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(19) CHRISTIANITY IN EASTERN AFRICA

Alfred Olwa

Country	Religion	Pop_2010	Pct_2010	Pop_2025	Pct_2025	GrPct_1970_2025
Eastern Africa	Christians	225,497,000	65.8%	347,594,000	67.8%	2.9%
Eastern Africa	Independents	27,259,000	8.0%	41,058,000	8.0%	2.8%
Eastern Africa	African-initiated	21,912,000	6.4%			
Eastern Africa	Orthodox	37,658,000	11.0%	55,163,000	10.8%	2.6%
Eastern Africa	Oriental Orthodox	36,911,000	10.8%			
Eastern Africa	Protestants	90,795,000	26.5%	132,227,000	25.8%	2.5%
Eastern Africa	Anglicans	25,878,000	7.6%			
Eastern Africa	Baptist	12,482,000	3.6%			
Eastern Africa	Pentecostal	12,098,000	3.5%			
Eastern Africa	Lutheran	9,594,000	2.8%			
Eastern Africa	Adventist	6,308,000	1.8%			
Eastern Africa	Reformed, Presbyterian	5,952,000	1.7%			
Eastern Africa	Lutheran/Reformed	5,576,000	1.6%			
Eastern Africa	United churches	3,990,000	1.2%			
Eastern Africa	Nondenominational	3,532,000	1.0%			
Eastern Africa	Roman Catholics	74,746,000	21.8%	117,635,000	22.9%	3.1%
Eastern Africa	<i>Pentecostals/ Charismatics</i>	57,264,000	16.7%	86,883,000	16.9%	2.8%
Eastern Africa	<i>Evangelicals</i>	53,356,000	15.6%	80,235,000	15.6%	2.8%
Eastern Africa	Muslims	73,068,000	21.3%	110,238,000	21.5%	2.8%
Eastern Africa	adherents of traditional African religions	40,087,000	11.7%	49,109,000	9.6%	1.4%
Eastern Africa	Hindus	1,611,000	0.5%	2,128,000	0.4%	1.9%
Eastern Africa	Baha'is	1,144,000	0.3%	1,763,000	0.3%	2.9%
Eastern Africa	Jains	93,300	0.0%	134,000	0.0%	2.5%
Eastern Africa	Chinese folk religionists	70,900	0.0%	102,000	0.0%	2.5%
Eastern Africa	Sikhs	57,000	0.0%	80,700	0.0%	2.3%
Eastern Africa	Jews	37,400	0.0%	37,900	0.0%	0.1%
Eastern Africa	Buddhists	31,300	0.0%	45,900	0.0%	2.6%
Eastern Africa	adherents of new religious movements	3,200	0.0%	3,800	0.0%	1.0%
Eastern Africa	Zoroastrians	970	0.0%	970	0.0%	0.0%
Eastern Africa	Spiritists	600	0.0%	600	0.0%	0.1%
Eastern Africa	people professing no religion	1,042,000	0.3%	1,582,000	0.3%	2.8%
Eastern Africa	Total population	342,743,000	100.0%	512,821,000	100.0%	2.7%

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

In this account, Christianity in East Africa is surveyed at a broad level. We commence with a brief explanation of three major streams of Christianity in East Africa and a general look at five aspects of it: (1) Its historical origins, (2) Its increasing growth, (3) The encounter between politics and the gospel, (4) The way it represents Christianity in the market-place, and (5) The way in which it changed indigenous cultural practices. We then highlight the nature and shape of Christianity in the major denominational families as well as noting some major challenges it currently faces. We consider briefly also the question of ecumenism before some concluding remarks.

Explaining Three Streams of Christianity in East Africa

Christianity in East Africa, according to my categorization for the purpose of this essay, exists in three main streams. My choice of the expression ‘streams’ is deliberate. I use this word in the sub-title of this section to mean the ‘outflow of Christianity in East Africa’. The three streams refer to (1) Mainline denominations – Catholic, Anglicans, Lutheran and Greek Orthodox. This stream includes the largest group; (2) Pentecostal and Charismatic denominations – Africa Inland Church, Baptist Church, Full Gospel, Pentecostal Assemblies of God, Presbyterian Church, Salvation Army, and the Seventh Day Adventists, among others. These groups constitute the fastest growing Christian denominations; and (3) African Instituted churches¹ – Chosen Evangelical Revival, Church of the One Almighty God (Abamalaki), African Brotherhood Church, African Church of the Holy Spirit, African Divine Church, Maria Legio of Africa, and the Nomiya Luo Church, among others. In the third stream of churches there are some Christian bodies with only one or just a few congregations. These include Power of Jesus, Wokofu African Church, and the Holy Spirit Church of Zayun, among others. The reason we give a brief sketch of these three streams is to show that East Africa has become very much a Christian belt in Africa.

More may be said about these streams of churches. With the exception of the African Instituted Churches, the first and second streams usually have strong ties with their historical roots in the western world. However, from 2005, parts of the Anglican churches in East Africa have rejected teachings from their counterparts in the West which are questioning the authority of Scripture. Henry Luke Orombi, the Anglican Archbishop of Uganda (2002-2010), epitomizes such rejection. At the peak of his leadership when he rallied resistance against disobedience to the authority of Scripture by some churches in the West, he wrote:

The Bible cannot appear to us a cadaver, merely to be dissected, analysed and critiqued, as has been the practice of much modern higher biblical criticism. Certainly we engage in biblical scholarship and criticism, but what is important to us is the power of the Word of God precisely as the *Word* of God – written to bring transformation in our lives, our families, our communities and our culture. For us, the Bible is ‘living and active, sharper than a double-edged sword; it penetrates to dividing soul and spirits, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart’ (Heb. 4:12). The transforming effect of the Bible on Ugandans has generated so much conviction and confidence that believers were martyred in the defence of the message of salvation through Jesus Christ that it brought.²

For the Ugandan church to compromise God’s call of obedience to the Scriptures would be the undoing of more than 125 years of Christianity through which African life and society have been transformed.

¹ For a more fuller list of these churches of African Initiated Churches originating in Kenya, see Dr. Philomena N. Mwaura of Kenyatta University, assisted by Rev. Bernard Nyabwari, in: *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*, www.dacb.org/history/aics-kenya.html. Accessed 18 March 2015.

² Henry Luke Orombi, ‘What Is Anglicanism?’ in 2007 First Things. www.firstthings.com/author/archbishop-henry-luke-orombi. Accessed 19 March 2015.

Historical Developments

In most of East Africa, Christianity had its origins and growth tied in with socio-political factors of the region during the missionary era. On a broad scale across East Africa, the best introduction to this subject is perhaps still Ronald Oliver's classic, *The Missionary Factor in East Africa*.³ It was out of the humble dedicated work of missionaries as objectively discussed by Oliver that Christianity in East Africa was planted.

Once Christianity was planted in East Africa during the missionary era, it grew and spread to different parts of the region; however, this growth was not uniform: some mission stations were established fairly quickly while others struggled. For instance, in the case of Uganda, Baganda evangelists embraced the gospel introduced by CMS missionaries and soon they were dedicated to spreading the gospel within Uganda and beyond. Kevin Ward in 1991 wrote:

Missionaries arrived first at the court of Kabaka Muteesa in 1877; almost a century after the missionary impetus from Europe had begun. And yet, within 25 years, Uganda had become one of the most successful mission fields in the whole of Africa.⁴

While the CMS missionaries arrived on 30th June 1877, the Roman Catholic Archbishop Lavigerie's missionary order – the White Fathers – arrived in Buganda in June 1879, much to the consternation of the Protestants. The CMS missionary, Alexander Mackay, brought with him invaluable practical skills and he preached with much passion, which the early converts in the Kabaka's palace liked very much. But when the White Fathers arrived, Mackay's match was to be found in Simeon Lourdel in his debating skills.⁵

In Kenya, at the end of the fifteenth century, the Portuguese had established their presence and some rulers were converted to Catholicism; however, Portuguese meddling caused hatred as, with the dwindling of Portugal's power, Christianity declined.⁶ In 1844, it was the CMS missionary Ludwig Kraft who arrived in Mombasa with his pregnant wife in order to renew the Christian presence against decline. He had been expelled from Ethiopia for attempting to win over the Orthodox Church. In 1862, Bishop Tozer established a second Anglican mission station in Tanzania, at Zanzibar. David Livingstone's advocacy brought about the Universities' Mission to Central and East Africa (UMCA). In the fight against slave trade, it was more innovative than Kraft.

The UMCA's most impressive missionary was Frank Weston who arrived in Zanzibar in 1898, was made bishop in 1908, and fought for *the abolition of Serfdom in East Africa*; by the 1920s he was a leading figure in the Anglican Communion and his death at 53 was felt deeply.⁷ Over time, the most remarkable missionary work was the German Lutheran ministry among the Chagga of the Mount Kilimanjaro region. By the 1870s, CMS had already established in Mpapwe, Dodoma and Mwanza as part of their supply route from the coast to Uganda. CMS Australia assumed responsibility in 1929 and, ironically, Mwita Akiri (at the time of writing, bishop of the diocese of Tarime in Tanzania), in his thesis 'The Growth of Christianity in Ugogo and Ukaguru',⁸ makes the case that, in Tanzania, Catholic mission experienced to be joined by many Protestants.

³ Ronald A. Oliver, *The Missionary Factor in East Africa* (London: Longmans, 1952).

⁴ Kevin Ward, 'A History of Christianity in Uganda' in Nthamburi Z (ed), *From Mission to Church* (Nairobi: Uzima, 1991), 81-112.

⁵ Kevin Ward, *A History of Global Anglicanism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 166.

⁶ G. S. P. Freeman-Grenville, *The Mombasa Rising Against the Portuguese, 1631* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 163.

⁷ H. Maynard Smith, Frank, *Bishop of Zanzibar* (London: SPCK, 1926).

⁸ Mwita Akiri, 'The Growth of Christianity in Ugogo and Ukguru', Ph.D dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1999.

The success of the planting and growth of Christianity in East Africa were also experienced in Congo, Rwanda and Burundi. The vigour of the churches in these countries arose out of the evangelistic inspiration of the East African Revival which started in Uganda, moved to Rwanda, was reinforced with a vibrant thrust back into Uganda and then spread beyond Uganda. A challenge remains for the Anglican Church in Rwanda with the genocide that took place between the Hutu and Tutsi in 1994: what do they understand by Christian discipleship?⁹

Despite the success of the planting and spread of Christianity in the missionary era in East Africa, there were pockets of resistance to the missionaries and the gospel they preached by some groups. Among these groups in Uganda was the society of the One Almighty God (the *Abamaki*).¹⁰ In 1924, they came into contact with the people of north-western Tanzania and established their branches in Tanzania, resenting the CMS. A similar indigenous group was *Nomiya* ('I have received'), which started in Kenya and spread to Tanzania – also a result of secession from CMS.¹¹

More is yet to be said about resistance to missionary Christianity. Actually, in Kenya there are several more independent Christian churches that have broken ties with other Protestant denominations. The largest of these is the Nomiya Luo Church, whose founder, Johana Owalo, was an early convert to Christianity in 1900. It is believed that in 1907 he had a vision in which the angel Gabriel took him to heaven. While in heaven, he claims to have seen that Europeans and Asians, and even popes, were not allowed to enter heaven. However, later Owalo converted to Islam and began to preach against mission churches – and that mission churches were opposed to traditional beliefs. It is striking that Owalo's mix of Christian, Anglican and traditional practices attracted many followers. While missionaries encountered resistance from native peoples such as the Owalo in their work in East Africa, their labour in the gospel was not in vain; it would emerge more visibly in the 1970s and continue to the present.

As with other parts of Africa, there is some consensus among scholars that the nature and shape of Christianity in Africa in this century will be determined by events and processes that take place outside a western context.¹² Indeed, Andrew Walls helpfully observes that the distinguishing dogmas, worship, moral instructions and social practices of Christianity and new schemas for theology will progressively be those noticeable in Africa,¹³ raising questions of historical development as well as the nature and shape of Christianity in East Africa.

In this survey, we ask: why is it that across the different denominations in East Africa there is a general sense in which every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ has a deep feeling of being a missionary. And, what implication does this feeling have for the public face of Christianity in East Africa? It continues to take on a volcanic dimension – not only in the increasingly explosive growth of its adherents – but also in many other aspects, including its indigenous leadership and cultural, political, and economic dimensions. What is behind these developments? To these questions we now turn.

⁹ See discussion on this challenge in Meg Guillebaud, *Rwanda: The Land God Forgot? Revival, Genocide and Hope* (London: Monarch, 2002).

¹⁰ John Iliffe, *A Modern History of Tanganyika* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1979), 363.

¹¹ Iliffe, *A Modern History of Tanganyika*, 363.

¹² These scholars include Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995). He argues that African Christianity is to be seen as 'the renewal of a non western religion'; Philip Jenkins, *The New Christendom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). He argues that in the 'new Christendom' Africa was a key player.

¹³ Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2002), 85.

Increasing Growth

As Christianity in East Africa multiplied from the mid-twentieth century, a significant increase in its profile was noticed across the denominations from the 1970s. For example, in Table 1 below, by 1970, the percentage of the population of Christians in East Africa was 49.4%. It increased by 65.9% by 2010, while by 2020 it is projected to reach 67.0%. This projection shows a clear increase in Christian numbers: nearly 45% of Africa's Christians will be found in East Africa, an increase of approximately 39% since 1970. However, numbers tell us nothing of the depth and extent of maturity of the Christian faith in East Africa.

Although out of sequence with this discussion of increasing growth, Paul Gifford, a Catholic historian, focusing on Christianity in Ghana in his *Ghana's New Christianity*, the new kind of Christianity that he describes is clearly rising across East Africa: it is a type of Christianity that is deeply engaged with the context of life in modern East Africa, engaging East Africans culturally, politically and economically.¹⁴

Table 1: Christianity in East Africa, 1970-2020

County	1970			2020			
	Population	Christians	%	Population	Christians	%	Rate*
Eastern Africa	111,412,000	55,009,000	49.4	431,818,000	289,235,000	67.0	3.38
Burundi	3,513,000	1,500	0.6	933,000	4,500	0.5	2.62
Kenya	11,252,000	7,058,000	62.7	52,564,000	43,068,000	81.9	3.68
Rwanda	3,749,000	2,292,000	61.1	14,042,000	12,964,000	92.3	3.53
South Sudan	3,785,000	858,000	22.7	13,181,000	8,405,000	63.8	4.67
Tanzania	13,605,000	5,007,000	36.8	61,081,000	34,028,000	55.7	3.91
Uganda	9,446,000	6,429,000	61.8	45,424,000	38,310,000	84.3	3.63

* Rate = average annual Christian growth rate, per cent per year 1970-2020

Note: This table has been adopted from 'Christianity in its Global Context, 1970-2020: Society, Religion and Mission': 24-25, *Centre for the Study of Global Christianity, Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary*, June 2013: 1-92. It was modified by this writer, extracting only data that suits our definition of East Africa (so omitting data on countries outside the current protocol of the East African community).

The Encounter between Politics and the Gospel

In allowing Christianity in East Africa to influence everything else around our way of life, clearly East African Christians are being honest and clear about their existence: they are being true to themselves; there is no putting on of masks. Take a recent but important example from the practice of Christianity and politics as exhibited by the President of the Republic of Uganda; Lieut-General Yoweri Kaguta Museveni will suffice to illustrate a practice that is currently spreading across East Africa.

President Museveni made a prayer on the eve of the National Day of the celebration of Uganda's Independence Jubilee on 8th October 2012, at an overnight prayer meeting at the Nelson Mandela National Stadium.¹⁵

¹⁴ Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalizing African Economy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 23.

¹⁵ The event was organized by Uganda Jubilee Network a loose coalition of Christian leaders, Pastors and organisations together with the Covenant Nations Church (whose pastor is the President's daughter).

Father God in heaven, today we stand here as Ugandans, to thank you for Uganda. We are proud that we are Ugandans and Africans. We thank you for all your goodness to us. I stand here today to close the evil spiritual past and especially in the last fifty years of our national leadership history and at the threshold of a new dispensation in the life of this nation.

I stand here on my own behalf and on behalf of our past leaders to repent. We ask for your forgiveness for our own sins, and those of our past leaders. We confess these sins, which have greatly hampered our national cohesion and delayed our political, social and economic transformation: sins of idolatry and witchcraft, so rampant in our land; sins of shedding innocent blood; sins of political hypocrisy, dishonesty, intrigue and betrayal; sins of pride, tribalism and sectarianism; sins of laziness, indifference and irresponsibility; sins of corruption and bribery that have eroded our national resources; sins of sexual immorality, drunkenness and debauchery; sins of un-forgiveness, bitterness, hatred and revenge; sins of injustice, oppression and exploitation; sins of rebellion, insubordination, strife and conflict.

These and many others have characterised our past leadership, especially the last fifty years of our history. Lord, forgive us, and give us a new beginning. Give us a heart to love you, to fear you and to seek you. Remove far from us all the above sins. We pray for national unity. Unite us as Ugandans and eliminate all forms of conflict, sectarianism and tribalism. Help us to see that we are all your children, children of the same Father; help us to love and respect one another and to appreciate unity in diversity.

We pray for prosperity and transformation. Deliver us from ignorance, poverty and disease. As leaders, give us wisdom to help lead our people into political, social and economic transformation. We want to dedicate this nation to you so that you will be our God and guide. We want Uganda to be known as a nation that fears God, a nation whose foundations are firmly rooted in righteousness and justice.

Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord – a people you have chosen as your own (Ps. 33:12). I renounce all the evil foundations and covenants that were laid in idolatry and witchcraft. I renounce all the satanic influence in this nation. And I hereby covenant Uganda to you, to walk in your ways and experience all your blessing for ever. In the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

The above prayers said by President Museveni, a politician with the background of the influence of the Revival Movement, show the hard facts of political leadership and the real content of daily life that politicians and Christian leaders deal with in East Africa. Although this prayer also acknowledges the significance of Christianity as lived by politicians, some Christian politicians in East Africa have used texts such as Proverbs 11:10 which state that ‘when the righteous prosper, the city rejoices’. But in this prayer the president used the Scripture from Psalm 33:12: ‘Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord. A people you have chosen as your own.’ It is helpful to understand the President’s prayer within the broader socio-political historical context of Uganda. It reinforces the significance of the question as to what place Christianity and daily living has done or used to do in East Africa, in structuring political power.

Furthermore, the fact that the President prayed it on the eve of the celebration of Uganda’s Independence Jubilee that was organized by a section of the religious community – including a section of the Christian community – in Uganda highlights the interplay between politics and Christianity in Uganda today. As much as the interplay between politics and Christianity is very real in the case of Uganda, the same is true in the rest of East Africa. And the content of the prayer by President Museveni – notably, the cleansing of the ‘evil spiritual past and especially in the last fifty years of our national leadership history and at the threshold of a new dispensation in the life of this nation’, is quite telling: the evils mentioned – and not mentioned; and the acknowledgement that Uganda is faced with a transition which is familiar all over East Africa.

Christianity in the Market-place

Across the different major Christian denominations in East Africa, there are Christian institutions as well as Christian men and women motivated by a desire to be Christ's representatives in the market-place of higher education as well as business as forms of Christian mission. They are pitched in doing business in a missional way: bringing the gospel to bear in their working life. The institutions of the major denominations include Kenyatta Methodist University, Kenya; Catholic University of East Africa, Kenya; St Paul's University, Kenya; the Lutheran University of Tumaini University, Tanzania; Uganda Pentecostal University, Uganda; and Uganda Christian University (UCU), Uganda, among others.

In 1997, the Anglican Church in Uganda founded Uganda Christian University. Our founding Vice-Chancellor, Prof Stephen Noll, writing on 'Higher Education as Mission: The Case of Uganda Christian University' observed that the university as a tool for mission in the hands of the Church of Uganda would be 'an authentically Christian university, not only in name but in substance'.¹⁶ This meant two things which rings true across all Christian institutions of the different denominations spread across East Africa. First, it exposed an obvious need of the denominations to continue in actively spreading the gospel in the modern context of East Africa through higher education. Scholars in the region agree that this pattern is on the rise. One such Anglican priest-turned-academic and university administrator is James Kombo of Kenya.¹⁷ In his article, 'The Past and Presence of Christian Theology in African Universities', he observed that much as Christianity in Africa is on the rise, it must 'embrace creativity and innovation in theological education, while avoiding the mistakes of North America and Europe, and incorporating some of the best practices in modern universities'.¹⁸ Although his observation was made of Africa generally, whilst living and practising in East Africa, Kombo's observation makes perfect sense in East Africa for the different denominations involved in spreading Christian education at university, and not just theological education. Christian education has become increasingly popular in East Africa. The different denominations have realized that this precious way of education is not to be eschewed in their institutions if they are to remain representatives for Jesus Christ in the market-place.

Secondly, it means that for a market-place like UCU, morning devotions and community prayers are held twice during the week in the university. In doing this, the Christian denominations are continuing for students and employees from a Christian background a natural activity for the different issues in life that Christianity addresses through worship and biblical teaching. Moreover, for people who have no Christian background, both students and employees, a new Christian foundation is laid. At some of the Christian institutions, employees are requested to fast and pray for their institution once every semester to avoid losses and or bankruptcies in the case of Christian corporations.¹⁹ Often spiritual reasons are given for the success or failure of these institutions. Besides the institutions above, there are Christian companies with branches spread across East Africa. One such company working largely with churches in the region is the Equity Bank. Their business is run on Christian principles. Besides a manager, the company has appointed a bishop as a spiritual overseer for the life of the organization. Their spiritual activities are run just as they

¹⁶ Stephen Noll, 'Higher Education as Mission: The Case of Uganda Christian University': 913-918, 913, in Isabel Apawo Phiri and Dietrich Werner (eds), *A Handbook of Theological Education in Africa*, Dorpspruit, South Africa: Cluster Publications, 2013.

¹⁷ Professor James Kombo is Deputy Vice Chancellor Academic Affairs at Daystar University, Nairobi, Kenya; currently he is our External Examiner in the Bishop Tucker School of Divinity and Theology. But he is also an Ordained Anglican Priest in the Anglican Church of Kenya.

¹⁸ James Kombo, 'The Past and Presence of Christian Theology in African Universities': 100-107, 107, in Isabel Apawo Phiri and Dietrich Werner (eds), *A Handbook of Theological Education in Africa*, Dorpspruit, South Africa: Cluster Publications, 2013.

¹⁹ A day of prayer and fasting for the University is fixed on the Semester Rotas. The theme of the prayers is simply: prayer and fasting as taught in the Bible.

would be in church and other sacred places. In doing so, they remain on course as representing Jesus Christ in the market-place in East Africa.

Changing Indigenous Cultural Practices

On the cultural front, the rise of Christianity in East Africa has also changed the landscape significantly. It has fast-tracked a culture that was already religious into become something even more recognizably so. It has, however, controlled the religious zeal in ways that directed and transformed people's spiritual energies according to the message from God as revealed in Christian tradition. Now, instead of consulting the diviner in times of drought, sickness or natural calamity, Christians, led by their politicians, fill a national stadium to pray to the Christian God for answers to such issues. Many believe that this Christian God was with them in East Africa before the missionaries came and introduced Christianity. The language they use to name their children, especially among the brethren in the East African Revival, are imported from Christianity.²⁰

As the culture itself became more Christian, many of the traditions that were seen as secular in East Africa have been re clothed in a Christian outfit - or have simply disappeared. For instance, in the northern part of Uganda, in the area covered by the Anglican dioceses of Lango and of West Lango, the traditional initiation rite – called *Kayo cogo* – used to prepare newly married young women into a new clan, have totally disappeared in the late 1990s.²¹ This tradition was central to the process of gaining acceptance in the clan (among the Langi of Uganda) when a woman is married, but Christians in the 1980s and the 1990s publicly rejected the practice, preaching against it and calling it a pagan and secular tradition that was not sanctioned by biblical teaching. The Revival sects, *Gwara* (Trumpeters) and *Nico* (Re-awakened) in the diocese (at that time, the Diocese of Lango), continued preaching against it and members of these sects would not eat in the homes of anyone who openly condoned it, causing tension in families until the practice disappeared.

With the general picture of Christianity in East Africa, we now turn to look broadly at the nature and shape of Christianity in the three major streams of Christianity in t region.

Mainline Denominations

Within the mainline denominations, as elsewhere in Africa,²² at the heart of the churches there lies the Christian message: the gospel is public and relevant to the individual as well as to society. Given that the Christian message is ever-expanding across the different denominations since the missionary era, it is an indication in part of its coming of age in East Africa. This is precisely what is happening in the mainline denominations. It is also remarkable that new congregations emerge every week, and there are numerous changes of names and relocation of places of worship. Why? A key reason for the emergence of new

²⁰ See Manuel Muranga, 'The Revival's Impact on the Naming Traditions of the Peoples of East Africa, with Special Reference to Kigezi and Ankole': 65-80, in William Rukirande, Joan Hall, Zabuloni Kabaza, Elisabeth Traill, Apolo Nsibambi, Medard Birungi, Manuel Muranga, Medard Ruyendo, *The East African Revival Through Seventy Years (1935-2005)* Kampala, Uganda: Logik Media, 2005.

²¹ At the funeral of the late Muzee Aleny Ketitic, Aboke, Kole district Bishop Melchizedek Otim while officiating at the funeral was challenged by one of the tradition clan leaders in Lango, lamenting the Christianity in the diocese has wiped out the traditional rite: *Kayo cogo!* *Kayo cogo* is a primitive cultural practice where newly married woman is ushered into the clan of her husband. She is made to sit naked on a cow that all the legs are tied together until the cow is dead. There is great celebration at the occasion.

²² See Chapter 10, 'The East African Revival', 169-188, in Mark Noll, *The New Shape of World Christianity: How American Experience Reflects Global Faith*, Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009.

congregations every week and for the relocation of worship place is partly the rapid growth of the Christian faith. Growth comes with some changes and some pain.

The growth in the mainline denominations is directly linked with leadership and the working of the Holy Spirit. Leadership in the mainline denominations has become predominantly non-white, especially in the Anglican Church, Africa Inland Church, the Baptist Church, and even in the Catholic Church as it is fast becoming less dominated by foreign ministers. Closely connected with leadership in the mainline churches is denominational management. Denominationally, Christianity in East Africa has become indigenised. We may illustrate this with the benefit of hindsight in the history of Uganda when Bishop Alfred Tucker came in 1913 to offer leadership to the local Anglican church. At the outset of his ministry, Tucker proposed to set up a theological college at Namirembe to train Ugandans to lead the church. Tucker's vision became a reality as observed by scholars who studied the work of local Christians in the mainline churches. Among these scholars are Louis Pirouette who referred to the native peoples as 'Black Evangelists'.²³ Pirouette took great care to show how Christianity in the mainline churches in Uganda had been carried forward at great personal cost to the native peoples who were converted to Christianity.

This dedication is true, not only of the mainline churches in Uganda but across East Africa. And, in the early 1970s, a Ugandan historian-turned-developer and priest, Tom Tuma, produced a work that gave credit to the Basoga Catechist.²⁴ However, there was a second reason why early missionaries like Bishop Tucker supported the work of the native peoples in spreading the gospel: the high mortality rates among the missionaries. Once the native peoples led the mainline churches, the churches across the different denominations have learned to support themselves financially. A good example is the Lutheran church in Tanzania which was a real success story. Nearly every Sunday together with worship there is fund-raising in every church in order to sustain and grow church activities.

Pentecostals and Charismatic Churches

One of the features of Christianity in East Africa is the face of Pentecostalism. Pentecostalism in East Africa is charismatic in its nature. The Pentecostal church churches in East Africa is growing fast, a characteristic not unique to East African Christianity but true all over Africa. This has become increasingly so since the 1990s. The Pentecostal churches in East Africa date back to the late 1800s but for many reasons they really took off in the 1970s. Pentecostalism is now at the heart of church growth of Christianity in East Africa. What are the reasons for this? The worldviews of Africans that comprehend the spirit world and how it influences daily life are part of this. Bishop Festo Kivengere of Uganda, perhaps the greatest evangelist from that country in the twentieth century tells in his 'Testimony' of how he worshipped God through the agents of the spirits of his dead ancestors before his conversion to Christianity:

Being the firstborn, my father introduced me to this worship very early. He taught me by example. He took me to the worship. We sacrificed together. And yet we never found that god... He remained a distant god – someone too far to help you when you needed him. That is where I grew.²⁵

²³ Louis Pirouette, *Black Evangelist* (Yet to complete the citation)

²⁴ The Rev Canon Dr Tom Tuma taught history at Makerere University after graduating with a PhD in history from the London School of Oriental studies. Later he became Ordained and worked as Co-ordinator of Planning, Development, and Rehabilitation Officer of the Church of Uganda. He is a priest of Busoga Diocese.

²⁵ Festo Kivengere, 'Testimony'. Pages 416-417 in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice: Official Reference Volume, Papers and Responses*. Edited by J. D Douglas Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1975.

This telling testimony, seemingly so far from biblical Christianity, includes the religious background that influenced his conversion and belief in the Christian God. Later, in an interview with his biographer, Anne Coomes, he confessed that belief in the Christian God was a settled matter, but the real problem was found in the question: ‘How can we know him?’ Indeed, the worldview in which he was raised facilitated his understanding of the Christian God. This was nothing unique to Kivengere: it is common to all Africans – including East Africans!

Additionally, any expression of the gospel that embraces the manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit connects immediately with the spirit-centred culture of the African people and their traditional religions.²⁶ In 2010, Todd Johnson, Kenneth Ross and Sandra Lee, in their book, *Atlas of Global Christianity, 1910-2010*, indicate that Pentecostals, not only in East Africa, but also all over Africa are still growing rapidly.²⁷ Indeed, when charismatic Christians are placed together with the Pentecostals, then their numbers are significant. A striking feature of the Pentecostal movement in East Africa today is this: when you move in the region, it is hard to find aspects of society that are not touched by it. For example, all over in Uganda, you find radio ministries, healing programmes, and now there is a move to capture power in the region!

In Tanzania, a Pentecostal pastor proudly told me: ‘If the mainline churches cannot get rid of the Pentecostals, then just work with them.’ This is not perhaps the view of the Pentecostal church but the expression of an attitude from within the Pentecostal movement towards the mainline churches. A closer look at the profile of the Pentecostals reveals its attraction for the young, educated and enterprising affluent classes in urban society. In Uganda today, this class of urban Pentecostals enjoys a great sense of influence in the nation.

In East Africa, the *Balokole* (‘saved ones’) as well as the Pentecostals have enjoyed the missionary trait of the East African Revival brethren, which itself has links with the missionary traits of the Keswick movement of the 1870s. A good example of this is found in Kivengere’s style of preaching in which he combines in one sermon what the Keswick leaders would preach in a week at their conference, and on the last day they preach and make an appeal for believers to reach out in mission.²⁸ They preach the gospel with a sense of urgency and spread it from ‘everywhere to everywhere’.²⁹ They explicitly believe in the work of the Holy Spirit in individuals and communities. According to them, God can speak to any individual who is following the lead of the Holy Spirit by opening him or her to spreading their faith all over East Africa. Their theology assures them that the Holy Spirit can use anyone to do missionary work as long as they have the calling of God.

But more striking are their eschatological convictions of the immanent rapture and tribulation, judgement and hell, which make it imperative for them to reach the world and to bring salvation to many. I have heard heated debates in my preaching classes,³⁰ drawing students from all over East Africa. One Pentecostal pastor expressing that ‘he is living on bonus time’ and so, like Richard Baxter, said, ‘I preach like a dying man to dying men’. At which, another from Tanzania shot back, ‘I have preached throughout overnight prayers and I “lost his voice” because I am living in the end times.’ These heated conversations

²⁶ Harvey C. Kwiyani, ‘The Holy Spirit in African Theology’, *Transformed* 1, no. 1 (2001).

²⁷ Todd M Johnson, Kenneth R. Ross, and Sandra S. K. Lee, *Atlas of Global Christianity, 1910-2010* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 20019), 110-11.

²⁸ Alfred Olwa, *Missionary of Reconciliation: The Role of the Doctrine of Reconciliation in the Preaching of Festo Kivengere of Uganda between 1971-1988*, Carlisle: Cumbria: 2013, 100-101.

²⁹ The expression is my critical appreciation of Michael Nazir Ali, *Mission is From Every Where to Every where*.

³⁰ I teach Homiletics, Evangelism, and Christian Communication to BD2 and Master of Divinity 2; and, Expository Preaching to Doctor of Ministry. The profile of the preaching classes is a broad range of students coming from different Christian denominations. However, the majority are Anglicans.

made the class lively! But these attitudes lie behind their missionary convictions that have brought about much outreach and enabled their churches to grow.

While interacting with my theology students in our discipleship group,³¹ a fascinating feature has been the observation that there are Pentecostal pastors who from their background have no experience of the mainline churches. Their experiences are different, especially those who have converted to Christianity in the late 1980s and worked with the Miracle Centre in Kampala. They have found it difficult to stay in the mainline churches and live out their faith but, interestingly, often at the end of their BD course, they have still sought ordination within the Anglican Church and then have brought about a great transformation in their ministry to young people.

Pentecostal and Charismatic churches are used to freedom in worship – long praise and worship songs, loud singing, spontaneity and long sermons; they have coined a name for 15-minute sermons: *amala*, a kind of appetizer! Of course, this hunger for the word is not found only in Pentecostal churches. At St Francis Chapel at Makerere University, I once preached a 15-minute sermon under the strict supervision of my English tutor and I was challenged by a Christian physics professor for a short sermon: a ten-minute sermon is like a period for kindergartens whose concentration span is short. We are adults. Don't starve us!

Moreover, Pentecostals and Charismatics find it difficult to settle under the structured leadership of the mainline churches. The spirituality of these faithful ones is shaped by the word of God. Jesus is their Lord and Saviour and Friend who they commune with daily. Their pastors are referred to by expressions like 'man of God' or 'woman of God', and they speak prophetically into the situation and lives of individuals. Prayer with passion and fervour is central to their ministry and way of life. However, their understanding of prophecy in the sense of *forthtelling* and *foretelling* is incomplete. They tend to emphasize *foretelling* rather than *forthtelling*. In most of the Pentecostal churches in East Africa, 'feeling welcome', 'feeling appreciated', 'feeling loved' and 'feeling at home' are expressions commonly used and are also the reason why Pentecostals prefer to stick with their Pentecostal churches when they visit or move from one place to another in East Africa.

African Instituted Churches

'African instituted churches' in East Africa are known variously as African 'independent' churches or African 'initiated' churches. A closer look at the etymology of the terms describing these churches reveal some degree of ambiguity. For instance, the terms 'instituted', 'initiated' and 'independent', when used in a broad sense, may also refer to the numerous Pentecostal and Charismatic churches of East Africa.³² However, here we take only a brief look at a few AICs. These are native spiritual churches spread all over East Africa but founded by foretelling and far-sighted spiritual leaders.

In their practice of Christianity, AICs depict a spirit-filled style of worship combined with a strong emphasis on the show of spiritual power of their leaders in the form of miraculous healing and exorcisms. Within East Africa, especially in the mainline churches, they are branded as syncretistic, as sects or cults. However, this perception is considered negative in the eyes of AICs. For the AICs, they are very much part

³¹ See Alfred Olwa, 'Discipleship Groups: Philosophy and Purpose in the Context of Bishop Tucker School of Divinity and Theology Training': 1-4, presented to the Bishop Tucker School of Divinity and Theology, Easter Semester 2014. Unpublished paper.

³² The list of Pentecostal and Independent Churches in East Africa, see Barrett, *Kenya Churches Handbook: The Development of Kenya Christianity 1498-1973*, Kisumu, Kenya: Evangel Publishing House.

of the Christian church. Why? They can only explain their argument in terms of their defence of Jesus Christ.³³

Members of AICs largely often be recognized by their dress code: usually a long white *sultana* robe accompanied by sandals. Although in the rural areas, due to their poverty, most people walk barefoot, it has become a general for most members of AICs in rural areas to go without shoes. And most of their men wear beards. In East Africa, the most numerous and most popular AICs are to be found in Kenya. Among these is the Celestial Church (Kenya) which is also found throughout East Africa. The Aladura type of AICs has transformed itself from being seen as a quasi-spiritual sub-group to being a vibrant Christian church accepted by World Council of Churches. A good example of this is the Redeemed Christian Church of God.

Their denomination's charismatic founders also know most AICs for their firm loyalty. This loyalty – some argue – sometimes seems to supersede even their commitment to Jesus Christ. For instance, in Gulu in Northern Uganda, there is an AIC called Evangelist Yustu Otunu's Chosen Evangelical Revival (CER), with branches in Lango, Teso, Masindi, Hoima, Mukono, Tororo, West Nile, South Sudan (Kejokeji) and Kitgum. As its founder, this evangelist led the denomination until his death in exile in the USA.³⁴ His followers know him as their father (Baba/Daddy) and follow him with undivided loyalty. When he went to their monthly fellowship gathering, he would be carried shoulder-high and not allowed to walk, and would be accompanied with drumming and praise songs. According to Lead Ejon, renowned lay evangelist, the title 'Baba' defines his role as their spiritual father, leader and teacher of everything for the denomination. Unlike other AICs denominations, he had deputies or assistants, while women also shared in leadership.

With the opening up of increasingly better transport facilities and business opportunities in East Africa, AICs of this nature are fast multiplying all over the region and beyond its immediate hinterland. Most AICs in East Africa originate in Kenya and have most of their headquarters there. AICs in Uganda have opened congregations in Congo. But most AICs find themselves at odds with missionary Christianity. Why? Their theologies and practices reflect strong influence by the same African culture that the missionaries of the nineteenth century worked hard to evangelize.

Consequently, traditional churches in East Africa are suspicious of them. A striking feature of AICs that hold them back include worship styles involving massive celebration with dancing, loud music and speaking immense volumes of words in a short time. Their dress code resembles Muslim dress: the *sultans* and the *kaftans*. The Chosen Evangelical Revival (CER) are so focused on evangelising everyone that they do not think of themselves as citizens of one place but simply as Children of God (*Otino Obanga*). John Kamdini, a leader of CER in Lango, believes that the entire world is their mission field, which they need to evangelize faithfully, irrespective of where they are; and so they carry trumpets made out of old cooking oil tin, flattened and moulded in the shape of a trumpet (*Gwara*), and preach to any group of people. However, this urgent missionary mindset does not bear fruit: fruit that lasts. This is because of their method and also because of how they live out their faith, especially in relating to youth.

The presence and growth of AICs in East Africa has thrived on deep allegiance to their founder-leaders and their charismatic leadership. It has also thrived under the umbrella of the explosive growth and spread of Christianity in the region. How long will this growth last? It is hard to tell for many reasons. However, our projection for the immediate future is hopeful. Since Christianity in East Africa is no longer a white

³³ See Olupona and Gemingnani, *African Immigrant Religion*, 107. Allan Anderson, *African Reformation: African Initiated Christianity in the 20th Century* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2001). Allan Anderson, *Moya: The Holy Spirit in An African Context*, Manuala Didactica 13 (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1991).

³⁴ George Piwang, 'Archbishop Janani Luwum martyrdom and Biography: A Political Theology of Peace, Justice Healing and Reconciliation in Uganda & The Great Lakes Region', pages 15-16, a Unpublished paper delivered at the East Africa and Burundi Annual Conferences of the united Methodist church meeting in Mukono, Uganda, 26th-29th August 2014.

man's religion, as is argued by Kwame Bediako in his book, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of Non-Western Religion*,³⁵ the impact of African Christianity in East Africa will need careful attention.

AICs in East Africa are a phenomenon linked with the resistance to colonization and decolonization as hinted earlier in the section on the historical development of Christianity in East Africa. AICs have had little to do with the traditional churches of East Africa. Their growth is largely the work of God. However, since the AICs are founded by native peoples and they seem likely to be around for the foreseeable future, traditional churches will do well to recognize them. Will they fully recognize them as of God's making? If the growth and spread of AICs continue, Christianity will increasingly become a non-western religion in East Africa. But one serious question remains for the AICs to reckon with before they are accepted by the traditional churches is how to overcome their low theological profile and biblical depth, both in the leadership and among their congregations. John Njeru Gichimu, writing on 'Theological Education in African Independent Churches in East Africa' observed that 'from 2000, a number of AICs have attempted to start theology training programmes', adding: 'However, most of these churches have been struggling with registrations of their institution.'³⁶ He is spot on with the need for AICs to increase the depth of theological education for their leaders, and hence their Christians. It seems risky to belong to a church with little or no theological depth.

Ecumenism

In East Africa, ecumenical relations have remained very significant. However, in this section we give only a brief survey of Ecumenism. The work of Stephen Candia, 'East African Contribution to the Ecumenical Movement: A Catholic Perspective', is a survey of the historical attempts made in Eastern Africa to foster Christian unity, especially from the Catholic point of view.³⁷ However, within the Pentecostal denominations, there seems to be at a national level in each of the East African countries, an ecumenical body that brings them together; yet at the grassroots much work is still to be done on this front to make it real.

For many years, the mainline denominations have formed joint Ecumenical Councils. In Uganda, there is the Uganda Joint Christian Council formed in 1963, in Kenya there is Kenya National Council of Churches, and in Tanzania there is the Tanzania Council of Churches. These denominations have formed joint councils against a background of religious diversity in their respective countries. In Uganda, there was some inappropriate teaching on guilt that discouraged joint ecumenical meetings. This mentality has discouraged Christians to maintain proper ecumenical relations and even in other East African countries is responsible for some bloody religious wars in our history. However, on a positive note, lately there have been some improvements concerning good ecumenical relations. In 1963, the Church of Uganda, along with the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, founded the Uganda Joint Christian Council. This Council provided some excellent services in the areas of education, health care, Bible translation and distribution, printing presses and local relations, and has also monitored national elections and provided civic education for the masses.

In Tanzania, the Tanganyika Missionary Council was formed in 1936, which made possible co-operation among the denominations. In 1948, it became the Christian Council of Tanganyika and in 1964 was renamed the Christian Council of Tanzania. Members include the Lutherans, Anglicans, Monroviens, Salvation Army and the Baptists. In the 1960s, conversations were held for the unification of

³⁵ Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of Non-Western Religion (Studies in World Christianity)*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995.

³⁶ John Njeru Gichimu, *Theological Education in African Independent Churches in East Africa*, 420-422.

³⁷ Stephen Candia, *East African Contribution to the Ecumenical Movement: A Catholic Perspective* (Peter Lang, 2004).

the churches but in 1968 it failed. Despite this negative picture, the Roman Catholic Church has established good contacts with the various Protestant churches. A good example of inter-confessional co-operation is the shared leadership of religious broadcasting.

Additionally, there is an agreed curriculum for religious teaching in schools. And, at large religious celebrations, there are shared services of worship. President Julius Kambarage Nyerere (1964-85), Tanzania's first President after independence and an active Catholic, mediated for the churches. The Education Act of 1969, which gave the government of Tanzania oversight of all schools, was the result of an upturn in ecumenical co-operation in Tanzania. The bishops' conference meets frequently to discuss matters of mutual interest. Moreover, ecumenical co-operation in Tanzania is even visible at the level of village congregations.³⁸

The Pentecostal denominations across East Africa have also come together in ecumenical co-operation. In Uganda, they have celebrated over fifty years of the Association of Pentecostal Churches in Uganda. This co-operation is true of the other East African countries. There also is the Interreligious Council of Uganda, which includes Muslim representatives. The Interreligious Council brings together the different religious groups in matters of politics, education seminars and discussions of topical issues like the absence of peace in a region. Interreligious Councils are determined to bring unity, peace and harmony to the people of God in East Africa. We project that, as time moves on, there will continue to be a positive religious presence in the region. In the universities of East Africa, study and research are done on different aspects of religion in the region. In the process, the fruits of these studies will enhance peace between the different religious groups of the region.

Conclusion

The impact of Christianity in East Africa goes far deeper than I have surveyed here. Other scholars have paid attention to some of these themes. However, we do need also to sound a note of caution that the depth of the impact of Christian faith on African society varies from place to place in East Africa. Not all cultures were open to the planting and spread of the gospel. Missionary work connected and continues to connect with the native peoples at different levels in different places through the various denominations. Nevertheless, the story of the planting and spread of Christianity in East Africa continues to be a success. In East Africa, the majority of the population now is Christian. However, it is equally important that ecumenical relations in the region are strengthened.

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³⁸ At Kerekekere, Bunda, Tanzania, November 2014, I went to supervise a student on Block Placement, Rev Johannes Mark Onyango. The village churches located in the same school, Pentecostal Assembly of God and Methodist Church invited me to go and preach in their churches soon after preaching at the Anglican Church. There was a clear sense of Ecumenism among the churches at village level.

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