MISSION HISTORY IN AFRICA:
NEW PERSPECTIVES ON AN ENCOUNTER

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In recent years, the study of mission history has achieved a remarkable vitality, partly owing to the ready availability of material but deriving more fundamentally from a growing integration with the major thrusts of contemporary African historiography. It would seem appropriate at this point to attempt a "progress report" on these accomplishments and to suggest some possible directions for further investigation.

From its inception, mission history has paralleled rather closely the larger tendencies of African history generally. Formal examination of the subject was initiated by missionaries and their supporters and gave rise to what might be called the metropolitan-ecclesiastical school of mission history. Focused on European strategies for the planting of Christianity in Africa and on the heroic missionary efforts to implement these plans, this literature hardly spoke to the theme of encounter at all. In this respect, it resembled the early colonial history which saw Africa as a stage on which Europeans of all kinds played out their interests and their fantasies.

Taking vigorous exception to this view of the African past was what might loosely be called the nationalist perspective in African historiography, which emerged strongly in the 1950s and the 1960s. In consonance with this new emphasis on African initiative, historians of mission activity began to probe the ways in which African perceptions and reactions conditioned the pattern of mission expansion, the extent to which evangelization was an accomplishment of African catechists rather than European missionaries, and the kinds of protests that were generated against mission policy and attitudes. Concerned to puncture the pious pretentions of the earlier approach, nationalist historians delighted in showing that missionaries were no less racist than other Europeans and that they were intimately linked to imperial pressures and colonial governments. Finally, the nationalist perspective has emphasized the extent to which mission activity has transformed traditional patterns of African life by undermining the cultural self-confidence of their converts and by generating an educated and modernizing elite which eventually brought down the colonial system that had spawned them (Ajayi, 1965; Ayandele, 1966; Temu, 1972; Ekechi, 1972).

The nationalist stance toward the missionary presence was profoundly ambivalent. While they were bitterly critical of missionary arrogance and deeply regretted aspects of the world they had lost partly through mission efforts, they regarded mission-inspired efforts at modernization as fundamentally progressive and believed that missions had contributed, albeit unwittingly, to political independence, the great denouement of nationalist historiography. Clearly this

point of view was a useful stage in the development of mission history, for it exposed mission hypocrisy, uncovered an important arena of African protest, countered the colonial stereotype of African inactivity, and established the importance of African initiatives in the making of mission communities and churches. Yet it is time now to go beyond the dominantly political emphasis of the nationalist approach and to refine our analysis of the relationship of missions to colonial politics and social change. These have been among the major themes of recent work in mission history.

Without doubt the most exciting of these new approaches has been that of African religious history, and here again, developments in the larger field have stimulated new modes of inquiry into mission history. It is only very recently that historians have acted on the assumption that African religious systems may in fact have changed significantly over time and that this history could be recovered (Ranger and Kimambo, 1972). Associated with this discovery of indigenous religious history was the idea of examining mission-African interaction at the level of symbol, ritual, myth, and theology—in brief, at the level of religious encounter. In emphasizing the political, economic, and social factors in the spread of Christianity, nationalist historians largely neglected the religious dimension, in part at least in a deliberate effort to reaffirm the validity of traditional religious systems against European presumptions of the superiority of their own faith. Acknowledging African interest in Christianity *qua* religion meant accepting missionary definitions of traditional belief systems as inadequate or worse; thus it was assumed that religious exchange was unlikely to occur without being stimulated by some ulterior motive. For example, in a recent study Professor Ekechi wrote that "Igbos did not accept Christianity because they thought it was superior to their own religion" (Ekechi, 1972: 22; also see Southall, 1961: 3; Cairns, 1965: 10-11). While by no means wholly inaccurate, such views may underestimate the capacity of African societies for serious religious interaction with Christianity and the extent to which social and religious change may subtly intermingle and facilitate one another.

It is in fact precisely the assertion of the new mission history that African societies did on occasion see in mission Christianity symbols, techniques, and ideas which they found to be appropriate or useful in coping with the new and wider world that was intruding upon them, an encounter that occurred at several levels of African religious systems. One such point of contact, most clearly articulated by Robin Horton (1971), existed at the top of the African religious hierarchy in the Christian concept of an active and personally concerned High God. Local spirits and subordinate deities, Horton argues, were becoming increasingly inadequate to explain, predict, and control a larger social universe, the defining features of which were so clearly and painfully alien, and in such an environment Christian monotheism might very well seem both intellectually and religiously attractive. In his study of Kalabari religious history over the past century, Horton (1970) has provided some documentation for his theory. He observed that the cult of the supreme being became "more important than ever" and made an easy identification with the Christian God, while lesser spirit cults declined or fluctuated. Moreover, Christian modes of approach to God, namely churchgoing, have largely replaced traditional means of intercession without implying acceptance of other Christian ideas such as sin, salvation, and the afterlife.

Yet the advent of the macrocosm did not everywhere or automatically erode

that intermediate level of the African religious hierarchy between man and God. Here too there was the possibility of interaction, particularly where religious expression was institutionalized and focused in a territorial cult rather than dispersed in private worship, as occurred in segmentary lineage societies. The M'Bona cult among the Mang'anja people of southern Malawi, recently described by Matthew Schoffeleers (1975), represents a case in point. The central figure in the M'Bona cult was the spirit of a great Mang'anja prophet, martyred by an alien political authority, whose death "had liberated great spiritual power." When not directly associated with hostile political forces, mission Christianity offered little direct competition for the M'Bona cult and much room for symbolic and mythological borrowing. The absence of a named father in the M'Bona tradition, because of the Mang'anja system of matrilineal descent, came to be interpreted as an indication of the prophet's virgin birth, while his ability to ensure an adequate food supply was represented as providing biblical manna. M'Bona, in fact, became a black Christ, responsible for African welfare in much the same way as Jesus, God's other son, cared for whites, and neither was to interfere in the affairs of the other. By assimilating biblical imagery, the M'Bona cult both linked itself to the religious tradition of the dominant Europeans and acquired a new mode of expressing anticolonial sentiments.

Likewise at the microcosmic level of local belief and technique, there were, at least in African eyes, frequent points of contact with mission Christianity. Tapping the power of alien intruders was often believed to involve giving up or destroying old paraphernalia and charms, which were sometimes turned over to baffled but pleased missionaries. More positively, many Africans felt that mere possession of the Bible or acquisition of the skills of literacy was effective in warding off misfortune or promoting temporal success. In the 1890s, for example, there was a significant movement into the Anglican mission in Kenya by those Giriama who had migrated just north of the Sabaki River. The resident missionary described the process as follows: "All their fetish worship has stopped. We were commissioned to destroy every sign of it. . . . The people have stopped wearing charms. All of the men and some women attend morning and evening worship—many learning to read" (CMS/1897/45, Hooper to Baylis, Dec. 19, 1896).

Certainly the most pressing microcosmic religious problem in many areas was that of witchcraft. Jocelyn Murray (n.d.) has suggested that the missionary message of sin often must have sounded like a description of the effects of witchcraft, and the invitation to salvation like an alternative to the cleansing rituals designed to rid the community of that blight. Indeed, in my own research, I have observed a temporarily heightened receptivity to mission teaching among the Taveta people of southeastern Kenya after the application of protective medicine and an antiwitchcraft cleansing ceremony had failed to remedy a series of natural disasters including sickness, famine, and locusts. Or again, on the lower Congo in 1886, Swedish missionaries found themselves receiving and destroying the *nkissi* or charms of many people and soon had on their hands a congregation of one thousand people at Mbanza Mateka, while others in neighboring communities were burning their charms in the process of accepting a new indigenous antiwitchcraft cult (Axelson, 1970: 271, 281; Vansina, 1973: 85-86). In examining the early twentieth century religious history of the Lala of Zambia, T.O. Ranger (1975) has shown that they desperately "wanted a Christianity which offered a spiritual solution to the problem of witchcraft," and not finding it in the local UMCA

mission turned to the millenarian message of Watch Tower preacher Tomo Nyirenda, whose activities ultimately issued in the witch-killing movement of the Mwana Lesa.

All of this suggests that the expansion of Christianity in modern Africa had important popular religious roots, as it apparently had in the late classical world of the third century. Peter Brown's (1971: 55) observation that the missionaries of the early church "advanced principally by revealing the bankruptcy of men's invisible enemies" may apply as well to their twentieth century counterparts in Africa. The latter, however, seldom tried to make religious contact in anything approaching African categories of thought, with the result that the initiative for religious interaction derived primarily from the flexible, nondogmatic, almost experimental character of traditional African religious systems (Isichei, 1969 and 1970). Though it was in this respect a one-way transaction, the mission-African encounter can be viewed as only the most recent phase in a much longer story of African religious development and change. Thus mission studies can tie into a central current concern of African history as well as participating in the history of the expansion of Christianity.

It would be a mistake, however, to think that mission Christianity was the sole source of new concepts, symbols, and myths to accompany and facilitate the transition to the new social universe of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, for African religions themselves were not without internal resources for the task. Horton (1971) has theorized that concepts of an active High God were in fact gaining ground within traditional cosmologies when Christianity appeared coincidentally on the scene, and that acceptance of the new religions was due as much to developments within the old as to the exertions of missionaries. There seems to be some evidence of this view. Apart from Horton's own study on the Kalabari, Pauw's (1960: 212-15) work on Tswana religion comes to the conclusion that while ancestor cults declined, "the belief in God is much more prominent, more clearly expressed and more consciously held than appears to have been the case in former times."

Indigenous witchcraft-eradication movements, the phenomenon of African prophetism, and the revival of traditional religions in Buganda and in contemporary Rhodesia represent further evidence for the vitality of traditional African religions. In West Africa, Ajayi and Ayandele (1974: 1) have commented on the continuing strength of traditional religion:

> In spite of the iconoclastic efforts of Muslims and Christians, shrines, groves and "idols" are as plentiful as ever. . . . The incredibly resilient African religion is still patronized by whole ethnic groups . . . as well as several towns and village communities and is far from being ignored by individual Muslims and Christians.

There can be no linear description of modern African religious history which points to the steady erosion of traditional systems in favor of Christianity. An uneven interaction between the two, coupled with a recognition of the capacity for persistence, renewal, and change within traditional belief systems offers a less elegant but more interesting context for future research in mission history.

An awareness of the vitality of indigenous religion leads to a consideration of the sources of religious opposition to the missionary presence. If missionaries were potential sources of religious power, that power could be abused. If missionaries could function as witch finders, they might also be witches. If they could pray for rain, they might also withhold it. The coincidence of famine and drought among

the Taita of Kenya with the arrival of the first resident missionary in 1883 provoked considerable antagonism toward him on the grounds that he was preventing much-needed rainfall. This hostility delayed missionary occupation of the area for over a decade. But as colonial rule became entrenched, this element of fear diminished, as did the problem of religious competition, for missionaries largely removed themselves from such major areas of African religious concern as supernatural healing, witchcraft, and spirit possession.

Antimission protest became part of the larger African response to the colonial situation. Among the Chewa of Malawi, for example, a major agency of continuing resistance to colonial rule were masked dancing societies called *Nyau*, which sought to defend both Chewa cultural identity and local village autonomy against European rule (as they had earlier done against the Ngoni). They created masks and songs designed to ridicule such major Christian figures as Mary and Joseph and campaigned to enroll school age children in *Nyau* societies before they could be recruited into mission schools. *Nyau* societies, concluded Ian Linden (1974), remained for decades a major obstacle to the growth of Christianity in Malawi.

African reactions to mission Christianity cannot, however, be divided into two neat and opposite categories marked attraction and opposition. The history of religious encounter must also include the theme of disappointment, early expectations subsequently unfulfilled. In his study of popular intellectual responses to the pressures of acculturation among the Fang of Gabon, James Fernandez (1972: 25-26) remarked on this phenomenon:

> Since the Fang had early regarded the coming of the missionary with high hopes, one can imagine their sense of deception when not only were the expectations of material advantages disappointed but there occurred a great increase in evil (witchcraft). Whereas earlier there had been a tendency to assimilate the Europeans, with their manifest material superiority, to the ancestors or to some other kind of supernatural status, there now appeared a tendency to assimilate them to the power of evil, and in various myths, to ascribe their superiority to trickery and duplicity.

The theme of disappointment touches on mission history most concretely when it confronts the question of religious independence. In fact, one of the reasons for the continued vitality of mission studies lies in its attempt to locate the roots of the massive proliferation of independent churches, surely one of the most dramatic developments in the history of twentieth century Christianity. Much of the voluminous literature on the subject has emphasized the element of political or social protest, and thus the search for origins has focused on missionary attitudes and policies on matters of race, education, and Africanization of the church hierarchy.

This was an emphasis particularly compatible with the outlook of nationalist historiography. A few of the older studies as well as many of the more recent ones have tended to shift the emphasis to an examination of the process of religious disappointment. Horton's (1971) suggestive thesis on the inability of mission Christianity to meet the African need for an instrumental religion of explanation, prediction, and control has been the most general formulation of this approach. Robert Mitchell's (1970) examination of the origins of the Aladura movements of western Nigeria found the roots of schism in the inability of mission churches to provide an adequate religious response to the practical problems of life—healing, unemployment, sterility—and in the incompatibility of Christian notions of evil as the breach of an abstract moral principle with traditional views of evil as real and

personal power. Central African studies (Murray, n.d.) in particular have stressed
the inadequacy of mission response to the problems of witchcraft in explaining the
popularity of Zionist independent churches.

While mission history links up with the burgeoning study of independent
churches, its focus is mission communities and the churches they have spawned. In
fact, so much attention has been paid to separatist movements that the question
confronting mission studies now is how to explain the historical vitality of
orthodox mission communities despite internal conflicts of a political or religious
nature and competition from independent churches. The Africanization of
Christianity must have been occuring, at least to some extent, in these communities
as well as in their independent counterparts. Was adaptation, in short, the price of
survival?

The theme of adaptation within mission communities can be approached from
at least three angles. In the first place, it might be argued that adaptation was not
always necessary in order to make Christianity more genuinely African. Such an
argument would involve challenging the sharp distinction which some have made
between African religions as "this-worldly" instruments of explanation, prediction,
and control and mission Christianity as a religion of personal communion, an
incompatibility often regarded as central to separatism (Horton, 1971). However,
the phenomenal success of mission Christianity in Africa—as compared to India
and China, for instance—might lead one to look for elements of continuing
convergence rather than difference between the two religions.

Certainly mission Christianity was not always wholly unconcerned with real
"this-worldly" problems. Particularly in the pioneer period, missionaries often
presented their message in straightforward instrumental terms, particularly in those
areas of life over which they felt little control. They prayed for rain, sometimes in
virtual competition with traditional rainmakers; they sometimes presented reading
as a magic art; they assured inquirers that Europe's power derived from worship of
the one true God. For a later period, one might point to Horton's prediction that
the long-term prospects for religion in Africa, as in any modernizing society, lie in
the performance of expressive rather than instrumental functions. If so, then those
individuals who had come to a genuinely secular and scientific view of the world
might find a more intellectually satisfying religious experience in modern mission
Christianity, with its emphasis on the satisfaction of non-empirical needs, than in
independent churches, which, unless they transform themselves, may prove to be
the last spurt of religious instrumentalism in an increasingly secularized Africa.

A second, and rather less speculative, approach to the question of adaptation
lies in a reexamination of the extent to which missionaries themselves encouraged
or allowed adaptation in African religious and cultural forms. There seems to be
some correlation between missionary adaptation and resistance to the attractions of
independent churches. In his study of southern Shona independent churches in
Rhodesia, M.L. Daneel (1971: 244-65) carefully compared the attitudes and
policies of the Roman Catholic missions and the Dutch Reformed Church mission
in an effort to explain why the former lost far fewer members to the independents
than the latter. He concluded that the willingness of the Catholics to Christianize
elements of Shona ritual and to be flexible on such matters as polygyny,
bridewealth, and veneration of ancestors was "the most important reason" for this
discrepancy. Research on the female circumcision crisis among the Kikuyu of
Kenya suggests that Anglican unwillingness to push the initiation issue beyond a

certain point resulted in far fewer defections from the stations of the Church Missionary Society than from those of its Presbyterian and American fundamentalist rivals. And it has been suggested that one reason for the relative absence of separatist movements in Tanganyika lay in the presence of a missionary leadership strongly committed to adaptation (Ranger, 1971: 131).

A third approach to adaptation focuses on the African Christians. Adaptation was not usually planned from above, and even where it was, it could only be implemented with the cooperation of those below. It takes nothing away from Bishop Lucas's creative efforts to Christianize the male initiation rites around Masasi in southern Tanganyika to recognize that his success was very dependent on the active support of African priests, who gained prestige from their control of the new rites, and of African congregations, who accepted them as valid indicators of adult status (Ranger, 1972). More important by far were those frequently unplanned and perhaps unconscious adjustments of concept and practice made by African Christians within the framework of mission communities and without the inspiration or approval of their European mentors.

One such pattern of adjustment was simple eclecticism, a carryover perhaps from a traditional attitude of religious pragmatism. African clergymen who wore protective charms and communicants who consulted customary religious specialists put this pragmatism into practice and frequently subjected themselves to severe church discipline for doing so. In the eyes of many African Christians, however, it was missionary absolutism, not Christianity, that created the problem. And with the proliferation of mission outstations after World War I and the withdrawal of many missionaries into the central institutions of the church, this pattern of adjustment doubtless became easier. Marshall Murphree (1969) has described a situation of "religious interdependence" among the Roman Catholic, Methodist, Independent, and traditional religious communities in Shonaland in which individuals shuttle with relative ease among these various systems of belief and ritual. Evidence from Ghana, South Africa, and elsewhere (Brokensha, 1966; Pauw, 1960; Tanner, 1967) suggests that orthodox Christian communities were by no means as alienated from or hostile to their societies as might be expected. All of this represented a quiet but effective movement away from the general mission view of Christianity as a religion of exclusive validity.

The reinterpretation of Christian rites and practices in terms of traditional belief represents another mode of adaptation that was altogether possible within mission churches. African Dominican sisters in Rhodesia, we are told, regard themselves as equivalent to the traditional *mbonga*, virgins who served at the shrine of Mwari, the Shona High God (Weinrich, 1975: 227). Professor Ranger (1972: 231-33) has shown how baptism could become a healing rite, St. Andrew a raingiver, and how African clergy might on occasion be assimilated into the role of customary religious practitioners. It has in fact been argued that mission Christianity on occasion adapted itself all too successfully to traditional modes of religious thought. In examining Protestantism in Uganda, Philip Turner (1971) claims to have found "a form of Christianity which fits easily with many aspects of traditional culture" in that it is ecclesiastically conservative, legalistic, or proverbial in its use of the Bible and pragmatic in the sense of being essentially unconcerned with theological issues.

But beyond ritual mobility and reinterpretation, there is some evidence that adaptation may take the form of outright incorporation of traditional practices. The *Rukwadzano* and *Mabvuwi,* Rhodesian Methodist associations of women and

men respectively, regularly experience miraculous healings and practice exorcism during their meetings (Murphree, 1969: 73-77; Muzorewa, 1975: 258). That such phenomena normally occur in the absence of missionaries and African pastors suggests that this is a popular adaptation from below, and that participants justify their behavior by reference to New Testament parallels indicates that they feel it is unnecessary to venture beyond the framework of mission Christianity to meet these needs.

Clearly, then, a considerable range of religious adaptation was possible within mission churches without provoking schism. We have perhaps underestimated the extent to which some Africans in some churches could find a real measure of religious fulfillment, even if they had to create it themselves. It seems that this was most likely to occur in churches at opposite ends of the theological spectrum—Catholic and High Anglican communities on the one side and Pentecostal churches (which emphasize the work of the Holy Spirit) on the other.

The possibility of adaptation is not, however, the only reason for the persistence of mission communities, for they came to perform a variety of important functions in the larger society. It has been argued, for example, that among the Igbo Christianity, particularly in its patriarchal Roman Catholic variant, served to reinforce the values of male dominance which new and independent economic opportunities for women tended to undermine (Salamone, 1975). Others have suggested that Christianity came to express the collective aspiration of certain peoples, at least as articulated by their elites. Margaret Read (1971: 353) has remarked that a number of Christian Ngoni began to articulate the traditional concept of a Ngoni mission or task in terms of the Christian missionary purpose. In Buganda (Low, 1968: 150-63), Christianity as well as Islam symbolized for many that greater destiny toward which their country had been striving for centuries, while conversion to Catholicism among the Padhola served to strengthen their identity against that of their Baganda and largely Protestant conquerors (Ogot, 1972: 131-32).

In a more general sense, mission communities continued to be viewed as highly important mediators of modernity. A recent study (Salamone, 1975) has suggested that many Igbo Christians of an orthodox persuasion regard independent churches as backward looking and full of "ignorant dirty people," while mission Christianity is seen as both progressive and consonant with traditional values. Likewise, educated Kikuyu Christians clearly saw themselves in the vanguard of progressive social change and yet not divorced from the past. "The Gospel," declared a group of staunch mission adherents in 1929, "began to form a new nation from that of old Kikuyu. . . . We are at the beginning of a great building up of new customs and the forming of Christianity, the same as those who before us made ordinances for the generations after them" (Anderson, n.d.). Such perceptions often had an important basis in fact, for mission schools in many places retained a virtual monopoly of quality education throughout the colonial era. Mission communities, in short, could more adequately perform the function, vital in a colonial society, of linking the culture of subordinate communities to that of their rulers (Ranger, 1975: 67).

If the new mission history goes beyond the nationalist perspective in examining the process of religious encounter, it seeks to refine the nationalist analysis of the relationship of missions to the politics of colonial society. Despite the monopoly of legitimate political authority in white hands, colonial societies were intensely

political rather than merely administrative societies. Within the community of the colonizers and that of the colonized, as well as between them, there occurred a great deal of bargaining, compromise, and shifting of alliances. The missionary role in this political maelstrom, which after all largely determined the shape of colonial societies, needs to be reexamined.

In studying the politics on the European side of the racial cleavage, nationalist historians have stressed in general the extent of integration between colonial and mission structures. Such an emphasis can hardly be criticized, for evidence is overwhelming that missionaries willingly served colonial regimes as channels of communication, agencies for the recruitment and training of lower level administrative staff, inculcators of appropriate political values, and in numerous other ways. Yet to characterize missions as nothing more than an "arm of the colonial administrations" (Temu, 1972: 132) is surely to neglect important nuances and major elements of divergence in the relationship. While there was seldom conflict over such fundamental values as the survival of the colonial system, there was nonetheless a consciousness of separate interests, antagonism, and sometimes struggle between missionaries and those other whites in the colonial establishment, a pattern of conflict that could on occasion have important consequences for both mission communities and the larger colonial society.

While the grounds of divergence were many and varied, they were all rooted in a general sense that an overly close association with the state might imperil the missions' ability to realize their own goals. The head of the Anglican mission in the early years of British involvement in Kenya was concerned to "avoid any action or cooperation [with the Imperial British East Africa Company] such as would give the idea that the BEAC and CMS are only different names for the same thing" (CMS 1880/360, Price to Smith, September 15, 1888). Catholics in Rhodesia were likewise warned to "remember that you are not to propogate the kingdom of men" (Daneel, 1971: 234). German mission societies in particular appear to have had a more suspicious attitude toward the German colonial movement than did the British missions for their own imperial tradition (Wright, 1971: 1-20; Hallden, 1968).

The cleavage between the missions and other Europeans was rooted in differences in class, education, and values, particularly where the more evangelical mission societies predominated. A critical observer of public affairs in Kenya commented perceptively on the matter in the mid-1920s:

> It is important to realize that the Evangelical party, as the inheritors of the Puritan tradition are now called, have always been a minority party in the national life. . . . The puritan tradition is, furthermore, notoriously unpopular among those classes of English people from which the Europeans in Kenya are chiefly drawn. It stigmatizes many of their pleasures, such as horse-racing and the use of alcohol. The emphasis it lays on private judgment is difficult to reconcile with authority and it is well known to be the parent of equalitarian and socialist ideas that are even more excessively disliked by Europeans abroad than by their friends in England. It may be added that most missionaries are adherents of the older theological ideas, now becoming less common in Europe (Leys, 1973: 226-27).

Here is an area in which the need for research into missionary sociology is obvious in order to define the sort of social backgrounds that gave rise to particular missionary attitudes to the colonial situation (Beidelman, 1974: 238-39). An example of what such studies might demonstrate is shown in recent work on

Rev. A.S. Cripps of Rhodesia, whose Anglo-Catholic background, Oxford education, and clerical experience in a London slum combined to produce an attitude of Christian socialism and an uncompromising antagonism toward many aspects of the Rhodesian regime (Steele, 1975).

Where the missionary presence had predated that of colonial authority, missionary resentment over increasingly strong government control of their competitive and expansionary efforts was prevalent. When the government of Kenya required rival missions to keep their stations at least ten miles apart, it was regarded by at least one outraged Anglican as "a monstrous violation of British liberties" (CM/1910/71, Wray to Baylis, April 2, 1910). But there were other and more potent reasons for missionary uneasiness with the advent of colonial authority. While most missionaries were convinced imperialists, they held to a view of empire opposed to official imperialism in several important respects.

One of those differences involved the potential secularism of government policy, a fear missionaries experienced most directly when cooperating with state authorities on educational matters. It is ironic that while education was the area in which mission and colonial structures were most closely integrated, it was also here that government policy made missionaries most anxious and defensive. Several recent works on the making of British educational policy in Kenya (Schilling, 1972; King, 1971; Anderson, 1970) show clearly how the policy of mission-government cooperation represented from the mission viewpoint a continual struggle to maintain essential interests. They fought a losing battle against a conscience clause that exempted unwilling students from religious instruction, and a more successful one to retain a measure of literary education in the curriculum against settler pressures for an almost wholly technical focus. What made missions most nervous was the ever-present possibility that the government might opt for a policy of secular schools and thus deprive missions of their most effective recruiting device for the church. It was in fact a Belgian move toward the secularization of the Congolese educational system in the mid-1950s that destroyed the mission-state *entente* which had for decades constituted one of the pillars of the colonial establishment (Markowitz, 1973: 83-103).

The most obvious and publicized of the conflicts between missions and colonial authorities occurred when missionaries acted in their presumed role of defender of African interests. On one level, missionaries acted on behalf of their converts and attempted to pressure frequently reluctant governments into creating and enforcing the legal structures that would exempt Christians from compromising participation in "pagan" culture. Leon Spencer (1973), for example, has described a twelve-year struggle by Kenyan missionaries to secure passage of legislation protecting Christian widows from levirate marriages. On other occasions, however, they presumed to act on behalf of Africans generally, with German missions taking up the challenge earliest. Marcia Wright has described mission-government relations in early Tanganyika as nothing less than a *kulturkampf,* primarily over German reliance on alien askaris for their lower level administrative staff (1971: 43-84). On the other side of the continent the Basel Mission was simultaneously publicizing the abuses of the German plantation policy in the Cameroons and helping to oust an offending governor (Hallden, 1968). Similarly, Protestant missions in the Congo played an important role in exposing the terrible conditions created by Leopold's early regime (Langergren, 1970: 344-46).

Further study is needed in order to define more precisely the conditions under

which missions most actively opposed government policies which they regarded as inimical to African interests. Beidelman, for example, has suggested that mission-government antagonism was more likely where the two groups of Europeans differed in nationality (1974: 238). One might also hypothesize that occasion for protest was more frequent in settler territories than in those with an African cash crop economy.

A major nationalist criticism of missions has been that they acted hand in glove with the administration to subvert African political movements, especially during the interwar period. Evidence from Kenya suggests, ironically enough, that it was those missionaries most outspokenly critical of colonial policy who were most effective in diverting African protest into what they regarded as constructive channels. A case in point involves the activities of W.E. Owen, known to the settlers as "Archdemon Owen" and to his Provincial Commissioner as "an out and out Bolshevist." Believing that the only "Christian justification for empire is service," Owen roundly and frequently condemned what he saw as the "foreign exploitation of the soil" and publicly denounced government capitulations to settler pressure. It was largely the expression of such views that gave Owen the necessary standing in African eyes to convert the politically active Young Kavirondo Association into the moderate and welfare-oriented Kavirondo Taxpayers Welfare Association (Lonsdale, 1970: 589-638). It would be interesting to know if missionary opposition to government policies functioned elsewhere, as it apparently did in Kenya, to channel African protest in approved directions.

While very little study has been undertaken on mission interaction with the later mass nationalist movements of the post-1945 era, some preliminary work in Zaire and Rhodesia indicates that such movements provoked certain mission groups into a break with governments toward which they had long assumed an uncritical stance. Fearful of becoming altogether irrelevant in an environment of anti-European nationalism, progressive Catholic circles in the Congo began belatedly to Africanize the church hierarchy and to disengage it from close links with the state (Markowitz, 1973: 144-64). A similar set of political adjustments seem to be currently under way in Rhodesia, where even the Dutch Reformed Church has assumed a certain air of neutrality in the political conflicts of the day (Daneel, 1971: 243-44).

What I am suggesting here is that we need to become aware of the nuances involved in mission interactions with colonial politics and that we need to sort out, systematically and comparatively, those variables that have shaped the nature and impact of missionary attitudes and actions in the political arena.

A very similar plea might be made for the reexamination of the relationship between mission activity and cultural and social change. "Missionaries felt it right that the African must receive the Western culture with his Christianity" (Atieno-Odiambo, 1973: 5). Such has been the common understanding of this relationship, for the often passionate denunciation of African culture by missionaries has been viewed as evidence of their insistence on wholesale Westernization. Indeed both critics and defenders of the missionary enterprise have viewed it as a major and deliberate change agent in colonial society. African nationalists and their European supporters have damned missions for contributing to the disintegration of African culture, while secular champions of mission work have seen it as an important agency of social mobilization and as a mechanism for easing the transition to the modern world (Temu, 1972: 155; Hopkins, 1966: 555-63).

It is possible, however, to raise questions on several levels about the equation of missions and change. In the first place, it may be necessary to reexamine the extent to which missionaries themselves generated major socio-cultural change. Horton has reduced the role of mission Christianity, even in the process of religious transformation, to that of a catalyst for other changes already in the air (1971). It is also essential to remember that the mission presence seldom made much headway until other political and economic changes had been imposed and thus can hardly be regarded as an independent motor of social change. While missions may, for example, have shaped the character of the new elite, they can hardly be credited with the unaided creation of this important social group. It would be interesting to know if the process of elite formation differed significantly in areas where government secular schools predominated from those in which missions provided most educational services. Recent studies from Malawi have suggested that certain missions, Roman Catholic and Dutch Reformed Church for instance, simply did not generate anything akin to a modernizing elite, and their authors have in fact sharply criticized African historians generally for an overemphasis on the modernizing outcomes of the colonial encounter (Linden, 1974; Channock, 1972: 429-36).

Furthermore, the character of the changes associated with the missionary intrusion did not always prove as politically and socially disruptive, nor as psychologically traumatic, as common images of the "lonely African" might indicate. Reviewing a number of southern African studies of acculturation, Murphree (1969: 160) noted that "in none of the societies studied have Christians become a distinct social group, separated from other members of their communities." More specifically, Schapera (1960) concluded that among the Tswana the introduction of mission Christianity, associated from the beginning with its political leadership, produced no fundamental breach in Tswana political unity and did not lead to the "detribalization" of mission adherents. In an example of Christianity among the Sukumu of Tanzania, Tanner (1967: 100) observed that "there are few convert tensions between Christians and traditionalists." Is it possible that an understandable emphasis on conflict and discontinuity in recent African historiography has led scholars to neglect elements of persistence and of change that was neither dramatic nor disruptive? Missions studies in fact provide an arena in which to examine the subtle relationship of continuity and change in the cultural and social history of African societies.

Beyond reevaluating the effectiveness of missionaries as agents of change, it is also necessary to reflect on the question of missionary intentions. To what extent did they, in fact, want to stimulate modernizing or Westernizing change? In an examination of Catholic missions in the Congo, Markowitz (1973: 13) has commented perceptively on the issue:

> Their own anti-intellectualism and anti-cosmopolitanism also led many missionaries to become exponents and supporters of African provincialism. They idealized African village life and rejected such aspects of modernity as urbanization and industrialization. To them rural life was the epitome of virtue while the city was filled with evil and atheism. In its extreme form this rural romanticism led to rejection of the accoutrements of Western civilization and to cultural asceticism.

The existence of a deep missionary ambivalence regarding modern Western culture should not be surprising, for part of the missionary motivation was a desire to escape from the rationalism, materialism, and urbanization that were eating away

at the kind of society in which the church had earlier played a pivotal role. Furthermore, missionaries profoundly feared that contact with the West would "detribalize" their converts, a direction of cultural change which was viewed with as much horror as unredeemed African culture. Sometimes associated with this sentiment was a grudging respect for certain general values and structures of African life, if not their specific manifestations. African religiosity compared favorably to European secularism—though not in all its particulars. The "sense of filial piety" was approved, but not polygamy and bride wealth; the sanctions associated with African communal life, but not the blood feud or trial by ordeal. Accordingly, missionary thought often envisaged that traditional African society, once shorn of its grossest abuses and infused with Christianity, would represent a more desirable cultural alternative and a better base for future development than the increasingly secular, urban, and industrial European society. As rationalism and religious modernism swept the old world, Africa presented an opportunity to build anew the church of Christ in a more congenial, essentially pre-modern environment. Far from embracing modernity, missionaries felt constrained to resist it at numerous points, and this imperative set definite limits on their role as conscious change agents in African society.

A measure of confirmation for such a view arises from an examination of antimission protests, which derived at least as much from opposition to missionary limits on African access to modern Western culture as from attacks on customary ways of life. Such protests, at least in Kenya, focused on a variety of mission policies, including opposition to Africans wearing European clothing, artifically low wages and prohibition on trading opportunities for African employees, reluctance to offer instruction in English, and failure to develop a sufficiently high standard of education (Strayer, 1973). Africans, then, insisted on a wider range of modern cultural, educational, and economic opportunities than many missionaries were willing to grant.

Where, then, should mission history go from here? The variety of outcomes generated by the mission-African encounter suggests the need for more explicitly comparative studies. Which forms of mission Christianity were most open to a dialogue with and an adaptation to African religion? Under what conditions were African societies most likely to seek religious points of contact with missionaries? What are the major variables that account for differences in the stance of mission groups toward the colonial situation, and what real impact did these differences have? Perhaps such inter-African comparisons might some day contribute to a world historical comparison of the tremendous success of Christianity in Africa in relation to its general failure in Asia.

We are in fact beginning to get some studies with an important comparative dimension. On the mission side of the encounter, Wright (1971) has described the very different mission communities that emerged from Moravian and Berlin Mission activity in southern Tanganyika, while Daneel (1971) has related the theological differences between the Roman Catholic and Dutch Reformed missions to the relative cohesiveness of their Rhodesian churches. Equally important are the variations on the African side of the encounter. J.D.Y. Peel (1967) probed certain social and historical differences within Yorubaland in order to account for the differential receptivity to Christianity there. Ranger and Weller (1975: 9) have suggested that "responses to missionaries varied because what was needed from them in terms of myth and ritual and symbol and technique varied also." Concepts

of an active High God, witchcraft eradication techniques, means of ensuring rainfall, the fulfillment of millenial expectations, as well as differences in social, economic, and political circumstances will need to be considered in explaining the African response to missionary intrusion.

In conclusion, the vitality of mission history today derives from its linkages to the major themes of African history generally. Insofar as it is able to draw from and contribute to the discussion of such critical issues as religious history, social change, and political protest, mission studies will remain an important dimension of the African historical landscape.

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