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(7) GROWTH AND TRENDS IN AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu

Country	Religion	Pop_2010	Pct_2010	Pop_2025	Pct_2025	GrPct_1970_2025
Africa	Christians	502,673,000	48.1%	751,547,000	50.0%	2.7%
Africa	Independents	109,828,000	10.5%	155,266,000	10.3%	2.3%
Africa	African-initiated	97,035,000	9.3%			
Africa	Orthodox	45,175,000	4.3%	63,246,000	4.2%	2.3%
Africa	Oriental Orthodox	44,315,000	4.2%			
Africa	Protestants	192,187,000	18.4%	270,367,000	18.0%	2.3%
Africa	Anglicans	50,398,000	4.8%			
Africa	Pentecostal	34,928,000	3.3%			
Africa	Baptist	20,589,000	2.0%			
	Reformed,					
Africa	Presbyterian	16,478,000	1.6%			
Africa	Lutheran	12,521,000	1.2%			
Africa	Adventist	9,204,000	0.9%			
Africa	Evangelical churches	9,029,000	0.9%			
Africa	United churches	8,421,000	0.8%			
Africa	Methodist	8,210,000	0.8%			
Africa	Lutheran/Reformed	5,576,000	0.5%			
Africa	Roman Catholics	178,266,000	17.1%	274,772,000	18.3%	2.9%
	<i>Pentecostals/</i>					
Africa	<i>Charismatics</i>	179,046,000	17.1%	257,931,000	17.1%	2.5%
Africa	<i>Evangelicals</i>	115,201,000	11.0%	168,819,000	11.2%	2.6%
Africa	Muslims	436,962,000	41.9%	627,440,000	41.7%	2.4%
	adherents of traditional					
Africa	African religions	91,292,000	8.7%	106,881,000	7.1%	1.1%
Africa	Hindus	2,985,000	0.3%	3,652,000	0.2%	1.4%
Africa	Baha'is	2,149,000	0.2%	3,177,000	0.2%	2.6%
Africa	Buddhists	260,000	0.0%	314,000	0.0%	1.3%
Africa	Chinese folk religionists	133,000	0.0%	177,000	0.0%	1.9%
Africa	Jews	123,000	0.0%	106,000	0.0%	-1.0%
	adherents of new religious					
Africa	movements	121,000	0.0%	160,000	0.0%	1.9%
Africa	Jains	95,300	0.0%	137,000	0.0%	2.4%
Africa	Sikhs	74,100	0.0%	103,000	0.0%	2.2%
Africa	Confucianists	20,600	0.0%	25,000	0.0%	1.3%
Africa	Spiritists	2,900	0.0%	3,100	0.0%	0.4%
Africa	Zoroastrians	970	0.0%	970	0.0%	0.0%
	people professing no					
Africa	religion	7,215,000	0.7%	10,491,000	0.7%	2.5%
Africa	Total population	1,044,107,000	100.0%	1,504,213,000	100.0%	2.5%

Source: Centre for the Study of World Christianity (CSGC), Boston, Gordon-Conwell TS

This entry examines some of the changes that have taken place within world Christianity in the twentieth century focusing on developments in Africa. Developments in world Christianity over the last century include the very fact of a shift in the demographic centre of Christianity from the Northern to the Southern continents. Africa has developed into a major Christian heartland since the establishment of historic mission denominations at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In the process of growths and trends that have since taken place in the last century, Christian groups that emerged include Mission classic churches, Ethiopianist or Nationalist churches, Zionist or African Initiated/Independent/Indigenous churches (AICs), classical Pentecostal denominations of both western and indigenous origins, and more recently various

Pentecostal/charismatic churches and movements. Of Pentecostalism in particular, which has become the representative face of Christianity in Africa, Harvey Cox states that its spirituality has led to ‘the reshaping of religion in the 21st century’.¹ The trends started with the African disenchantment with aspects of mission Christianity. This was the direct result of the inability of western mission Christianity to work within what was perceived as biblical and indigenous enchanted worldviews.

In responding to the presence of historic mission Christianity, the spirit world as an important African reality has informed indigenous appropriations of the faith and this also explains why pneumatic forms of Christian expression have enjoyed considerable appeal on the continent. The religious emphasis of indigenous Christians has been on the reality of supernatural evil and the power of the Holy Spirit. This has been evident not just in the rise of independent churches outside the control of mission societies but also the current formation of African immigrant churches in the former heartlands of Christianity that has been underway in the West within the last three decades. Thus as far as Christianity in Africa and African Christianity are concerned, the last century has been one of religious innovations. Endeavours in mission such as the translation of the Bible into various vernacular languages helped to facilitate the process of the expansion leading to what may be called Africa’s Christian century.

Africa in World Christianity Today

In his book, *The Next Christendom*, Philip Jenkins makes it clear that we are currently living through one of the most transforming moments of religion worldwide noting that Christianity is doing very well indeed in the global south and concluding that the era of western Christianity has passed within our lifetimes, and the day of Southern Christianity is dawning.² This recession of Christianity in the global North has coincided with its accession in the global South with Africa emerging as one of its major heartlands. This development, occurring within the twentieth century, defied the fears of the Edinburgh 1910 World Missions Conference that Africa was going to turn Islamic by the end of that century. That the continent emerged rather as a major Christian stronghold makes it important, Kwame Bediako argues, that we ‘should seek to understand what this might mean for Africa and the world’.³ The growth of Christianity in Africa for him amounted to nothing but *The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*.⁴ This Bediako argued on the understanding that the prospects for Christian expansion and innovation in Africa were going to continue on a high note through the 21st century.

At the dawn of the 21st century, we could say that although Africa remains a religiously pluralistic continent, it has indeed emerged as a major Christian heartland. This is at a time when the faith is clearly under siege, and in some cases even being deliberately hounded out of public life, in parts of the modern West. The decline of Christian presence in the former heartlands of the faith is a process that has been underway since the era of the Enlightenment. This was the period in which rationality and science emerged as the dominant determinants in decision-making and development, leading to a deliberate courting of secularism and the creation of a morally permissive society. Africa’s place as an important flag-bearer of Christianity recalls the historical biblical development in which the life of Jesus had to be preserved in Egypt because it had come under threat at the hands of Herod.

¹ Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-first Century* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1995).

² Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity. Revised and Expanded Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 2, 3.

³ Kwame Bediako, ‘Africa and Christianity on the Threshold of the Third Millennium’, *African Affairs*, vol. 99, 395 (April 2000), 306.

⁴ Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995).

Development of Christianity as an African Religion

The process of transformation of Christianity from a western to a non-western religion has been gradual but certain. By confining the Kingdom of God within the protective walls of the conscious and the rational, John Taylor points out in *The Primal Vision*, it left untouched ‘the great deep of the subliminal, and unredeemed the glories of the elemental energies of man’. Enlightenment Christianity, he notes, left the incalculable out of the faith and played down the supernatural leaving non-westerners with a religion that was too cerebral to touch people at the deeper levels of spirituality.⁵ During the twentieth century, African Christians had to take their spiritual destiny into their own hands. Historic mission Christianity in Africa came under indigenous leadership. Translations of the Bible into various vernaculars enabled mother-tongue comprehensions and consequent spread of the message in local idioms. On the importance of the translation of the Scriptures, for example, Lamin Sanneh notes how the process bypassed Europe’s Enlightenment prerequisites to connect with what he refers to as ‘the pre-industrial sensibilities of hinterland populations’, and ‘thereby allowing the Bible to speak with authority in its own original voice’.⁶

African-initiated churches, including new forms of Pentecostalism, have over the period under consideration burgeoned with considerable speed leading to a situation where it has become impossible to talk about Africa without Christianity or Christianity without Africa. David B. Barrett had argued that given its phenomenal growth, ‘African Christians might well tip the balance and transform Christianity permanently into a primarily non-western religion’.⁷ During the twentieth century, Barrett surmised, the goal of world evangelization long espoused by the western churches receded from their grasp.⁸ It is against this backdrop of the decline of Christianity in the West that I argue, albeit euphemistically, that the faith may have taken ‘refuge’ in Africa because it is under siege in its former heartlands. This decline of Christian presence in the modern West is one that according to Sanneh, carries at its heart a moral relativism that discounts Christianity’s transcendent claims and resists the religion, or any religion for that matter, as a valid source of truth.⁹

In addition to all else, the experiential element around which religion revolves is very important in primal thought or preindustrial sensibilities. The neglect of the experiential dimension of Christianity was therefore problematic for many African believers. In the early 1960s, Ghanaian sociologist, Methodist lay preacher, and later Prime Minister Kofi A. Busia, expressed grave disquiet with the manner in which Europe – the main geographical source of mission work in Africa – was consciously edging God out of public life:

There is an even more serious problem that arises. It concerns the attitude of Europe to Christianity today. It is being seriously asserted that through the advances in science and technology, man has learnt to cope with all questions of importance without recourse to God as a working hypothesis; that everything gets along without God, and that in scientific as well as human affairs generally, God has been edged out of life.¹⁰

⁵ John V. Taylor, *The Primal Vision: Western Christendom and the African View of Life* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963): 21.

⁶ Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*. Revised and Expanded Edition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009): 57.

⁷ David B. Barrett, ‘AD 2000: 350 Million Christians in Africa’, *International Review of Missions*, Vol. 59 (January 1970), 39-54.

⁸ Barrett, ‘350 Million Christians in Africa’: 52.

⁹ Lamin Sanneh, *Encountering the West: Christianity and the Global Cultural Process: The African Dimension* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993): 184.

¹⁰ Kofi A. Busia, ‘Freedom and Unity in Christ in Society’, vol. LII, *International Review of Missions* (January 1963): 447.

The emergence of African immigrant Christianity in the West might be taken as a direct historical and ecclesial response to the sort of picture that Busia paints here. Today, in Europe and North America, African Christianity represented by immigrant churches contributes immensely to factors keeping the faith alive in the minds of people. We cannot talk about growth in African Christianity without reference to African Christian churches in the western diasporas. The development verifies John Mbiti's observation that the centres of the church's universality are no longer in Geneva, Rome, Athens, Paris, London, and New York, but rather in Kinshasa, Buenos Aires, Addis Ababa and Manila.¹¹ Much of the modern West seems to have opted for the privatization of faith, demystification of the supernatural and secularization in the process of development and the organization of public life. This means the moral imperatives of Christianity and the right to make moral judgements for example are now subordinated to liberal concepts of personal rights.¹²

Christian Europe in Africa

The Eurocentric approach to world history missed such developments in Africa as the continent's enhanced place in the modern transformation of Christianity in the world.¹³ Thus an important book edited by Ogbu Kalu was entitled *African Christianity: It's an African Story*.¹⁴ The fact is, for over five centuries, the story of Christianity had been inextricably bound up with western civilizations. The western missionary enterprise in Africa had culminated in the formation of historic mission churches from the early decades of the nineteenth century. The historic mission denominations prioritized formal education and provided health care and other social services as tools of evangelization.¹⁵ Pastoral ministries, theological education, religious services, liturgical orders, clerical accoutrements and the architectural designs of chapel buildings with their high spires and stained-glass windows including interior set-ups and decorations, sustained models inherited from Western European Christendom traditions of the Victorian era. This was so because missionaries had a double identity as representatives of the gospel and as representatives of western cultures.¹⁶ Vestiges of the European Christian heritage remain to varying degrees within Christianity in Africa; nevertheless, African Christianity as representing particular modes of religious expression has changed seismically.

Africa's collective response to the presence of European Christianity may be discerned through a 1955 article by E.A. Asamoah with the revealing title: 'The Christian Church and African Heritage'. It appeared at a time when the Church in Africa was still searching for relevance more than a century after missionary work began. The Church in Africa had been struggling to make Christianity relevant within a culture in which, unlike in European Enlightenment societies, supernatural realities remained real, hyperactive and important. The clash of religious cultures generated a number of important responses among Christians in Africa.

The first response came towards the end of the nineteenth century when Nationalist or Ethiopianist churches emerged under indigenous leadership in Africa south of the Sahara. David Vincent Brown of the Niger Delta was representative of this development. He formed the Native Baptist Church and, to give

¹¹ Quoted in Jenkins, *Next Christendom*, 2.

¹² Philip Jenkins, *God's Continent: Christianity, Islam, and Europe's Religious Crisis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007): 39, 40.

¹³ For this point, see Kwame Bediako, 'Africa and Christianity on the Threshold of the Third Millennium: The Religious Dimension', *African Affairs*, 99 (2000): 303-323.

¹⁴ Ogbu U. Kalu ed., *African Christianity: It's an African Story* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2006).

¹⁵ Frederick P. Keppel, 'A Comment on Christian Missions to Africa', *International Review of Missions*, vol. XVIII, 72 (October 1929): 503-508.

¹⁶ Walls, *Missionary Movement in Christian History*, xviii.

practical expression to the African repudiation of Christianity as a western religion, he changed his name, becoming Mojola Agbebi. That was in the late 1880s. Subsequently, several Nationalist churches appeared across Africa. They did not become a mass movement as such but the Nationalist churches were important as indicators of the desire to express the Christian faith in ways that remained loyal to the Bible and indigenous religious sensibilities at the same time. The quest of the Christian Nationalists was a quest for an Africanization of the church that challenged white monopoly over ecclesial administrative structures and countered the denigration of indigenous cultures with a Nationalist anti-structure.¹⁷

It is the challenge thrown at the churches in Africa, beginning with the Nationalist churches that much later than the 1960s led academic theologians to start writing on African theology. There developed a fervent search for an authentic theology that would address African concerns and we find these in the writings of John S. Mbiti, E. Bolaji Idowu, Kwesi A. Dickson, Jean Marc Ela, Vincent Mulago and John S. Pobee. Mercy A. Oduyoye of Ghana later formed the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians to reflect on religion in Africa from gender, and precisely feminine, perspectives. Subsequently a major trend in African Christianity became the importance of religion and gender on the curricula of university departments for the study of religion and theological seminaries of the Protestant type. It is important to add that the Nationalist or Ethiopianist churches differ from later religious innovations in Africa on account of their appearance as the Christian religious counterparts of local parties such as the Aborigines Rights Protection Society that initiated the agitations leading to political independence from the 1950s.

The second response to mission Christianity came through the formation of the AICs. These blazed the trail in the integration of traditional worldviews and charismatic renewal phenomena into Christian belief and practice. Additionally they championed a gender ideology that ordained women and pursued practical forms of salvation that gave pastoral attention to such issues as healing and fertility which are all, in the traditional context, matters for religion. Unlike the Nationalist churches whose main agenda was administrative and the recognition of local cultural values and languages as important vehicles for Christian expression and practice, the AICs had a much more popular agenda of reform. Their key concern was the non-recognition of the power of the Holy Spirit in historic mission church life. Discerning African Christians criticized the negative disposition of historic mission Christianity to traditional worldviews of supernatural causality and the power of witchcraft in particular. Witchcraft for example had been denied in missionary preaching and homiletics as a psychological delusion and a figment of the African imagination.

In response, Asamoah articulated a position that had long been taken on board by the AICs with their integration of charismatic experiences into Christian worship and their decisive prayers for health, wholeness, employment, marriage, business, and promotion. Their pneumatic approach to Christianity made them so popular that the Nationalist churches started to slip into oblivion. The older denominations, from which the Nationalist churches walked out, now started to lose patrons in significant numbers. The AICs served as critiques of these older denominations for clutching at the Western European missionary theological heritage that had alienated traditional worldviews as nonsensical and superstitious with no contribution to make to the appropriation of the gospel. Asamoah wrote that the dismissive approach to African worldviews would not edge out such ideas from the imagination of the people even after they came to Christ.¹⁸

In fact, the article was coming fifty years after the beginning of African Initiated Christianity. Indeed by the time the World Mission Conference reconvened in Le Zoute, Belgium, in 1926, indigenous charismatic prophets – Garrick Sokari Braide of the Niger Delta, Isaiah Shembe of South Africa, William Wade Harris of West Africa, and Simon Kimbangu of Central Africa – had already taken the process of evangelization to another level drawing crowds and leading to the formation of AICs across Africa. On account of their

¹⁷ Ogbu U. Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008): 24.

¹⁸ Asamoah, 'The Christian Church and African Heritage', *International Review of Mission*. Vol. 44 (July 1955), 297.

disproportionate emphasis on the power of the Spirit and prayer the new AICs became known as Spiritual churches (churches of the Spirit) in Ghana and Aladura churches (churches of prayer) in Nigeria.

With the rise of Zionist, Spiritual and Aladura churches, Western European Christianity gradually ceased to be paradigmatic of the faith on African soil. The AICs emerged as embodiments of Christianity that was acclaimed as thoroughly Christian and truly African. As Lamin Sanneh observes, a process of internal change was thus initiated in which African Christians sought a distinctive way of life through mediation of the Spirit, a process that enhanced the importance of traditional religions for the deepening of Christian spirituality. He notes how the African spirit-centred movements of the early twentieth century combined the two fundamental elements of Christianity and African culture in ways that advertised their intentions without undervaluing their African credentials.¹⁹ The new African churches, inspired by what they had read from the translated Scriptures and their own charismatic experiences, developed a strong interventionist theology that helped patrons make sense out of the spiritually precarious African world and how the name of Jesus proved capable of dealing with the fears and insecurities emanating from the African universe.

Pentecostalism in African Christianity

In Africa, contemporary forms of Pentecostal expression with their mega-size urban-centred congregations, youthful membership, and innovative uses of modern media technologies and prosperity theologies may be included in what we consider as the third response to missionary Christianity. While Ethiopianism appealed to the African Christian elite of the late nineteenth century, the new prophetic movements and AICs took on a very spirit-centred character and in the processes were able to create mass conversions that enlarged the frontiers of Christianity in Africa beyond those of the missionaries. The classical Pentecostals of the 1930s lived their ecclesial lives in somewhat parallel fashion to the independent churches. The new Pentecostals, especially their modern mega-size versions based in urban Africa have emerged within a very different socio-economic context that has usually been captured in the word 'globalization'.

The prophetic movements out of which the AICs were born laid the foundations for the rise of contemporary Pentecostalism in modern Africa.²⁰ In *Religious Innovation in Africa* Harold W. Turner summarized the emphases of African Christianity as mediated through the AICs in two main theological themes. The first is a pneumatological emphasis in which the Godhead is envisaged as present and powerful through the Holy Spirit, who reveals the will of God and the destiny of the individual, guides through dangers and fills men with new powers of prophecy, utterance, prayer and healing. On that account Turner even proposed that a more appropriate designation for them would be prophet-healing churches. The second is a soteriological emphasis that calls on people to turn away from the spirits and deities of the traditional pantheon, and traditional medicine-men and -women with their magical powers and techniques. They then turn towards the Christian God for their salvation that is interpreted in very practical terms, including seeking protection from the host of evil forces that inhabit the African universe.²¹ To that extent, the key theological orientation of the new Pentecostal/Charismatic churches may not be markedly different from those of the AICs.

The point is that Pentecostalism in Africa has not developed as a monolithic movement. Classical Pentecostal denominations of both western missionary and indigenous kinds started in sub-Saharan Africa from the late 1920s. This means they developed alongside the AICs. This was the case until the late 1970s when new expressions of Pentecostalism started burgeoning in Africa. Contemporary Pentecostals, as I

¹⁹ Lamin O. Sanneh, *West African Christianity: The Religious Impact* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983): 180.

²⁰ Ogbu U. Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008): x.

²¹ Harold W. Turner, *Religious Innovation in Africa: Collected Essays on New Religious Movements* (Boston, MA: G.K. Hall, 1979): 98.

refer to them collectively, have manifested themselves as mega-sized urban-based independent churches; renewal movements within historic mission denominations; and as trans-denominational charismatic fellowships. The best known of the trans-denominational charismatic groups would be the Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship International originating from North America. Together the contemporary Pentecostals have further transformed the African Christian religious landscape. Trans-denominational charismatic fellowships for example promote a responsible church membership that makes those movements serve as conduits for charismatic renewal in non-Pentecostal churches. The new mega-size churches in particular have a tremendous appeal for Africa's youth and their innovative uses of modern media technologies and modernization of worship have contributed to their great appeal.

These churches have grown inside and outside Africa. With more than 10,000 worshippers attending its various weekly services in London alone, Pastor Ashimolowo's Kingsway International Christian Centre has taken over the territory of the Church of England as a contemporary Pentecostal Church with the single largest *active* congregation in Western Europe. Pastor Ashimolowo, aided by a vibrant media ministry, addresses more people around the world than any Protestant leader in Western Europe. The same is true of Eastern Europe where another Nigerian, Pastor Sunday Adelaja, runs a 25,000 member Church of the Embassy of the Blessed Kingdom of God for all Nations. A majority of the membership of God Embassy is white European and most of the early members of this 21-year-old church are recovered drug addicts and/or alcoholics. It is the moving testimonies of former drug and alcohol addicts and gang members and those of their grateful family members that have helped to populate God Embassy and turned their pastor, Sunday Adelaja, into a champion of Christian presence in former communist Europe. This charismatic Pentecostal church has also taken over territories that the Eastern Orthodox Church, until fairly recently, simply took for granted.

The prosperity gospel associated with contemporary Pentecostalism has often been criticized for its promotion of materialism in the name of a message of motivation and empowerment. That may well be the case if considered only against the backdrop of the flamboyant and materialistic lifestyles of some of its leaders in particular. But that is just one side of the story. The prosperity gospel has a very important empowerment and motivational dimension that often gets lost in the discussion. Within the difficult economic conditions and disappointing political leadership in Africa, many young people, through the motivational messages of contemporary Pentecostalism, have managed to take their destinies into their own hands for self-improvement. Testimonies abound of people who have returned to school to improve their employment prospects, others have started their own businesses, and for many others, simply choosing Jesus Christ has led to moral reformations that have helped to re-channel resources away from gambling, drinking, drugs and womanizing into more constructive purposes.

The Process of Transformation

The process of transformation of Christianity into a non-western religion has been inspired by several factors. Christian growth from the viewpoint of mission is inspired by the Holy Spirit who has been at work in the transformation of Christianity into a non-western religion. An important tool used by the Spirit was access to Scripture in the vernaculars. Bible translation helped to bring about a historic shift in Christianity's theological centre of gravity by pioneering a strategic alliance with local conceptions of religion.²² In non-western Christianity, unlike in western contexts, the Bible has largely kept its place with greater respect for its authority as divinely inspired text.²³ In the hands of many western theologians, on the

²² Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity: The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2003): 10-11.

²³ Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006): 4.

other hand, it is now a mere textbook, which means in many cases the Bible seems to have lost its authority, holiness and respect in church and family life.

If the Bible lost its place as the source of guidance for public life and morality in the West, it did so by first losing its status as more than a sacred book through a process of biblical relativism and gradual demystification.²⁴ It may have been completely lost on many western Christians that St Paul writing to Timothy referred to 'all scripture' as 'God-breathed' and useful among others for teaching, rebuke and training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16). Unlike in many western cases, vernacular translations of the Bible were generally received in African churches as inspired by the Spirit of God. With these vernacular translations went cultural renewal that encouraged Africans to view Christianity in a favourable light.²⁵ Missionaries played leading roles in the translation of the Bible into the languages of societies beyond the West and, in so doing, became champions of non-western cultures.²⁶ Thus in the midst of the recession of the faith in its former western heartlands and its accession in Africa, the major historical contributions of Christian missions needs to be upheld and commended.

African Christianity and Politics

In many places on the continent there was a close relationship between colonial power and the mission church.²⁷ This was understandable as these mission agencies had their roots and financial bases in Geneva, Basel, Bremen, Rome and London. We noted earlier that mission Christianity evangelized mainly through formal education. This meant that in post-colonial Africa, the leadership of various countries, including Ghana, Liberia, the Gambia, Sierra Leone, Benin, Ivory Coast and several others, were trained in mission schools. Many of them as we noted, such as Ghana's Kofi A. Busia, remained leading churchmen and preachers well into the 1970s. The development of autocratic regimes from the late 1970s led to much insecurity in the corridors of power. In the search for protection and longevity in office, several African leaders formed alliances with founders and prophets of spiritual churches for the provision of supernatural protection against enemies using mystical means to thwart political efforts. Stephen Ellis and Gerrie ter Haar note how former President Daniel Arap Moi of Kenya visited Prophetess Mary Akatsa. Apparently, she was not the only prophet to have been sought out by politicians who considered it a matter of interest to associate with powerful spiritual leaders.²⁸

In most of Africa, especially West, Central and East, coups occurred and, by the middle of the 1970s, these areas had come under military dictatorships. The leadership of many historic mission denominations was persecuted for using their academic clout to challenge the brutal regimes of military dictatorships in Ghana, Uganda and Liberia. The return to multi-party democracies from the middle of the 1980s was greatly facilitated by the Christian Councils and Catholic Bishops' Conferences with many clergymen chairing these transitions.²⁹ In Benin, Monsignor Isidore de Sousa who was Archbishop of Cotonou, presided over the transition to democratic rule in that country in the late 1980s. It is on record that the transitions from dictatorships to democratic governance in countries like Ghana, Togo and Benin were

²⁴ J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, 'Beyond Text and Interpretation: The Bible as a Book of Sacred Power in African Christianity', *Journal of African Christian Thought*, vol. 10, 2 (December 2007): 18-23.

²⁵ Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity*, 18.

²⁶ Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Modern Culture*. Revised and Expanded (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009): 30.

²⁷ Adrian Hastings, *A History of African Christianity 1950-1975* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1979).

²⁸ See Stephen Ellis and Gerrie ter Haar, *Worlds of Power: Religious Thought and Political Practice in Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 42, 44.

²⁹ See Paul Gifford, *Christianity and Politics in Doe's Liberia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); *Christianity, Politics and Public Life in Kenya* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

aided in part by especially mainline Christian denominations.³⁰ The developments coincided with the rise of the new Pentecostal churches. In the search for legitimacy various charismatic leaders struck new alliances with governments. The case of Frederick Chiluba of Zambia who declared his country officially Christian with the support of Pentecostal pastors is fairly well known and document in a study by Isabel Phiri.³¹ There has not been one unique mode of engagement therefore between the church and the political order and establishment, but what is true is that with the massive presence of Christianity on the continent the role of the church in the state continues to be an important one in Africa.

African Christianity in Scholarship

The writings of scholars in African Christianity demonstrate the extent to which the Christian tradition has, over the past century in particular, become part of Africa. They indicate some of the distinctively African shapes that Christianity is taking following its appropriation and integration as an African religious form. Christian scholarship follows and derives from Christian mission, Andrew Walls wrote, and the demand for scholarship occurred as soon as the gospel crossed its first cultural frontier – that between Israel and the Hellenistic world.³² Thus Christian mission from the inception of that process has been a history of scholarship and documentation and this is true also of the early planting of Christianity in Africa. Early Ethiopian Christianity developed its own distinctive literature and tradition of scholarship, using its own distinctive writing system and this, Walls notes, enabled the recovery of Ethiopian Christianity from near disaster.³³

The tradition of Christian scholarship continued with the modern missionary movement in Africa as the missionary movement, out of its essential concern to communicate the gospel, was forced into innovative scholarship.³⁴ The point is that non-western Christian theology, especially when focusing on Pentecostal/charismatic Christianity, is gradually shifting to the centre as mainstream theology. There is therefore a call for Christian scholarship in Africa to realize the dawn of that new theological era, and rise to the occasion. African theological scholarship will help determine the shape and quality of world Christianity because it is only in the area of theological scholarship that leadership may shift into African hands. Authentic theological scholarship, Walls argues, must arise out of Christian mission and, therefore, from the principal theatres of mission like Africa. What this means is that, if Africa and the other continents of the South fail to develop proper capacities for leadership in theological studies, there will be, for practical purposes, no theological studies anywhere that will be worth caring about.³⁵

Conclusion

Thus Africa, a continent that was minimal in Christian profession when the missionary movement began, has virtually moved to the position where it may have more professing Christians than any other

³⁰ Richard Joseph, "The Christian Churches and Democracy in Contemporary Africa", in John Witte, Jr. ed., *Christianity and Democracy in Global Context* (Boulder, Colorado: Worldview Press, 1993), 231, 234.

³¹ Isabel A. Phiri, "President Frederick Chiluba and Zambia: Evangelicals and Democracy in a 'Christian Nation'", in Terrence O. Ranger edited. *Evangelical Christianity and Democracy in Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008): 95-129.

³² Andrew F. Walls, 'Christian Scholarship in Africa in the Twenty-first Century', *Journal of African Christian Thought*. Vol. 4, 2 (December 2001): 44.

³³ Walls, 'Christian Scholarship in Africa', 45.

³⁴ Walls, 'Christian Scholarship in Africa', 46.

³⁵ Walls, 'Christian Scholarship in Africa', 47.

continent.³⁶ This was very much the thinking of Taylor who was once a missionary to East Africa, as he observed the sort of religious innovation championed by the AICs. Impressed with their innovation, spiritual dynamism and fervour he noted:

In Africa today it seems the incalculable Spirit has chosen to use the Independent Church Movement for another spectacular advance. This does not prove that their teaching is necessarily true but it shows they have the raw materials out of which a missionary church is made – spontaneity, total commitment, and the primitive responses that arise from the depths of life.³⁷

In Pauline thought, the God of mission is said to call into being things that are not as if they were; he uses the foolish and despised things of the world to shame the wise. In choosing Africa, God would seem then to have been acting true to character by choosing the weak things of the world to shame the strong; the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not to nullify the things that are ‘so that no-one may boast before him’ (1 Cor. 1:27-29). The growth and dynamism of Christianity in Africa and among Africans in the diasporas has also given the faith some new lease of life that may just ensure its survival as a world religion.

The type of Christianity and Christian theology coming from Africa would be important in understanding the current shape of world Christianity. Africa is very much a context that has been open to the work of the Spirit through various revivals and where the Bible has kept its place as containing God’s prophetic voice and authority. In the end no serious study of Africa can ignore Christianity and the role it has come to play in world Christianity. To understand African Christianity however, significant attention must be given to the ways in which indigenous Christians have appropriated the faith and made it workable against the backdrop of traditional religious and cultural worldviews. It is within these cultural worldviews that people locate their identity and function as human beings in relation to the transcendent powers of the universe with the God who revealed himself in Christ at the helm and *very active* in the power of the Holy Spirit.

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³⁶ Walls, *Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996): 85.

³⁷ John V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God: The Holy Spirit and the Christian Mission* (London: SCM, 1972): 54.

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