



# THE PRINCETON SEMINARY BULLETIN

VOLUME 33

NEW SERIES 2016

ISSN 1937-8386

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The Princeton Seminary Bulletin is published annually by Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, New Jersey

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Religious Maps of the Universe

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## Mapping African Christianities within Religious Maps of the Universe

Afeosemime Adogame

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Chinua Achebe's symbolism of a masquerade becomes a useful starting point for mapping African Christianities. He suggests that in order to describe a dancing masquerade you have to move with it. According to Achebe:

I believe in the complexity of the human story and that there's no way you can tell that story in one way and say, this is it. Always there will be someone who can tell it differently depending on where they are standing; the same person telling the story will tell it differently. I think of that masquerade in Igbo festivals that dance in the public arena. The Igbo people say: If you want to see it well, you must not stand in one place. The masquerade is moving through this big arena. Dancing. If you're rooted to a spot, you miss a lot of the grace. So you keep moving, and this is the way I think the world's stories, and the story of Christianity should be told—from many different perspectives. [1]

The late poet and novelist Chinua Achebe's premier novel, *Things Fall Apart* [2] has drawn local-global attention and received worldwide acclaim and recognition, having been translated into at least 50 languages. It has also sold more than eight million copies. This perhaps makes Achebe the most translated African writer of all time and *Things Fall Apart* considered to be the book that launched the modern canon of African literature. [3] As Donna Urschel puts it, "the author gave Africa its first authentic voice." [4] While *Things Fall Apart* undoubtedly represent the book that parachuted Achebe to a global literary icon, he nevertheless wrote *No Longer at Ease*; *A Man of the People*; *Chike and the River*; *Arrow of God*; and *Anthills of the Savannah* [5] as well as short sto-

ries, poetry, essays, criticism and political commentary, and children's books.

In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe best describes the robust culture and complexities of Igbo society in Nigeria, articulating an insider's sense of the African experience, and the book is the greatest work of literature to come out of Africa. [6] The author's original intention was to counter the depiction of black Africa in Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* [7] and other related biased European colonial and Eurocentric discourses on and about Africa. One also calls to mind Achebe's infamous critique, "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*", [8] that accused the novel of stinking xenophobia. [9] In July 1989, Chinua Achebe visited Iwalewa Haus and the University of Bayreuth as a guest lecturer of the "Sonderforschungsbereich." The text of the conversation which took place between Chinua Achebe and Ulli Beier, was entitled "The world is a dancing masquerade: A conversation between Chinua Achebe and Ulli Beier." [10] This description of the world in terms of a dancing masquerade is very illuminating.

Almost six decades after *Things Fall Apart* was published, it continues to elicit literary, cultural, religious, historical, anthropological, economic, political imports and reverberations locally, but also globally. Achebe's unique appropriation of the English language is evidenced in its vernacularization, invoking Igbo language, imagery, and cultural idioms; as well as Nigerian proverbs, metaphors, and rhythmic speech. [11] It is against this backdrop that I picked a concept from this religio-cultural reservoir to draw a road map for my lecture. While masquerade as a typical phenomenon is used in representing and invoking African cultural and indigenous values, metaphorically I find it useful beyond its aesthetic, artistic significance to represent the dynamism and fluidity of African Christianities as a "faith on the move."

### **Interrogating the Complexity of African Christianity**

The story of African Christianity is one of a faith in motion. This mobility depicts dynamism and innovation; it portrays creativity and relevance. The texture and stature of the faith can be described as a buffet of Christianity in Africa and African Christianity. One cannot fully understand Africa without its diaspora, neither can we understand the African diaspora in isolation. This is more so as the African Union (AU) now characterize the Africa diaspora as the sixth region of Africa. [12] This nexus has religious, cultural, political, economic, social, and strategic import that cannot be undermined. Thus, a pictorial image of a masquerade with multiple colors depicts the different shades of Christianity in Africa and African Christianity in the diaspora. This is why I talk about African Christianities, in a sociological rather than a theological sense, to capture the unity in diversity, the different colors of Christianity in Africa and its diaspora.

Christians in America and Europe are often surprised to learn that the largest Christian continent is Africa: there are more Christians in Africa (some 520 million) than in the United States, Canada, and Mexico combined (380 million). Estimates are that in 1900 Africa had around 10 million Christians, but by 1945 there were about 30 million Christians in Africa. In 2008, Africa had around 500 million Christians, which was around 47% of the continent's population. [13] Put another way, in 1900, only 2% of the world's Christians lived in Africa. [14] In 2005, nearly 20% of the world's Christians lived there. What triggered this rapid demographic shift? It does not seem to be driven by missionary or colonial impulses, [15] but by local African agency. Indeed, once the European colonial and missionary entrepreneurs left Africa, Christianity grew fantastically: "Africa's most dramatic Christian growth ... occurred after decolonization." [16] This is especially the case with Protestant/Independent churches, where growth rates are staggering. In the 1960s, there were already over 6000 independent Christian denominations, all born in the twentieth century. [17] It is perhaps counterintuitive

that once Western colonial and ecclesial powers receded from the African continent, Christianity received a new lease on life. However, the evidence seems to illustrate that Christianity's greatest gains in sub-Saharan Africa occurred during and after the independence era— the 1950s and 1960s onwards.[18]

Christians in America and Europe are even more surprised to learn that Africans are no longer merely on the receiving end of missionary work and church planting from the countries of the Global North, but are also sending clergy and missionaries to Europe and North America. These clergy and missionaries are not limited to the Christian traditions (Roman Catholicism, Anglicanism, Methodism, Presbyterianism, etc.) that performed the missionary work in Africa originally. There are a significant number of Christian traditions and denominations that have arisen in Africa – traditions independently started by Africans for Africans – that have sent missionaries and church planters of their own to Europe, the United States, and other countries of the Global North. I shall return to this phenomenon. How can we possibly capture this vast richness and perhaps also contradictions in African Christianity in light of globalization? Is it at all possible for an individual scholar to comprehend this religious fervour? How do we conjecture the religious phenomenon by laying any claims to inter-subjectivity and or objectivity?

Africa is one continent with several worlds, covering an area of around 30 million square kilometers, one-fifth of the earth's land mass, and has more than 50 countries. Africa is vast in both geography and people. There are approximately one billion people in Africa today speaking around 2,000 languages.[19] The over-900 million people of Africa have evolved as a cultural milieu, which is a study in contrast and has several dimensions.

Africa is a vast continent characterized by complex cultural, religious, and linguistic varieties, as well as diverse historical experiences.[20] It is home to innumerable ethnic and social groupings, some representing very large populations consisting of millions of people, while others are smaller groups of a few thousand. All of these ethnic groups have cultures which are different, but represent the mosaic of cultural diversity of Africa. Sub-Saharan Africa, also labeled as Africa south of the Sahara or tropical Africa, represent countries of predominantly black indigenous population that are not often considered within the geographical ambit of North Africa.

There is, perhaps no clear-cut, defined geographical boundaries between North and sub-Saharan Africa regions owing to discontinuous and blurred breaking points between national boundaries, ecologies and ethnicities. Nevertheless, the sub-Saharan Africa context seems to have produced the most profound religious vitality, with interaction of the various indigenous religions with Christianity, Islam, and other eastern and Western-related religious movements producing new religious constellations that have attracted more scholarly attention than anywhere else on the continent. North Africa has witnessed a longer, more ingrained history and imprint of Islam in a way that renders its interlocking with the indigenous religion less visible. The Islamic onslaught on the former Christian strongholds in North Africa has largely stripped it of much contemporary significance as a context for Christianity.

I find statistics sometimes useful, although I am not a stout believer and would not totally rely on global statistics on religions, statistics of Christianity in Africa, nor of the other religions such as Islam and the indigenous religions. The politicization of census on religious and ethnic grounds has resulted in unreliable religio-ethnic demographic data in several African countries.[21] The official population statistics are often manipulated for political, economic, and religious ends. This partly explains why the religion indices are completely excluded from some recent national census. In many parts of Africa, there are no credible censuses or in some cases the actual counting of members does not exist. Second, some churches actually do not take attendance nor have an adequate record of membership. This is also because membership is in many cases fluid and hardly stagnant. People are engaged constantly in shopping the spiritual marketplace. Third, many people maintain multiple reli-

gious affiliations or memberships in combining multiple intra-faith traditions or even inter-faith allegiance, i.e., Christianity and Indigenous religions, consciously and unconsciously.

All of these features further complicate how aspects of the congregationalism discourse makes sense within African religious sensibilities. The example of the taxi driver who had stickers and concrete object indicators of Christianity, Islam, and the indigenous religions will suffice here. During a research trip to Lagos, Nigeria in the summer of 1995, I boarded a taxi and was soon attracted to the windshield and bumper stickers and inscriptions such as “Jesus is the Way, the truth and the life”, “Jesus is Lord,” “Allah is the Greatest,” “Smile Allah loves you,” “Nigerian by birth, Saved by the Grace of God,” etc. My curiosity led to further revelations as I found a charm and amulet tied beneath the car’s steering wheel. This eclectic religious aesthetics led me to pose a question whether he was a Christian, Muslim, or adherent of the indigenous religion. His rhetorical response “Why did you ask?” led to my further probing. When I pointed out the religious insignias to him, he immediately responded: “*Aaahh* my brother, it is better to hold on to the three faiths just in case one fails, then the other will work.” Such reasoning, controversial as it may be, can be better understood against the backdrop of local religious sensibilities and appropriations that are contextual in nature.

Another problem of reliable statistics is in locating African Christianity within global statistics of Christianity. The meaning, texture and scope of church membership have changed considerably. Church membership in many parts of Africa would require regular attendance at church services and programs, paying church dues, offering, tithes, while also carrying out such rites of passage as water baptism, confirmation, and baptism of the Spirit. In other contexts such as in Europe and the United States, the prerequisite for membership can be a bit more complex. For instance, Grace Davie best illuminates the phenomenon in the United Kingdom in what she refers to as “precarious religion” in “believing without belonging” and “belonging without believing.”<sup>[22]</sup> How these dichotomies are factored into global statistics of Christianity is an indication of the power dynamics inherent in global Christianity and the politicization of religious statistics. Who gets to decide on numbers? Who decides who is Christian or not; or who is Christian enough or less? What is authentic or genuine Christianity and what is its counterfeit or fake semblance? Which Christianity is syncretistic and which is not?

With the politicization of statistics of Christians in Europe and North America, one cannot but wonder where the Christians are (as contrasted with huge statistics of Christian population) against the backdrop of dwindling church membership, empty pews, the closing of churches, the drop in clergy/priesthood numbers, the museumization of church buildings and in circumstances in which church buildings are desacralized, sold and converted to bookshops, brothels, restaurants, pubs, bed and breakfast, or even converted into yoga centers or mosques. Or could one suggest that in spite of the new phenomenon of ‘precarious Christianity’; perhaps ancestors and saints have continued to be counted among the living?

Such hegemonic discourses obscure the rich flavour and flowerings of Christianity just as it reifies its homogeneity as opposed to its heterogeneity. Such power dynamics seem to caricature the dynamic nature of Christianity as a faith that transcends geographical, racial, social, ethnic, cultural, class dichotomies; a faith that can germinate and survive in both conducive and unfavorable conditions; one that responds to both local and global stimuli; one that has the potential to speak all languages either mundane or esoteric. It is also a faith that can survive in oral and written cultures; one that is resilient but transforms and changes in historical perspectives. It is against this backdrop that the interdisciplinary field of World Christianity now attempts to interrogate these complex questions such as “Whose Religion is Christianity?”<sup>[23]</sup>; or “How is the Christian faith recognised in all cultural contexts and milieus?”; or what is the public role or social relevance of the church in a constantly

changing global society marked by secularizing and globalizing trends?

This enigma of statistics raises another critique regarding how church growth is measured. Could it be that we should transcend statistics (numbers) and also look at the public role and social location of Christianity? How is Africa Christianity interrogating politics, economy, social, cultural and strategic issues of the day? How are churches and Christians responding to HIV and AIDS pandemics, the Ebola crisis, gay priesthood and same-sex marriage, poverty, religious conflicts/violence, global terrorism such as Boko Haram, Al-Shaabab, new forms of economic apartheid in South Africa, Afrophobia (racism of Africans against Africans), unsustainable economies, rigged democratic structures, unwarranted migrations and refugees to Europe and loss of young bodies, child and sexual trafficking, child abductions like the Chibok girls in Northern Nigeria, new slavery or slave trade, social abuses within and outside the church, i.e., child abuse by priests, defrauding of members through false hopes of prosperity, brainwashing, church leader's corruption and abuse of office, endorsement of despotic and autocratic political leadership, the marginalization of women. In what ways can we unpack church institutions as employers; to what extent does the church continue to serve as the moral conscience of society; how does the church community engage in building social, cultural and spiritual capital; supporting sustainable development and democratic governance?

### **Conceptualizing African Religions and Globalization**

The perception of religion as a phenomenon completely separate from culture is not a suitable reflection of the embedded nature of "religion" in African cultures.[24] Religion is variously conceptualized as a spiritual, epistemological, and philosophical phenomenon. Beyond the typical focus on religion as a coterie of belief and ritual patterns, the treatment of religion as an epistemological phenomenon further helps to shed new light on studies of African cultures and societies. Religion viewed in this way allows for a deeper understanding of the complex interaction between Africans and non-Africans, an encounter sometimes based on incompatible worldviews. As a category of analysis to the study of culture and society, religion is therefore quintessential to our understanding of African cultures in a global context. A proper grasp of the texture, shape, and complexity of the different religious traditions improves our understanding of Africa and its religious culture in conditions of globality. This points to the significance of religion in contextualizing Africa in ongoing globalization processes.

The purview of African religions transcends the continent and goes into the African diaspora.[25] Contemporary "African religion" is itself a product of globalization, for it is less a single tradition than a sociological context in which the elements of a variety of indigenous religious experiences are combined with Islam and Christianity. All three of these dimensions – indigenous religion, Africanized Islam, and Africanized Christianity – are part of the interactive, globalized African religious experience.[26] The interface of religious cultures of sub-Saharan Africa with globalization needs to be set against the backdrop of the interlocking relationship and mutual enhancement of the triple religious heritage rather than any unilateral perspective. In other words, we will understand the growth and transformation of indigenous religion, Islam, or Christianity better when we consider them within the locus of mutual religious interaction, competition, and influence.[27] These constellations have also produced new religious movements that are far from being identical with the triple religious heritage. Such new movements have appropriated symbols and employed religious imagery from one or the other religious traditions, giving it a novel interpretation and producing a new kind of religious creativity.[28] The institutional stature, demographic mobility, and public visibility of these religious traditions in Africa and the African diaspora have shot them into global religious maps of the universe.



The spread of Christianity and Islam saw the introduction of new religious ideas and practices into indigenous religions. The encounter transformed indigenous religious thought and practice but did not supplant it; indigenous religions preserved some of their beliefs and ritual practices but also adjusted to the new socio-cultural milieu. As a result of social and cultural change, some indigenous beliefs and rituals were either dropped or modified due to the impingement of European and Arab cultures, Christianity and Islam. The change also led to the revivification and revitalization of other aspects of the indigenous religion and culture. In many cases, Christianity and Islam became domesticated on the African soil. The contact produced new religious movements, with some appropriating indigenous symbols and giving them a new twist. African religion is itself a product of globalization as, in its widest sense it now refers also to creativities within this triple religious heritage. These initiatives attest to the continuity of African worldviews and ritual cosmos in the midst of worldwide socio-cultural change.

Sub-Saharan Africa has served as a significant theatre for the dramatization of Christianity and Islam, especially in the twentieth century. The impingement of Christianity and Islam led on the one hand to the denigration of indigenous religions, culminating in their rejection and abandonment by some indigenous peoples. On the other hand, the encounter served as a catalyst for innovation and creativity, thus portraying them as versions of African modernity. The Christianization and Islaminization processes in the African context can be clearly understood in its different phases of growth and development. A brief historical trajectory of Christianity in Africa will suffice here.

### **Periodization in Mapping Christianity in Africa and African Christianities**

To effectively map the broad history of Christianity in Africa and African Christianity, periodization is essential.

The history of Christianity in Africa and African Christianity must be conspicuously located within the *longue durée* of Christian history rather than perceived as a historical “volcano.” Before I highlight the different phases of history, it is important to remark that the historiography of African religions and spiritualities provide a significant template for understanding and deconstructing Christianity in Africa and African Christianity within global academic studies.<sup>[29]</sup> The historical trajectory of the study of religions (Christianity) in Africa has evolved through several phases, each involving different purposes and points of view. Jan Platvoet categorizes these overlapping epochs paradigmatically, as “Africa as object,” when its religions were studied virtually exclusively by scholars and other observers from outside Africa; and as “Africa as subject,” when the religions of Africa had begun to be studied also, and increasingly mainly, by African scholars.<sup>[30]</sup> Travelogues, the missionary and the colonial historiography, of the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth century, pioneered the study of and writing about the religions of Africa. The earliest phase was supplanted by armchair ethnographers and evolutionary anthropologists who propounded theories on the origin and evolution of human culture following evolutionary paradigms. With the decline of evolutionary theory and the advent of social anthropology, systematic field-work studies of African societies took root in the late nineteenth century. The 1950s and 1960s marked the era of integrated and consolidated research on the religions of Africa, the transition from “Africa as object” to “Africa as subject.” The African story (agency) about and on Christianity only started to be told from this last phase of its history (the 1950s/60s), in a way that challenges but also further enriches the stories told for and about them and their religions, cultures, ways of thinking and doing things.

The growth and development of old and new forms of Christianity in Africa, and the academic, public, insiders’/outsiders’ discourses they engender are laced with interpretational powers that are often conflicting in nature. Thus, this historiography is burdened, on one level, by competing claims for the power of interpretation

between African and non-African scholars, the different academic/scholarly approaches and historical phases aimed at defining, explaining, interpreting, and (de-)legitimizing African religious beliefs and ritual systems. In the intellectual enterprise highlighted above, it is important to mention that European (Western) scholars dominated and continue to dominate this endeavour, namely the academic study of Christianity in Africa and African Christianity. In the process these scholars imported their methodologies and brought their worldviews and epistemologies to bear on the African context. In fact, the academic study of religion in Africa has its roots outside the continent, just as the very category of religion itself has a European history. Make no mistake, Western and non-African scholars have contributed significantly to our understanding of African religions generally, and African Christianities in particular. But they have also, at times, paved the way into its obscurity and public misunderstanding. Having provided some hint of the historical trajectory of the study of Christianity in Africa and African Christianity as evolving through several phases, I shall now turn to viewing Christianity in Africa and African Christianity like a dancing masquerade.

I do not pretend I am able to tell the story of the development of Christianity in over 2000 years and Africa's role and impact within the limited space I have for this lecture. Such an attempt would be overambitious and difficult to imagine, let alone achieve. Therefore I shall paint with large strokes and will therefore isolate five broad, but hardly mutually exclusive, phases that will help us navigate this robust history. Most importantly, I will demonstrate, through my work, how and to what extent the demographic stature and texture of African Christianities could have broad implications for international politics, intercultural relations, and world religions. Also, I explore how Christianity, the world's largest religion, is becoming more associated with Africa than with the West, and how this development is gradually shaping our understanding of world Christianity.[31]

### *Phase 1*

Contrary to popular imagination, Africa did not know Christianity through European missionaries. In other words, Africa and Africans have been integral to the emergence and development of Christianity long before the introduction of European Christianity that accompanied the early Portuguese explorations, and later, the imperial and colonial experiments. Thus, Africa is the heartland of early as well as contemporary Christianity. Indeed Africa contains some of the oldest forms of Christianity on earth.[32] The earliest known presence of Christianity in Africa is located in late antiquity, the period from the first century onwards when North Africa was visibly vocal in the development of the Christian tradition. [33]

Early African Christianity has deep roots in Ethiopian Judaism. As Daugherty demonstrated:

There was significant Ethiopian-Jewish contact many centuries before Jesus, documented in the King Solomon-Queen of Sheba relationship from 1 Kings 10. Presumably, the Ethiopian-Jewish relationship continued and expanded since Africa played a key role in several New Testament passages. For example, Jesus spent time living as a refugee in Egypt according to Matthew 2:13-14. Simon of Cyrene—modern-day Libya—was forced by the Romans to carry Jesus' cross for him when he became too weak to do it himself (Matt. 27:32). Thus, it was an African who first took up a cross and followed Jesus, up the hill to Golgotha. In Acts 2, on Pentecost Sunday, we read of Libyans and Egyptians at the birth of Christianity." In Acts 8, an Ethiopian eunuch, "... an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians" had gone to Jerusalem to worship. Africans were among the first to preach the gospel to non-Jews. For example, Acts 11:19 discusses evangelists from Cyrene preaching to Greeks in Antioch. The apostle Paul was probably ordained for ministry by a group that included Africans (Acts 13:1-4). One



of the great evangelists of the New Testament was Apollos, a native of Alexandria (Acts 18:24). Church tradition states that Mark evangelized Egypt in the 40s and became the first Pope of the Coptic Orthodox Church... One of the earliest Christian states on earth was Axum, in Ethiopia. Still today Ethiopia is a proudly Christian country that remained isolated from Christendom for centuries. [34]

From Athanasius and Anthony to Augustine, Africa helped to spawn the largest religion in human history. Thus, African Christianity has come full circle. For the first several centuries of Christian faith, Africa was the hub.

Africa's extra-canonical pedigree is impressive.[35] Saint Anthony the Great, the father of monasticism, was Egyptian. Several African church fathers defined the Christian faith as we understand it today: Athanasius, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Cyprian, and Tertullian. Athanasius was probably the leading theologian in the Trinitarian controversies as well as in the determination of the biblical canon. Athanasius's home city, Alexandria, was well known as "the leading academic center of the ancient world." [36] Indeed, Alexandria and Carthage (Tunisia) were pivotal in shaping the earliest medieval Western universities. And perhaps the most important theologian in Christian history, Augustine (354–430 CE), was an African Berber from Algeria. It is indeed an irony of history that contexts (such as Egypt, Libya, Tunisia) that marked the birthing and hotbeds of early Christianity have now turned to be the heartlands of Islam.

Christianity had been firmly rooted in North Africa by the wake of the fourth century.[37] One inherent weakness of the Church however was its superficiality, a Latinized brand of Christianity that was devoid of features of an African Church.[38] It failed to be a missionary church and to penetrate the life of the indigenous peoples, with the exception of Coptic Christianity. The Church later traversed hard times in their encounter with an Islamic onslaught. In the seventh and eighth centuries, Islam grew quickly and African Christians became a minority voice. The impact of this was the inability of Christianity to gain inroads into the Muslim population. Though the Church left behind some footprints in places such as Egypt and Nubia (Ethiopia), yet the resilience of the Church in North Africa was to a large extent insignificant. A myriad of factors contributed to its deterioration and subsequent demise during the eighth century. The situation has changed again in latter centuries, it is projected that by the year 2030 Africa will surpass Latin America as having more Christians than any other continental block. With Africa's fertility rate—the highest in the world—African Christianity is on pace to continue its impressive growth trajectory.[39]

## *Phase 2*

Following this debut of Christianity in Africa was the second Christianization phase, which occurred several centuries later in sub-Saharan Africa.[40] The late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries witnessed the activities of Portuguese Catholics in some African societies as the Congo Kingdom and Zambezi valley in Central Africa; Warri and Benin Kingdoms (Niger Delta area) of the West African Coast; and the hitherto unpopulated islands of Cape Verde and Sao Tome. As missionary enterprises to Africa appeared unattractive to the Reformation Churches prior to the Evangelical revival, the Catholic missionaries from Portugal were alone in the task of introducing a few African societies and converting the "natives" to Christianity. Even then, they constructed their incursion on the narrative of looking for Prester John, the Christian King of Ethiopia. Aside from this religious activity, the Portuguese were not unmindful of the economic (i.e. trade in slaves) and political gains inherent in this venture. Church and State worked hand in hand to realize these possibilities. Wherever the Portuguese flag was pitched, the Jesuits and other missionaries were on its trail and established missions.

Protestantism had a strong foothold in Africa before 1800 at the Cape, where the Dutch formed a settlement

and in 1685 the Huguenots started to enter the colony.<sup>[41]</sup> Quite a number of the slaves were baptized, and in 1683 a regulation was passed which declared that all baptized slaves should be free. Organized missionary activity is thus over two-and-a quarter-centuries old in sub-Saharan Africa. In 1737, Georg Schmidt of the Moravian Brethren came to South Africa, and the latter half of the eighteenth century witnessed the beginning of British missions in Africa. The late eighteenth century and onwards witnessed a remarkable proliferation of Protestant missionary societies, many of who later became profoundly interested in the business of “spreading the gospel” to the African shores. Some of the Protestant missionaries of the eighteenth century, like their Catholic predecessors, have been caught fulfilling the role of trading in slaves or collaborating with the traders in the business. However, apart from the evangelical revival in Europe, the full effect of the slave trade had come into the limelight (the anti-slavery movement). The majority of Africans carried overseas into slavery were by the late eighteenth century core or nominal Christians. Many found Christianity a unifying and strengthening force, and it played strategic roles in the anti-slavery campaigns, as well as in the latter propagation of Christianity to their fellow Africans. Granville Sharp was one of the most determined protagonists of African freedom in London. When some of them were later resettled in Africa, Sierra Leone (the Creoles and Americo-Liberians), it was the freed African slaves who spearheaded the task of evangelization to their original homes. Local (African) agency represents the arrowhead for Christian growth and mobility in sub-Saharan Africa, thus paving the way for indigenous Christianity to take root. Notable among them were Samuel Ajayi Crowther, who led the Yoruba Christians and became the first African Bishop in the Anglican Church. Kimpa Vita (a.k.a Dona Beatriz) spawned an indigenous movement in the Kongo (1684-1706). Baptized by Italian Capuchin missionaries, she was later burnt at the stake as a witch at only 22 years of age. Vita inspired scores of people who were sent as slaves to Brazil and South Carolina. From the late 1780s Protestant Christianity would impinge upon Africa in a new and far more dynamic way.

The modern phase of missionary enterprise in Africa began with the foundation of the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) in 1792, the London Missionary Society (LMS) in 1795, and the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in 1799. The process continued with the establishment of the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS) in 1804, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) in 1810, the Leeds Methodist Missionary Society (LMMS) in 1813, the Basel Mission in 1815 and many others several years later. While most of these new Protestant mission societies differed considerably in their forms of organization, they were overwhelmingly evangelical in character. However, the missionary concerns of these bodies were not limited to the African continent, but international in scope, with each Society mapping and developing a particular regional focus for actual mission work. At their inception, the evangelical missions demonstrated a high level of mutual cooperation. The story however turned sour in the mission field, where there often existed an element of rivalry between some mission bodies. It is important to note that these decades of missionary endeavour produced only a small number of African converts.<sup>[42]</sup>

Between 1880 and 1920, the heyday of imperialism, there was a dramatic expansion in the number of missionaries at work in Africa. The Berlin Conference exacerbated the scramble and partition of Africa by European imperial powers by formalizing it. Missionaries in the field often supported the imperial ambitions of their compatriots, resulting in mission and imperialism being understood by many as “two sides of the same coin.” The missionizing task became synonymous with the transplantation of Western civilization. The implication of this development was that African converts were taught to repudiate African cultures in their entirety and assume a new status of, for instance, a “Europeanized African.” This was the quandary that lay at the very core of the missionary enterprise. The question was: To what extent should an African adopt the Western civilization? To what extent should s/he abandon African cultures in order to embrace the “white man’s faith?” It was the attempt at reconciling these inherent contradictions within mission Christianity that welled up a new phase of in-

indigenous Christianity in Africa. Thus, the expansion of Christianity that took place in the twentieth century was largely through the handiwork of local African agency (evangelists).

### *Phase 3*

The West African Coast was the first home and indigenous breeding ground for the mission churches in the nineteenth century, just as it fulfilled the same function for the indigenous African Churches in the twentieth century.<sup>[43]</sup> African indigenous or independent churches can be understood as three levels of development. The first and earliest level refers to those groups of churches that severed from the existing mission churches owing to a number of irreconcilable issues. They flourished mainly in South Africa (Ethiopian Churches) and West Africa (African Churches) in the nineteenth century. They emerged out of similar circumstances such as rigid white (European) missionary control and domination, discrimination against local African agency, dispute over resources, a general feeling of marginalization among educated Africans, and apartheid (mainly in the South African context). Some of the churches which seceded from the historic churches in Nigeria were the United Native African Church (1891), and African Church-Bethel (1901) from the Anglican; the United African Methodist Church (1917) from the Methodist church. These African churches of Nigeria had their counterparts in other parts of Africa. A branch of the African Methodist Episcopal Church-Zion (1898), the Nationalist Baptist Church (1898), and the Nigritian Church (1907) were founded on the Gold Coast (now Ghana). One notable feature of these churches was that in spite of the change in the mantle of church leadership, they were still tied to the apron strings of the mission churches in their liturgical and hierarchical structures. Some of them still depended largely on the parent churches for financial resources. Let me now turn to what I consider the most recent phases of Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa.

### *Phase 4*

Africa's encounter with European mission Christianity also gave birth to African indigenous churches (AICs) from the late twentieth century onwards.<sup>[44]</sup> Thus, the 1920s and 30s witnessed the second wave of new beginnings within Christian independency. John Mbiti described AICs as "an African opportunity to mess up Christianity in their own way."<sup>[45]</sup> These groups emerged under the initiative of African leaders and prophets outside the immediate context of mission churches. They include the Zionists in South Africa, the Aladura in Nigeria, the Roho/Arathi in East Africa, the Spirit or Spiritist movements in Ghana. They are also variously referred to as prophet-healing churches. The most dramatic aspect of twentieth-century Christianity in South, East, and West Africa was the growth of prophetic churches. These categories share basic characteristics in their worldview, which helped to create a rather African brand of Christianity. The centrality of the Bible, prayer, healing, prophecy, visions and dreams, elaborate rituals, flexible mode of worship and un-stereotyped liturgy, and a charismatic leader (i.e. prophet or prophetess) are some of the basic features of these churches. They embrace a functional theology and their pragmatic approach to life and existential problems had endeared them to many Africans. Though they utterly condemn and reject the traditional religion as "fetish" and "demonic," their belief systems and ritual structures appear to have affinities with the indigenous cosmology. That is why they derive much of their membership not only from within the mainline churches, but also from other Christian as well as non-Christian groups (Islam and indigenous religion).

In spite of the affinities that abound among the prophetic churches, it is important to note that each has its own religious dynamic. There are differences in specific doctrines and details of ritual acts and performance, just as in their histories of emergence. Their patterns of emergence are twofold. The first are those that emerged from

or had their nucleus as “prayer bands” or “fellowship groups” within the mainline church, but later severed their links to form an independent group. In Nigeria, the Garrick Braide Movement was the earliest of movements in this category. As early as 1916, it broke away from the Niger Delta Pastorate Church. Other churches that fall under this category include the Cherubim and Seraphim (1925), the Church of the Lord – Aladura (1930), the Christ Apostolic Church (1930). There is also the Musama Disco Christo Church (1922) in Ghana, the Nazarite Baptist Church (called Nazarites or ama-Nazareth) founded by Isaiah Shembe (1911) in South Africa.

The second category refers to those groups that did not emerge in conscious schism from an existing mainline church. They were founded through the visionary experience of a charismatic figure, and independently of any existing mission church. Typical examples are the Celestial Church of Christ founded by Samuel Bilewu Oschoffa (1947) in Benin Republic and Nigeria, the Harrist Churches by William Wade Harris (1922) in Liberia, the Kimbanguist Churches by Simon Kimbangu (1921) from the Congo. Most of the indigenous churches of both categories belong to a continental ecumenical movement referred to as the “Organisation of African Instituted Churches” (OAIC), while not many AICs were accepted into the World Council of Churches (WCC). The non-recognition and non-acceptance of several AICs into global ecumenical bodies such as the WCC raises a crucial question about power dynamics and the politics of religious (Christian) identity. European mission churches, other brands of Christianity and a cross section of the public discriminated against the AICs on grounds that they were too African or not Christian enough, thus complicating the politics of religious but also cultural identity.

### *Phase 5*

The most recent development within Africa Christianity is the emergence and increasing proliferation of Pentecostal (Charismatic)/Evangelical Churches especially from the 1950s, 1960s, and onwards.<sup>[46]</sup> For instance, the past two decades in Nigeria have witnessed a huge proliferation of new Pentecostal churches. In an attempt to forge ecumenical links and cooperation among themselves and with other churches, the majority of the churches have now come under an umbrella called “Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria” (PFN). There are two waves of Pentecostal Movements, the indigenous Pentecostal groups, such as the Redeemed Christian Church of God, the Deeper Life Bible Church, Church of God Mission International, Winners Chapel, Rhema Bible Church, Christ Chapel, Zoe Ministries, Latter Rain Assembly, and the Household of God Fellowship; and the Pentecostal groups and organizations such as the Four Square Gospel Church, the Full Gospel Businessmen Fellowship International, Campus Crusade for Christ, Youth with a Mission, and Christ for All Nations, which exist as branches or missions of Pentecostal churches and organizations outside Africa. The earlier is largely independent and hardly relies on any external assistance, while many groups in the latter relies greatly on funds, literature and sometimes even personnel from their mission headquarters. The earlier has also embarked on mission activities by planting branches in United States, Canada, Europe, and other parts of the world.

One underlying feature of the Pentecostal Churches is the emphasis on the need for a specific conversion experience, spiritual rebirth (born again-ism) and the manifestation of charismatic gifts such as speaking in tongues (glossolalia). Some are more or less “holiness movements,” interested in religious experience than in rituals. There are those which are noted for the kind of “prosperity gospel” they preach. This is becoming very popular, especially among Nigerians and (white) South Africans. The “gospel of prosperity” teaches that God is a rich God and intends his followers to prosper in all their endeavours in life. It promises a miraculous escape from poverty, unemployment, ill health, and lack of promotion. One “short-cut” way to riches is thus by tithing

and giving to the poor and less privileged. Some of these groups have assimilated some ideas and features originating from American Pentecostalism. On the other hand, their commitment to the gospel of prosperity fits in well with values of the African traditional culture where elaborate religious rituals are engaged to ensure prosperity, health and protection against the malevolent forces. That is why Christian groups such as the Pentecostal churches, the Aladura or prophetic churches which seek to address these day to day, existential problems will continue to expand in contemporary Africa.

The AICs and the Pentecostal/Charismatic churches have shaped African Christianity through their increasing involvement in the public sphere, especially in their political and social roles. In this vein I have explored how African Christian communities, as strategic actors and benefactors in Africa and its diaspora, are involved in processes of religious, social, and cultural capital engineering.[47] This is partly achieved through strengthening and establishing relationships, norms, and values as a means towards realizing a new state of social inclusion/exclusion; but also through networks that mediate access to the host cultural context, new opportunities, resources and information. African Christian communities contribute enormous bridging, bonding, and linking social capital, but also confront barriers to development and civic engagement. Their spaces of worship are not simply religious places, they are also spaces of socialization where business, politics, education, music, home country and food cultures, even gossips are engaged and negotiated. Such spaces often transcend socio-ethnic, race, class, gender and intergenerational boundaries. People meet others from different backgrounds, they share activities and build trust in one another, albeit temporarily. African-led churches facilitate bridge building and links-building with others, thus generating local-global networking trends, new forms of association, and engendering trust in shared community initiatives. Their landscapes of worship can also be a source of conflict among members, between the leadership and the followers, but also between these religious communities and their neighbourhoods.

### **The Public Face of African Christianities**

Generally speaking, hardly any attention has of yet been devoted to the unique role that African Christianities may play in building and generating social, cultural, and spiritual (religious) capital. More attention needs to be given to the dynamics of African Christianities in generating social, cultural, and spiritual capital so as to illuminate pathways in which the economy and quality of capital formation is relevant to African Christian communities in Africa, but also in the United States and Europe. [48]

No longer just a passive recipient of Western missionaries, Africa is today a major player in world Christianity.[49] Two of the six General Secretaries of the World Council of Churches (established in 1948) were African: Samuel Kobia of Kenya, and Philip Potter— of African descent but from the West Indies. Another important African ecumenist was Akanu Ibiam, a medical missionary from Nigeria who became a political leader and one of the Presidents of the World Council of Churches. Additionally, two of the nine General Assemblies of the World Council of Churches were held in Africa: in Kenya (1975) and in Zimbabwe (1998). The African diaspora is huge, and is changing world Christian demographics.[50] Examples of these impacts are plentiful. For example, John Sentamu (Archbishop of York)—the Anglican Church's second highest official—is from Uganda. The Anglican Communion is witnessing a shift in leverage as Africans are clearly taking the reins of leadership in that denomination.[51] Unmistakably, the future of the Anglican Church is African. There are more Anglicans in Nigeria than in England. It is estimated that there are over 40 million Anglicans on the African continent. Africa claims approximately 55 percent of the global Anglican Communion, and that percentage is certain to rise.[52] Perhaps the most important aspect of African Christianity is that it represents the turn-



ing over of a new leaf in world Christianity. While Christianity in the West declines, in Africa it grows in numbers, in strength, and in energy.[53]

Mission-related churches in Africa have also acted in ways that put them on the global map.[54] For example, the popularity of the faith-healing ministry of the Zambian Catholic Archbishop Emmanuel Milingo provoked anxiety at the Vatican and has social and theological implications for the Catholic Church globally because it demonstrates one of the ways in which contextualization and enculturation processes have taken place within African Catholicism. The anti-gay stance of the Anglican Church of Nigeria (the largest Anglican community outside of England) on the ordination of homosexual bishops by the main Anglican body—as well as the blessing of same-sex unions in the United Kingdom, United States, and Canada—has drawn local and global attention. While the West has largely criticized this stance as fundamentalist, the West has also taken a fundamentalist posture in not lending an ear to understanding the reasons for the vehement opposition.

It is likely that Christianity will be more identified with Africa than with any other place in the world. And the reverberations are already being felt.[55] For centuries the Christian narrative has been told primarily from a European perspective. But African narrators are now settling in, and African narrators have several significant implications for telling the story of Christianity. Scholars of Christianity are taking note of these changes, even if they are not widely known. In my own travels and research, it is clear that not only is African Christianity rising, but the African diaspora is making great gains in the West as well, impacting what has up to now been considered a Western religion.

Moreover, Daugherty aptly notes how Africans are impacting the way Christians read the Bible.[56] Many Westerners studied F. C. Bauer, Bultman, Althizer, and Tillich, yet the future of biblical interpretation may not necessarily include those names. Africans offer a different set of biblical interpreters, who come to very different conclusions than the commentators of the last 200 years in the West; the so-called “Enlightenment.”

Furthermore, African Christians bring confidence, and come to Christianity from a very different cultural perspective.[57] Daugherty remarks that an African-infused Christianity holds many possibilities.[58] World Christianity waits in expectation for what new things will be revealed. No one knows precisely how African leadership will shape world Christianity, but what is known is that changes are coming. He was perhaps right in observing that since Christians in the Western world still have a disproportionate amount of the world’s wealth, they will likely find themselves further partnering with African Christians and African institutions, a partnership that has existed for some time but will likely increase.[59] This may come from contributing in terms of international research fellowships; it may mean theological institutions offering full fellowships that enable Africans to study at Western schools. A rising cross-pollination process is taking place that will benefit both Africa and the West. And there is a good argument to be made that Western Christians should consider taking their tuition money to African institutions and place themselves under the tutelage of African theologians and scholars.

Otherwise, the relationship will continue to be one-way, perpetuating the paternalism of the past.[60] In other words, the answer will not always be to bring Africans to the West. Perhaps a better alternative is to encourage Westerners to adapt to the African educational context. He concludes that this interplay would be dynamic and certainly more authentic for Westerners wanting to know more about how and why African Christianity is growing.[61]

Ethiopianism became a clarion call for generations of Africans and diaspora Africans to take pride in their Christian roots and confront the stereotypes that had held them back.[62] Sanneh’s pioneering work on how Christianity translates into new cultures has impacted the field of world Christianity like no others. His thesis is



that no single people group owns Christianity, thus it is incorrect to consider it a Western faith.[63] Daugherty again notes, African Christianity present a series of contrasts. Christianity is ancient in the continent yet its explosion is recent. It will be fascinating to observe how Christianity continues to shape Africa, but perhaps more importantly, how world Christianity is shaped by Africa.[64]

The global stature of African Christianity is largely indicative of significant, contemporary shifts in the religious center of gravity of Christianity from the Northern to the Southern Hemisphere. Demographic considerations, the flavor and texture of contemporary African Christianity confirm this trend. Nevertheless, a consideration of this religious development in Africa must be seen in terms of its relation and links with the global context, but also in how and to what extent it interrogates and negotiates wider external influences and global forces. In addition, the ways in which the African Christian diaspora is contributing to the enrichment, diversification, and plurality of new geo-cultural and religious spaces becomes more and more expedient.

My work has explored the connection between religious expression and society, particularly focusing on expressions of African Christianity and indigenous religious movements in Africa, as well as the interaction of those religious expressions with the phenomena of migration, globalization and social change. I have attempted in my research initiatives to contribute important understandings of how Christian movements that began in Africa have been transplanted into communities of African migrants in Europe and the Americas, and have helped those communities express their identity in their new context. My first monograph on the Celestial Church of Christ (CCC)[65] interrogated and emphasised local agency in the contestation and negotiation of religio-cultural identities. The book had its focus on one of the most popular, widespread indigenous religious initiative in West Africa, the Celestial Church of Christ. This study examined the incipience, contemporary growth and development of the church, especially the period following the demise of the founder.

The book chronicled the routinization of charisma and the institutionalization of the faith and its practices, and places those developments in the context of the religious, cultural and historical practices of West Africa at the time of the church's founding. The work explored as well how the church has embraced and developed through the challenges of globalization. In describing, analyzing and interpreting their belief pattern and ritual structure, the study demonstrated how and to what extent the CCC situates traditional religio-cultural matrix within the context and continuum of African Christianity. I highlighted the unique aspects of the CCC as a particular church, while also establishing the church's identity as a synthesis of existing beliefs and traditions in dialogue with its adherents and their changing environment. I concluded that while the church maintains their identity as a Christian church *sui generis*, they have also created a synthesis of belief-ritual forms as a new rationalization, a new ordering of their religious cosmos.

This body of work on the CCC has been critical for scholars engaging with the broader implications of African Indigenous Churches (AICs) and their role in world Christianity. Many churches such as the CCC were born in the tumultuous post-war era as African countries declared their political independence, and established churches had to confront their being identified as agents of the colonial powers. AICs represent a powerful witness that the Christian message resonates in Africa. I have attempted to bring scholarly attention to the unique ways in which the Christian message and praxis have become part of West Africans' expression of their identity as African Christians.

Another aspect of identity (re)construction that was central in my work bears on women and gender.[66] In demographic terms, women dominate mission-related churches, AICs and Pentecostal-charismatic churches, al-

though their role in leadership is somewhat negligible. Commentators have adduced patriarchy and marginalisation as accounting for the inconspicuous leadership role in churches but also the charged debate about female ordination. Contrary to popular perception of Africa as essentially made up of patrilocal societies and patriarchal cultures, there are visibly matrilineal/matriarchal societies and cultures. While I do not deny how and to what extent patriarchal structures have impacted Christianity, I think the point is sometimes overstated.

In my work I contend that women exercise crucial ritual functions and occupy significant religious roles within many indigenous religious worlds prior to the debut of missionary Christianity. I argue that missionary Christianity hijacked these roles and stripped women of most of their ritual functions by privileging the strand of Pauline injunctions that were disadvantageous to women. Female religious actors, particularly within the AICs and Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity, are partly staging a comeback, assuming hitherto “traditional” roles and ritual functions, which colonialism and mission Christianity had largely stripped from them.

Women are assuming increasing roles as resource managers, decision makers and captains of religious industries. Other women have become church founders, leaders and visible religious functionaries on both sides of the Atlantic. The resurgence and public visibility of female leaders and ritual roles within African religiosity in the new diaspora and on the continent must be located in historical, socio-cultural precedents. Thus, the leadership and ritual role reversal witnessed in some new forms of African Christianity within the continent and beyond needs to be historically and contextually understood. By democratizing certain roles and responsibilities, women are increasingly incorporated into ecclesial administrative and liturgical structures in ways that mission churches before them failed to do. Let me now turn to what I consider as the most recent phases of Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa.

The research coming into fruition in my most recent publications, such as studies of transnationalism, contribute to the public understanding of contemporary society in the United States, United Kingdom, and European Union, and of perceptions of Africa and global community. This is relevant to how people understand the world as a global village and how governments make policies, for instance on immigration. One major emphasis through my interdisciplinary research and output is developing methodologies and techniques appropriate for the study of non-western Christianity, the new African Christian diaspora, and indigenous African religious phenomena generally.

My second monograph, *The African Christian Diaspora*<sup>[67]</sup> was based on extensive religious ethnography among African Christian communities in Europe, the United States, and Africa in the last 17 years. The book maps and describes the incipience and consolidation of new brands of African Christianities in diaspora; demonstrating how African Christianities are negotiating and assimilating notions of the global while maintaining their local identities. I contend that the historical and cultural significance of African Christianity is partly discerned in their plurality and multivocality both in Africa and the African diaspora. The relevance of African Christian communities is not only located in the unique expression of African Christianity they exhibit, they also constitute international ministries and groups that have implications on a global scale. The last few decades has witnessed a rapid proliferation of African-led Christian communities, particularly in North America and Europe, thus resulting in the remapping of old religious landscapes. These have helped in the reconfiguration of Christianity in the United States, and have contributed to the increasing religious diversification of host American societies. The salience of Christianity has been assisted by African-led churches where secularizing trends within Christianity are prevalent. Thus, African Christian communities in America should no longer be considered as outposts of Africa in an alien continent, but as institutions that are part of American life. The im-

pact and import of the “exportation” of African-led churches, driven by a vision of winning converts, is that it offers a unique opportunity to analyze its impact at local levels. The transnational linkages between African Christian communities in the countries of origin (Africa) and the “host” societies, such as the United States are assuming increasing importance for African immigrants. The links and networks that are established and maintained between these contexts are of immense religious, cultural, economic, political and social importance. This suggests how African Christianities can be understood within processes of religious transnationalism. This development is a remarkable change and marks a historic moment in the relations between Africa, North America, and Europe.

### **African Christianities and Reverse Mission**

African-led churches have increasingly taken to proselytizing in North America and Europe, viewing the regions as “new abodes” and promising “mission fields.”<sup>[68]</sup> There are also groups existing as branches of mother churches headquartered in Africa; and others founded by African migrants in the diaspora. Examples include the Redeemed Christian Church of God, with headquarters in Nigeria, and the Kingsway International Christian Center in East London. Both have a huge African membership with few non-Africans. The Embassy of the Blessed Kingdom of God for All Nations in Kiev, Ukraine, is a typical example of an African-led church with a majority non-African membership. Such African religions are significant within the framework of globalization, owing to the unique expression of African Christianity they exhibit—a feature that could be described as their self-assertion and preservation of religious identity. They are also important because they increasingly constitute international ministries that have implications on a global scale. As part of an increasing phenomenon of what they term “mission reversed” or “remissionization of Christianity to a secularized West,” these African churches have systematically set out to evangelize the world. Notions of globalization and globality are appropriated as theological and ideological constructs, and thus feature prominently in their mission statements and strategies, as well as sermon rhetoric—although these notions are used and understood differently. It is common to find churches defining themselves as “global churches” and their mission as “global tasks.”

#### *Reverse mission: Europe as a prodigal continent?*

The religious ethnography that took me from Germany to Nigeria in the summer of 1996 led to a striking and unprecedented finding, an advert captioned “Europe: A Prodigal Continent! ...Europe: A Mission Field in Need of Church Attention” adorning the Missions Office notice board of RCCG’s International headquarters in Lagos, Nigeria.<sup>[69]</sup> It proclaimed: “Why has Europe’s spiritual light grown dim? A mission force of years ago, becoming another missionary field at the moment!” It is not uncommon now that Christians from the two-thirds world often employ similar narratives of representation giving the impression of a “Christian” Europe as “the dark continent of Europe” or “a dead and secularized Europe.” Although it has been said that Europe is an exception in this regard, however, such traces of secularization are evident in North America as well. Controversial and puzzling as such assertions may be; they cast our minds and gaze to a new, emerging global religious phenomena.

“Reverse mission” or “reverse flow of mission” is an increasingly common buzz phrase in academia, mission circles, media, and among Christians from the two-thirds world. The (un-) conscious missionary strategy and zeal by churches in Africa, Asia and Latin America of (re-) evangelizing the West is a relatively recent one. This enterprise, according to them, was aimed at re-christianizing Europe and North America. The rationale for reverse mission is often anchored on claims of divine commission to “spread the gospel,” the perceived secularization of the West, the abysmal fall in church attendance and dwindling membership, desecralization of church buildings,

liberalization, and issues of moral decadence.

It is so far unclear whether “reverse mission” is simply operating as mere rhetoric, and/or what shape, structure, and dynamic will emerge through this process in the long run. It will suffice at this point to underscore public ignorance and ecclesial conspiracy that has left unnoticed this emerging mission trend, partly characterized by church proliferation in the South and its expansion from there to the Northern hemisphere and elsewhere. Nonetheless, reverse mission as “rhetoric” or “an evolving process” is of crucial religious, social, political, economic and missiological import for the West and world Christianity, as the non-Western world were hitherto at the receiving end of missions till the late twentieth century. The emergence of the “global South” as the new center of gravity of Christianity provides the watershed for the reversal and/or multidirectionality of missions.

### *Reverse mission: The antinomy of mission?*

The moratorium discourse and its fall-outs and the very concept and process of reverse mission or reverse missionaries has been documented by scholars – scholars of religion, social scientists, historians, missiologists, theologians, other related works – and an interesting cross-section of the media, although sometimes attributing a variety of meanings and perspectives. It needs to be demonstrated further how reverse mission as a concept and process can be used as an analytical, descriptive tool. Adogame and Spickard[70] identify reverse missions, South-South religious trade, and transnational organization theory as interrelated approaches aimed at breaking the stereotype that places the North Atlantic at the center of the religious universe. Each of these approaches illustrates a kind of religious action that may include the West, but which does not privilege it.

Adogame and Shankar[71] have taken this argument further. They demonstrate how the comparative dynamics of religious expansion illuminates, for instance, the complex models of Christian expansion in different geo-historical epochs.

The emerging phenomenon of reverse mission has attracted media attention. For instance, *The New York Times* story captioned “Mission from Africa” describes the mission task of the pastor of the RCCG Chapel of Restoration in the Bronx, New York and who coordinates the church’s missionary activities in North America:

Pastor Daniel Ajayi-Adeniran is coming for your soul. It doesn’t matter if you are black or white, rich or poor, speak English or Spanish or Cantonese. He is on a mission to save you from eternal damnation. He realizes you may be skeptical, put off by his exotic name – he’s from Nigeria – or confused by his accent, the way he stretches his vowels and trills his R’s, giving his sermons a certain chain-saw rhythm. He suspects you may have some unfortunate preconceptions about Nigerians. But he is not deterred. He believes the Holy Spirit is working through him – aided by the awesome earthly power of demographics. [72]

The story continued, “The Redeemed Church offers a case study of the crosscurrents that are drawing Christianity southward. Its leader and guiding force, Pastor Enoch Adeboye, sums up the church’s history this way: ‘Made in heaven, assembled in Nigeria, exported to the world [...]’ Today the process is reversing itself [...]”[73] Also, *The Chicago Tribune* with its front-page headline “Africans now missionaries to US” signposts the RCCG as the Nigeria-based Pentecostal church that is spreading its evangelistic form of Christianity to America. It noted, “For years American missionaries brought Christianity to Africa. Now African Christians say they want to export their own brand of ecstatic worship and moral discipline to the US, a country they believe has lost its fervor.” [74] *The Christian Century*, a Christian magazine carried a story “African missionaries to the U.S.” and reports: “For generations, Christian missionaries from the U.S. journeyed to Africa to teach their reli-

gion. Now, however, amid a burgeoning of Christianity in Africa, churches there are sending thousands of missionaries overseas to preach the Christian message in their own unique style. And many of those missionaries are coming to the U.S. 'We have been blessed by the U.S. and now we want to give back to them through the gospel of Christ,' said Badeg Bekele, pastor of Emmanuel Ethiopian Church in Los Angeles [...] African ministries are springing up in America because 'the church in Africa is on fire, while the church in America is, for the most part, losing its zeal,' said Pastor Ivey Williams of a congregation in Tallahassee, Florida, established by the Nigerian-based Redeemed Christian Church of God. Williams is the first African-American pastor of an RCCG church." [75]

The Herald also captures this trend with the storyline: "Out of Africa: now the missionaries head for Scotland" and noting that, "For centuries, the church sent missionaries to Africa to spread the word of God – now it needs them back." [76] In a reversal of the stream of Scots who pioneered their way across the continent, one church has turned to ministers from South Africa to stem the shortage of staff at home. In a recent development in March 2012, the BBC 2 TV Series *Reverse Missionaries* epitomizes the stark reality of the enduring processes of reverse mission. In their introduction to the series, the producers note: "Nineteenth-century Britain was a golden age for Christian missionaries, who took the word of God around the globe to countries in which that religion remains and is now thriving. In a reverse of those great missionary journeys, idealistic modern-day missionaries travel to Britain to discover the historical roots of their faith and try to pursue their own missionary agenda in 21st-century Britain, trying to breathe new life into churches with declining attendance." [77] This documentary chronicled, under three episodes of one hour each, new missionaries from the two-thirds world – Jamaica, Malawi and India – to the United Kingdom.

These academic interpretations and media perceptions of the reverse mission dynamics or reverse missionaries can hardly be thought of as a historical accident or occurring as sporadic events. What circumstances have enabled the reverse mission that has dramatically shifted the center of world Christianity to the two-thirds world? Andrew Walls best explores the complex dynamics of Christian mission by first historicizing it, and then balancing a broad, theoretical view of missions with more intensive discussions of specific missions.[78] Walls offers a panoramic view of the modern flux of the missionary movement and Christianity in general, emphasizing the recession of the Church in Europe and North America and its expansion everywhere else.[79] Walls contends that the next phase of the missionary movement must incorporate sending and receiving.

A historiography of reverse mission must respond to the antecedents and precedents of reverse mission process. The discourse on moratorium and reverse mission requires a historical backdrop especially as a backlash against decolonization. The history of the decolonization process in Africa is an intricate one that implicates all spheres of life. Ogbu Kalu[80] best captures this complex interplay by mapping African Christianity between the World Wars and decolonization. Decolonization exposed the differing agendas of the colonial government and missionaries; differences on the goals and curricula of education and cultural policies betrayed the ideological cleavages and competing visions between missions and colonial government. Africans were sensitive to missionary unwillingness to afford them higher training, ordain an adequate number of indigenous priests, devolve power or overtly support nationalism.

Rivalry suffused the missionary enterprise as each denomination sought to imprint its own version. The main thrust of the missionary policy of indigenization was passive revolution to maintain influence using indigenous personnel and resources. People increasingly found the missionary version of indigenization to be unsatisfactory and restrictive. By the 1960s, most former European colonies in Africa underwent decolonization and be-

came independent, although decolonization did not imply a radical change of Africa's colonial socio-economic structure. Missionaries' responses to nationalism varied according to individual whims, official or denominational policies and regional contexts. Vast changes in the political climate of the decade forced enormous changes in the religious landscape. The impact of decolonization on church groups varied: based on the size and ecclesiastical organization; the vertical spread and social quality of adherents; the inherited pattern of colonial relationship; and the theological emphasis and international relations.

The call for a moratorium was a more strident and different form of indigenization project. The moratorium exposed the character of Africa's relationship with the West – extraversion was in – built in the pattern of African relationship with the West as an essential ingredient to maintain “eternal juniority.” It reflected African impatience with the nature, pace and results of mission-initiated indigenization. Africans suspected a hidden agenda to embroil them in cosmetic change while the same people retained real power.

When the WCC General Assembly met in Nairobi in 1975, the choice of venue was as significant as the speech of the Pope in Kampala in 1969. The themes that emerged indicated a new mood that accepted African Christian maturity in ways hardly planned by the missionaries. Some Protestant missions took the opportunity to abandon missionary engagement. In some cases it led to the emergence of short-term missionaries. Thus, the moratorium and African liberation struggles influenced the shifts in the strategy for decolonizing the African churches. But who is this revolutionary figure that single-handedly stirred controversy within global mission circles turning the paternalistic trend of Christian mission on its head? Where did he derive the inspiration and guts to throw such a challenging blow at an unsuspecting mission audience?

### **John Gatu, from colonial soldier to moratorium crusader**

John Gatu was the man whose spark ignited the moratorium debate, has been described as “a great leader, mediator, pastor, preacher, counselor, speaker, poet, writer and ecumenist.”<sup>[81]</sup> Gatu initiated the call during a visit to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in February 1971. He embarrassed his ecumenical hosts by declaring that he had not come to beg for money or personnel, but to request that missionary aid in money and personnel should cease for at least five years so that African Christians can learn how to catch fish instead of relying on gratis fish from European mission boards. The stark call by Gatu for “a moratorium on missions and missionaries from the West” put missions at a crossroad. In fact, the Reformed Church of America, sponsors of the Milwaukee “Mission Festival 71” meeting would probably not have invited him to speak during the event, if they had any inkling that his speech was going to be so controversial to the extent of stirring up and turning the parameters of mission praxis on its head.

The moratorium call came under heavy criticism based on the mere fact that it emanated from the so-called Third World, the context that had been the primary mission field for many years. There were wide-ranging responses of mission bodies to the moratorium debate through seminars, conferences, and in the pages of journals. This call, which took a revolutionary stance, generated heated conversation, rebuttals and criticism from various quarters; particularly from the Western world. The criticisms of the moratorium were theological, ecclesiastical and logistical in nature. As Kalu explained, it was argued that a moratorium was theologically unacceptable because of the Pauline imagery of *soma* that we are one body and one part cannot prevent the other from performing a mandatory task.<sup>[82]</sup> Ecclesiastically, it was dangerous to become a national church. This threatened catholicity; the pilgrim and the indigenous principles must be held in tension. Logistically, it would be impossible to dismantle the mission structures that had built up over a century. Then, there was the gut reac-



tion of those who presumed that the Africans were ungrateful after years of missionary sacrifices.

The moratorium debate in the early 1970s evoked consternation among the white missionary agencies that dismissed it as preposterous. Ironically, their rebuttals provided the impetus for an African Pentecostal missionary enterprise. Within a few decades, they achieved the goals that the mainline churches failed to consolidate.<sup>[83]</sup> Legacies of the moratorium discourse as eulogized by Gatu and his contemporaries are still fresh and resilient within world mission circles. In fact, Gatu has remained very consistent, positive and vehement about the urgency for self-sufficiency and self-reliance of the church in Africa.

Although the moratorium failed to produce a formal radical and systemic halt to the influx of Western missionaries and mission resources to Africa, it nevertheless raised a question that resulted in self-reflection and structural adjustment by Western missionaries and of their mission resources. It served as an eye-opener for many about the new changing dynamics of mission and religious expansion in which Africans were not only looking inward for self-reliance, but outwardly with a mission mandate to evangelize what they now refer to as “the dark continent of Europe,” “the prodigal continent,” or “the dead West.” Several Third World Christian leaders supported this suggestion because they believed that it would break the circle of dependency on the Western churches and create room for self-development. Alongside their African counterparts, some Asian and Latin American church leaders echoed this sentiment. The moratorium also produced a new consciousness about dependence and strategies for self-reliance that has challenged definitions of mission but also altered the unidirectional nature of missions that characterized earlier conceptions.

In 1973, his moratorium proposal took center stage during heated debates on “partnership in mission” by the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the Bangkok Assembly of the WCC. In the following year, it became a recurring topic at the All Africa Conference of Churches Third Assembly at Lusaka, Zambia. This empowerment of the Third World churches brought significant changes in mission practices as issues of cooperation and partnership were promoted as new mission strategies at the International Congress on World Evangelization, Lausanne, Switzerland in July 1974 and in subsequent congresses. Third World Christians participated in these congresses and held additional continental and regional conferences, which provided global challenges and opportunities. The Lausanne Covenant gave a qualified endorsement to the moratorium call: “A reduction of foreign missionaries and money in an evangelized country may sometimes be necessary to facilitate the national church’s growth in self-reliance and to release resources for unevangelized areas.”<sup>[84]</sup>

In 1975, the WCC Fifth Assembly at Nairobi continued to echo the moratorium call. The terms of the debate had moved from the discussion of a possible moratorium toward understanding mission as the joint privilege and responsibility of churches in all six continents.<sup>[85]</sup> A deal for “mission partnership” had been brokered, this helped Western mission bodies to save face. Mission “partners” became a leverage to deconstruct the inherent ecclesiastical paternalism that characterized the missionary enterprise. Thus, the initiative that entailed sending African missionaries abroad came partly against the backdrop of the moratorium call to awaken “two-third world” peoples to their responsibility, creating new goals and formulating a viable evangelism strategy towards Europe.<sup>[86]</sup>

The Lutheran World Federation had experimented with “reverse flow,” in which African ministers were posted to German congregations where they were mostly treated with cold civility. In the early 1980s, Tanzanian Lutheran pastors were sponsored to serve in various parishes in Germany. The reverse-mission agenda is growing very popular among new African-led churches, with pastors and missionaries commissioned to head al-

ready existing branches or establish new ones in diaspora. The growth of missionary endeavors from Africa and other parts of the non-Western world has gained momentum in the 1990s, in a way that challenges Christianity in the West but also World Christianity.

By the 1990s, many churches had progressed to define their missions as witnessing communities to the Western churches and societies, which were waning numerically and spiritually. In the closing decade of the twentieth century, reverse missions became more recognized and gradually gained ascendancy due to economic decline and political conflicts, which intensified the migration of Africans, Asians and Latin Americans to the West. Confronted by the secularization of the Western society and the decline of church attendance and public piety, these migrants took up a revivalist agenda. At the same time, these immigrant Christians looked at the Western churches as being in a state of apostasy, and in a spiritual wilderness that needed re-evangelization.

As Ojo highlights, the founding of the Third World Missions Association (TWMA), in Portland, Oregon, in May 1989 as a forum for mission-sending agencies in Africa, Asia, and Latin America to enhance their capacities to undertake extensive missionary endeavors brought in an institutional perspective and transformed non-Western world missions into a global force in world Christianity.<sup>[87]</sup> In fact, the closure of some Arab countries to Western missionaries and the acceptance and success of African and Asian missionaries working among Arabs also proved quite significant in this process of reverse missions. Likewise, the AD 2000 and Beyond Movement, a global effort of world evangelization, directed by third world Christian leaders provided additional involvement and networking for evangelization and cross-cultural missions. By the mid-1990s, non-Western churches were beginning to achieve some degree of success in their missionary efforts, though they were largely using non-conventional missionaries. Many African churches have been evangelizing among whites and non-African immigrants since the mid-1980s. While migration continued to provide missionary mobilization, African Christian communities were able to realize their strength within world Christianity and perceive their missionary activities in global perspectives.

## Conclusion

The implications of reverse mission for world Christianity are not difficult to see. First, reverse mission has brought a major shift in mission understanding, provided better sensibilities to, and appreciation of, the multicultural nature of Christianity in the twenty-first century. Second, new definitions of mission are emerging in which traditional “mission fields” now form “mission bases” of renewed efforts to re-evangelize Europe and North America. Missions changed from unilateral to multilateral, itinerant missionaries increased, short-term missions emerge, and missions moved from cultural transplantation to contextualization. Third, as churches in the West, and particularly in Europe, are declining in number and in missionary significance, the impact of non-Western missions looms large in the revivification of Christianity in the US and Europe. Fourth, this trend helps in the deconstruction and demystification of ecclesiastical paternalism that characterized global Christianity. Lastly, the proliferation of priests/missionaries from the two-thirds world may help fill a spiritual/administrative vacuum caused by the dearth of American and European clergy. Andrew Walls’ remark, “Europe needs immigrants but do not want them,” sums up European attitudes towards immigrants in Europe. How different is it in the case of the United States? Nonetheless, this reverse trend in missions now offers the “old heartlands of Christianity” a model for renewal, transformation, and change.

[1] Jerome Brooks, “The Art of Fiction No. 139: Chinua Achebe,” *The Paris Review* 133, Winter 1994.

- [2] Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (Oxford: Heinemann 1958; New York: Anchor, 1994).
- [3] Donna Urschel, "Achebe's Impact: Author Gave Africa its 'First Authentic Voice'," *The Library of Congress Information Bulletin* 67.12 (2008).
- [4] Ibid.
- [5] Chinua Achebe, *No Longer at Ease* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1960); *A Man of the People* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1966); *Chike and the River* (Cape Town: Cambridge University Press, 1966); *Arrow of God* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1969); *Anthills of the Savannah* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1987).
- [6] Quoted in Donna Urschel, "Achebe's Impact: Author Gave Africa its 'First Authentic Voice'," *The Library of Congress Information Bulletin* 67.12 (2008).
- [7] Joyce Cary, *Mister Johnson* (New York: Time, 1962; London: J. M. Dent, 1995).
- [8] Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (London: Blackwood Magazine, 1899; London: Penguin, 1995).
- [9] See Chinua Achebe "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness," *Massachusetts Review* 18 (1977).
- [10] Ulli Beier, and Chinua Achebe, "The World is a Dancing Masquerade: A Conversation Between Chinua Achebe and Ulli Beier," *Southerly* 63.2 (2003): 163-177.
- [11] See Simon Gikandi, "Chinua Achebe and the Invention of African Culture," *Research in African Literatures* 32.3 Fall (2001) 3-8.
- [12] The Executive Council of the AU, considers the African Diaspora as consisting of: "peoples of African descent who live outside the African continent, irrespective of their citizenship and nationality and who are willing to contribute to the development of the continent and the building of the African Union." [<http://auads-nl.org/au-sixth-region/>]. The other five regions of the AU are Western, Eastern, Northern, Central and Southern Africa. See also African Union (AU) Official website: <http://au.int/en/cido> and Press Release No: 05/ 27th AU SUMMIT Signing of Memorandum of Understanding between the African Union Commission and the African Diaspora Forum, available at: [http://au.int/en/sites/default/files/pressreleases/31088-pr-pr\\_05-\\_signing\\_of\\_memorandum\\_of\\_understanding\\_between\\_the\\_african\\_union\\_.pdf](http://au.int/en/sites/default/files/pressreleases/31088-pr-pr_05-_signing_of_memorandum_of_understanding_between_the_african_union_.pdf)
- [13] Terence Ranger, ed., *Evangelical Christianity and Democracy in Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), x. See details in the World Christian Database (known previously as World Christian Encyclopaedia), <http://www.brill.com/publications/online-resources/world-christian-database>
- [14] See Dyron Daugherty, *The Changing World of Christianity: The Global History of a Borderless Religion* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 193.

- [15] Dyron Daughrity, "Assessing Christianity in Africa's Transforming Context," *Hekima Review* 52 (2015): 51.
- [16] Ranger, *Evangelical Christianity and Democracy in Africa*, x.
- [17] David Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements* (London and Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1968).
- [18] Daughrity, "Assessing Christianity in Africa's Transforming Context," 51.
- [19] Ibid.
- [20] Afe Adogame, "Religion in Sub-Saharan Africa," in *Religion, Globalization, and Culture* (eds. Peter Beyer and Lori Beaman; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 527.
- [21] Afe Adogame, "The Politicization of Religion and the Religionization of Politics in Nigeria," in *Religion, History, and Politics in Nigeria* (eds. Chima Korieh and Ugo Nwokeji; Lanham: University Press of America, 2004), 137-153.
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- [23] Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel beyond the West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).
- [24] Adogame, "Religion in Sub-Saharan Africa", 528.
- [25] Afe Adogame, "Practitioners of indigenous religions in Africa and the African diaspora," in *Religions in focus: New approaches to tradition and contemporary practices* (ed. Graham Harvey; London: Equinox, 2009), 75-100.
- [26] Olupona, J.K., "African Religion," in *Global Religions: An Introduction* (ed. M. Juergensmeyer; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 78.
- [27] Adogame, "Religion in Sub-Saharan Africa," 528.
- [28] Ibid., 529.
- [29] Afe Adogame, "Calling a Trickster Deity a "Bad" Name in Order to Hang It? Deconstructing Indigenous African Epistemologies within Global Religious Maps of the Universe," in *The Changing World Religion Map: Sacred Places, Identities, Practices and Politics* (ed. S.D. Brunn; Springer Netherlands, 2015), 1813-1826.
- [30] Jan Platvoet, Platvoet, J., Cox, J., & Olupona, J. eds., *The study of religions in Africa: Past, present and prospects* (Cambridge: Roots & Branches, 1996).

[31] Daughrity, "Assessing Christianity in Africa's Transforming Context," 50.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Adogame, "Religion in Sub-Saharan Africa", 535.

[34] Daughrity, "Assessing Christianity in Africa's Transforming Context," 53.

[35] Ibid., 50.

[36] Ibid., 53.

[37] Kenneth Sawyer and Youhana Youssef, "Early Christianity in North Africa," in *African Christianity: An African Story* (ed. Ogbu Kalu; Trenton: Africa World Press, 2007), 41-65.

[38] Adogame, "Religion in Sub-Saharan Africa," 536.

[39] Daughrity, "Assessing Christianity in Africa's Transforming Context," 50.

[40] Adogame, "Religion in Sub-Saharan Africa," 536. See also, Ogbu Kalu, O. ed., *African Christianity: An African Story* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2007).

[41] Adogame, "Religion in Sub-Saharan Africa," 536ff.

[42] Ibid., 537.

[43] Ibid., 538.

[44] Ibid. See also, Afe Adogame & Lizo Jaftha, "Zionists, Aladura and Roho: African Instituted Churches," in *African Christianity: An African Story* (ed. Ogbu Kalu; Trenton: Africa World Press, 2007), 271-287.

[45] Quoted in Noel Davies and Martin Conway, *World Christianity in the 20th Century* (London: SCM Press, 2008), 118.

[46] Adogame, "Religion in Sub-Saharan Africa," 540 and following.

[47] Afe Adogame, *The African Christian Diaspora: New Currents and Emerging Trends in World Christianity* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 101-122.

[48] Ibid., 108.

[49] Daughrity, "Assessing Christianity in Africa's Transforming Context," 55.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, "Global Anglicanism at a Crossroads," June 2008.

[53] Daughrity, "Assessing Christianity in Africa's Transforming Context," 55 and following.

[54] Adogame, "Religion in Sub-Saharan Africa," 546.

[55] Daughrity, 'Assessing Christianity in Africa's Transforming Context,' 56 and following.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid., 57.

[59] Ibid., 57 and following.

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Hock, eds., *Christianity in Africa and the African Diaspora: The Appropriation of a Scattered Heritage* (New York: Continuum, 2008).

[69] Adogame, *The African Christian Diaspora*, 169.

[70] Afe Adogame & James Spickard eds., *Religion Crossing Boundaries: Transnational Religious and Social Dynamics in Africa and the New African Diaspora* (Religion and the Social Order Series 18; Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010).

[71] Afe Adogame and Shobana Shankar, (eds) *Religion on the Move! New Dynamics of Religious Expansion in a Globalizing World*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013.

[72] See Andrew Rice, "Mission From Africa," *The New York Times*, April 12, 2009.

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[75] See "African Missionaries to the US," *Christian Century*, August 13, 1997.

[76] See Lucy Bannermann, "Out of Africa: Now the Missionaries Dead for Scotland," *Herald*, January 28, 2006.

[77] Accessed April 3, 2012, [www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01dmzcz/episodes/guide](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01dmzcz/episodes/guide)

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[79] Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 257.

[80] Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 271-291; Ogbu Kalu, ed., *African Christianity: An African Story* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2007).

[81] Adogame, *The African Christian Diaspora*, 177. See also, John Gatu, *Joyfully Christian: Truly African* (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2006).

[82] Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*, 276.

[83] Ibid., 290.

[84] See, *Lausanne Covenant* 1975:6.

[85] James Scherer, *Missionary, Go Home!: A Reappraisal of the Christian World Mission* (New Jersey:

Prentice-Hall, 1964), 273.

[86] Ogbu Kalu, "Church, Mission and Moratorium," in *The History of Christianity in West Africa* (ed. Ogbu Kalu; London and New York: Longman, 1980), 365–374.

[87] Matthews Ojo, "Reverse Mission," in *Encyclopaedia of Missions and Missionaries* (ed. Jonathan Bonk; New York: Routledge, 2007), 380–382.