

Anglicanism in Africa: History, Identity, and Mission

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Abstract

A historical perspective is a vital part of insight into Anglicanism in Africa. This article assesses the role of missionaries when colonialists and missionaries were often perceived as collaborators. Further, the African nations' struggle for independence impacted issues of *identity* and enculturation, so it offers a review of the place of African cultural and religious practices in this new faith, including the place of the uneducated in a seemingly elite religion and how addressing this necessitated liturgical renewal and other adaptations. Finally, it will look at the Anglican *mission* in African societies in relation to leadership, injustice, poverty, disease, secularization, and a restive youth population and highlight African Anglicans' response to Western revisionist tendencies and redefinitions of gender and family.

Keywords

Anglicanism, bishop, colonialism, historical perspective, identity, Kikuyu Conference, East African Revival, missionary

Anglicanism in Africa is a broad subject that must necessarily include the major dimensions that make it intelligible. While some have approached it from regional or contemporary perspectives, this article provides a survey of the key aspects of Anglicanism in Africa along three fronts: the history, the identity question, and the mission. In so doing, it will compress vast periods of time to remain within a reasonable size.

Africa's encounter with Christianity has been categorized into four broad periods: Christian Antiquity in the northern half of Africa (CE 62–1500), Christianity in the Ancient African Kingdoms (1400–1800), the foundation of modern Christianity (1792–1918), and twentieth-century Christianity.¹ The advent of Protestant and missionary societies in Africa was significant, and John Baur has observed, “The most important new ingredient that helped foster modern Christianity in Africa is Protestantism. For half a century (1792–1842), Protestant missionaries were practically alone in the field, and until that great nineteenth century ended with World War I, Protestant missionaries were far more numerous than Catholic ones.”²

Besides North Africa, which stands out as the front-liner in the encounter with Christianity, it can be rightly asserted that in many parts of Africa, Anglicanism was among the first forms of Christianity introduced. It is helpful to understand Anglicanism in Africa from several perspectives: the missionary encounter, the colonial complications, and the response stage, during which issues of identity and mission became apparent and inescapable.

I. Historical Perspectives

The spread of the Anglican Church from a national to a worldwide denomination was a consequence of various factors besides missionary zeal. In the case of the Episcopal Church of Scotland, it was a result of persecution, while political assertiveness and the struggle for independence explains the emergence of the Church in the American colonies and African provinces.

The Church Missionary Society (CMS) was founded in 1799 as a result of the Evangelical revival, which was characterized by an unflinching commitment to the authority and infallibility of the Bible as the word of God. Equally important was the earlier founding of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK) by Dr. Thomas Bray in 1698 and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) in 1701.

¹ John Baur, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa: An African Church History* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1997), 7–12.

² *Ibid.*, 105.

As needs arose in the British colonies for gospel impact and social transformation, these societies swung into action, bringing about the birth of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG). Their ministry soon extended to West Africa through the Rev. T. Thompson, who went to the Gold Coast (Ghana), with the lasting legacy of his ministry being the education and ordination of Philip Quaque as “the first of any non-European race since the Reformation to receive Anglican orders.”³ Anglicanism in Africa is therefore the story of the fruit of mission by these societies. Along with other mission churches like the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA), which was an offshoot of the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM),⁴ the Roman Catholic Mission (RCM), the Methodist and Presbyterian missions, and a few others, the Anglican Church had a distinctly foreign identity.

1. *The West Coast*

The search for a suitable place for the resettlement efforts following the abolition of the slave trade found Freetown, Sierra Leone, a favorable location in West Africa. Despite the unexpected difficulties with the unwilling and hostile local chiefs, who were determined to continue with the lucrative slave trade, the intervention of the British government gave Sierra Leone a new status as a crown colony in 1804, and with that status a naval base was set up for the Royal Navy to enforce the new law against the slave trade. Gradually, the reputation of tropical Africa as the dreaded “white man’s grave” gave way to the same region becoming “the black man’s life.”⁵ A groundbreaking initiative by the CMS was the establishment in 1827 of the Fourah Bay College, where several catechists and teachers were trained to become the workforce for the evangelization of the West African coast. From this early effort, the former slave boy, Adjai Crowther, set free by the British naval patrol on the West Coast, *was found* suitable for training and eventual presentation for ordination by the Bishop of London on June 11, 1843. On December 2 of that year, “the black man who had been crowned a minister” (as the Sierra Leoneans described him) preached in Sierra Leone to a packed and enthusiastic audience, also administering the Lord’s Supper to a large number of communicants.⁶ He was among the earliest

³ Ibid., 24.

⁴ ECWA used to be known as the Evangelical Church in West Africa, an attempt at indigenization by the Sudan Interior Mission.

⁵ Eugene Stock, *History of the Church Missionary Society: Its Environment, Its Men and Its Work* (London: Church Missionary Society, 1899), 1:156.

⁶ Ibid., 1:457–58.

CMS missionaries to introduce Christianity to Nigeria through the Yoruba mission, working alongside Henry Townsend, a British missionary.

As the English-speaking colonies geared up for political independence, it was important that the churches be not left behind. Ecclesiastical provinces were created in Africa to allow for some form of structure, spiritual affinity, and cohesion. In 1951, the Province of West Africa was inaugurated (comprising the dioceses of Accra, Lagos, On the Niger, Sierra Leone, and Gambia/Guinea), followed in 1955 by the Ecclesiastical Province of Central Africa.

Ghana, then called the Gold Coast, had as its first missionary the Rev. Nathaniel Temple Hamlin, who had been a CMS missionary in Nigeria. According to John Pobe, “The Anglican tradition in Ghana grew out of the SPG mission endeavors in Africa in the eighteenth century but more energetically in the twentieth century.” This, he believes, has given the Anglican Church in Ghana such a strong flavor of high churchmanship that Ghana is said to represent “one of the vestiges of raw Anglo-Catholicism in the world.”⁷

2. East Africa: The Kikuyu Conference and the East African Revival

The Anglican Church was introduced in East Africa by the Rev. Dr. Johann Ludwig Krapf in 1844, who persevered despite the loss of his wife and children in the process. Yet he remained unflinching, with the result that he lived to see great results of his mission in Africa. Even though the British Protectorate of Uganda (1894–1962) had as many as eight hundred thousand baptized Christians in eight dioceses within the same general period, political difficulties prevented the three territories of Uganda, Kenya, and Tanganyika from becoming one province.

As the church grew in East Africa, there were problems with order. An arrangement had been made to share areas of concentration or spheres of interest within which to confine missionary efforts by the societies to avoid duplication of efforts in view of the lean resources of the missions. As social change necessitated movement to urban centers, there was a need for migrating converts to find welcoming congregations, even if they were different from what they were used to in their home areas. Growth sometimes comes with unforeseen challenges, and this situation was no exception. The CMS, which was the first to establish effective mission stations in neutral centers such as Mombasa, Nairobi, and Kisumu, ran into other pastoral

⁷ John S. Pobe, *The Anglican Story in Ghana: From Mission Beginnings to Province of Ghana* (Accra: Amanda, 2009), 28–29.

problems that called for cooperation between different missions. The search for a solution brought unintended complications, as catechists dismissed by one mission for misbehavior would be engaged by another a few miles away, often at a higher salary than what they had lost. Christians under discipline from one denomination would transfer their allegiance to another. Adherents of the American “gospel” missions would ask to be received by Anglicans or Presbyterians, who offered superior facilities for education.⁸

That situation needed to be addressed urgently. The most important attempt to do so was the move toward a federation of Protestant missions that would welcome these African Christians who migrated from rural areas in search of better living conditions and job opportunities opened up by the establishment of the railway. J. J. Willis, a CMS missionary who later became Bishop of Uganda, proposed a way forward to emphasize the gospel and liturgical affinity of the mission churches rather than allowing room for strife:

No unnecessary differences should be allowed to become habitual among African Christians; ... on the contrary, the edification of these Churches should proceed “upon converging lines,” through the recognition by all missions of a single standard for Church membership, a single code of discipline, a common attitude towards certain native customs, a common form of simple worship which could be used with sufficient frequency for it to become familiar to all African Christians, and similar courses of training for African ministers based upon a common recognition of the Scripture and the Creeds.⁹

Rather unfortunately, the intentions that welcomed the proposal for a federation of churches and service of Holy Communion in a Presbyterian church at which Bishop William G. Peel of Mombassa and Bishop John J. Willis of Uganda (as Anglicans) presided and non-Anglican received communion were misconstrued. Frank Weston, the neighboring Anglican Bishop of Zanzibar, imputed heresy charges to this effort, and this generated much heat that stalled this otherwise noble venture. Further progress was limited to broad issues devoid of doctrinal and ecclesiastical controversies, necessitating the establishment of “a body in which different missionary organizations would cooperate in certain activities ... a body that would allow common representation to government and united activity in providing educational and health services.”¹⁰

⁸ Archdeacon M. G. Capon, “History of Christian Cooperation in Kenya,” quoted in Roland Oliver, *The Missionary Factor in East Africa* (London: Longmans, 1970), 225.

⁹ Oliver, *Missionary Factor*, 225.

¹⁰ Colin Reed, “Denominationalism or Protestantism? Mission Strategy and Church in the Kikuyu Conference of 1913,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 37.4 (October 2013): 207–12.

The most outstanding feature of Christianity in East Africa is what became known as the East African Revival in Kigali, Rwanda, and Burundi. Missionaries in the CMS Rwanda Mission, such as Dr. Joe Church, who served as a medical missionary for forty years, were critical of this growth. “As a lay medical missionary of the Church Missionary Society, Joe Church had a strong loyalty to the mission which sponsored him and to the ‘Native Anglican Church,’ the Church of Uganda,”¹¹ even though there were tensions between the mission and the church. A witness of the revival describes its flavor:

My own first and strongest impressions of the revival came to me through working with an English colleague, one Jean Ely, who arrived hotfoot from Uganda to join me when I became Principal of the then new CMS Training College, Crowther Hall, at Selly Oak in Birmingham. She turned out to be a startlingly challenging colleague. From the outset, she applied what I discovered later was the revival practice of asking if she could be “in the light” with me, which invariably meant confronting me directly with one or more of my many failings. I would apologise and thus win through to complete reinstatement. At moments of confrontation, Jean led us into frequent moments of prayer. Friends of hers, Africans or Europeans influenced by the revival, who came to visit the college, adopted the same approach I found the process, of a kind of continuous confession and absolution, humbling, and yet at times, quite edifying They opened up to me a depth of relationship with God and with the other person in the presence of God, which moved me.¹²

The prominent Anglican leaders at this time were Archbishop Erica Sabot, Archbishop Janani Luwum, Bishop Misaeri Karma, and Bishop Festo Kivengere, among others. As the heat of President Idi Amin’s tyranny increased and it seemed clear that Archbishop Luwum’s life was in danger, the suggestion was made that the CMS could arrange his evacuation to the UK. His response shows the strength of conviction in these Christian leaders at the time: “Eight and twenty years ago the Lord did a work in my heart, and he has been doing that same work every day since. I would be untrue to Him if I left my people now”¹³ (quite reminiscent of Polycarp’s “eighty and six years have I served him ...” [Mart. Pol. 9.3]).

3. South Africa

The Anglican Church in South Africa has had a complex history, given the multiplicity of prior missionary efforts by the Dutch Reformed Church,

¹¹ Kevin Ward, “Revival, Mission and Church in Kigali, Rwanda and Burundi: A Complex Relationship,” in *The East African Revival: History and Legacies*, ed. Kevin Ward and Emma Wild-Wood (Farnham, Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2012), 12.

¹² Simon Barrington-Ward, “The Revival Through CMS Eyes: Potential and Limitations,” in *East African Revival*, ed. Ward and Wild-Wood, 77.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 79.

the Lutherans, the Moravians, the London Missionary Society, and the Wesleyan Methodists. The first Bishop of Cape Town was Robert Gray, and by 1876 the constitution of the Province of South Africa was adopted. The Anglican Church's first mission to the Africans was in 1854 among the Xhosa tribe, and by 1872, when Bishop Grey died, there were six Anglican dioceses served by 127 pastors.¹⁴ As the work expanded beyond Cape Town, Grahamstown was chosen as the headquarters of South Africa's second diocese. The greatest hindrance to the work in this region was the social upheavals such as intertribal wars and racial prejudice. There has been an appreciable Anglican presence in these six countries: South Africa, Lesotho, Swaziland, Namibia, Angola, and Mozambique.

II. *Identity: Faith and Culture in Contest*

1. *The Colonial Context*

While the English colonists and merchants supplemented the efforts of the missionaries wherever they went, the stranglehold of parliamentary consent for every little decision of the Anglican Church—even in distant climes—was becoming increasingly absurd. An experience that illustrates this impression came up at a Lausanne Theology and Education group meeting held at Willowbank, Bermuda, in 1978, where the theme was “Theology and Culture.” John Stott, the acclaimed twentieth-century evangelical leader in the Anglican Communion, recalls how at one point, some of the theologians from the developing world accused him of English imperialism for trying to impose what they called “Westminster parliamentary procedure” on Africans, Asians, and Latin Americans “whose cultural ways of discussion and reaching consensus are more leisurely and more emotional.”¹⁵

Anglicanism as a major aspect of Christianity in Africa is a story of religious and cultural encounters that soon metamorphosed into an inevitable contest of identity. Missionary Christianity was seen as a foreign religion in a foreign cultural garb that was a threat to the local context. As the implications of the encounter opened up unforeseen dimensions, issues of identity and contextualization (or enculturation) took center stage. This was sometimes expressed in the form of nationalistic movements for independence or the emergence of African independent churches that predated the advent of Pentecostalism on Africa's religious scene.

¹⁴ Peter Falk, *The Growth of the Church in Africa* (Bukuru, Plateau State, Nigeria: African Christian Textbooks, 1997), 165.

¹⁵ Timothy Dudley-Smith, *John Stott: A Global Ministry* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001), 225.

The intricacies of trying to transplant a national church such as the Church of England on foreign soil continued to loom large. Henry Venn, during his tenure as CMS secretary (1841–1877), sought to address this challenge by articulating into the missionary agenda what became popularized as the “three-selves” principle. In it he saw the missionary preaching of the gospel to the natives as only the beginning and the foreign missionary presence as the “scaffolding,” while he envisaged a time when the native church would have become mature enough to become self-propagating, self-financing, and self-governing; then the presence of the foreign missionary would become unnecessary, and he could move on to other regions. This he called the “euthanasia of the mission.”¹⁶ Of course, it was an ideal that met with unforeseen hurdles that threatened the very survival of the mission in places like the Niger Mission in West Africa. So, even though the first bishoprics overseas were all “created under acts of Parliament and by letters patent from the Crown,”¹⁷ it became increasingly clear that the Church of England could not exist in exactly the same way on foreign soil.

Essentially, Anglicanism thrives on its identity as an organization that blends the traditional and the Reformed traditions—the *via media*. It has been the middle way between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, making room for a diversity of Christian expressions that can hold together both extreme and flexible views. In seeking to maintain unity within considerable diversity, the traditional elasticity of Anglicanism has come under strain in recent years. The nature of compromise is being scrutinized by other parts of the Anglican Communion.

Of course, it arrived in English garb and was seen as both an evangelistic and civilizing mission. It had to justify its appearance either as a transplanting of the Anglican tradition of the Christian faith or as a supplanting of the African religious and cultural milieu—or both, depending on the particular situation. That the missionary heralds of Anglicanism were compatriots of the colonial imperialists exposed them to the charge of contradictory motives. The usually voluntary outlook of religion became confused with the mandatory face of imperialism.

For much of its existence, the most visible challenge of the Anglican Church in Africa—as, indeed, much of Christianity in modern Africa—is that of identity. The issues of identity have seen the Anglican Church in Africa

¹⁶ Wilbert Shenk, *Henry Venn: Missionary Statesman* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 119.

¹⁷ Stephen Neil, ed., *Twentieth Century Christianity: A Survey of Modern Religious Trends by Leading Churchmen* (London: Collins, 1961), 120.

pass through a kind of metamorphosis. It has struggled to be disentangled and weaned from the apron strings of the Church of England (viewed by some as a colonial church) to be a church in which God was reaching out to the unique challenges of the indigenous setting in the larger context of human depravity. Pobee writes, “The Anglican Church in Ghana need not express things in ways identical to the style of the Church of England.”¹⁸

While the church in Africa can rejoice in its appropriation of Isaiah’s prophecy that “the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone” (Isa 9:2 ESV), it has had to continually redefine just what “deep darkness” in the African religious experience must be discarded and query the authenticity and superiority of the new values that are to take their place. Even in the seminaries from which the leadership has come, the challenge of theological identity and relevance has been an ever-present enigma that is now being consciously addressed:

It has come as a rude shock to many African church leaders that the Western curriculum of our seminaries needs to be revised to address the burning issues in our experience. What would Christ do if he were in our setting? For quite a long time that curriculum was patterned after Western priorities without discernment or question. So we turned out ministers who did not know where the people were itching!¹⁹

Some specific aspects are worth highlighting here.

2. *Baptism and Music*

The Anglican Church’s practice of infant baptism finds affinity with African communal life, wherein young and old are included in religious expressions. Yet a point of conflict in the early years was the practice (by some missionaries) of discarding meaningful African names, which were considered pagan, for “Christian” names that sometimes were simply English names that had no meaning to the converts. So there were many converts bearing not only Bible (Jewish or Greek) names but also names like George, Franklin, Anne, Annabel, Robert, Jones, Macaulay, Dandeson, Davies, Francis, Justina, and Faustina. It is therefore common to find that most African Anglicans have middle names that enable them to retain their identity along with their surnames. Indeed, a good number of them use their middle names more than their foreign baptismal names. The protest of the famous Kenyan

¹⁸ Pobee, *Anglican Story*, 11.

¹⁹ Emmanuel Egbunu, “To Teach, Baptise, and Nurture New Believers (i),” in *Mission in the Twenty-First Century: Exploring the Five Marks of Global Mission*, ed. Andrew Walls and Cathy Ross (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2008), 25–36.

novelist who started out as James Ngugi—and formally changed his name to Ngugi wa Thiongo in 1977—is a case in point.

Similarly, the language and instruments of worship that expressed the depths of the native consciousness went through times of conflict. The preconversion language of worship for local deities in the local shrines had to be directed to the worship of the Christian God, and the instruments previously employed in native worship were now banned in the churches as being occult. Ngugi again speaks about this in relation to his resolve to strengthen his commitment to Kenyan culture by writing in Gikuyu or Swahili rather than English, which was a foreign language:

Language is a carrier of a people's culture; culture is a carrier of a people's values; values are the basis of a people's self-definition—the basis of their consciousness. And when you destroy a people's language, you are destroying that very important aspect of their heritage ... you are in fact destroying that which helps them to define themselves ... that which embodies their collective memory as a people.²⁰

Worship in native styles remains most natural for African Anglicans. The liturgy of the Book of Common Prayer and the well-composed literary expressions of the European hymns and the musical rhythms required an appreciable level of intellectual ability and a radical adjustment to these new forms. The Anglican Church came with classical anthems and church organs, and wedding attire like suits and wedding gowns, which made it a church for the elite and estranged the uneducated and rural converts. What passed for solemnity in the hymns composed in the West generally did not reach the same soul-stirring depths as when the same theological truths were put into indigenous composition and vibrantly performed with a jubilant spirit accompanied by typical African rhythms and dance. The grandeur of organ music remains mostly the expression of elite city congregations.

Confirmation services required a high level of literacy to grasp the teachings of the catechism. Often, converts memorized responses such as the decalogue, the creeds (especially the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds), or the Lord's Prayer in English or in the dominant language of that region (that could be as strange as English to some of the adherents). As some missionaries became sensitive to these needs, they spent time learning the languages and translating the Bible and worship resources into indigenous languages.

²⁰ Hansel Hdumbe Eyoh, "Language as Carrier of People's Culture: An Interview with Ngugi wa Thiongo," *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 14.3 (1985): 156–60.

The affinity between certain Old Testament practices and African culture, such as polygamy and taboos or abominations, have played a role in the African Anglican response to issues of polygamy, concubinage, adultery, homosexuality, and other sexual perversions. At different times, the Lambeth Conference²¹ has avoided dealing with these issues and instead left them to the pastoral discretion of the leaders in the context. On polygamy, for instance, as I have noted elsewhere,

A particularly radical, difficult and controversial demand of missionary Christianity was the idea of monogamy. ... [Polygamy] was a pillar of African religious, socio-economic worldview upon which so much was hinged. With many wives, a man had many children. It was indeed an indication of a man's stature in society in a manner akin to the Old Testament picture that the man who had his quiver full of children was like a happy and unashamed warrior who stood shoulder-high to face his enemies in the gate (Psalm 127:4–5) ... When missionary Christianity signaled monogamy as the biblical standard for their converts, those who fell short of the standard were barred from accessing the benefits of the sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. While not all the converts could measure up to this standard, those who were engaged as native agents were required to comply.²²

By the third Lambeth Conference held in 1888, the issue of polygamy among African Anglicans had received considerable attention as one requiring pastoral direction. At that conference, it was resolved:

That it is the opinion of this Conference that persons living in polygamy be not admitted to baptism, but may be accepted as candidates and kept under Christian instruction until such time as they shall be in a position to accept the law of Christ. That the wives of polygamists may, in the opinion of this Conference, be admitted in some cases to baptism, but that it must be left to the local authorities of the Church to decide under what circumstances they may be baptized.²³

Subsequent conferences (1958, Resolution 120; 1988, Resolution 26; 2008, Resolution 114) revisited the matter with considerable consistency of resolve, prohibiting polygamists from leadership positions, especially Holy Orders, and advising that the limitations placed on women should be remedied by the Church by advancing their status in every way possible, especially in the

²¹ The Lambeth Conference is the gathering of Anglican bishops from around the world approximately once in ten years (since 1867) to discuss matters of common concern. It is convened by the Archbishop of Canterbury and recommends, but does not enforce, its resolutions.

²² Emmanuel A. S. Egbunu, *Pathfinders for Christianity in Northern Nigeria, 1862–1940: Early CMS Activities in the Niger-Benue Confluence* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2021), 123.

²³ “Lambeth Conference Resolutions Archive,” Anglican Communion, 1888, <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/127722/1888.pdf>.

sphere of education. In many ways Anglicanism in Africa remains the face of lingering colonialism and Western culture. The vestments of the clergy—and those of the judiciary and academic institutions—are vestiges of the colonial encounter with which the Anglican Church remains identified.

III. *Mission: The Task before the Anglican Church in Africa*

The missionary endeavor must give birth to a church and a theology that is relevant in its response to the burning issues in society. Andrew Walls has observed,

Theology springs out of mission; its true origins lie not in the study or the library, but from the need to make Christian decisions—decisions about what to do, and about what to think. Theology is the attempt to think in a Christian way, to make Christian intellectual choices. Its subject matter, therefore, its agenda, is culturally conditioned, arising out of the actual life situations of active Christians.²⁴

Paternalism has assumed a larger dimension than necessary in view of increasing perspectives on enculturation. It is the posture adopted by some of the mission-sending provinces that the African converts must remain subservient to the missionaries and the church structures must always be dictated, vetted, or approved by the parent body, whether it is the Church of England or their accredited representatives. The idea of the “euthanasia of the mission,” which was not carried through during the missionary era, has persisted in other forms, sometimes inadvertently.

This is a two-sided issue. While the missionaries saw themselves as the trailblazers who set up the best standards in worship, ecclesiastical traditions (including vestments and attire for special occasions like weddings), Christian living, education, health care delivery, and agriculture, the indigenous Anglicans have felt sentenced to a lifetime of tutelage wherein their initiatives, however brilliant, can only be authenticated by the standards already established, without any room for innovation, independence, or enculturation. The best Christian books—including textbooks and commentaries—must only be those authored in the West; the best musical instruments must be only those imported from the West (e.g., pipe organs, guitars, other string and wind instruments, indeed even percussion instruments, as well as church bells). The implications of these are obvious and have been expressed in various ways. Seminaries and theological institutions have for

²⁴ Andrew Walls, “Afterword: Christian Missions in a Five-hundred-year Context,” in *Mission in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Walls and Ross, 203.

a long time leaned on opinions held by the West, even on issues that are more naturally within the African worldview, including issues that border on occultic, diabolical, or negative spiritual manifestations such as witchcraft and the supernatural. This is not to suggest, of course, the absence of these in the societies of the West. But they were not factored into the curriculum or the missionary evangelistic package. This mindset produced clergy who were ill-equipped to deal with whatever did not fit into the Western worldview and syncretists who, in seeking relevant approaches in secret, did not know where to place acceptable boundaries. That has not changed very much in some parts of Africa.

This intellectualization and Westernization of the faith by the Anglican Church tended to exclude the greater mass of converts who were not educated. Consequently, the emergence of the African Instituted Churches held greater appeal for this group of people, for whom the faith had to be incarnate within their cultural milieu. They needed the reassurance that one could be African and Christian, even if not Anglican. This yawning gap in relevance constrained the Anglican churches in Africa to put them forward for wider discussions at the Lambeth Conference and to admit more indigenous aspects to authentic Anglicanism. The goal has been a blending of the respectability of the Anglican Church and the supposed primitiveness of indigenous practices. Of course, the constant caution is to review the dimensions of enculturation that started to take shape in the 1960s. The Church has since sought indigenous leadership and liturgical renewal and relevance without sliding into apostasy or syncretism.

1. African Youth and Anglicanism

Among the greatest challenges for Anglicanism is the need to adequately carry the youth along. Foreign influences from the increasingly secular West and urbanization have introduced many social changes that have become attractive to the youth population, prompting them to want to break away from the vestiges of colonialism that older denominations like the Anglican Church represent. The appeal of the digital age has been exploited by the Pentecostal congregations and in some places has resulted in the exodus of youth from the Anglican Church. A new middle class is emerging that needs to come to terms with the digital generation, and in this regard the Anglican churches are not front-liners. The Anglican Church in Africa is struggling to avoid becoming the church of the past and the older generation by making necessary adjustments to their structure. This has given expression to such groups as the Anglican Youth Fellowship and the Anglican Children's Ministry in the Church of Nigeria.

2. *The Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion*

The Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion (EFAC), which had John Stott as a founding father, also spread to Africa. Provinces that had been founded through the efforts of the CMS—an Evangelical missionary society—and had been low Anglicans saw EFAC as a welcome Evangelical renewal that linked them with likeminded Anglicans around the world. Of course, its expression varied in different provinces (such as Nigeria, where it took a distinctly charismatic outlook). Even in the strange divisions of the South African situation, it showed positive potential when “in South Africa, the twin Evangelical Fellowships of the Church of England in South Africa and of the Church of the Province were both members of EFAC, suggesting a possible bridge towards some better future understanding.”²⁵ The lasting impact is in the EFAC bursary scheme, which became the model for the Langham Scholarship of later years, which provided for the training of Christian leaders and Evangelical scholars from the developing world. Other partnership initiatives, such as Sharing of Ministries Abroad (SOMA), fostered ministry partnerships that enhanced a greater sense of oneness beyond region or race.

3. *The Council of Anglican Provinces of Africa*

The Council of Anglican Provinces of Africa (CAPA) was established in 1979 in Chilema, Malawi, by the Anglican Primates of Africa with the aim of addressing the peculiar issues affecting the Church across the region. With a membership of fifteen Anglican provinces in twenty-six African countries, it had been the uniting platform for Anglican provinces until the controversies relating with the revisionist agenda of some provinces in the West brought a split that remains mostly unresolved. In its place the Global Anglican Future Conference has grown in prominence as the uniting body, though it is not limited to African Anglicans.

4. *The Global Anglican Future Conference*

The Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON) came up formally in 2008 as a fellowship of Anglicans who felt they could not go along with the departures from biblical Christianity, especially in the core area of biblical orthodoxy, and the revisionist agenda by some provinces in the West in areas such as human sexuality, marriage, and family life. The key verse of this movement has been “contending for the faith once delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). The first conference was held in Jerusalem in 2008 at about the

²⁵ Dudley-Smith, *Stott: A Global Ministry*, 152.

same time that the Lambeth Conference was to be held in England. Two more conferences have been held in Nairobi (2014) and again in Jerusalem (2018), with a greater resolve to walk apart from the compromised Anglican Communion. Among the leading provinces are the African Anglican provinces. The situation has caused much division and has remained unchanged.

Increasingly, the questions are being raised whether the relationship of the African Anglican—and indeed the African Christian—with the Christian God is a new discovery or a rediscovery of the unknown God that is latent in traditional religion. Is the African God one to be discarded or to be rediscovered? The thin line between this hidden God and the God revealed through the Christian faith must give way to a merger that welcomes the incarnate God into the African worldview.

Perhaps the unavoidable challenge facing the Anglican Church is the issue of the relevance of the Church to important social issues. Two major conferences have addressed these concerns, and the records articulate the issues succinctly. The first was in October 2004, when the first ever African Anglican Bishops Conference (AABC) was held in Lagos, Nigeria, bringing together over two hundred Anglican bishops with their wives. The theme was quite telling: “Africa Comes of Age: An Anglican Self-Evaluation.” The chairman of CAPA at the time, the Most Rev. Peter Akinola, told the World Press Conference just before the conference commenced,

After 160 years of existence, the Anglican church in Africa cannot claim to be an infant or an adolescent. It definitely has come of age and, of necessity, must be proactive in relating to the challenges that surrounded and start marshalling resources to deal with them. The church must develop collaborative efforts in dealing with various problems facing Africa and must be largely self-motivated and self-reliant in order to engender sustained progress. ... For the Anglican Church in Africa, it has been an eventful journey from the dawn of missionary encounter and subsequent blend of values as we sought to discern what should be smothered by that encounter and what should be allowed to survive. It has indeed been a discovery of Christian values and a rediscovery of our own place in God’s continual outreach to man.²⁶

He went on to identify some of these challenges as poverty in the midst of plenty; diseases such as HIV/AIDS and malaria; the need for self-reliance under God; partnership and sharing of resources in Africa; holistic gospel proclamation; Anglican identity and spirituality; theological education; enculturation; the relationship between church and state; matters of justice and peace, such as war, ethnic cleansing, youth, and women in Africa; and

²⁶ *Africa Comes of Age: An Anglican Self-Evaluation; The Official Report of the 1st African Anglican Bishops’ Conference* (Lagos, Nigeria: CSS Bookshops, 2004), 3, 9.

finally, the leadership crisis in church and state. As delegates from all over Africa and their friends from Southeast Asia and some mission organizations from the West (notably the CMS) launched into the week, these were the issues placed before them as the focus of the historic conference.

Six years later, in August 2010, the African Anglican Bishops came together again, this time at Entebbe, Uganda, to further discuss the mission of the Anglican Church in Africa. The theme shows a continuing emphasis carried over from the Lagos conference: “Securing Our Future: Unlocking Our Potentials” (Heb 12:1–2). By this time, the Most Rev. Ian Ernest, Archbishop of the Indian Ocean, had become the CAPA chairman. He articulated the focus of the conference in these words: “We will reflect in depth on the issues that hinder our witness to the world and to the continent.” The hosting prelate, the Most Rev. Henry Luke Orombi, went further with these reflections on the issues that had become quite major in the expression of Christianity by African Anglicans after about a century of Christian encounter:

A century later we still see huge gaps in the development of Africa. We as custodians of the faith handed down by our forefathers are tasked with the responsibility of identifying where we went wrong and what we can do to make the world a better place for the people of Africa.²⁷

Again, views from the other parts of the world, notably from the sitting Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, affirmed the legitimacy of the issues both for the African Anglican Bishops as leaders and for the rest of the world:

The clarity of Christian and especially Anglican witness against corruption in political leadership in so many contexts in this continent has been a great beacon for many elsewhere, and our prayer is that it will continue with the same force and integrity, always underpinned by this personal integrity in Christian leadership It has been said that this is going to be the African century of the Christian Church in terms of energy and growth and vision. ... And if the churches of Africa are going to be for this time a city set on a hill, how very important it will be for the health and growth of all God’s churches throughout the world that this witness continues at its best and highest.²⁸

²⁷ David W. Virtue, “All African Bishops Conference Meets in Entebbe, Uganda,” *Virtue Online*, August 27, 2010, <https://virtueonline.org/all-african-bishops-conference-meets-entebbe-uganda>.

²⁸ Rowan Williams, “Archbishop Rowan Williams Address to the All Africa Bishop Conference II,” Entebbe, Uganda, August 24, 2010, Church of Uganda, <https://churchofuganda.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/ARCHBISHOP-ROWAN-WILLIAMS-ADDRESS-TO-THE-ALL-AFRICA-BISHOPS-CONFERENCE-II.pdf>.

The Anglican Church in Africa must articulate its mission in a continent that needs to mobilize its potential for the good of its citizens. At the moment the biggest issues include discipleship, whereby the catechizing classes for baptism and confirmation can be related to the implications for godly living in church and society.

Conclusion

The import of all these is that theology must spring out of mission, wherein people must learn to make decisions that are influenced by a fresh understanding of the incarnate God in their situation who changes their lives and perspectives. Imported theology has much that is good but also many pitfalls. Again, Walls observes,

This means that the normal run of Western theology is not big enough for Africa, or for much of the rest of the non-Western world. It offers no guidance for some of the most crucial situations, because it has no questions related to those situations. The reason is that Western theology—whether of more liberal or more conservative tendency is irrelevant—is heavily acculturated. It is substantially an Enlightenment product, designed for an Enlightenment view of the universe.²⁹

The issues crying for attention among African Anglicans are many: The place of women and their status in the Christian faith is one timeless concern. Mothers' Union, founded by Mary Sumner in 1876 in England as a support group for family life and mothers in the Anglican world, has found much appeal in many provinces in Africa. This is its stated aim and purpose:

To demonstrate the Christian faith in action by the transformation of communities worldwide through the nurture of the family in its many forms. In order to carry out this aim, Mothers' Union's objectives are: To uphold Christ's teaching on the nature of marriage and promote its wider understanding.³⁰

In the Church of Nigeria, Mothers' Union is only open to women who are baptized, confirmed, and wedded in the church, and the wife of the bishop serves as president. Eligible women are required to go through special classes to be enrolled by the bishop. To accommodate those who have been married in other ways acceptable to the church, such as faithful traditional marriage, a counterpart organization, the Women's Guild, has also been introduced. Fidelity in marriage is a critical issue.

²⁹ Walls, "Afterword," 203.

³⁰ Mothers' Union, 2021, cf. "Mothers' Union," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mothers%27_Union.