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# Writing African Christianity

## *Perspectives from the History of the Historiography of African Christianity\**

*Elias Kifon Bongmba*

Rice University, Houston, TX, USA

and, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

*bongmba@rice.edu*

### Abstract

In this overview of the historiography of Christianity in Africa a number of desiderata and considerations for future research are reviewed. The first issue considered relates to the practice of historiography. The second issue relates to African identity/-ies and its relationship to global cultural movements. The third desideratum is the pursuit of new disciplinary practices in the study of African Christianity, especially interdisciplinarity as scholarly ethos. Finally, a number of themes that should become foci in historiography of African Christianity are explored, among these are: concentration on local and regional narratives, the gendered character of Christianity in Africa, attention to the material conditions and needs of African religious communities and the various cultural innovations adopted to cope with these conditions, as well as the role of Christian communities in development in Africa and the wider encompassing question of ethics and morality.

### Keywords

African Christianity – African religions – African history – African culture – inculturation – Africanization – sociology of religion in Africa – interdisciplinarity

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## 1 Introduction

Studying and writing the history of African Christianity calls for critical dialogue on the nature of the task ahead. The scholarship on African Christianity has grown to the extent that one can only speak from a perspective. It is important to emphasize as Jean François Bayart argued in the case of African history that there is a need to map out the ordinary which in the case of Christianity refers to Christianity as it is lived in Africa.<sup>1</sup> Bayart addressed the wrong perception and portrayal of Africa as something different and excluded from the rest of the world; but a history of African Christianity today is part of the global Christian movement because the dynamics of African Christianity have touched different parts of the world. A few years ago, David Maxwell provided important insights on the future history of Christianity in Africa from his view as editor of the *Journal of Religion in Africa*, drawing largely from the social sciences.<sup>2</sup> In many ways this project recalls previous attempts by scholars, notably the influential volume, *Christianity in Independent Africa*, in which contributors addressed religious and secular structures and the continuities and conflicts with traditional religion.<sup>3</sup> Today one should emphasize that writing the history of African Christianity should include contributions from theologians, church historians, biblical scholars, and scholars whose background include theological and seminary education. I have taught classes on Christianity in Africa for two decades and it has been challenging to determine what texts to use out of the available resources for several reasons.

First, earlier histories of African Christianity articulated mainly the outcome of a missionary project.<sup>4</sup> Second, the anti-colonial and post-colonial

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1 Jean François Bayart, "The Historicity of African Societies," *Journal of International Affairs* 46, no. 1, Sub-Saharan Africa: Dilemmas in Political and Economic Development (Summer 1992): 55–79.

2 See David Maxwell, "Writing the History of African Christianity: Reflections of an Editor," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 36, no. 3–4 (2006): 381–399.

3 Edward Fasholé-Luke, Richard Gray, Adrian Hastings & Godwin Tasie, eds., *Christianity in Independent Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978).

4 See William Fox, *A Brief History of the Wesleyan Missions on the Western Coast of Africa* (London: Aylot and Jones, 1851); William Ellis, *The Martyr Church: A Narrative of the Introduction, Progress and Triumph of Christianity in Madagascar* (London: Snow, 1870); W. Clifford Holden, *A Brief History of Methodism, and of Methodist Missions in South Africa* (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1877); Edward Wilmot Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* (London: W.B. Whittingham, 1888); Hugh Goldie, *Calabar and its Mission* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1890); John Brown Myers, *The Congo for Christ* (London: Partridge, 1895); Holman H. Bentley, *Pioneering on the Congo*, 2 vols. (London: Religious Tract Society, 1900);

turn led to a proliferation of histories and accounts of African Christianity which involved a will to tell the African story in an increasingly ecumenical context.<sup>5</sup> This was an appropriate path forward for many African churches at a time when missionaries ceded control of the churches to African leaders. Some studies focused on regional and local studies and provided sustained critiques of missions.<sup>6</sup> Third, scholars, especially social scientists investigated African initiatives in Christianity under several rubrics such as independent

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A.E.M. Anderson-Morshead, *The History of the Universities Mission to Central Africa 1859–1909* (London: Universities Mission, 1909); J. du Plessis, *A History of Christian Missions in South Africa* (New York: Longmans, 1911); J. Taylor Hamilton, *Twenty-Five Years of Pioneer Missions in Nyasaland: A History of Moravian Missions in German East Africa* (Bethlehem: Society for Propagating the Gospel, 1912); J. du Plessis, *The Evangelization of the Pagan Africa: A History of Christian Missions to the Pagan Tribes of Central Africa* (Johannesburg: J.C. Juta Press, 1930); G.G. Findley and W.S. Holdsworth, *The History of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society*, vols. 1–5 (London: Epworth, 1921–1922); J. Lowry Maxwell, *Nigeria, the Land, the People and Christian Progress* (London: World Dominion, 1927); Alfred Bonn, *Ein Jahrhundert Rheinische Mission* (Bremen: Missionhaus, 1928); Charles Pelham Groves, *The Planting of Christianity in Africa*, Vol. 1 (From Early Church to 1840); Vol. 2 (1840 to 1878); Vol. 3 (1878 to 1914); Vol. 4 (1914 to 1954) (London: Lutterworth, 1954–1964); L.K. Anderson, *Bridge to Africa* (New York: Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in U.S.A., 1952); E.A. Ayendele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842–1914* (London: Longmans, 1966).

- 5 Adrian Hastings, *African Christianity: An Essay in Interpretation* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1976); Peter Falk, *The Growth of the Church in Africa* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979); Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa 1450–1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa: From Antiquity to the Present* (London: SPCK, 1995); Bengt Sundkler and C. Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Thomas Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind: Rediscovering the Africa Seedbed of Western Christianity* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2008); John Baur, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa: An African Church History* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1994).
- 6 For social scientific studies of Christianity in Africa see, Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, Volume One (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); John L. and Jean Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, Volume Two (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); for regional studies see Lamin Sanneh, *West African Christianity: The Religious Impact* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1983); Peter B. Clarke, *West African and Christianity* (London: Edward Arnold, 1986). For edited volumes see Thomas Spear and Isaria N. Kimambo, *East African Expressions of Christianity*, Eastern African Studies (Oxford: James Currey, 1999); Werner Roland, William Anderson, and Andrew C. Wheeler, *Day of Devastation, Day of Contentment: The History of the Sudanese Church across 2000 Years*, Faith in Sudan 10 (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2000). Aylward Shorter, *Christianity and the African Imagination after the African Synod: Resources for Inculturation* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1995).

churches, new religious movements, prophetic churches, and Ethiopian/Zionist churches.<sup>7</sup> Fourth, following the explosion of scholarship on Christian independency, scholars shifted their attention to Pentecostal Charismatic Christianity in Africa.<sup>8</sup> The literature on this topic continues to overflow as scholars map out Pentecostalism in Africa and the African diaspora. Fifth, studies of African Christianity have explored themes, major movements as well as lively topics which have animated the history of the church such as culture, politics, liberation, health and healing, and poverty.

The question for students and teachers of African Christianity is what holds for the future of the scholarship on the history of Christianity in Africa. First, studies of African Christianity must be grounded in research methods and rules of historiography. This calls for research that will bring together quantitative and qualitative research skills. Scholars must continue to gather data from interviews, direct observation, from archival materials and use the best tools available to ethnographers and archeologists. Ethnographic and archeological studies will strengthen research and analysis of data and offer a broader spec-

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- 7 Bengt Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* (London: Lutterworth, 1948); Efraim Anderson, *Messianic Popular Movements in Lower Congo*, *Studia ethnographica Upsaliensia* 14 (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1958); Harold Walter Turner, *History of an African Independent Church: The Church of the Lord Aladura*, Vol. 11 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961); S.G. Baeta, *Prophetism in Ghana: A Study of Some Spiritual Churches* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962); F.B. Welbourn, *East African Rebels* (London: SCM Press, 1962); David B. Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968); G.C. Oosthuizen, *Post-Christianity in Africa. A Theological and Anthropological Study* (London: Hurst, 1968); Johannes Fabian, *JAMAA: A Charismatic Movement in Katanga* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1971); Sheila S. Walker, *The Religious Revolution in the Ivory Coast: The Prophet Harris and the Harrist Church* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983); Willy de Craemer, *The JAMAA and the Church: A Bantu Catholic Movement in Zaire* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1977); Jean Comaroff, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance: The Culture and History of a South African People* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Absalom Vilakazi with Bongani Mthethwa and Mthembeni Mpanza, *Shembe: The Revitalization of African Society* (Johannesburg: Scotaville Publishers, 1986).
- 8 M.L. Daneel, *African Earthkeepers: Wholistic Interfaith Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2001); Allan Anderson, *African Reformation* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2000); J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana*, *Studies of Religion in Africa* 27 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2005); Birgit Meyer, *Translating the Devil: Religion and Modernity Among the Ewe in Ghana* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999); Matthews A. Ojo, *The End Time Army: Charismatic Movements in Modern Nigeria* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2006); Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Ruth Marshall, *Political Spiritualities: The Pentecostal Revolution in Nigeria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

trum for interpretation and theological analysis that will significantly change historical writing. I consider interpretation here simply to mean making reasonable inferences and judgement and conclusions from the available data.

The historical method privileges data collection from all sources, calls for questioning of those sources and presenting the results or findings in a coherent narrative or argument. The datum of history must be documented and accounted for using rigorous scientific methodologies. Such a questioning of the data involves a critical examination of the sources to be sure they are credible, a procedure made popular in modern historical research by Leopold von Ranke.<sup>9</sup> The historian also needs to take into consideration the time and place for the occurrence of events; inquire about who creates the data, what data was there before and how was it gathered to ensure the credibility of the materials.<sup>10</sup>

In his classic essay on the historical method, François Simiand argued that the historical method was an “indirect, experimental ... factual knowledge obtained through the intermediary of another mind.”<sup>11</sup> He argued that the process involves verification carried under specific methods of observation or notations made by the researcher. From this perspective, the scholar proceeds in searching for factual knowledge of the past, by working through sources, data, informants, direct observation of factual notations, and very often without a known or defined method of study in order to promote documentation. He also raised important questions about the relationship of that process to social science which he defined simply as the study of social phenomena that form human life and society and which cannot be approached in a strict positivist manner because social phenomena cannot always be accessed by direct individual observation.<sup>12</sup> He argued that social science must use the historical method but Simiand insisted that a historian does not mainly seek facts, but also “groups them, manipulates them, constructs them ... constitute[s] out of them a certain system of knowledge that is a particular science, history ... it is the transformation of scattered facts into a whole and it is in the way and spirit of using these facts to constitute a science that divergences and opposite tendencies between social science and traditional history manifest themselves.”<sup>13</sup>

9 Leopold von Ranke, *The Theory and Practice of History*, edited with an introduction by Georg G. Iggers (New York: Routledge, 2010).

10 Gilbert J. Garraghan, *A Guide to Historical Method* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1946).

11 François Simiand, “Historical Method and Social Science,” *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 10, no. 2 (Fall 1985): 163–213.; here 164.

12 Simiand, “Historical Method,” 164–165.

13 Simiand, “Historical Method,” 165.

Simiand argued that what one needs to bear in mind is that social facts have a psychological component to them because of one's relation to the outside world of things and the sensations which organize and shape our understanding of those things. In scientific research then, objectivity is "the independence they establish by their own actions and by our thoughtful spontaneity. The regularities of co-existence and succession among phenomena that are uncovered and expressed by science impose themselves on us; they are not our doing, and therein lies their objective value."<sup>14</sup> This does not mean that one can dispense with scientific laws since science deals with phenomena and the scientist works to establish formulas which define relationships between phenomena to establish the basis for objectivity in science which is "independent of our individual spontaneity." What lies independent of the researcher needs not always be hard data or tangible things. It could be things in the psychological realm which are as real as things one can touch. Historians and scholars seeking knowledge and understanding of data might need to raise another question: What do these things that manifest themselves mean? In other words what does the data mean and how can one understand that data today.

My point here is that the historian and scholar of church history in Africa should interrogate data before interpretation. In a world where critical dialogue calls for perspectives from other sources, and the recognition that new tools for research and understanding have given us a different perspective of the historical record, historical writing and analysis involves a dialectical process of collecting and interpreting data, then presenting the data in a coherent narrative which reflects the best possible judgement of the historian. In the African context, local contextual nuances and specificities add meaning to theological ideals and provide opportunities to pursue certain lines on inquiries based on local realities and data, but which does not claim that historical writing is a matter of the hard sciences. One example here among others, is the work of Dorothy Hodgson, *The Church of Women*, in which she demonstrates that Maasai women in Tanzania, embraced Catholicism and their Maasai heritage.

Jan Vansina has expressed a disquiet about the developments in social science and the humanities over the last three decades that leave a lot to be desired, especially positions he attributes to the trio, Valentine Y. Mudimbe, Johannes Fabian, and Bogumil Koss (Jewsiewicki at the time) who, Vansina claims, introduced postmodernism to African studies.<sup>15</sup> Vansina's concern is developed in the chapter on "professionals and doctrines" where beginning

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14 Simiand, "Historical Method," 168.

15 Jan Vansina, *Living with Africa* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1994).

with Walter Rodney's still admired book, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*,<sup>16</sup> Vansina criticizes the many paradigms in African historiography because recent developments have undermined empirical historical analysis. This was a precursor to dependency theory and Marxist analysis, premiered in France and championed by Cathérine Coquery-Vidrovitch; moves which rather than dismiss, Vansina laments that Terence Ranger interpreted as opening "a usable past" in African Studies.<sup>17</sup> I do not see the postmodern as a negative, but rather as a productive strategy to unsettle what was assumed to be settled perspectives about our world and the philosophies of life and methodologies which we use to articulate those beliefs, or even a questioning aspects of modernity itself, even if one must not agree with Jürgen Habermas that we have not exhausted the idea and ideals of modernity.<sup>18</sup>

In my view, postmodernism has opened up a critical space for historians, and in our case scholars of African Christianity, to move away from the illusion that we had the whole story, or a comprehensive narrative. One does not need to be a committed postmodernist to recognize what Jean François Lyotard described as "that which in the modern invokes the unrepresentable in presentation itself, that which refuses the consolidation of correct forms, refuses the consensus of taste permitting a common experience of nostalgia for the impossible, and inquiries into a new presentations – not to take pleasure in them, but to better produce the feeling that there is something unrepresentable."<sup>19</sup> In his *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard had characterized the period of the modern as that of meta-narratives, or other meta-perspective which seemed to assume one coherent organizing story or account of truth and how to find that truth.<sup>20</sup> Lyotard described meta-narratives as "precisely narrations with a legitimating function. Their decline does not stop countless other stories (minor and not so minor) from continuing to weave the fabric of everyday life."<sup>21</sup> What post-

16 Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London: Tanzanian Publishing House, 1972).

17 Vansina, *Living with Africa*, 198.

18 Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1987).

19 Jean François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Explained. Correspondence 1982–1985*, transl. ed. Julian Pefanis and Morgan Thomas, trans. Don Barry, Bernadatte Maher, Julian Pefanis, Virginia Spate and Morgan Thomas (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 15.

20 Jean François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition. A Report on Knowledge*, Theory and History of Literature 10, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, foreword Fredric Jameson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

21 Lyotard, *Postmodern Explained*, 19.

modernism therefore offered was a complex way of understanding historical movements which could be accessed through non-totalizing histories. Steven Feierman has argued that the rise of African history, to which one might add, the writing of African Christianity, signaled the end of a “unicentric and uni-directional narrative.”<sup>22</sup> Writing the future of African Christianity calls for a departure from unicentric accounts, that would open up every place and the practices that image and reflect the Christian movement in Africa.

## 2 Considerations for Future Accounts of African Christianity

Writing the story of African Christianity demands a number of considerations. The first approach of the scholar is to maintain a critical balance between all the periods. One big challenge I faced in putting together *The Routledge Companion to Christianity in Africa* was responding to the issues which John Weller raised forty years ago in the groundbreaking book, *Themes in the Christian History of Central Africa*.<sup>23</sup> A key question was the issue of geographical balance which for Weller had to do with the fact that African Christianity ought to focus on Africa and at the time ought to receive priority in African curriculum of instruction. The church history that was taught in many parts of Africa did not include the story of the church in Africa itself. The balance that is called for here is now the availability of literature because the books, even on African Christianity, are published and distributed mostly in Europe and North America. Geographical balance is still an issue, because surveys of Christianity in Africa tend to ignore or pay only scant attention to North Africa and Ethiopia. In *The Routledge Companion to African Christianity*, we included three chapters on North Africa and one chapter on Ethiopia.<sup>24</sup>

22 Steven Feierman, “African Histories and the Dissolution of World History” in *Africa and the Disciplines: Contributions of Research in Africa to the Social Sciences and Humanities*, eds. Robert H. Bates, V.Y. Mudimbe, and Jean O’Barr, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 169.

23 Elias Kifon Bongmba, ed. *The Routledge Companion to Christianity in Africa* (New York: Routledge, 2016); John Weller, “Preface” in *Themes in the Christian History of Central Africa*, eds. T.O. Ranger and John Weller (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), xi–xvi.

24 For selected works on North African and Ethiopian Christianity, Jean-Paul Monceaux, *Histoire littéraire de l’Afrique chrétienne depuis le origins jusqu’a l’invasion arabe*, 7 vols. (Paris, 1901–1923; reprinted, Brussels: Culture et Civilisation, 1963); J.A. Ilevbare, *Carthage, Rome, and The Berbers: The Study of Social Evolution in Ancient North Africa* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1980); R.A. Markus, *From Augustine to Gregory the Great: History and*

There are challenges here that scholars must take into consideration. For example, there is an on-going debate if North Africa and Ethiopian Christianity should be considered part of Christianity in Africa because the story of the church in both regions are so different from the rest of Africa. Some African scholars resent the fact that some people in both regions do not consider themselves Africans. I still consider North Africa and Ethiopia part of Africa and for that reason, the story of the church in both regions remains an African story. Bringing the story of the church in North Africa and Ethiopia, will also ensure that there is a good coverage of all the periods in which the church has existed in Africa. While no region can claim privileged status, I should point out that recent scholarship on North Africa which take into account the Greco-Roman influences, like Gerhard van den Heever's essay in the *Routledge Companion*, offers African scholars to claim ownership of the history of Christianity, and embrace those developments and the theological landscape that was created in the early centuries of the Christian movement.<sup>25</sup> Too often writers of the story of the Christian church in Africa have glossed over North Africa and Ethiopia without taking time to explore the many facets of Christianity in those regions.

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*Christianity in Late Antiquity* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1983); W.H.C. Frend, *Orthodoxy, Paganism and Dissent in the Early Christian Centuries* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002); J. Patout Burns Jr. and Robin M. Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa: The Development of its Practices and Beliefs* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014); François Decret, *Early Christianity in North Africa*, trans. Edward L. Smither (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2009); Thomas Oden, *Early Libyan Christianity: Uncovering a North African Tradition* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2011); Jane Merdinger, "Roman North Africa" in *Early Christianity in Contexts: An Exploration across Cultures and Continents*, ed. William Tabbernee (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic), 223–260; See Jon Bonk, *An Annotated and Classified Bibliography of English Literature Pertaining to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church* (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1984); Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972); Edward Ullendorff, *Ethiopia and the Bible*, The Schweich Lectures of the British Academy 1967 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968); Steven Kaplan, *The Monastic Holy Man and the Christianization of Early Solomonic Ethiopia*, Studien zur Kulturkunde 73 (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1984); Giulia Bonacci, *The Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the State, 1974–1991: An Analysis of an Ambiguous Religious Policy* (London: Center for Ethiopian Studies, 2000); Donald Crumme, *Priest and Politicians: Protestant and Catholic Missions in Orthodox Ethiopia, 1830–1868* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972); Samuel A.B. Mercer, *Ethiopic Liturgy: Its Sources, Development, and Present Form* (London: Mowbray, 1915); Haile Getachew, *The Mariology of Emperor Zära Ya'qob of Ethiopia: Texts and Translations* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1992).

- 25 Gerhard van den Heever, "Early Christian Discourses in North African Christianities in the Context of Hellenistic Judaism and Graeco-Roman Culture," in *The Routledge Companion to Christianity in Africa*, ed. Elias Kifon Bongmba (New York: Routledge, 2016), 61–78.

Future scholars must reject the temptation to see Christianity in Africa largely from the lens of the so-called Sub-Saharan Africa. In the *Companion* I argued: “Christianity in North Africa left a legacy of ecclesial practices, a complicated engagement with the secular world and political authorities, especially the struggles with imperial Rome, persecutions, and the struggle of the early Christians to assert a spiritual, cultural, and intellectual identity. The struggles of the Coptic Church in Muslim society are all entanglements which Christianity continues to navigate and manage today.”<sup>26</sup>

A second imperative should involve the critical assessment of the colonial interlude which significantly altered the map and complicated the account with the proliferation of missions and agencies that significantly influenced the development and growth of the church. While the story that should be told must be an African story, the nature of the dialogue between Africa and the rest of the world needs to be mapped out carefully.<sup>27</sup> This calls for creative approaches to mission histories, which tell more than the story of the missionaries and their work. As Weller pointed out, it is important to document “what the convert heard, rather than what the missionary thought he had said, which really determined subsequent events.”<sup>28</sup> In addition, significant ties remain between African and Western churches, even at a time when the statistics have shifted and the church is growing fastest in Africa and the rest of the Global South. Terminology has changed and there are no longer sending and receiving churches. We do not speak of mission fields and mission stations and compounds in the same manner in which previous scholars understood it. Examining the nature of that relationship is necessary to map out African Christianity and the place of Africans in global Christianity.

Jehu Hanciles has recently argued that the previous divide was unnecessary because the story of African Christianity cannot be told without an accurate account of the engagement of missionaries, African Americans, and Africans who evangelized their own people. Hanciles’s study is an example of a text that balances mission history, theory, development, and gives voice to all the participants.<sup>29</sup> The theme of euthanasia employed by Hanciles (like the debate on

26 Elias Kifon Bongmba, “Studying African Christianity: Future Trajectories” in *The Routledge Companion to Christianity in Africa*, ed. Elias Kifon Bongmba (New York: Routledge, 2016), 555–563, here 556.

27 Ogbu Kalu, ed. *African Christianity: An African Story* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2006).

28 Weller, “Preface,” xiii.

29 Jehu Hanciles, *Euthanasia of a Mission: African Church Autonomy in a Colonial Context* (Westport: Praeger, 2002); Marianne Gullestadt, *Picturing Pity: Pitfalls and Pleasures in Cross-Cultural Communication. Image and Word in a North Cameroon Mission* (New York:

moratorium) invites a critical dialogue on mission principles which sometimes ignored local realities and priorities, leadership and other themes such as language, indigenization that have been elaborated by other African scholars who have studied missions in the African context.<sup>30</sup>

A third imperative requires the scholar to carry out a critical analysis of local and global developments which began with the Africanization of African Christianity. If we limit ourselves to the 20th century, there is a lot to draw from to present a dialogue that balances historical appreciation, critique, appropriation, and innovation. It is now well known that the landmark 1910 Edinburgh Missionary Conference was largely a Western festival which ignored the so-called mission fields, even though it was called to take stock and put in place an aggressive plan to reach the whole world with the gospel; a project which contributed to the myth of the Christian century. Ignoring Africa which was already a vast field of Christian activity, also ignored some of the important questions that had already been raised by Christian intellectuals of African descent such as Edward Wilmont Blyden, and the Pan African Movement that held its own inaugural meeting at Manchester.

Scholars would do well to pay attention to the growth of the church and the broad implications of the Pentecostal revival, reformation, and revolution. It is important to document and critique the rise and growth of the ecumenical movement which continues to manifest itself in continental organizations like the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) and the Association of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar (AEAM), both headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya. Scholars still have to probe the legacy of Vatican II. One cannot ignore ecclesial developments that were unleashed by the watershed Vatican II. The implications of that historic council continue to affect the church today. For example the bishops argued in *Gaudium et spes* 53 that an individual attains full humanity through culture, and that the gospel reaches all people through culture. *Gaudium et spes* 54 pointed out that the church was faced with a new period in human history in which it had to work with new aspects of culture which presented an opportunity for the church and its pastoral obligations. In *Ad gentes* 19 and 22 churches were encouraged to study the cultures of their communities in order to discover practices that would enable the church to plant roots in their local culture. In *Fides et ratio* 72 Pope John Paul II stated:

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Berghahn Books, 2007); Thomas Beidelman, *Colonial Evangelism: A Socio-Historical Study of an East African Mission at the Grassroots* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982).

30 Lamin Sanneh, *Abolitionist Abroad: American Blacks and the king of West Africa* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1989).

“Today, as the gospel gradually comes into contact with cultural worlds which once lay beyond Christian influence, there are new tasks of inculturation.”<sup>31</sup> In *Ecclesia in Africa*, the Pope and the bishops affirmed the positive aspects of African traditional cultures which include the African view of family, their love and respect for human life, the respect they pay their ancestors, communal solidarity, and the respect Africans give to chiefs, and elders.<sup>32</sup>

The growth of liberation theology around the globe emphasized not only the social conditions under which the Global South lived, but the cultural priorities they wanted to highlight because those different cultures was their world and made them. In African Christianity, this has been articulated in the African, black, and feminist theologies, which have called for a critical theology that articulates the needs of the African people. Black theology fought alongside other critical and social movements against apartheid. In South Africa, churches called attention to their cultures that were destroyed by the apartheid machine which necessitated a liberation/black theology movement in South Africa. Feminist theologians have articulated the needs of the women of African church.<sup>33</sup> These theologies arose in the African ecclesial context to serve the aims and goals of African Christianity. Theologies of inculturation must go beyond folklore, songs, and local colors and the practice of liturgy. Today there is a need to have a broad perspective and appreciation of African culture to make the church relevant to the African experience, and burning traditional artifacts that belong to constituted cultural institutions is not the right thing to do.

Fourth, there is the religious factor which must continue to animate an account of Christianity in Africa. This was the theme of Lamin Sanneh's early

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31 “Encyclical Letter *Fides et ratio* of the Supreme Pontiff, John Paul II, to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Relationship between Faith and Reason,” [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_14091998\\_fides-et-ratio.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio.html).

32 “Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* of the Holy Father, John Paul II, to the Bishops, Priests and Deacons, Men and Women Religious and all the Lay Faithful on the Church in Africa and its Evangelizing Mission towards the Year 2000,” 30–37, 42, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_14091995\\_ecclesia-in-africa.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_14091995_ecclesia-in-africa.html).

33 John W. de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979); Jean Mar Ela, *African Cry*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1980); F. Eboussi Boulaga, *Christianity Without Fetishes: An African Critique and Recapture of Christianity*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1981); Kwesi A. Dickson, *Theology in Africa* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1984); Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1986).

work in which he argued that Christianity did not come into a religious vacuum in Africa.<sup>34</sup> Christianity came into a rich religious atmosphere as African practiced local religions which have been called either traditional religions or indigenous religions. Bolaji Idowu and John Mbiti who earned doctorates in theology in England, both taught courses and published books on African traditional religions, opening up African realities in ways that theologians could not ignore as they attempted to articulate theology in the African context. Universities in Nigeria, Cameroon, Congo (Kinshasa), Kenya and South Africa became important centers for interdisciplinary thinking on theology. The term “African religions” reflect an attempt to call attention to the specificity of the religious that tell us some things about the religions. Two studies demonstrate a balanced narrative that is necessary for a robust understanding of the interrelationship between local religions and the history of African Christianity. First, theologian Laurenti Magesa’s *African Religion in the Dialogue Debate: From Intolerance to Coexistence*, offers a good example of the dialogue that is needed in writing the relationship between indigenous religions and Christianity. The second comes for social scientist David Maxwell whose *Christians and Chiefs in Zimbabwe: A Social History of the Hwesa People* presents a balanced view of local religions and Christianity.<sup>35</sup> It is perhaps the irony of history that some of the best terms used to describe local religions came from social scientists like Edward E. Evans-Pritchard’s *Nuer Religion*, Nadel’s *Nupe Religion*, or Godfrey Lindhardt’s *Divinity and Experience: The Religion of the Dinka People*.<sup>36</sup> African scholars, trained in theology have continued to use the title African Religions in their own publications, partly in response to colonial literature, but also to provide broad surveys of the religious imagination in Africa. African religions are still vibrant and influence daily life. Colonial and missionary animosity did not destroy them. Writing the story of Christianity cannot ignore these traditions, irrespective of the scorn Pentecostalism is putting on them. Pentecostalism has introduced a triumphalism that is comparable only to the lowest forms of distaste for African religiosity that were practiced by some missionaries and colonial officials who all parlayed Christianity as the solution to all of Africa’s problems.

34 Lamin Sanneh, *West African Christianity: The Religious Impact* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1983).

35 Laurenti Magesa *African Religions: The Moral Traditions of the Abundant Life* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997); Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion in the Dialogue Debate: From Intolerance to Coexistence* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2010); David Maxwell, *Christians and Chiefs in Zimbabwe: A Social History of the Hwesa People c. 1870s–1990s* (Edinburgh: International African Library, 1999).

36 Edward E. Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956).

Fifth, an account of African Christianity must continue to interrogate the claims and challenges of culture. The importance of culture was articulated clearly in *Des prêtres noirs s'interrogent*.<sup>37</sup> Future scholarship on Christianity in Africa must continue to explore the place of culture in Christianity. The debates on culture have been reflected in the many positions on incarnation, inculturation, adaptation of Christianity, and indigenization. All of these terms as intellectual projects have been serious attempts to claim and own the church in an African setting. An account of the church should take into account the dynamics of culture, its plurality, and substantive innovations which highlight the malleability of every culture and openness to appropriate ideas and practices that would have been considered anathema in the past. It is in this light that African scholars must not only condemn, but reject Pentecostal castigation of African cultures as ancestral curses. African cultures still have a seminal role to play in determining the future of Christianity. For now, I consider it as part of the larger question of the challenges in the research and writing of Christianity in Africa. It ought not to be the case, were it not for the attacks on African culture mounted by some Christians.

In South Africa, the claims of culture are further complicated by the challenge of race and ethnicity. The many cultures of South Africa have received a distinct voice since the end of apartheid. Yet it is clear that a social, political, and economic culture that dominated the apartheid era still provides a strong orientation in the scholarly and business ethos of the country. The culture of the Dutch Reformed Church is gradually transforming, yet such transformation cannot eviscerate the culture that evolved with it. The claims of Afrikaner culture like all other cultures cannot be ignored in the future of Christianity in Africa, as all the cultures of South Africa continue to work to foster a just and equal society. All cultures in South Africa have a wonderful opportunity to contribute the best values and build a diverse ecclesial community that speaks for all the peoples of the different faith traditions and historians and scholars would be amiss to ignore this rich diversity.

Sixth, future studies of African Christianity should wrestle with the challenge of language. For those who intend to write broadly, the task of writing the story of Christianity in Africa would require negotiating the linguistic challenges. While so much has been accomplished in this regard with literature in different languages and Bible translations, grammar books, hymnals, devotional literature, serious research is needed so that scholars can continue to engage the literature that is available in many of the African languages that have

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37 Albert Abble, *Des prêtres noirs s'interrogent*, Rencontres 47 (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1956).

been used by Christians to express their faith. I have in mind here languages like Coptic, Ge'ez, and Amharic which have served as liturgical languages for a long time and could hold the key to understanding many documents of the church in Africa that are available only in those languages. One could add to that list Hausa, Fulfulde, Swahili, Lingala, Douala, all the major languages spoken in Southern Africa.

### 3 Future Studies Calls for Interdisciplinary Historiography

The history and dynamics of Christianity in Africa calls for an interdisciplinary approach. I have argued that interdisciplinary studies is needed in theological studies in Africa.<sup>38</sup> Current studies of interdisciplinarity demonstrate that a multiple analysis of certain topics, themes, movements, is greatly enriched when scholars borrow insights from other disciplines other than their own. Other scholars have argued that interdisciplinarity often leaves ideas and themes unclear because scholars offer no clear definitions of terms, something which comes from the fact that scholars may not be well schooled in any different disciplines and their theoretical groundings.<sup>39</sup> This position cannot be dismissed because the danger of drawing from different disciplines increases if scholars do not demonstrate the patience to understand how theories are developed and deployed in other disciplines. But interdisciplinarity remains attractive because it offers what A.F. Repko has described as a way “of answering a question, solving a problem, or addressing a topic that is too broad or complex to be dealt with adequately by a single discipline and draws on disciplinary perspectives and integrates their insights to produce a more comprehensive understanding or cognitive advancement.”<sup>40</sup>

38 In this section, I draw from a previously published study in interdisciplinarity. I have revised it for this essay. See Elias K. Bongmba, “Interdisciplinary and Transdisciplinarity in African Studies: Theology and the Other Sciences,” *Religion & Theology* 21, no. 3–4 (2014): 218–250. See also J.T. Klein and W.G. Doty, eds., *Interdisciplinary Studies Today* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1994); W.H. Newell, ed. *Interdisciplinarity: Essays from the Literature* (New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1998); K.M. Sullivan, “Forward: Interdisciplinarity,” *Migration Law Review* 100, no. 6 (2002): 1217–1226; R. Schleifer, “Disciplinarity and Collaboration in the Sciences and Humanities,” *College English* 59, no. 4 (1997): 438–452.

39 Thomas Benson, “Five Arguments against Interdisciplinary Studies,” in *Interdisciplinarity: Essays from the Literature*, ed. W.H. Newell (New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1998), 103–108.

40 A.F. Repko, *Interdisciplinary Research: Process and Theory* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2008), 12.

This calls for a good understanding of the literature in other disciplines; a challenging thing for many scholars. In order for an interdisciplinary approach to work in any field of studies, scholars must be willing to understand and translate the language and concepts from other disciplines; a challenging task that is complicated by the danger of merely cannibalizing the thought of others.<sup>41</sup> Effective translation must consider what Paul T. Zeleza has described as the deployment of geographical metaphors to highlight boundaries which scholars want to reach.<sup>42</sup> Scholars should think of metaphors like river, current, flow or the practice of learning a new language, or building a new relationship where one has to look for complementarities because disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity “are mutually constitutive: the latter entails, indeed requires, the existence of the former.”<sup>43</sup> One has to know what the disciplines are, and furthermore, disciplinary scholarship is the basis for interdisciplinary studies.<sup>44</sup>

In *Africa and the Disciplines*, the authors demonstrated convincingly how interdisciplinary studies have shaped African studies, especially in the social sciences and the humanities.<sup>45</sup> Social science disciplines like history and economics had a wide impact in their fields and on development studies, dependency theory and its demise, revolutionary activities of peasants, state structures and crisis, economic adjustment. In the humanities, Africanists have shaped their fields in historical studies, Art History, Philosophy, and Literature.<sup>46</sup> Cheikh Anta Diop worked in an interdisciplinary manner to champion African intellectual ideas, civilization, and race.<sup>47</sup> Several works have set the

41 See Paul Ricoeur, *Reflections on the Just*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 107–120.

42 Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, “The Disciplinary, Interdisciplinary and Global Dimensions of African Studies,” *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies – Multi, Inter- and Transdisciplinarity* 1, no. 2 (2006): 6.

43 Zeleza, “Disciplinary, Interdisciplinary,” 7.

44 L. Hunt, “The Virtues of Interdisciplinarity” *Eighteenth Century Studies* 28, no. 1 (1994): 1–7.

45 Bates, Mudimbe, and O’Barr, eds. *Africa and the Disciplines*.

46 Bates, Mudimbe, and O’Barr, eds. *Africa and the Disciplines*, xiv–xx.

47 See Cheikh Anta Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth and Reality*, trans. and ed. M. Cook (New York: Lawrence Hill, 1974); Cheikh anta Diop, *Precolonial Black Africa* (New York: Lawrence Hill, 1974); Cheikh Anta Diop, *Civilization or Barbarism: An Authentic Anthropology*, trans. Y.L. Ngemi (New York: Lawrence Hill, 1981); Cheikh Anta Diop, *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa: The Domains of Patriarchy and of Matriarchy in Classical Antiquity* (London: Karnak House, 1989). See also studies on and analysis of the interdisciplinary nature of the work of Diop which I have drawn from for this section, including J.G. Spady, “The Changing Perception of C.A. Diop and His Work: The Preeminence of a Scientific Spirit,” in *The Great African Thinkers, Vol. 1, Cheikh Anta Diop*, ed. Ivan Van

stage, among them Jean and John Comaroff's two volumes, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, because of the transdisciplinary dimension of this ethnographic account which draws from field work, the colonial and missionary archives to study the local situation. As a work in social science, these studies also offer so much for theologians who continue to appreciate the critique the Comaroffs present of the logic of the non-conformist missionaries who could not deploy their own teachings in a colonial and racialized context, where the ideologies of modernity, science and their products such as education and medicine defined as an integral system with gospel were used to shape consciousness.<sup>48</sup> Other studies that followed include John Peel's *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba*.<sup>49</sup>

The growth of the church which is driven by the Pentecostal revolution which has been celebrated by many scholars, highlights the need for more interdisciplinary studies. This is important because Pentecostals have opened many questions that call for critical dialogue. Times have changed and interdisciplinary studies offer us the tools for critical engagement with the times. In writing the story of African Christianity, scholars can benefit from the data collected using social scientific methods and analysis, and traditions of interpretation articulated in the human sciences to understand the Christian communities that have been established. Within the humanities themselves, it is important to get insights from biblical scholars and theologians in order to understand the place and use of sacred texts, church documents and statements of faith, and different liturgical traditions that have been established on the basis of these texts and traditions.

One needs epistemological flexibility and openness that will allow theories and ideas from one discipline to provide insights into the object of study, in this case African Christianity. This is important for a number of reasons and I will mention only two here. First, the story of African Christianity is not

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Sertima (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1986), 89–101; Dani Wadada Nabudere, "Cheikh Anta Diop: The Social Sciences, Humanities, Physical and Natural Sciences and Transdisciplinarity," *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies – Multi, Inter- and Transdisciplinarity* 2, no. 1 (July, 2007): 6–34.

48 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, Volume One; Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, Volume Two; Norman Etherington, ed. *Missions and Empire*, The Oxford History of the British Empire Companion Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

49 J.D.Y. Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).

only an account of institutions, personnel, and other forms of organizations such as para-church agencies and faith-based organizations. It is an account of ideas, beliefs, and philosophical viewpoints, theological perspectives which have been cultivated, debated, and made into articles of faith. Ecclesial communities are defined to be beliefs and theological positions first before they are defined by denominations. Depending on data from the social sciences alone tells only part of the story. The traditions known as the *Geisteswissenschaften* must weigh in to enable the scholar have a full picture of the community called church, or the movement called African Christianity.

Ideas, beliefs, and theological positions which we access through the disciplines of the humanities, not only provide an identity for the ecclesial community, but define its mission and *raison d'être* of the religious community. During the last 30 years, the study of African initiatives in Christianity has shifted to the study of Pentecostalism and Charismatic churches. In the growing literature and analysis of the sub-Christian culture of Pentecostalism, social scientists have enabled us see the community, the structures and institutions that now seem to dominate and some would argue on the verge of taking over and redefining African Christianity. This analysis is only part of the story because the theological imagination that fuels the growth of African Pentecostalism is as old as the idea of the Christian church itself – the view that the Holy Spirit gives special power to individual believers, and that power enables them to see visions, see signs and perform wonders, and in the process grow the community and strengthen as spirit-filled community. Understanding this dimension of Pentecostal/Charismatic churches calls for a careful theological analysis. Calling out its excesses makes sense if it is accompanied by careful exegesis of sacred texts and interpretation of theological history.<sup>50</sup>

#### 4 Themes to Consider in Future Writing

The adoption of historical methodology and historical-critical/analytical hermeneutical perspectives, along with theological methods will go a long way

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50 For texts that probe Pentecostalism from that perspective see Nimi Wariboko, *Nigerian Pentecostalism* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2014); Nimi Wariboko, *The Pentecostal Principle: Ethical Methodology in New Spirits* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012); James K.A. Smith, *Thinking in Tongues: Pentecostal Contributions to Christian Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010); Amos Yong, *In the Days of Caesar: Pentecostalism and Political Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

in strengthening thematic studies. At the end of *The Routledge Companion to Christianity in Africa*, I speculated on what lies ahead and will highlight some of those ideas here.

First, it is important to encourage the writing of local historical narratives in addition to the broad regional, continental, and global perspective of the Christian tradition in Africa. Each local expression of Christianity is different and tells a story of lived religion – how locals live Christianity in their own context. The regional perspective requires all researchers to map out the tradition in different countries and regions of Africa. It is possible to still provide useful surveys of different regions even if those surveys discuss mainly selected themes. Such histories must continue to explore ancient as well as contemporary issues and the trajectories which connect African Christianity to the large growing expression of that Christianity on a global platform. Historians of African Christianity can find other opportunities for studying African Christianity through research ventures organized for example by the Edinburgh group, and questions in mission studies that relate to the African Christian tradition.

Secondly, the literature on African Christianity remains a testament to the gendered dimensions of the church in Africa. While so much has been done to document the place, role, and influence of women in the African church, especially through the publications of The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, more needs to be done to ensure that the story of women and the church in Africa is told to the fullest. Critical scholarship that would call into question patriarchy is an urgent task and future church historians and scholars of African Christianity must face that challenge. The idea is to move away from seeing women as playing only supporting roles, to seeing them as part, parcel, and fabric of the Christian movement in Africa. A careful documentation of women leaders in African Christianity from the colonial period to the present is long overdue. Future studies of African Christianity must probe the place and role of women in the church across Africa. Many women have also provided a distinct theological voice and orientation for church life and practice at different levels. There are references to and few publications on Perpetua and Felicity in North Africa, Herias the Martyr, Apolonia Mafuta, full-length studies on Beatrice Kimpa Vita of ancient Kongo, and brief discussions of Nzinga baptized as Doña Ana da Souza but. It is important to do full-length studies of church founders such as Christianna Abiodun, Christianita Olatunrile, or women who as spouses promoted the cause of women like Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti. It is necessary to study the work of contemporary church leaders like Margaret Idahosa, and Bishop Margaret Wanjiru. In order to accomplish this, historians and theologians in all regions of Africa have to carry out intensive research to identify women in different ecclesial communities and eras

whose contributions have not been recognized. Finally, we are still in the early stages of the appraisal of the work of Mercy Amba Oduyoye and the members of the Circle and one hopes that in the years ahead the revolution they launched in theological studies will receive greater scholarly attention.

In addition to historical studies, topics that unmask gender divisions in the church continue to invite attentions. Whether these issues are analyzed through culture, economy, politics, or ecclesial issues like leadership and ordination, a full account of the Christian community is incomplete if scholars do not pay attention to these issues. One of the broad issues that has brought out the voices of women scholars in the church is health in the age of HIV and AIDS. Members of the Circle as individuals and academic community have called attention to the gender inequalities that continue to fuel the spread of the pandemic. In doing so, they have highlighted not only gender disparities, but cultural, social, political, economic, even religious factors that have contributed significantly to the fact that women and the girl child are more at risk and have borne the disease burden for most African communities.<sup>51</sup>

Third, the scholarship on Africa should continue to probe African initiatives in Christianity. Studies have highlighted the political, economic, cultural, and religious dimensions of these churches and their global outreach as well their significant contributions to the rise of Pentecostalism. The developments of the 19th century have led to a real reformation of African Christianity today.<sup>52</sup> These churches which championed the African right to be different on the expression of Christianity grew in all regions of the continent. While the Charismatic Pentecostal churches now see no need for the African particularity, from a cultural perspective, early African initiated churches did. It was the basis of

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51 Isabel Apawo Phiri, Beverley Haddad, Madipoane Msenya (ngwana' Mphahlele), eds., *African Women, HIV/AIDS and Faith Communities* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2003); T.M. Hinga, A.N. Kubai, P. Mwaura, H. Ayanga, eds., *Women, Religion and HIV/AIDS in Africa: Responding to Ethical and Theological Challenges* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2008); Musa Wenkosi Dube, *The HIV & AIDS Bible: Selected Essays* (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2008); Eunice Karanja Kamaara, *(Re)constructing Gender: A Holistic Strategy to Controlling HIV/AIDS in Kenya* (Eldoret, Kenya: Moi University Press, 2012); Nyokabi Kamua, *AIDS, Sexuality, and Gender: Experiences of Women in Kenyan Universities* (Eldoret, Kenya: Zapf Chancery, 2009); Beverley Haddad, *Religion and HIV and AIDS: Charting the Terrain* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu Natal Press, 2011); Isabel Apawo Phiri and Sarojini Nadar, eds., *African Women, Religion, and Health: Essays in Honor of Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye* (Maryknoll: Orbis 2006).

52 Birgit Meyer, "Christianity in Africa: From African Independent to Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to African Religions*, Blackwell Companions to Religion, ed. Elias Kifon Bongmba (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 153–170.

their formation and growth. Further studies must go beyond the histories of founding leaders and focus on the day to day dynamics and the spirituality which these churches have introduced to the Christian movement, especially in Africa and expand studies of theological and political studies and increase understanding of their work in social development.

Fourth, there is need to continue to examine the relationship between church and state in Africa from a broad historical context. There is no uniformed story here as the account of the Egyptian Coptic and Ethiopian churches demonstrates. The account of the church-state relations in Ethiopia remains one of the most fascinating and ended with the Ethiopian Revolution of 1974. Other relationships have been marred by betrayal and violence as the case in Uganda, or the example of Rwanda has indicated, such relations between ecclesial communities are much too complex and cannot be reduced to simply state domination or ecclesial surrender to nationalistic politics. There is no doubt that further studies are needed not only to understand the use of religion to supplant constitutional rule in many countries. Further studies of political theology are necessary to understand the belief systems that influence politicians who profess to be Christians as it happened in Kenya with Daniel arap Moi, Uganda's Yoweri Museveni, Laurent Gbagbo in Côte d'Ivoire and Matthieu Kerekou in Benin, let alone the historic betrayal of the faith through the practice of apartheid in South Africa. The promise and hope of liberation in South Africa lies in the fact that the new nation crafted legal instruments that could forestall future Babylonian captivity of the church, if those instruments are used to promote the rule of law and respect the independence of religion and religious communities. Comparative studies could shed light on why South African Pentecostalism has not produced the political practice seen in other parts of Africa.<sup>53</sup>

Fifth, studies of African Christianity should also analyze economic questions as they affect people in all parts of Africa. The economy is perhaps the single most troubling aspect of life in the postcolony because most countries in Africa continue to go through economic decline. Many Africans not only live below the poverty line, but many states can no longer provide basic necessities life food and water for their people. While the blame has been placed on colonial arrangements which started Africans on a difficult trajectory to economic growth, the postcolonial regimes have not been good stewards of the resources

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53 Paul Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role* (Bloomington: Indian University Press, 1998); See his *Christianity and Politics in Doe's Liberia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

of Africa. Studies of Christianity therefore cannot ignore difficult questions about the economy. Such questions should explore a religious perspective on the political economy that stays away from the promotion of an economy based on miracles and breakthroughs. New critical studies should also bring fresh perspectives on the economy and bring a balance to the critique of the economy which offers new thinking other than the rampant critique of markets, when they target Reaganomics and Thatcherism, the poster systems of neoliberalism. This line of criticism has made some to blame every failure of economic policy on neoliberalism. There is more to understand the economy in its broad context and future studies should hold current systems under scrutiny and avoid the simple belief that if Africans do away with neoliberalism all will be fine. Scholars of African Christianity and church leaders need studies that will go beyond the usual accusations between capitalism and socialism and ask serious questions about the role of the markets in the creation of wealth. Such studies should inquire into the nature and role the political community could and should play in promoting values, rights, fair play, stewardship, rational principles, and an ethic of care to promote economic justice for all members of the political community. Such analysis would lay bare the illegal practice of *embourgeoisement* by the political and cultural elites of the continent and call all Africans to recognize the resources as a gift for all people to cultivate and enjoy. A critical analysis is necessary to check the shortcomings of the prosperity gospel and its means of attaining such prosperity, namely miracles.

Sixth, the role of church in alleviating social upheavals, providing benefits like education, healthcare, and community development remains an area of active research. Critical studies are needed to provide a historic account of the full force of the Christian tradition, but to also lay out a road map of possible action should the wellbeing of the African community be threatened again by death-causing pandemics. Studies of health in African Christianity has demonstrated the significant contribution the African churches have made to public health in Africa, and more still needs to be done in this area.<sup>54</sup> In addition, more critical studies of the role Christianity has played in causing the environmental crisis and what they are doing to remedy the situation are needed.<sup>55</sup>

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54 Elias Kifon Bongmba, "From Medical Missions to Church Health Services," in *The Routledge Companion to Christianity in Africa*, 502–523; James R. Cochrane, Barbara Schmid and Teresa Cutts, eds., *When Religion and Health Align: Mobilising Religious Health Assets for Transformation* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2011); Charles M. Good Jr. *The Steamer Parish: The Rise and Fall of Medical Medicine on an African Frontier* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

55 Jill Olivier, "In Search of Common Ground for Interdisciplinary Collaboration and Com-

The research project, African Religious Health Assets Program (ARHAP) was grounded in a transdisciplinary approach aimed at studying and unveiling the resources Christian communities had at their disposal for health care in Africa at a time when the continent carried a huge disease burden from the HIV and AIDS pandemic. The study bridged the gap that exists between the biomedical understanding and procedure in diagnosis and treatment of illness with an integrative perspective that considered other things which religious communities brought to the table. What was significant about this approach was the novel way in which they interrogated Christian medical services that was different from accounts which focused on medical missions, yet ARHAP did not ignore contributions of medical missions to the emergence of today's church healthcare services in Africa. This interdisciplinary approach underscored the close relationship between religion and health drawing from what the researchers described "as wide and rich as possible array of intellectual resources and practitioner wisdom, utilizing any discipline we could that might be helpful, in order to probe what we originally called a 'bounded field of unknowing,' bounded because not everything is fitting to the subject and we have some clues about what is, unknowing because so little has been done or published on religion and public health over the last decades."<sup>56</sup> My point here is that a transdisciplinary approach opened a new window for readers to see a different side and activity of Christianity in Africa, namely, the important role played by the health services of the church during times of stress, stigma, and suffering. This interdisciplinary approach gave birth to new perspectives on the church's public ministry, introduced new terminology to that practice as they described what they were able to gather through data, analysis, interpretation, as the existence of healthworlds, to underscore the connectivity of health to nearly all areas of life. One term that emerged in Lesotho that captured the complexity and interrelatedness of health, wellbeing, and spirituality was the term *bophelo* which was used in Lesotho to communicate a holistic view and a relational ontology.

One must add that such studies cannot be triumphalist because the Christian tradition in Africa has had a rough relationship with other ritual approaches to and the practice of health and healing African communities. Over the years, this took the form of denunciation of traditional healing practices, dismissal of African medicinal remedies, the demonization of African

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munication: Mapping the Cultural Politics of Religion and HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa," PhD. Dissertation, University of Cape Town, February, 2010.

56 Cochrane, Schmid, Cutts, eds., *When Religion and Health Align*, xxiv.

healing rituals, often calling the practitioners “witchdoctors.” One must admit that there was great ambivalence on this topic as some Christian organizations struggled with local healing and worked hard to recognize their therapeutic values. Some church leaders recognized the value of local medicines, but insisted that the introduction of biomedical approaches by Christian churches lifted Africa out of darkness. Kent Maynard captures the ambivalence well when he argues:

As the church sought to find a solution to this matter, its policies and practices could result paradoxically – just like those of the Administration – in the promotion of new forms of “traditional medicine.” The truculent prohibition of any Christian involvement in the institutions of medicinal protection or in the sacrificial round of the Gods and ancestors led the church to promote, intentionally or not, a more individualistic, interventive, and commercial brand of popular medicine.<sup>57</sup>

Church historians and scholars of Christianity in Africa interested in reconstructing and presenting a holistic account of healing in Africa have a lot of sources to turn to, much of that in the social scientific studies of healing in Africa which have mapped the political, economic, social, ritual and above all the medicinal context of therapy and healing in Africa.<sup>58</sup>

Seventh, one of the greatest contradictions in church life in Africa is manifested in the current debate on sexuality, especially positions that stigmatize other people and call for their exclusion from the church. While the church has come a long way from the Victorian morality inherited from colonials and missionaries, more studies are necessary to open up a dialogue about the sensitive issues of sexuality, and especially homosexuality, one of the most divisive

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57 Kent Maynard, *Making Kedjom Medicine: A History of Health and Well-Being in Cameroon* (Westport: Praeger, 2004), 225.

58 Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967); Harriet Ngubane, *Body and Mind in Zulu Medicine* (London: Academic Press, 1977); John M. Janzen, *The Quest for Therapy: Medical Pluralism in Lower Zaire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); Steven Feierman and John Janzen eds. *The Social Basis of Health and Healing in Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); John Janzen, *Ngoma: Discourses of Healing in Central and Southern Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Megan Vaughan, *Curing their Ills: Colonial Power and African Illness* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992); Robert Pool, *Dialogue and Interpretation of Illness: Conversations in a Cameroon Village* (Oxford: Berg, 1994); Maynard, *Making Kedjom Medicine*.

issues in African Christianity today. Much progress can be made in this regard, if further clarifications are made on questions of human rights, the rule of law alone in governing political communities, and the adoption of basic decency towards one another, an approach which some would argue reflects dimensions of African humanism, which is now being conceptualized under broad categories such as *Ubuntu*.

Eight, there is a need to rethink the history of the church and its effort in development in Africa. The task here is not only to map out developments that conceptualize the work of the ecclesial community as *Missio Dei* to the world, but different ways in which African Christian communities have partnered with others, or acted on their own terms to engage in activities that have included social change, poverty alleviation, empowerment projects, economic activities aimed at meeting short and long term goals. In doing this, many Christian communities and organizations have married their task of conversion and proselytization with engagement in social, economic, and political development as a way of enhancing the lives of the members of their communities and society at large. Churches have done this through their own mission agencies, through their own organizational structure in Africa, where some churches have development officers and committees that run various development projects, or partner with and/or facilitate the work of global faith-based organizations.

Writing that history in the future calls for a critical engagement and dialogue with the political economy, social institutions, cultural perceptions, development experts, non-governmental organizations, faith-based organizations, and members of churches in different localities in Africa. The challenge here involves a careful navigation of key theoretical and theological perspectives in order to understand the logic of the church's involvement in development. It would be good to interrogate the distinctions between development as works of charity, and pursuit of justice. Stan Chu Ilo's study on the church and development is grounded on Pope Benedict's encyclical, *Caritas in veritate*, and the Catholic Church's social teachings. Ilo articulates a development vision that has the human person grounded on four ontological realities: namely the divine-human relation because humanity is created in the likeness of God; a person's relation to self; the person's relation to the entire created order; and the relation between male and female.<sup>59</sup> He also grounds development in love and responsibility towards all of creation. On theoretical issues he defends the nat-

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59 Stan Chu Ilo, *The Church and Development in Africa: Aid and Development from the Perspective of Catholic Social Teaching* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2013), 45.

ural law teachings of the Catholic tradition, arguing that it presents a richer option for defending human rights which is central to a robust argument for human development. This approach privileges the notion of human freedom articulated in *Gaudium et spes*, and argues that non-theistic anthropologies do not offer a solid basis for grounding human “personality, interiority, and subjectivity.”<sup>60</sup> Although I question the grounding of development on natural law, the idea of thinking through *Caritas in veritate* is compelling.

It would be necessary to move beyond past paradigms which construe development as modernization. Studies should probe actions of religious communities in using their influence to enable people to understand their local and social context, the social and spiritual resources those communities have to work with to make their lives meaningful and change their economic and social circumstances.<sup>61</sup> This does not mean that development can no longer address questions of poverty and how to overcome it; poverty alleviation remains at the center of social and economic development as Steve de Gruchy has demonstrated.<sup>62</sup> Future studies of Christianity need to probe how the ecclesial community has understood poverty, and the actions it has taken to overcome poverty within and without its own faith community. Such studies could explore the degree to which faith communities have adopted the discourse of human capability in economic development articulated by Amartya Sen. Sen has grounded it on freedom which he has described as the aim, means, and hence development.<sup>63</sup> It would be important to study how the churches have prioritized political freedoms, or even called for such freedoms as a condition for responsible development activity and not promote a development project inspired largely by desperation.<sup>64</sup> Future scholars of development must look at the assets available to each community and ask how the ecclesial community has used those assets in its development programs.<sup>65</sup>

60 Stan Chu Ilo, *Church and Development*, 49.

61 Gerrie ter Haar, “The Mbuliuli Principle: What is in a Name?” in *Development and Politics from Below: Exploring Religious Spaces in the African State*, eds. Barbara Bompani and Maria Frahm-Arp (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 40–55.

62 See Steve de Gruchy, “Of Agency, Assets and Appreciation: Seeking Some Commonalities Between theology and Development,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 117 (November 2003): 20–39.

63 Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York City, Random House, 1999), 36.

64 See de Gruchy, “Of Agency, Assets and Appreciation.” See John Kretzmann and John McKnight, *Building Communities from the Inside out: A path toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets* (Chicago: ACTA Publications, 1993).

65 de Gruchy, “Of Agency, Assets and Appreciation,” 32. De Gruchy argues that “the approach

Finally, writing the history of Christianity that is interdisciplinary calls for a careful analysis of the ethical vision of the ecclesial community in Africa. The studies of ethics in African Christianity has been reflected in some of the major analyses of the presence of Christianity on the continent in social, medical, and development work. However, there are specific studies that provide useful background to future analysis. From South Africa, Charles Villavicencio and John de Gruchy laid out a broad ethical praxis in the African context. Beginning with an analysis of the theological, philosophical, and biblical basis of ethics, the contributors to the volume explored theories of ethics, natural law, law and grace, responsibility, character and community, and Marxist approaches; followed by contextual approaches which stress liberation, contributions from black theology, African theology, and feminist theology. The contributors then addressed specific ethical issues focusing on medical ethics, abortion, HIV/AIDS, euthanasia, political ethics, war and violence,

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has received widespread support and use amongst development organizations such as the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at Sussex University, the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), the British government's Department For International Development (DFID), the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), the People Centered Development Forum (PCD Forum), Oxfam, and importantly, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)," de Gruchy, "Of Agency, Assets and Appreciation," 32. De Gruchy also argues that for Sustainable Life Framework to work, one needs to take into consideration five important livelihood assets which people have: human capital, social capital, natural capital, physical capital, and financial capital. I am indebted to De Gruchy for the literature on Sustainable Life Framework: see United Nations Development Programme, *Sustainable Livelihoods Unit Home Page*, [www.undp.org/sl/Overview/an\\_overview.htm](http://www.undp.org/sl/Overview/an_overview.htm); Rob Fincham, Susse Georg, Eskil Holm Nielsen, eds., *Beyond the Summit: The Role of Universities in the Search for Sustainable Futures* Proceedings from Linked University Consortium for Environment and Development, LUCEDs Pre-Summit Conference, Kasane, Botswana, August 2002 (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 2003); Mark Butler and Ran Greenstein, *Sustainable Livelihoods: Towards a Research Agenda for the Church Land Programme* (Johannesburg: Community Agency for Social Enquiry, 1999), 46; Robert Chambers and Gordon Conway, *Sustainable Rural Livelihoods: Practical Concepts for the 21st Century*, Institute of Development Studies Discussion Paper 296 (Brighton: IDS Publications, 1992); Czech Conroy, "Preface" and "Introduction" in *The Greening of Aid: Sustainable Livelihoods in Practice*, eds. C. Conroy and M. Litvinoff (London: Earthscan Publications, 1988), x-xiv; Robert Chambers, "Sustainable Rural Livelihoods: A Key Strategy for People, Environment and Development" in *The Greening of Aid: Sustainable Livelihoods in Practice*, eds. C. Conroy and M. Litvinoff (London: Earthscan Publications, 1988), 1-17; Koos Neefjes, *Environments and Livelihoods: Strategies for Sustainability* (Oxford: Oxfam, 2000), 58-112; People-Centered Development Forum, "Principles of Sustainable Livelihoods," <http://iisd.ca/pcdf/1995/princsl.htm>.

human rights, economic justice, ecology, and in the context of South Africa examined reparation and land.<sup>66</sup> While the focus was on South Africa, this volume still serves as a useful reference for a discourse on ethics in African Christianity.

In East Africa Laurenti Magesa has called for an approach that departs from missionary models of the church to studies of ethics that focus on liberation grounded in Christ and one that promotes human liberation, promotes human dignity, democratic values, and examines the challenges facing the African church from the beginning of the colonial encounter.<sup>67</sup> Another study that takes a Christian moral theological approach was edited by Jesse Mugambi and A. Nisimiyu-Wasike and addresses specific moral issues such as material things, public morality, ethnic relations, morality and gender, child abuse, who is a neighbor, amnesty, and HIV/AIDS and survival in Africa.<sup>68</sup> Bénézet Bujo from the Democratic Republic of Congo in a work that calls for dialogue between Africa and other parts of the world, has grounded an African approach on theocentric, anthropocentric foundations which allow the scholar to interrogate and appropriate the communal model of ethics.<sup>69</sup> Bujo then deploys the communal approach to study justice, marriage and monogamy, feminist theology, human rights, state and development, health, growing old in Africa, ecology and Christian responsibility.

African scholars have embraced the notion of *Ubuntu* as an ethical ideal and theory on which they have grounded ethical thinking and practice in Africa. *Ubuntu* prioritizes the person as a way of thinking about and grounding social and communal relations and actions. The Zulu expression “*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*,” which is generally taken to mean that “a person is a person through persons,” thus offers a grounding of social relations and actions which many people share in different parts of Africa as one that is also amendable to a Christian ethos. Grounding his work on ethics in *ubuntu*, Augustine Shutte has argued Africans see persons existing in relation to others.<sup>70</sup> Doing ethics

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66 Charles Villa-Vicencio and John W. de Gruchy, eds., *Doing Ethics in Context: South African Perspectives* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994).

67 Laurenti Magesa, *Christian Ethics in Africa* (Nairobi: Acton Press, 2002).

68 J.N.K. Mugambi and Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, *Moral and Ethics Issues in African Christianity: Exploratory Essays in Moral Theology*, second edition (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 1999).

69 Bénézet Bujo, *The Ethical Dimension of Community: The African Model and The Dialogue Between North and South* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1998).

70 Augustine Shutte, *Ubuntu: An Ethic for a New South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2001), 23.

from this perspective calls individuals to explore the best ways of relating and serving one another. The community in the African context refers to the extended family, the clan and even larger groups of people, but the key idea is that “each individual member of the community sees the community as themselves, as one with them in character and identity. Each individual sees every other individual member as another self.”<sup>71</sup> *Ubuntu* offers a broad spectrum on future analysis of the Christian tradition in Africa through which to explore the ethical imperative and responsibility of the ecclesial community. Future studies of *ubuntu* must depatriarchalize it to ensure that both men and women are treated with equality. Using *ubuntu* also invites a robust critique of homoeroticism which is generally assumed by many scholars who write about Christianity in the African context. It is time to raise the question of and affirm alternative sexualities within the church in Africa.

## 5 Conclusion

There are new tools today for researchers to engage the story of Christianity in Africa and make it an African story. In addition to libraries, the World Wide Web and social media continue to generate news and information about the life and growth of the church and should serve as useful platforms for analysis of what is taking place in Christianity today in the African context. It is also imperative that in addition to traditional research tools African scholars who have engaged social scientific studies of religion promote the study of material culture, engage in archeological studies to enrich the data available for the mapping of African Christian history.

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71 Shutte, *Ubuntu*, 27.

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