



The Future of Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa

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It would be presumptuous of me to say I am telling the future. This attempt is only an educated guess arising out of my own experience of the evolution of Christianity in the space under review, my memory of the shifts as I involved myself in the study of global Christianity from the epoch of the early church through to the modern ecumenical movement. Through all this I made it my business to focus on the area of the world in which God had placed me. One's locus is critical for what one observes and what one hopes for. This concluding chapter is therefore anchored on what I have read in the preceding chapters of *Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa* as they illuminate my experience of Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa since 1940, when I became aware of my being part of this development. In fact I am, by this contribution, making a wish-list, expressing what I pray for and hope will come to pass. Most germane of all, it represents what I would like to be involved in if I had the requisite talents, and therefore what I would encourage those who have the gifts to undertake. But before I launch into this dream or vision, let me say how I see the landscape before us.

Although *Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa* restricts its enquiry to Africa south of the Sahara, it is necessary to acknowledge the influence of North Africa as a cradle of Christianity and the source of the highly important Ethiopian Orthodoxy. This also reminds us that the story of African Christianity goes back to the conversion of the Ethiopian official recorded in the New Testament¹ and must not be defined solely in relation to the Western Christianity that came with missionaries from the North Atlantic in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In surveying Christianity in Africa today and seeking to discern what might be significant for its future, this concluding chapter will consider its organisation, its social function, its interaction with the political arena, its spiritual services, developments in liturgy and spirituality, and continuing concerns.

Organisation of Christianity in Africa

The scene as we have it at the beginning of the twenty-first century of the Christian era has developed mainly as a result of the denominationalism of North Atlantic Christianity that Africa has inherited. This has spread through the work of missionaries from the Western churches and Africans who came

¹ The "Ethiopian official" in Acts 8 was a government official of the Nubian kingdom of Meroë in what is now Sudan; he was not an official of the kingdom of Aksum in what is now Eritrea and northern Ethiopia. "Candace" was not the name of an Ethiopian, that is, Aksumite, queen but rather *Kandakē* is the Nubian title that means "regnal queen." — *JRB, editor*

into contact with their preaching. The latter became independent evangelisers when they moved to new locations or were employed by Western missionary societies as catechists and evangelists. These are the people who spread Christianity in Africa by initiating and animating small cells of converts who pray, sing, and listen to the Bible being read and its stories being told. These cells grow into societies and congregations and eventually into churches, either associated with existing denominations or new communities of Christians, new churches that have their own names.

Within congregations, interest groups serve the church's mission while they become home bases for the members of the church. Within congregations also are various singing groups, women's groups, men's groups, and youth groups. There are groups dedicated to praying, called 'prayer warriors' in some churches. Others are constituted as visiting groups for various categories of sick, housebound, or incarcerated persons. All these interest groups serve the church and Christianity and provide structures that counter the anonymity of large congregations. Africa's traditional way of organising society so that no one feels isolated has influenced this development.

Denominationalism persists and its historical causes are many. From the Coptic Church of Egypt, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church became autocephalous, and political developments resulted in the Eritrean Orthodox Church attaining autocephaly from the Coptic Orthodox Church. Thus Oriental Christianity is well represented in Africa. The Western churches in Africa multiplied following political independence in the 1960s as denominations that could not gain access to Africa for political reasons arrived. The idea of comity of missions proposed at the Edinburgh 1910 World Missionary Conference never really worked, so one finds many denominations in any one geographical location. There is no reason to assume that this trend will not continue. Like elsewhere in the world, the internal organisation of churches does get modified, but generally, national denominations are divided into 'parishes' that are under the jurisdiction of a single 'overseer'. This trend continues either from the practice of dividing existing ones or by constituting new ones from newly grown societies, but often it is to cope with the growing numbers of ordained persons with leadership skills. New parishes or dioceses create room for more bishops.

Christianity continues to grow in Africa as the number of churches increases. At the 2013 assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) at Busan, South Korea, almost 100 member churches from Africa were present. Beyond these are many more — Pentecostal, Charismatic and some traditional denominations that dissociate themselves from the Ecumenical movement. Many African Initiated Churches and of course the Roman Catholic Church do not belong to the WCC. Oriental Christianity in Africa has a growing diaspora, as does the Eastern Orthodox Church of Alexandria. Both have been spreading in Africa in the form of immigrant congregations but increasingly attracting nationals. This trend is bound to continue and affect the landscape of

Christianity in Africa in its organisation and spirituality. As persons have acquired the tendency to do 'church shopping', in search of an amenable spiritual home where their well-being (*alafia*) will be guaranteed, forms of Christianity and church organisation will continue to multiply to serve these needs.

Churches in Africa organised according to the North Atlantic heritage of the nineteenth century are commonly known as 'mainline churches'. In my view, this designation glorifies the 'Scramble for Africa' and its parallel 'scramble' for mission fields. It is questionable whether they are 'mainline', as some of the newer African Initiated Churches outstrip them in numbers, visibility, buildings, and media presence. Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity is growing and all signs indicate that this trend will continue as they attract persons in transition, those seeking anonymity and those who are interested in their teachings and spirituality. The Christianity of 'mega' media presentations is also fast becoming the order of the day.

The African Initiated Churches have by and large avoided the ecumenical councils of the nineteenth-century denominations and have organised their own manifestations of ecclesial unity to demonstrate the oneness of Christ or have remained free-standing. Many of the mission-founded churches, following their 'mother churches', have been associated with the WCC since its formation in 1948. This form of ecumenism exists in Africa in the All Africa Conference of Churches and in various national councils of churches. Although these councils meet periodically, by and large the churches keep their own denominational counsels. They make joint statements on national issues and occasionally pray together. My hope is that they do not 'unchurch' one another in the current atmosphere of subtle and not-so-subtle competitiveness. From the mid-twentieth century, ecumenical vision fostered the establishment of joint theological education institutions, but today some of these are being discontinued in favour of denominational establishments. When churches in Africa got into tertiary education, ecumenism was thrown overboard, hence the proliferation of church-sponsored universities. This trend of denominationalism will continue as Bible schools and denominational theological institutions multiply. The saving grace is that persons from all denominations are welcome into these new church educational institutions.

There are manifestations of unity in the Christian faith community that I pray will continue to grow and increase. Such initiatives as Evangelical fellowships, ministers' fraternities, and non-denominational and inter-denominational youth fellowships are providing ecumenical relations to minimise inter-church conflicts and intra-Christian competitiveness. All these showcase Christianity as a reconciling, healing and caring faith community that has the possibility of uniting in the service of society. The risk of co-option by political entities cannot be minimised, as has been demonstrated by cases in

Swaziland and Zimbabwe. On the other hand, they can serve to foster inter-religious relations, as we see in Ghana and Nigeria.

The organisation of Christianity into concert bodies of Christians is inevitable and indeed a *sine qua non* to the identity of the religion. A group that distinguishes itself by faith and practice is bound to be named and to stimulate expectations from those outside. Therefore monitoring the development of Christianity in terms of how it is organised is a worthwhile exercise. Doing it together might enable learning and developments that will promote the Christian presence in Africa.

Christianity at Work

Christianity is a visible manifestation of God's mission on earth, the task of restoring creation and enabling human beings to reveal themselves as made in the image and likeness of the source Being, God. I have read these research pieces² asking myself, "What on earth is Christianity on earth for?" With this in mind, the attempt here is to indicate the socio-economic contribution of the church. Literacy, the symbolic representation of oral speech, has been one of the most attested contributions of Christianity to life in Africa. Ethiopian Orthodox manuscripts in Ge'ez are among the most ancient Christian literature. The nineteenth-century missions to Africa were known for their introduction of Western forms of education. Contemporary Christian churches are fully involved in education at all levels, with their doors open to all. Modern education has had an impact on political development of Africa as it has instilled the unity and dignity of humanity and hence democratic principles that one hopes will increasingly bring well-being to community life.

Christianity of the missionary period was associated with the opening of schools, at times in cooperation with the governments of the day. In this way Christianity provided a service of enabling people to acquire literary skills, first to read the Bible, but broadly to become educated. Translating the Bible meant a collaboration between foreign missionaries and local native speakers. The terminology 'reducing' spoken words into script might not be too palatable, but it is a service of Christianity that continues to serve Africa well and might develop into more lucid expressions of Christian belief in the mother tongues of Africa.

With schools also came health services, clinics and hospitals and the training of healthcare providers of many types that have become the bedrock of medical services in Africa. Because Western medicine gained ascendancy over indigenous healing practices, the question is raised as to the role of Christianity in raising suspicions about them and thwarting their development. The early manifestation of Christianity in parts of Africa cast doubts upon traditional medicine, associating it with witchcraft and traditional religion, which

² That is, the previous chapters in *Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa*. — the editors

missionaries saw as antithetical to the Christian gospel. Now that 'scientific research' has begun in the field of herbal medicine and Africans are falling over themselves to try Chinese traditional medical herbs and practices, I hope Christianity will join in rehabilitating African medical practices that are proving to be lifesaving for many. In the field of healing, too, we need to believe and work on the basis that the hand of the Divine works everywhere and among all peoples, including Africans.

Contemporary health challenges are revealing stigma as a human trait that needs to be countered and I can see Christian theology contributing positively to the creation of inclusive communities that care for all who are under the threat of exclusion. Several churches are already serving in the arena of the trauma of HIV/AIDS but are yet to face the current threat of Ebola. In the field of health care, prevention and eradication are undertaken in partnership with governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), but for me the change of attitudes of persons towards 'the other' is a specifically religious, and definitely a Christian, service. It is God's mission and therefore the church's duty. We do have evidence to the effect that health services have been used as a means of attracting people to a central place for the purpose of evangelising them. For Jesus, however, healing was not a means of attracting followers. Rather, it was part of his mission of turning the world right side up, part of the task of getting the world to how God wills it.

An aspect of healthcare services promoted now mostly by NGOs is the campaign against harmful traditional cultural practices that impact negatively on the health of women. Some churches have tried to discourage these practices, saying they are contrary to Christian beliefs. This line of argument has sometimes backfired or been simply ignored by church members themselves. In general, little progress has been made towards minimising violence against women inherent in widowhood rites because people simply brush it off, saying "It is our culture." Maybe working with NGOs that approach the challenge from a human rights angle will yield positive results in the future. Pentecostal/Charismatic churches are addressing issues of witchcraft, spirit possession and curses with exorcism and other forms of deliverance ministries. An ecumenical approach to these religio-cultural challenges might yield a way forward for the mitigation of harmful practices like marriages for underage girls. The harm caused by tampering with female genitalia (commonly referred to as female genital mutilation, or FGM) for cultural reasons continues, benefiting a section of society to the detriment of others. The church must work assiduously to provide alternatives. On FGM we have the example of the Presbyterian Church in Kenya to show that Christianity can be at work in this field.

The nineteenth-century missions aimed to replace the trade in human beings with trade in other resources that abounded in Africa. This of course has resulted in the exploitation of Africa's natural resources for the benefit of the trading partners, many of whom were also the senders of Christian missionaries.

This rape of Africa by North Atlantic countries is now increasingly becoming a free-for-all, thanks to the controversial principle of globalisation. There is evidence that at the beginning of this encounter some Christian missions promoted agriculture and skills in building and carpentry. Skills development and other forms of economic activity have not been the forte the churches, and yet we have the unemployment of young people as a constant issue in our sermons and prayers. The survey we have in hand shows that Christianity has not made much impact on the economy of Africa, except the negative factor of its association with those who came to exploit, to steal and to kill.

Voluntary services and charitable works by Christians and churches reach people in difficult situations throughout Africa. The changes in the traditional organisation of family life, mainly as a result of urbanisation, have impacted negatively on traditional safety nets. We have more destitute people, people living on the streets of our cities, people traumatised by conflicts of many kinds — displaced, homeless and neglected. These human conditions pose multiple and complicated challenges to Christianity in Africa and the churches face them not head-on but with lamentations and moralising rhetoric. Preaching and announcing the love of God goes some way to give hope but needs to be complemented with practical action.

‘Family life’ appears on the agenda of many churches, but the content stops at premarital counselling and how wives should make husbands comfortable in the marriage. The rampant increase in divorces should alert the churches that their format of family life education is defective. The child factor is often totally ignored or left to the very comfortable atmosphere of Sunday school. Families need to be empowered to mentor children. Periodic gifts to orphanages, incarcerated persons and the destitute is a Christian duty, but churches need to begin to research the causes and join in rooting out these situations that demean human dignity. After-care of formerly incarcerated persons and those rescued from forced military service, many of them children and women, is yet to attract the attention of churches and Christians in Africa.

Christianity has the potential to make a difference in these situations, as over the years Christian organisations and churches have convinced partners of their ability to deliver services at the local level. Churches are present in slums as well as in kraals and villages. People gather at least weekly and are reached with messages of hope and education for practical life. One hopes this continues and intensifies and diversifies to reach all who are in need. The research here presented³ gives me hope that this will happen because Christians realise that they are in God’s mission and at work with God.

Christianity in the Political Arena

³ That is, in the previous chapters in *Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa*. — the editors

In Christianity, the “give to Caesar and to God” solution has become more and more complicated as the organisation of the community grows more and more complex. Separation of church and state served the Enlightenment process in Europe and enabled Christianity to escape from the clutches of kings and popes. It continues to be an issue in the secularisation of the North Atlantic nations. In Africa, however, the need for the church to be independent of the state does not spell secularisation. Constitutions of secular states are careful to note that although they are not aligned to any one faith community, the state is not against religion and follows the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) to provide freedom of religion for the individual. The need for the church to be independent of the state does not necessarily spell the secularisation that leans towards atheism.

This has meant that although most states adhere to the practice of not espousing one particular religion, on occasions when heads of African states have shown signs of espousing one religion the moves have most often been nipped in the bud. Christianity is as free as all religions to develop and thrive unhindered by the state. States might or might not require the registration of religious bodies, but the tendency to give them privileges because of the services they render the people is almost universal. Although most of the nations we are surveying do not have state religions, it is our experience that, in Namibia for example, governments do consult religious leaders on major issues and in periods of crisis. This is evidence that Christianity is expected to provide effective leadership for citizens, especially for the management of crisis situations. During election years, all churches are on their knees praying for peace. Examples abound of Christianity’s services in this area. Namibia, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, and Ghana are obvious cases.

This contribution of Christianity to political development has been present from the beginning of missions, and schools became the locus for political debates as independence from colonial powers was being mooted. Churches have had waves to ride when they sided with local ambitions for independence against the coloniser’s struggle to stay in power. The case of churches in Malawi and their relations with white settlers is only one graphic example. Whatever the case, Christianity cannot stay out of politics, for as the Mfantse proverb goes, “It is as the house stands that the shrine has a place to lodge.”

This places the onus on the churches of the future to present a profile of Christianity that calls for God’s justice, righteousness, and mercy for all humanity. The church’s own integrity must be pristine. The tendency for politicians to seek theological legitimisation for their political positions cannot be pandered to by Christians. Most challenging, however, is how politicians can play one Christian community against another to get their way. This calls for vigorous ecumenical relations that enable the churches and their leaders to take their own counsel and not to be manipulated by politicians. Religious conflicts can be used to fuel political interests. This calls for churches to work together as

well as to promote inter-religious dialogue so as to present a united voice from the communities of faith on controversial national issues.

The political arena is full of traps for the churches, not least being the registration of churches and the privileges that accompany being recognised and consulted. As the political landscape of Africa becomes more complex and churches continue to diversify, the practice of heads of state adopting particular churches widens and the danger of Christianity being drawn into the legitimisation of political moves becomes more and more real. Recent attempts by certain heads of state to pronounce Christianity as the national religion are worrisome, especially when taken together with the state of Christian–Muslim relations in parts of Africa and the moves of certain Muslims to gain control of politics in many parts of the world, including some African countries. This calls for both an ecumenical as well as an inter-religious approach if Africa is to be saved from more religious conflicts that aim at religious takeover of countries that make a mockery of the religious freedom entrenched in the UDHR and in national constitutions. For some years now, attention has been focused on the patterns of evangelisation because of clashes with people of other faiths arising from the language of their proclamations. We continue therefore with an examination of patterns of evangelism in Christianity.

Spiritual Services of Christianity

To evangelise, at its roots, means to proclaim the good news of the love of God in Christ Jesus to all humanity. The proclamation is expected to elicit a response from the hearers. The Matthew 28 text on which the Church bases its mandate to evangelise specifically includes: covering the whole inhabited world (a geographical mandate), proclaiming the good news of the love of God in Jesus Christ, baptising those who believe this message and nurturing them to become followers of Jesus of Nazareth. Proclaiming the good news should be in both word and deed, as Jesus demonstrated. This means that effective evangelisation has to have both sides and I would expand ‘deeds’ to include attitudes, how we relate to others.

The pattern of evangelisation as discussed by African Christians focuses extensively on the preached word. Sermons are preached to the converted, who sit in church pews Sunday after Sunday, a captive audience who listen without responding unless occasionally prompted by preachers to clap for Jesus. Occasionally a call to the altar may prompt those who have been moved by the proceedings to go up front for special prayers. Many sit listening in vain for the ‘word of God’ for their lives. But they will come back next Sunday because of what fellowshiping with other Christians does for them.

Evangelistic outreach in the form of open-air preaching in stadia, in parks, on street corners, in marketplaces and on television has become the norm in Africa. Strategies for following up those ‘touched’ vary. The increase that this brings to the membership of individual congregations is a matter for research.

The individual standing at the street corner or moving from village to village in Africa has been known to spawn churches, as seen in the Harris movement.⁴ Many of the city types are private entrepreneurs who expect donations from their hearers as a contribution to their 'ministry'. Teams from churches also go from door to door to share the good news. This has been the special mark of Jehovah's Witnesses, but now several youth groups of other churches are trying this 'personal encounter' format in their bid to proclaim the good news.

This form of evangelisation has become known as 'churching the unchurched.' Other forms might yield the same results. But what of the mandate to meet human needs, as we read from Matthew 25? As you have done to one human being, you have done it to God. In view of this, churches and Christians try to live out the gospel to demonstrate to the 'unchurched' what it means to be Christian.

Evangelisation that results in changing attitudes, having the mind of Christ, living lives of integrity and an ethic that can be called Christian is more difficult to evaluate. We observe this by its absence and by the fact that most preaching consists of listing "all the evil people do" and then adding "and yet they call themselves Christians." The effects of evangelisation depend on how we recognise the lives of the baptised as an attempt to follow 'the Jesus way'. A prominent phenomenon since the 1960s has been the growth of African churches outside Africa, first as loosely organised gatherings of African Christians who missed the way things are done at home or do not feel welcome at local churches where they have relocated. Many of these then seek relations with their churches back in Africa and eventually get sent ministers from home and become branches of the home church. Others remain free-standing churches and many more of these are being added. Many of these diaspora African congregations attract nationals of the host countries and have become a way of showcasing African Christianity around the world. The evangelisation originally aimed at Africans who miss the home church has now become a way of drawing others to Christ.

Another development is the periodic revival events that often carry the unfortunate label of 'crusades'. Some are massive and are held in open-air neutral spaces like stadia so that all might feel invited, welcome and at home. However, they tend to become routinised in such a way that when held by single congregations they are no more than attempts at reawakening the enthusiasm of the flagging church members who might come but do not invite friends to come hear the good news being preached. The attraction of these revivals is the expectation of miraculous healing and testimonies of answered prayers. These

⁴ That is, the 'Harrist' churches that are part of the legacy of the West African Christian revitalization movement founded by William Wadé Harris (c. 1850–1929). — *the editors*

are meant to induce faith as well as strengthen faith. People are invited to come and participate with the promise that their lives “will never be the same.”

I do not see the churches changing any of these. What I see is that new forms will be added and contemporary ones intensified, especially in line with the development of modern communication technology. By this I am referring to disseminating the good news and building communities by such techniques. Sermons on tape, text messages and tracts might give way to these as more people come to own phones and tablets. Instead of featuring ‘regular’ worship services on television, maybe we shall see more religious drama carrying the good news. With each new development in media technology, the church will be challenged to disseminate the good news appropriately, but the one-on-one contact with the call “come and see” (cf. John 1:39, 46) will never fade away as coming to faith is, in the final analysis, a personal decision.

Developments in Liturgy and Spirituality

Spirituality is an all-encompassing concept that includes what we do with our beliefs — how our faith moves us to live our lives. This is why we need to take spirituality and liturgy together. Liturgy is not only the way we worship in the church but also what the church does after the ‘in-house’ ritual is over. The formal services planned and mostly controlled by the church’s rules and rulers are a tradition that will remain but will be shaped to respond to contemporary needs. The sacramental liturgies remain firmly in the hands of the ordained. You need ordained persons of the particular Christian family to minister the prescribed sacraments, be they two or seven. You need ordained persons to baptise, confirm, marry, and bury, although some of these may be performed *in extremis* by persons with the required dispensation from their official church. The non-sacramental liturgies are open to the leadership of the non-ordained, that is, the lay persons, and in many churches these outnumber the sacramental liturgies.

In Africa, liturgy has been freed from books. Few congregations go by liturgies read from books. By and large, Christian gatherings in Africa depend heavily on the oral and the spontaneous. Even the Eucharistic liturgies that are more formal get modified with the insertion of songs, although leaving the words of the institution intact. The vernacularisation of worship has promoted congregational participation, including much singing and dancing.

Spirituality is writ large in African Christianity. We remember how the activities of the Spirit-filled women of the early church caused “and also the Holy Spirit” to become part of the creed of Nicaea. In today’s African Christianity, a church that does not exhibit “the gifts of the Spirit,” especially in the form of glossolalia and other forms of enthusiastic exhibition of one’s possession of the Holy Spirit, is considered a failed church. It is, however, a source of contention as to the difference between “possessing the Holy Spirit” and being “possessed

by the Holy Spirit.” This debate arises from interaction with African indigenous religious imagination, which can never be discounted.

One thing is certain: a person guided and counselled by the Holy Spirit lives a Christ-like life. It is this that for me is central to the concept of spirituality and its manifestation in the church and by Christians. I look for spirituality in people’s will to enhance the quality of life of others as for themselves. I find spirituality where people are engaged in stamping out evil, in righting wrongs, in seeking justice and doing what is just, and where they sustain and empower those who are engaged in contending with hostile environments, both physical and psychological.

Churches and Christians feature strongly in this arena, with the care of the vulnerable in all aspects of life. Orthodox spirituality, for example, is seen in environmental rehabilitation; sanitation; hygiene; access-road construction; small-scale irrigation; care of refugees, returnees, and displaced persons; infant and child feeding; and gender mainstreaming. These and many others feature in the tasks undertaken by churches in Africa. I have to observe, however, that the church’s spirituality as manifested in its concern for the well-being of women falls short of the standard of Jesus Christ, as it is still ruled by the demands of traditional cultures in Africa. While Christian women are in solidarity with the church, the church tends to take this for granted and operate as if the status quo should be preserved. My hope is that sensitivity to the welfare of women will become an agenda item for the future church in Africa.

As Jean-Marc Éla has pointed out, “The shock of the gospel” in Africa⁵ is the “coexistence of the gospel in Africa with the veritable empire” of injustice “and hunger.”⁶ It is this that the spirituality of the church needs to engage. Christian spirituality has the task of guarding and promoting human dignity. Spirituality as seen in the lives of Christians is expected to be holistic, as Christian life should manifest Kingdom values and communities should experience peace and reconciliation, compassion, and justice. While ecstasy in worship abounds, one rightly expects enthusiasm in seeking the welfare of the vulnerable, all the vulnerable, whatever their religious faith.

Continuing Concerns

As John Pobee reminds us, Christianity came to Africa in a spirit of fear of Islamic expansion, searching for Prester John to help halt the advance of Islam.⁷ Today, the saga deepens in Africa with Boko Haram (“all things Western are anathema,” a home-grown Nigerian movement), Al-Shabaab and other so-called ‘radical’ Islamic groups teaming up with those who want to establish

⁵ Jean-Marc Éla, *African Cry*, translated by Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1986), 109.

⁶ Jean-Marc Éla, *My Faith as an African* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1988), xvii.

⁷ John S. Pobee, “Worship and Spirituality,” in *Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 340.

Islamic states around the world and specifically those aiming at Islamising Africa. This has generated Islamophobia, which is becoming a barrier to inter-religious relations that promote mutual respect among people of different faiths. In spite of the common boast that Christians and Muslims live side by side and take care of one another as members of the same social family, Christian-Muslim relations have not enjoyed smooth sailing in Africa, and the seeming détente of the colonial era has given way to turf wars in Uganda, Kenya, Somalia, and the Central African Republic and to periodic skirmishes in Ghana and elsewhere. In all this there are Christians and Muslims who insist on an atmosphere of mutual respect and work for it. The future of Christianity depends on this fragile atmosphere of striving for dialogue as represented by the Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA), based in Nairobi, Kenya. Nationally this trajectory is present in commissions set up and promoted by governments.

The challenge of living in a multi-faith environment is the lot of Africa. From the beginning, Christian missions to Africa took a stand of discontinuity vis-à-vis indigenous religions. We know that this continues but has not succeeded in eliminating beliefs and practices that are closely woven into traditional culture and appear to be simply 'social.' We are learning that the indigenous African beliefs are closely woven into the fabric of all that we call traditional African culture. Rarely do adherents of African traditional religion (ATR) present open challenges to Christians and Muslims. This appearance of acquiescence to the presence of these two 'guest religions' is deceptive. I do not know about Islam, but I can see a lot of ATR seeping into Christianity and Christianity adjusting to ATR by openly admitting to its tenets and combating some of them. The booming deliverance ministries in Christianity thrive on beliefs associated with traditional religion. The exuberance of dancing in African Christianity reflects traditional religious dances, stimulated by spirit possession known in Akan as *akom*. The fervent exhibitionism in praying, for example, is a direct legacy from ATR. But when, according to traditional beliefs, periods that demand silence and sober living are called for, then Christians who counsel abstinence during Lenten periods insist on flouting these religious exercises, calling them pagan. Yet my sense is that as Christian churches absorb erstwhile adherence to Africa's autochthonous religious imagination, so Christianity in Africa absorbs the spirituality of ATR in an unannounced way.

Awareness of the fragility of coexistence of people of diverse faiths is for me a key concern that is bound to continue into the future of the continent and the church in Africa. Socio-religious concerns arise also from the interaction between Christianity and African culture. As much of African social culture has a religious component or basis, there has been throughout the presence of Christianity on the continent a tension that has often developed into crisis. Churches have continued to encroach upon and even take over much of what was family responsibility and practice, such as naming that incorporates babies

into their natural family units. Other rites of passage, especially marriage and death rites, have been Christianised or present uneasy compromises and double rites and meanings. 'Gospel and culture' issues remain with African Christianity, requiring the crafting of a theology of religion that will enable further deliberation on them.

Theological challenges have shifted from the traditional dogmatics that produced the classical Christian creeds, which we affirm without attempting to understand. For me, this is the reason for the inconsonance of words and deeds in the lives of Christians in Africa. Presently, the focus of theology in Africa seems to be on the reality and activity of Satan and a cohort of demons that thwart the well-being (*alafia*) of people and so necessitate a theology that emphasises the attributes of God or a 'demonology' that explains the machinations of Satan. What all this calls for in terms of ethics and spirituality needs spelling out, not only by experts but also by the whole community. Theology for the people crafted by the people remains a challenge. How we classify the required theology, whether moral or pastoral or any other, is for me not as crucial as what it does in terms of promoting our understanding of what we believe in order that we may live out the same.

The future of Christianity in Africa is bound to be influenced by the themes and issues of contemporary Christianity in Africa, many of which are discussed in this volume. Foremost among them is leadership formation. Leadership is a recurrent theme in all aspects of life in Africa, especially in politics. It stands to reason that it should be a challenge in Christianity too. Gender, for instance, has become and will remain a challenge not only with respect to leadership but also in all aspects of life. On this, Phiri and Kaunda in their contribution to this volume surmise that a gendered approach to African Christianity demands that we explore the injustices that exist in the church, in culture and in the appropriation of biblical text in regard to the relationship between women and men.⁸ The current fear that women's rereading of the Bible amounts to rewriting it is simply a sign that women's perspectives have not been factored into interpretation of biblical texts and that some are afraid that the hermeneutical approaches of women will undermine men's authority and power as currently experienced. I posit that since it is human beings who create culture, cultural practices in the Bible and in our own African contexts should not be construed as the will of God. Since both women and men are created in the image of God and given the responsibility to care for all creation, decisions should be a joint responsibility.

I join these scholars to advocate prioritising women's experience from now on as this has been a regularly ignored factor in decision-making. Subjugation of women has been the norm on this continent and few interrogate cultural

⁸ Isabel A. Phiri and Chammah J. Kaunda, "Gender," in *Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 386–396.

masculinity. They add that we need not fear to enter the controversy around same-sex relations, as human sexuality is an aspect of the factor of gender, which currently is being interpreted as the power relations between women and men. They hope that we shall outgrow the homophobic stance, with its tendency to castigate its existence among women while pussy-footing around the occurrence among men. It is my hope that we can remain open to the possibility of developing a culture that protects difference in sexual orientation rather than let the current situation shift into gear to make same-sex relations a death sentence. The growth of pastoral theology might help face the challenge of human sexuality in Africa. It is my hope that gender sensitivity will become a task for the African church and all African Christians and that we shall overcome deeply ingrained sexist attitudes.

Church women's organisations are particularly vibrant on this continent and mostly in solidarity with the church, especially taking care of the needs of clergy. Mostly they are co-opted by the church and their energies directed to enhance its mission. I know of only one church that refuses to have a separate women's organisation. But I know of many that succeed in bringing the women to heel when suspected of too much independence. The core issue for the future is how to live in the church as a community of women and men, all called to be Christ to the world. It is my hope that the church will promote theological education for women so that its deficiency among women does not remain a reason for excluding them from the leadership of the entire church while at the same time curbing their leadership in their own women's organisations.

Where leadership is discussed, the participation of women and young people is bound to feature. Today we recognise that young people are not waiting in the wings to become leaders of tomorrow. They are leaders today, and their needs and deeds shape our life together where they do not actually take the lead or dictate the terms. The original role of Sunday schools was to promote literacy and they became a parallel institution for the Christian education of young people. This format will need remodelling and revitalising, as very little of the educational material used in these schools is created in Africa. Children in these schools are nurtured on Bible stories, compete in learning memory verses and once a year present themselves during a week set aside for them to lead the church service. This does not look like a dynamic way of Christianising young minds. The future of the church cannot hang on this. Hopefully the church will struggle to transform its ministry with children and children's ministry in the church.

There was a period in Africa when the ecumenical movement called attention to urban and rural ministry. This made sense then, but today many of the new churches are concentrated in urban areas. Ministry specific to the needs of rural Africa has fallen behind. Christianity is fast becoming an urban religion, albeit occasional forays into rural areas to donate much-needed clothing and occasional contributions towards building churches. Services to rural areas in

terms of daily needs have been left to other organisations. Who is actually preaching the good news in rural Africa is not clear to me, so I have to ask a question here: Is the future of Christianity in Africa to depend on urban and peri-urban areas, where people crave deliverance and prosperity? Ethnicity, class, and gender are all continuing challenges of the church in Africa. So are the constant socio-political conflicts that disrupt life — land rights, the drying up of groundwater and other environmental challenges that plague Africa. Who brings good news? Economic challenges and wars drive Africans through the desert into the Mediterranean. But who is reading and rereading the Bible? In all of this we depend on the Bible to guide us through.

With globalisation and the exploitative brainwashing strategies that accompany the practice of religion, one cannot discount the growth of scepticism and secularism in Africa. But whatever happens to Christianity in Africa, it is certain that the Bible will remain its Holy Book. Nobody will dare rewrite it, but many will find the need to reread it. I have listened to lessons drawn from biblical texts that turn the events on their heads. Depending on the circumstances of preachers and hearers, the Bible can be made to dispense either life-giving or death-dealing verdicts. Being available to most in their mother tongue, and in various other languages and more and more revised and modernised versions, the Bible and quotes from it are available to all and are on the lips of all. Therefore we cannot ignore its presence in the future of Christianity and what it will mean for Christianity in Africa. The explosion of Christianity in Africa has been attributed in part to the vernacularisation of its Holy Book. The final issue to which I would like to call attention is therefore the contribution of Chris Manus.⁹

From pulpits in churches, on radio and on television, in myriads of Bible study groups, through text messages and songs, insights from the Bible are transmitted in Africa. The challenge here, as Manus notes, is that wisdom is derived directly from the text without reference to the original context of the biblical narrative. Scholarship on the text is totally ignored. Added to this is the fact that few read the Bible in its original languages, and we all know that translations are never ‘entirely innocent.’ Scholarship in this area is waning in Africa. For me, the critical factor is that most of the African translations are made from modern European languages and few resort to the original biblical languages and the critical apparatus that went into the European translations. My hope is that the church and the theological academies will see fit to remedy this lapse. They cannot shirk this task if the future of Christianity in Africa is to remain authentically biblical.

Lyrics, theology in song and ‘gospels’ all derive directly from biblical texts and events. Thus the narrative theology in song that we experience in church

⁹ Ukachukwu Chris Manus, “The Bible in African Christianity,” in *Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 421–432.

keeps people mindful of biblical and Christian teaching. Contemporary Christianity is awash with a belief in the spirit world. Every event and happening to individuals and communities is believed to have a spiritual provenance. Pastors derive their interpretations and counselling related to them from the Bible. The manifestation of 'spirit possession' as experienced in the autochthonous religious imagination is now present in the church, especially during 'crusades,' revivals and other special events like 'all-night' sessions of prayer and deliverance. The Bible is used to authenticate these exhibitions and 'prayer warriors' are always at hand to banish the spirits that war against the faith and the well-being of the faithful.

In Africa the Bible is everywhere and in all hands. People boast of the number of Bibles that they have placed strategically in their homes, offices, and cars. The Bible has become for them a talisman. As more and more mother-tongue Bibles are on the way, and the Bible societies ensure that they are affordable, the prevalence and power of the Bible will remain a major aspect of the profile of Christianity in Africa. With Bible in hand and the Blood of Jesus as their weapon, African Christians will continue to demonstrate the hold that Christianity has on Africa. They constitute the content of Christian preaching and counselling and with the power of the Holy Spirit at work in the church and in the individuals all is brought to fruition to the Glory of God.

Conclusion

I have tried to base my view of the future of Christianity in Africa on the content of the entire volume of *Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa* and on my own experience of 80 years in the church. It has not been possible for me to touch every chapter of the volume, as I have tried to stay close to my own experience and what I see or wish for the future of Christianity in Africa. My concluding remark is also personal. I have learnt from the vagaries of church history that the church belongs to God and that it is that factor alone that keeps it in the world. For this reason the church and for that matter Christianity will remain a part of the African landscape for as long as God needs it to be. Today, Christianity should be accepted as one of the 'traditional religions' of Africa. Having existed on the continent for over two millennia, it deserves no less an accolade.

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