters. This explains the predominant strategy of enclavement in the missionary presence in southern Africa. Holy Ghost Fathers, at Bagamoyo, off the coast of Zanzibar, turned their plantation into a lucrative exploitation of young people. The white settler communities in East Africa established a tight control of ministry that spurned the cultural genius of the people. Quite typical was the change in the attitude towards the Bombay Africans, who had been repatriated from Bombay where they had acquired education and whose resources sustained the CMS activities in Mombasa as the mission moved further inland. Their enormous contributions were spurned in a welter of hostile antagonism. The Catholic missionary presence in the Congo colluded with the brutality of Leopold, until the international outcry of 1908 forced him to sell the colony to Belgium. The abusive Portuguese presence in Angola, Mozambique, Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde Islands would later elicit anti-clerical and Marxist response after the forced decolonization.

Indeed, the dominant aspect of the story became the forms of African Christian initiatives, hidden scripts and resistance to the system of control that sought to make the agent legible. In one place after another, indigenous prophetic figures inspired a charismatic response to the gospel and through their efforts Christianity grew. "Native" agency became the instrument of growth. Some Africans gave voice to the indigenous feeling against Western cultural iconoclasm and control of decision-making in the colonial churches. Using the promise in the Psalms that Ethiopia shall raise its hands to God, "Ethiopianism" became a movement of cultural and religious protest. As a form of cultural appreciation, it indulged in social and historical excavation, a recovery and re-contextualization of black

traditions of emancipation hidden from consciousness of black people by colonial hegemony. In its religious guise, it breathed with hope that Africans would bear the burden to evangelize and build an autonomous church devoid of denominations and shirk European control of the church. They wove a network of educated Africans across West Africa to evangelize, inculturate, and create African Christianity. Typical of their ideology was *Ethiopia Unbound* by the Gold Coast lawyer, Casely Hayford and *The Return of the Exiles* by Wilmot Blyden of Liberia. Mojola Agbebi and others changed their English names, wore African clothes and decided to exit from the colonial religious establishment by founding African churches without foreign aid. Products of missionary enclaves in southern and central Africa did the same.

In southern Africa, the movement gained strength by its alliance with the American African Methodist Episcopal Church and its black ideology. Its leaders used the ideology to reintegrate their dispersed communities. Meanwhile, a strong charismatic religious force emerged. As racism divided whites and blacks in the Pentecostal impulse that came from Zion City, Indiana, the latter claimed the Zion and Apostolic rubrics and integrated symbols from indigenous religions to reformat the polity, liturgy and ethics of Western Christianity. Through mine workers, the movement percolated through the region. Between 1913 and 1990, the number of African Indigenous Churches in South Africa grew from 30 to more than 6,000. By the late 1920s, and in the midst of the second wave of the influenza that came with the First World War, visions and dreams and prayer led some to tap the pneumatic resources of the gospel, emphasize healing and use of African symbolism, musical instruments and leadership. The space for women enlarged as it did with the Montanists of the early years. African Indigenous/ Initiated Churches (AICs), differently referred to as *Zionists* in southern Africa, *Aladura* in West Africa and *Roho* in East Africa, changed the face of Christianity in the twentieth century in Africa. Graham Duncan and Ogbu Kalu image the varied forms of revivalism that characterized the period as patterns of indigenous appropriation of the gospel message. But specifically, the AICs are paid closer attention by Afe Adogame and Lizo Jafta, because these churches constitute an important African contribution to world Christianity.

However, a number of AICs separated from the classical forms and mutated into the genres that had tenuous roots with the original impulse; for instance, in Nigeria, the Zionist type, Cherubim and Seraphim, split into 51 groups between 1925 and 1975. Other genres emerged such as the *vitalistic* (who in the quest for miraculous power resort to occult resources as in the Sixth and Seventh Book of Moses), and *nativistic* healing homes

that clothe indigenous religion with a veneer of Christian symbolism. The fastest growing groups among them are the *messianic* forms in which the leader claims to be one or the other of the Trinity. These have shifted from the centrality of the Bible. Sabbatharian forms emerged that did not confess that Jesus is Lord. Some have incautiously romanticized the AICs because they wish to be inclusive and non-judgmental. This is a dilemma that church history must face and a call must be made. H.W. Turner, who pioneered this field, pointed to the need for a typology, however difficult, imprecise or lacking in political correctness. An eye to typology aids analysis as the movement has widened beyond the pale of Christianity. Some *revivalist* groups are nationalistic apologists who feel that Africa knew and worshipped God; they repackage indigenous religion with Christian format such as statements of belief, Christian architecture and the resonance between the Bible stories and African religions. One group calls itself, *Godianism*, another, *Orunmila* and yet another, *Afrikania*.

The story of Christianity in Africa has always been linked to the Muslim factor. Islam benefited from colonialism and expanded south of the Sahara, not just because of jihads that led to state formations but because Europe shifted from an idea that Islam was a form of superstition to the acceptance that since it acknowledged one God, it was superior to African religions. Bosworth Smith provided the arsenal that combined evolutionary theory with observations in India to argue that it was a religion suited for primitive races; that a religion that prohibited the use of alcohol was best for the ‘natives’. For other political reasons enshrined in the Indirect Rule strategy, the official policy protected Islam that used improved modes of communication to trade and spread. The battle with Christian “Soudan” parties merely modified protectionist structures to “one, one emirate”. The power of Islam has continued to challenge Christianity even when the state adopts a secular ideology because Islam perceives the state as an instrument for promoting religion. Thus, Moslems grab the center of power in every state. Akintunde Akinade explores these challenges.

The significant aspects of the nineteenth century are that—as missionaries sowed the seed of the gospel—Africans appropriated it from a primal, charismatic worldview and read the translated Scriptures from that hermeneutic. Indigenous agency subverted control through voice and exit; recovered the pneumatic resources of the Gospel and challenged missionary Christianity to be fully biblical. This set the stage for the decolonization process that followed the world wars. New forces such as the implosion of the state challenged the heritage of African Christianity; the collapse of the dictatorial states and attendant poverty probed the tensile strength of the church’s stewardship. Inexplicably, charismatic and

Pentecostal spirituality resurfaced to provide the energy for growth and sustainability in the midst of untoward circumstances.

#### IV. NEW DIMENSIONS IN AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY:

##### POWER, POVERTY AND PRAYER

Ogbu Kalu examines the vast changes that occurred in African Christianity between the world wars and that catalyzed decolonization. Between the First World War and the emergence of political independence, several denominations sought to consolidate their enterprises just as many religious entrepreneurs hatched various “Christianities” out of a vibrant religious culture. The two world wars and economic depression created so much disquiet that the pace of revivalism and religious innovation increased. Wade Harris, for instance, trekked across Liberia, Ivory Coast to the Gold Coast, preaching and healing. His ministry benefited the mainline churches and inspired charismatic movements. In the Congo, Simon Kimbangu prophesied that the global disorder signaled that God was changing the baton from whites to blacks. His imprisonment did not deter the growth of his movement. In the 1930s the Balokole Movement spread from Rwanda through the Congo into Uganda, Kenya, Tanganyika and into the Sudan. It urged repentance, holiness ethics and a closer relationship to Jesus.

Examples could be multiplied to show that, just as the wars increased African confidence and shifted the vision of cultural nationalists to the quest for political independence, so were the efforts of missionaries to consolidate denominationalism confronted by intensified, subversive, indigenous initiatives. Missionary response to nationalism was informed by a number of factors—including individual predilection, the negative racial image of Africans, some liberal support, and regional variations as those in the settler communities—and responded with fright and built bulwarks with apartheid laws. As the wind of change gusted more brutally, it became clear that the missions had weak roots: few indigenous clergy; a dependency ideology; undeveloped theology; poor infrastructure; and above all, little confidence in their votaries. From the 1950s, the Roman Catholics led in the hurried attempt to train indigenous priests. Missions conceived opportunities to waltz with nationalists because the educated elites were products of various missions and their control of power could aid their denominations in the virulent rivalry for turf. This strategy implicated Christianity in the politics of Independence.

Matters went awry when the elite grabbed the politics of modernization, mobilized the states into dictatorial one-party structures,



castigated missionaries for under-developing Africa, promoted neo-Marxist rejection of dependency syndrome, and seized the instruments of missionary propaganda such as schools, hospitals and social welfare agencies. J.W. Hofmeyr analyses the impact of the implosion of the state that challenged the churches. But the failure of the states produced the rash of military coups and regimes, abuse of Human Rights and economic collapse. Poverty ravaged many African countries. Militarization of the society intensified inter-ethnic conflicts and civil wars. The religion of displaced people in refugee camps is a key aspect of contemporary African Christianity. Natural disasters such as drought in the Horn of Africa worsened matters. A part of the problem could be traced to weak leadership; a part to external forces that used the continent as fodder in the Cold War; patronized dictators exploited the mineral resources and manipulated huge debts that have burdened and crippled many nations permanently. Meanwhile, the structure of the countries changed dramatically, as each country became more pluralistic in comparison to the beginning of the century. In many countries, Islamic rulers dominated and Christianity fought for space in the public square. A good example of the new dispensation is the Christian Association of Nigeria, which was formed in 1975 and brought many forms of embattled Christianity together to explore new models of presence that could serve as balm of Gilead in the untoward circumstances. As civil society was decimated, Christianity remained as the survivor. This explains why, at the end of the Cold War and the renaissance of Western interest in democratic structure, Christian leaders were chosen in one country after another to serve as presidents of consultative assemblies that sought to renew hope and banish the pessimism that imaged African problems as incurable.

A number of factors explain the survival of Christianity: the first, as Sam Maluleke shows, is that the development of African Christian theologies from the mid 1970s enabled a critique of inherited traditions and theologies. In southern Africa, the emphasis shifted from cultural theologizing to black consciousness; this sustained a black revolution against apartheid in South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe. The second is the rise of youthful charisma and Pentecostalism. Kwaben Asamoah-Gyadu provides a readable historical understanding of this subject matter, which has attracted a wild number and versions of sociological analyses. One commentator observed that in one country after another, young puritans emerged as if from the wormwoods in urban settings from 1970 onwards. With a message of repentance and holiness ethics, secondary school and university students transformed dowdy organizations such as Scripture Union and Students Christian Movement into emotionally

expressive charismatic movements. Mainline churches struck back with disciplinary rebuttals that forced them out into organizations that changed the face of Christianity. The classic Pentecostal and Holiness groups that had entered Africa between 1906 and the 1940s suddenly came alive during the 1970s, benefiting from the youthful revivals. Women featured prominently in these organizations and churches were compelled to create a space for charismaticism or otherwise lose their members to new-fangled Pentecostalism.

This form of Christianity has changed shape in every decade, absorbing American prosperity preaching in the 1980s and reverting to holiness and intercessory traditions in the 1990s. Pentecostal-charismatic influence is generating rapid growth in Africa. Reasons include the cultural “fit”, because they bring the resources of the Gospel as answers to questions raised within the primal worldviews. Healing and deliverance feature prominently. As an instrumentalist response, they provide coping mechanisms in the midst of economic collapse. The religious dimension is the inexplicable power of the Holy Spirit in Africa that has set the missionary message to work. The movement has flowed from urban centers into rural Africa.

Teresa Hinga and Philomena Mwaura explore a third feature of the times, namely, the rise of Christian feminist theology challenging the churches to become less patriarchal. Through many publications and programs, churches are compelled to ordain women and increase their participation in decision-making processes. Two challenges stare visibly, whether the churches will mobilize their resources and use the new opportunities to combat poverty in pluralistic environments and what the resurgence of Christianity in Africa could contribute to world Christianity. A fourth feature has two prongs: the explosion of African Christianity in the Western World; as well as the emergence of charlatans in the religious landscape. Afe Adogame has done much research on the African churches that are proliferating in Europe. The largest Pentecostal Church in Kiev, Russia was founded by Sunday Adelaja. In America, the Nigerian-based Redeemed Christian Church of God and the Ghanaian-based Church of the Pentecost are highly visible. African churches have woven linkages with both western and southern Asia. Quite interesting is the social relevance of charismatic religiosity: many people boldly use biblical names for their businesses, and political leaders declare themselves to be born again. Charismatic and evangelical bodies are founding crèches, Bible schools and universities and regaining a Christian hold on the family through education. Beyond quantitative growth there is much evidence of the deepening of the Gospel in the lives of people who would have been lost to

secularism. Contemporary Africa looks like a replay of early Christianity in the Maghrib.

# 1. The Early Africa

