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(11) THE PROFILE OF AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY AT HOME AND IN THE WEST

Jesse N.K. Mugambi

Introduction

According to the demographic survey conducted by Pew Research Centre on ageing in 2014, Africa has the youngest age profile, and will remain so at least for the next two generations. The population median age of Africa, which is the age that divides the population into two equal groups, was 19.7 in 2014 and will increase to 25.4 in 2050. Europe's age profile is the highest in the world (median age 40), and the region should retain that distinction in 2050 when it is projected to increase to the median age of 46.¹ These findings indicate that between 2010 and 2050 Africa will have the largest percentage growth of population compared with other continental regions. Depending on how the African youth are nurtured and socialized, and taking into consideration the religiosity of Africans today, projections indicate that Africa will have more Christians than any other continental region. Todd Johnson, Director of the Gordon Cornwell Centre for Global Christianity published in 2013 a Report prepared for the Pew Forum entitled 'Christianity in Global Context: Trends and Statistics':²

... Whereas in 1900 over 80% of all Christians lived in Europe and Northern America, by 2005 this proportion had fallen to under 40%, and will likely fall below 30% before 2050.... In 1900, with the exception of Brazil, the top 10 were all Western countries; by 2050, only the U.S. will make the list. It is interesting to note that, beginning in 2005, India and Nigeria are common to both lists.³

He continues to ask three disturbing questions arising from the projections on this unprecedented numerical growth of Christianity in the South and East:

What might it mean for the future of Christianity that its centre of gravity continues to move south and east? Three key factors bear watching: (1) whether Southern Christians will challenge Northern Christianity's 1,000-year dominance in theology and ecclesiology by producing their own reflections and practices, hearkening back to the earliest Christian centuries when they were in the majority; (2) whether the dominant languages of Christianity will continue to shift south (already by 1980, Spanish was the leading language of church membership in the world, and Chinese, Hindi, and Swahili are increasingly important languages of Christianity); and (3) whether the closer geographic proximity between Christians and Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists will on balance result in greater conflict or dialogue. With all three factors, the central question remains: 'How well will the new global Christianity navigate its increasingly diverse composition and southern majority?'⁴

These questions challenge African Christian scholars much more than those in other regions. During the early church, theologians based in Africa contributed immensely to the debates that shaped Christianity as we know it today. They include Augustine of Hippo, Cyprian and Tertullian of Carthage, Athanasius,

¹ See: www.pewglobal.org/2014/01/30/chapter-3-aging-in-major-regions-of-the-world-2010-to-2050/.

² See: www.pewforum.org/files/2013/04/051805-global-christianity.pdf.

³ See: www.pewforum.org/files/2005/05/051805-global-christianity.pdf; page 1.

⁴ See: www.pewforum.org/files/2005/05/051805-global-christianity.pdf; page 1.

Clement, Origen, and Peter of Alexandria, Optatus of Numidia.⁵ Will African scholars in the third millennium, in their turn, rise to the task of providing exemplary apologetic leadership?

The following statistics indicate some expected demographic changes by 2050: The global demographic statistics above indicate that in 2014, 76% of the world's population lived in Asia and Oceania (61%) and Africa (15%). By 2050 more than 80% of the global population will be living in these two continental regions. Asia and Oceania will host 55% and Africa 25%. In the present and the next generation Africa will continue having the youngest population. These statistics have very significant implications for the future of Christianity globally. Are African churches prepared for this demographic shift? Will African Christianity be able to take its leading role as the most vibrant when compared and contrasted with churches in other regions? This is the challenge for the present leadership in African Christianity.⁶

The Globalization of Christianity

Christianity is no longer a predominantly 'western' religious phenomenon. Between 400 AD and 1900 AD Christianity remained European, but within a century since 1900 AD it has spread abroad through the modern missionary enterprise from Europe and North America to the whole world. Whereas in 1910 two thirds of all Christians (66.3%) were in Europe, by 2010 this percentage had shrunk to one quarter (25.9%), then to 23% in 2015, and the downward spiral continues. During the same period, adherence to Christianity among Africans rose from 1.4% in 1910 to 23.6% in 2010, and the upward spiral is sharply continuing. George Weigel in an article entitled 'World Christianity by the Numbers' (February 2015) makes the following self-explanatory observation: The most extraordinary Christian growth over the past century has come in Africa: home to 8.7 million Christians in 1900, 542 million today, and perhaps 1.2 billion by 2050, when there will be as many African Christians as Latin American and European Christians combined.

Twenty-first-century Christianity is also a far more urban reality than a century ago. In 1900, 29% of the world's Christian population lived in cities; it is 65% today, although that is projected to decline to 59% by 2050. But perhaps the most astonishing numbers in the survey involve Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians. There were 981,000 of these souls in 1900; there are 643,661,000 of them today; and there are projected to be over one billion Charismatics and Pentecostals in 2050. In raw numbers, then, Charismatic and Pentecostal Christianity is the fastest growing phenomenon in world religious history. These three phenomena – African growth, urbanization and the rise of Pentecostalism – also help contribute, perhaps, towards the greater fragmentation of Christianity worldwide. What might be called entrepreneurial Christianity – founding your own church – is very much a part of all three, and that helps explain why the number of Christian denominations grew from 1,600 in 1900 to 45,000 today, with projections of 70,000 in 2050.⁷

According to Weigel, in 1900 there were 1,600 denominations, of which only one was African – the Coptic Church. At that time there were no autonomous African denominations in tropical Africa, a vast region regarded a 'mission field' for scramble and partition by European and American missionary societies, backed and protected by their respective imperial governments. European and North American missionaries established and managed outposts of their respective denominations in Africa and elsewhere. Since 1900 the number of African denominations has risen in one century from one to thousands, and the

⁵ See: www.catholic-defense.com/bios.htm.

⁶ See: www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-christians/.

⁷ See: George Weigel, "World Christianity by the Numbers", dated 25 February 2015, in: www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2015/02/world-christianity-by-the-numbers.

rate of increase is statistically unpredictable. The Roman Catholic Church has members in every African nation.

The All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), whose membership includes mainstream Protestant denominations, has a membership of 174 churches. African Instituted churches are in tens of thousands and the number keeps rising. It is difficult to keep abreast of their increase because many of them do not apply for registration. Increase in the number of urban-based Charismatic churches is particularly rapid, consistent with the high rate of urbanization in Africa.⁸

The 2011 Pew Research Centre Survey on Religion and Public Life indicated that although the proportion of Christianity in Africa in 1900 was insignificant as a percentage of the global aggregate, by 2010 every significant denominational thrust of western Christianity had gained a significant foothold in tropical Africa. The Pew Survey does not specifically document the statistical magnitude of African Instituted churches and Charismatic churches. Quite clearly, however, African Christians constitute a very significant proportion of all Christians globally. They may not wield comparable economic, political and ideological influence today, but this economic marginality is not permanent. The economies of some African nations are growing rapidly, and this growth is permeating into all sectors of culture including religion. Availability of surplus capital is facilitating the spread of African Christianity to other regions, particularly to Europe and North America. Some African charismatic preachers have already established themselves in various towns and cities in Europe and North America.⁹

Western Christianity in Africa

The history of western Christianity in tropical Africa dates from the voyages of European explorers around the continent of Africa in the fifteenth century. The exploratory expeditions included chaplains to care for the spiritual needs of the crews. Wherever they stopped along the African coast they erected sanctuaries, which became the initial entry points for missionaries. One such monument is the pillar constructed by Vasco da Gama at Malindi, Kenya, in early 1498, just before his departure to India.¹⁰

The earliest presence of western Christianity in tropical Africa is evident especially in Ghana, Angola, South Africa and Kenya. At the beginning these early initiatives were exclusively Portuguese, exploring the eastern sea route to Asia. The second phase was the Cross-Atlantic slave trade, in which European merchants procured African slaves for export to the Caribbean and the Americas. These expeditions also included chaplains, blessing the crews of the ships and the business thereof. The human merchandise (slaves) required no blessing, except, of course, in terms of the profit that would accrue to its 'owners' if it reached the Americas in 'good' enough condition to fetch the highest price from the highest bidder. When they were no longer needed, a programme to resettle them back in Africa was hatched, establishing the colonies of Sierra Leone and Liberia.

When the slave trade became no longer economically viable, a minority in the new generation of missionaries embarked on a campaign for its abolition. It was the economic argument, rather than the moral one, that persuaded perpetrators to make profit through means other than the sale and purchase of human beings.¹¹ David Livingstone persistently argued that it would be much more profitable for

⁸ See: www.breakingchristiannews.com/articles/display_art.html?ID=10896; www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-christians/.

⁹ See: www.pewforum.org/2011/12/19/global-christianity-traditions/; also: www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-christians/.

¹⁰ See: kenyatravelsites.wordpress.com.

¹¹ This point is amply documented by Eric Williams in his book *Capitalism and Slavery* (University of North Carolina Press, 1944; Paperback 1994), and also in Garth Lean's *God's Politician: Wilberforce's Struggle*. (Helmets & Howard, 1987).

Europeans to promote commerce, Christianity and civilization among Africans than to sell them as goods for profit.¹²

The third phase was the establishment of colonies in Africa, a project that required missionary personnel as auxiliaries to the main project of making Africans governable. In this role missionaries provided the mediatory function between the colonial administrators and the colonial subjects. The missionaries in this phase not only endorsed and blessed the project of colonization; they were an integral part of it. During the fourth phase of western Christianity in Africa, during the colonial period, missionaries were sent from the European capitals to win African converts into the respective national churches of the imperial powers. The earliest missionary societies were Catholic, followed closely by those of the Church of England.

The Berlin Conference (1884-5) restricted the operations of these missionary initiatives after the Scramble and Partition of the continent between the imperial powers that met at the behest of Chancellor Bismarck of Germany. The provisions of the Berlin Treaty required missionaries to operate in the respective imperial spheres of influence of their home governments, but exercise freedom of movement and operation in the spheres of influence of other powers provided that they complied with the imperial law of the host imperial power. In practice, missionaries preferred to operate in the territories where their safety and security was guaranteed by their home governments. The consequence was that the dominant Christian denomination of an imperial power became also the dominant denomination in its colonies, with other denominations becoming minorities.

This colonial legacy is still evident in tropical Africa. During the colonial period, two aspects of western Christianity evolved in Africa, as follows: *a) The Western Church of the Colonizers*: One aspect was the colonial church to which the missionaries and their families belonged, normally located in the administrative centre where the colonial authorities lived. The missionaries and other expatriate personnel would conduct their rituals there, but commute to the mission outposts to supervise the native 'evangelists' doing the work on behalf of the missionary. Remnants of this colonial church are still evident. Many are cathedrals headed by African clergy, but the architecture and the relics are still hanging on the walls, on the pews and on the commemorative plaques. From an observer's perspective, there is a mismatch between the original occupants of this western church in Africa, and those who occupy it today. It remains western, and the current occupants remain African. The Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa is the most prominent in this category of Christianity, although it had variants in other colonies.

b) The Domesticated Western Church of the Colonized: The other component of this western church in Africa consists of the African denominations the missionaries introduced by winning some African converts. It was a foreign church, fashioned in the image of the missionary, according to the culture and history in which he was nurtured, socialized and ritualized. The African converts were expected to fit into this foreign church, with a liturgy that was a translation of the liturgies 'back home' – from English, French, German, Latin, Portuguese, Spanish originals. Africans awkwardly slotted themselves into the cultural garb of this western church in Africa, which was a Sunday affair, and a classroom-based form of religiosity. For the whole week they would live normal lives, until Sunday morning when they would wear their 'Sunday Best' clothes, go to church, do the Sunday ritual, then return home. They would then remove their 'Sunday Best', put on their normal clothes and resume their normal chores until the following Sunday. John V. Taylor lucidly describes this phenomenon in his book, *Christian Presence amid African Religion*.

c) Self-reliant Western Christianity in Africa: In 1963 the All Africa Conference of Churches convened its Inaugural Assembly at Kampala, bringing together the mainstream Protestant churches in Africa – Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist, and Presbyterian. This was the launching event for the modern ecumenical

¹² Roland Oliver describes this aspect of western Christianity in his book *The Missionary Factor in East Africa*; A.J. Temu, *British Protestant Missions* (London: Longman, 1972); Adrian Hastings, *A History of African Christianity, 1950 – 1975* (CUP, 1979); Bengt Sundkler and Christopher Steed, *A history of the church in Africa* (CUP, 2000).

movement at the continental level in Africa. Two decades earlier, Christian councils had been formed by missionaries in various African colonies, in tandem with the modern ecumenical movement that was coalescing in Geneva. One of the focal concerns was ‘Selfhood of the Church’, in view of the fact that these churches were dependent on their parent denominations abroad.

In 1970, Pastor John G. Gatu, a Presbyterian church leader from Kenya, addressed a gathering at Milwaukee, Minnesota during which he stated emphatically that the time had come for missionaries to go home so that African Christians could enjoy the “selfhood of the church” here in Africa. This message was taken very negatively in the West, and precipitated what came to be called the Moratorium Debate.¹³ Within the World Council of Churches this debate raged for more than a decade, especially between the Fifth Assembly (Nairobi, Kenya, 1975) and the Sixth Assembly (Vancouver, Canada, 1983). As early as 1950, Bishop Stephen Neill had been commissioned to conduct a survey on theological education for these churches. His report was less than encouraging. Despite missionary presence in Africa for decades, there was hardly anything significant to show with regard to theological preparation for African leadership.¹⁴ A lot of recent African theological research has been done on this issue in past years.¹⁵

African Christianity in the West

African presence in the West began not voluntarily, but through the slave trade. European settlement in the Caribbean and the Americas was more than a double human tragedy: decimation of the native inhabitants in Africa, and the importation of Africans into the Americas as slaves to work in the plantations and the mines. African slaves on the plantations in North America and the Caribbean were forbidden to worship on their own, and the worship services organized for them by their masters were intended to ‘pacify’ and indoctrinate them to accept their servile condition. Attending worship sessions other than those authorized by the master would attract severe punishment, but most slaves would risk that punishment in order to worship with their fellow slaves in secret. Reading the Bible was forbidden, and most could not read. Those who were literate selected relevant verses from the Bible, and out of them the Spirituals were composed.

James H. Cone describes the theological importance of the Civil Rights Movement on the one hand, and on the other, the religiosity of enslaved Africans in North America. There was no wall separating the Spirituals and the Blues.¹⁶ The slaves who did not feel like worshipping in a church would still get the message of liberation via the Blues in pubs where Jazz became a unique genre of African music in the Americas. The Spirituals were primarily not about *spirituality*, but about *reality* – the *reality* of suffering and the *hope* for liberation from that suffering, which only God would bring about, since nobody seemed to care. This message is summarized in the spiritual known by the title – *Nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen*: ‘Nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen, Nobody knows but Jesus, Nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen, Glory Halleluiah!’

¹³ The most lucid elaboration of the issue was authored by Elliott Kendall and published under the title *The End of an Era: Africa and the Missionary* (London: SPCK, 1978).

¹⁴ This shortcoming is lucidly echoed by Professor Leslie Shyllon in the introductory Chapter of *Uniquely African: African Christian Identity from Cultural and Historical Perspectives*, edited by James L. Cox and Gerrie ter Haar, Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2003.

¹⁵ Laurenti Magesa, *Anatomy of Inculturation*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2004; John G. Gatu, *Joyfully Christian, Truly African*, Nairobi: Acton, 2005; David M. Gitari, *Responsible Church Leadership*, Nairobi: Acton, 2006; Simon Chiwanga, *The Episcopacy Reconsidered*, Nairobi: Acton, 2011.

¹⁶ See: James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (Catholic Foreign Mission Society America 1997, Orbis Books Maryknoll) and *The Spirituals and the Blues* (Orbis Books Maryknoll 1992).

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s provided unique opportunities for creative theological reflection among some Afro-American theologians, some of which filtered into the mainstream of the modern ecumenical movement.¹⁷ Since the 1980s, African Christian immigrants to North America and Europe have taken with them their distinctive Christian religiosity, manifested in their own worship communities where they religiously ‘feel at home’.¹⁸ African slaves took their religiosity with them, even though in their chains and handcuffs they could not carry any artefacts. On arrival in the Americas they re-constructed their material culture, some of which still survives to influence African Christianity in the West.

African Christianity in Africa

African Instituted Churches

The African Instituted Churches were formed by Africans as alternatives to the denominations introduced by missionaries in East Africa.¹⁹ Such churches were most prevalent in colonies with settler communities, such as DR Congo, Côte d’Ivoire, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), and South Africa. Missionaries condemned such churches as ‘separatist sects’, and recommended to the colonial administration that they should be banned. Some of the founders died in prison, such as Simon Kimbangu, founder of the Kimbanguist Church in DR Congo, who died in 1951 after thirty years of incarceration. Some of these churches have formed the Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC) as a forum to deal with their needs and concerns. This organization is parallel, not antagonistic to the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), whose membership is primarily from mainstream Protestant churches. There is a lot of research on African Instituted Churches in recent years.²⁰

African Christianity in Africa is perhaps the most potent expression of Christian religiosity in this continent, since it is the most conscious carrier of the African self-identification with African cultural roots. Yet it is the least understood, because it has not yet nurtured enough of its own scholars to explain itself. A few representatives of this category of African Christianity have entered academia, including Solomon Waigwa, a Kenyan of the Akorino Church, currently the Chair, Department of Philosophy and Religion of

¹⁷ In addition to James Cone, Gayraud Wilmore in *Black Religion and Black Radicalism* presents the broad spectrum of African religiosity under slavery in North America. Robert Hood, *Must God Remain Greek? Afro-cultures and God-Talk*, Minneapolis: Augsburg-Fortress, 1990. Peter Paris, *The Spirituality of African Peoples: The Search for a Common Moral Discourse*, Minneapolis: Augsburg-Fortress, 1995. Robert Beckford in his book *Dread and Pentecostal: A Political Theology for the Black Church in Britain* (London: SPCK, 2000) illustrates how culture influences social consciousness across generations and within specific historical contexts. Caribbean Christian presence in the UK bears its cultural memory from Africa via the Caribbean. It is not identical with African Christianity in the mother continent, nor is it integrated with the dominant culture of the host nation.

¹⁸ This phenomenon has been described by various scholars, such as Gerrie ter Haar, *Half-Way to Paradise: African Christians in Europe*; (Cardiff Academic Press, 1998); Robert Beckford, *Dread and Pentecostal: A Political Theology for the Black Church in Britain* (London: SPCK, 2000). James L. Cox and Gerrie ter Haar, eds, *Uniquely African? African Christian Identity from Cultural and Historical Perspectives* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2003).

¹⁹ In 1965 F.B. Welbourn and Bethuel A. Ogot published a book titled *A Place to Feel at Home* (Oxford University Press) describing the emergence of AICs.

²⁰ See: David B. Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa* (Oxford University Press, 1968); Deji Ayegboyan and S. Ademola Ishola, *African Indigenous Churches An Historical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Institute for Religious Research, 1997); Allan Anderson, *African Reformation* (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2001); Philomena N. Mwaura, “*African Instituted Churches in East Africa*,” (Studies in World Christianity, Edinburgh, Vol.10No. 2, October 2004); Samuel G. Kibicho, *God and Revelation in an African Context* (Nairobi: Acton, 2006); Berngt Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1948). See also: <http://irr.org/african-indigenous-churches-chapter-one>.

Wiley College, Texas. In his blog he has written that the emergence of the Akorino Church was not influenced by any mission agency. The church was begun by ‘prophetic figures, who claimed divine calling to their prophetic ministry’. Those founders were not notable figures in their former churches. Besides having been baptized in the mission churches and receiving minimal education, they had not risen beyond general church membership. The experience they received was so cataclysmically definitive that they began to attract large crowds until their meetings were declared illegal by the colonial government by the end of the 1920s. That experience was the in-filling of the Holy Spirit.

Another representative of this category of African Christianity is Dr Thomas Asante Oduro of Christ Holy Church International and President, Good News Theological College and Seminary, Accra, Ghana, and author of *Christ Holy Church International: The Story of an African Independent Church*. The book explores and examines the history, beliefs, practices and growth of Christ Holy Church International, an African Independent Church in Nigeria, founded by Agnes Okoh, an illiterate woman who, while returning from a market in 1943, heard a voice repeatedly saying ‘Matthew Ten’. How Agnes Okoh, a marginalized woman and a widow, was able to found and lead an itinerant evangelistic team of 12 members in 1947 till it developed into a church with nearly 800 congregation in 2002 in a pluralistic, multicultural and multilingual Nigeria is the focus of this book.²¹

Enculturation of Catholicism and Moratorium on Missionaries in Protestantism:

In Catholic circles, ‘Enculturation’ is about the domestication of western Christianity in Africa, which remains western at the core. In this third millennium the vestiges of western Christianity in Africa remain dominant, in both rural and urban churches. The oldest ones date from the colonial period, and the most recent are continually being introduced by short-term missionaries who come to ‘evangelize the un-evangelized’ while leaving at home their peers who have abandoned Christianity. Post-colonial Charismatic, Pentecostal missionary initiatives in Africa risk repeating the same mistakes that John V. Taylor describes in his book above, with disastrous consequences for both the missionaries and their converts.

African Christianity Evangelizing the West

Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu in his article ‘African-led Christianity in Europe: Migration and Diaspora Evangelism’ has observed that African Christians in the West are participants in evangelization among their host communities, at the same time that some missionaries from the West continue to evangelize Africa:

Today, some of the largest congregations in Europe – western and eastern – are either founded by Africans or are led by people of African descent. Discussions on African immigrant Christianity usually focus on churches whose memberships tend to be constituted by Africans or people of that descent. A good example is the Kingsway International Christian Centre (KICC) in London, led by the charismatic Nigerian pastor, Matthew Ashimolowo. My research has taken me to the doors of another type of African-led church whose membership is entirely European. This means the designation of these churches in the diaspora as ‘African churches’ is no longer tenable. For example, Sunday Adelaja’s Church of the Blessed Embassy of the Kingdom of God for all Nations is based in Kiev, Ukraine. Founded in 1994, it has a membership of approximately twenty-five thousand adults.²²

²¹ See: www.lutheranupress.org/pdf/announce_7.pdf.

²² Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, “African-led Christianity in Europe: Migration and Diaspora Evangelism”, in: Lausanne World Pulse Archives 7/2008, in: www.lausanneworldpulse.com/themedarticles-php/975/07-2008.

Asamoah-Gyadu concludes that at the beginning of the 21st century Christian missionary outreach is no longer the monopoly of western missionaries going out to the rest of the world for converts, and that African Christians have become effective participants in missionary outreach abroad. Their approach to evangelization has an African cultural touch and flavour, comparable and contrastable with western approaches. According to his observation, the tasks of mission and evangelization in Africa have truly gone international. Further, Jehu Hanciles in one of his essays writes that it is often overlooked that the global South-North divide is as religious as it is economic. In western societies, the process of modernization has produced distinctive cultural changes associated with the secular ideal of liberal democracy, including: stronger individualism; a greater push for gender equality; sexual permissiveness; greater tolerance of divorce, abortion, and homosexuality; and a massive erosion of institutional religion.²³ Due to the pervasive religiosity of non-western societies, the South-to-North migration movement is essentially a religious movement. This is to say that, in addition to the economic and cultural benefits, which the new immigrants bring, they are also impacting western societies in fundamental ways related to religious life. In other words, contemporary global migrations implicate the West as a site of new religious interactions. This is particularly true of the growth of new Muslim and Christian populations; however, it is the latter that forms the focus here.²⁴

Churches without Theologians and Theologians without Churches

Western Christianity has a long tradition of theological training, research and publication. As the membership declines in Europe and North America (owing to ageing, death and other factors), membership in African Christianity is inversely increasing, a trend that will continue for more than a generation, perhaps beyond 2050. The demographic statistics in preceding sections are indicative of great ecclesiastical challenges both in the West and in Africa. One of those challenges is that although there may be a surplus of theologians in the West who were trained for their respective cultural settings in the context of their respective world-views and ideological perspectives, it may be tempting for such foreign theologians (and their theologies) to be off-loaded to Africa, as happened in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Such a move will be catastrophic, because the Holy Spirit does not inspire retroactively.

At the same time, without adequate relevant and contextualized ministerial training, young people in Africa will continue starting unsustainable ‘churches’ and ‘ministries’ to meet the needs of their peers – moral, emotional and material. Such a scenario happened during the 1930s and 1940s when many of the African Independent churches were formed by the young of that period.

Congregations without Churches, and Churches without Congregations

Demographically, the 21st century has opened with dramatic paradoxes. In tropical Africa congregations are increasing in number and growing in membership, especially in towns and cities. Many congregations are meeting in the open, in tents or in rented halls. At the same time, in Europe and North America, some of the old churches are closing down, because there is nobody to worship in them any more. Below are the church opening and closing statistics for the UK in 2013. Peter Brierley reports that the actual number of churches increased between 2008 and 2013, and is expected to continue to do so between 2013²⁵ and 2020.²⁶

²³ See: Jehu Hanciles, “The Effect of Migration and the Growing Diaspora on Evangelism Efforts: Migration, Diaspora Communities, and the New Missionary Encounter with Western Society”.

²⁴ See: www.lausanneworldpulse.com/pdf/issues/LWPJuly2008PDF.pdf.

²⁵ Peter Brierley: UK Church Statistics 2: 2010-2020.

²⁶ See: <http://www.eauk.org/church/research-and-statistics/how-many-churches-have-opened-or-closed-in-recent->

2008 – total number of churches 49,727.
 2013 – total number of churches 50,660.
 2020 – estimated number of churches 51,275.

Number of UK churches opening and closing 2008-2013 in each denomination

	Anglican	Baptists	Independ -ent	Methodist	New churches	Pentecostal	Presbyterian	Smaller churches
Opening	0	+1	+104	+4	+256	+640	+9	+1,937
Closing	-324	-76	-112	-813	-4	-2	-183	-38
Net Diff	-324	-75	-8	-809	+252	-638	-174	+1,899

The Table above is self-explanatory. The old churches that were responsible for the evangelization of Africa are ‘dying’ while new ones are emerging. The founders and members of these new churches are young, and the demographic profile includes a large percentage of immigrants. Perhaps the scenario in the 21st century is comparable with that in the first, when St Paul was writing his epistles to the Romans, Corinthians, Colossians, Ephesians, Thessalonians, Galatians and Philippians. African Christians of the present generation in the West may be paving the way for a more sustained re-evangelization of Europe and North America – but from Africa. This will not be the first time that Africa undertakes such a role. The continent seems to be entrusted with the vocation of pioneering new eras in human history since time immemorial.

years.cf.