

3 Mission, development, and ‘reverse mission’ in Europe-Africa religious relations

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Introduction

This chapter will review some of the religious connections between Europe and Africa, focusing on the Christian religion. It will first discuss the spread of Christianity from Europe to Africa in the colonial context; then explore the reconfiguration of Europe-Africa Christian relations in the post-colonial era and the concomitant rise in US-Africa Christian relations; and finally consider the contemporary phenomenon of ‘reverse mission,’ in which African missionaries seek to re-Christianize a secularized Europe. As this chapter will show, Christian interactions between Europe and Africa have played an important part in non-state external relations between these two continents for centuries and continue to do so in the present day.

The European mission to Africa

Religious entanglements have been part of Europe-Africa relations from the very early days. When Portuguese traders and explorers first began to venture into West Africa in the 15th century they came with a desire to trade, particularly for slaves, and also to convert the local people to Christianity. The first Catholic diocese in Africa was established in Sao Tomé in 1534 and its often non-resident bishops came to play an important role as ‘ecclesiastical entrepreneurs’ between Portugal and Africa (Hastings 1994: 73). The Portuguese focused on trying to convert local rulers, particularly the kings of the various West African kingdoms. In 1491 the head of the Kongo kingdom was baptized, and in the next few years several other African kings followed suit, such that Catholic kingdoms existed in some form in Kongo, Angola, Warri, and Mwene Mutapa for several centuries (Isichei 1995: 2). By the 17th century Sao Sebastien, the Kongo capital, looked much like a Christian city with a mixed-race Christian population, a large number of Christian aristocrats, a Jesuit college, and a functioning cathedral (Hastings 1994: 94).

As the 17th century progressed, Portuguese power went into decline while the Church in Rome was gaining energy. Thus Catholic missionary work in Africa transitioned away from the Portuguese and more to the hands of the Vatican. In

1622 Pope Gregory XV established the Church of Rome's own missionary department in the form of the *Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* (Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith) and in 1627 Pope Urban VIII established within it a training college for missionaries. The aim was "to regain the faithful in all those parts of the world where Protestantism had been established, and to bring the light of the true faith to heathen" (Guilday 1921: 480). Nonetheless, during the 17th and 18th centuries Catholic missionary work in Africa was fairly low key, with Capuchins and Jesuits from Italy, Spain, and France working where they could. However, for the most part Catholicism remained rather marginal to traditional beliefs for most people except a few rulers and elites. By the late 18th century, when the Catholic mission movement in Africa almost completely collapsed under the impact of the French revolution and Napoleonic wars, very few Africans had embraced Christianity (Pawliková-Vilhanová 2007: 250).

At this time other European countries were becoming more interested in Africa, while Protestant revival movements swept across Europe in what has since become known as the 'Great Awakening' (Bebbington 1989). This combination of events led to the formation of the modern missionary movement, as European Protestants became interested in evangelizing the world. The Baptist Missionary Society was founded in 1792, and many other Protestant missionary societies were founded in subsequent years in Britain, Germany, Belgium, Norway, Sweden, England, the Netherlands, and Switzerland (Catalano 2014: 112). Thus in the early 19th century European Protestant missionaries quickly spread around the world, and many of them headed to Africa.

In the mid-19th century Catholic missions to Africa were revived, largely by the French (Pawliková-Vilhanová 2007: 251). And in the latter part of the 19th century a new wave of evangelical Protestant missions emerged, coming out of a second European awakening. Known initially as the faith missions, and later as the evangelical missions, their efforts were based on a premillennial dispensationalist theology that Christ would return when everyone had had the opportunity to hear the gospel and that those who did not believe would be eternally lost. Thus for them, more so than for the mainline Protestant and Catholic missionaries, the conversion of the 'unreached peoples' became a matter of the utmost urgency (Fiedler 1994).

Throughout the 19th century and into the 20th century, there were then, broadly speaking, three different groups of predominantly European Protestant and Catholic missionaries in Africa, each with different approaches, networks, and theologies. And these European missionaries, in collaboration with their African assistants, ultimately had a huge impact on the religious lives of Africans. But initially their quest to re-work the African religious world was difficult and met with much resistance. By 1910, despite all their efforts, they had only succeeded in converting around 9% of the sub-Saharan African population (Hackett et al. 2011: 19). In the early 20th century, as the reality of European colonialism set in, rates of conversion began to increase as "Europeans came to be seen as symbols of power, and Christianity itself came to be seen as part of a larger order, comprising Western education, colonial administration, commerce and industry,

with which everyone had hence-forth to reckon” (Horton 1971: 86). Nonetheless, by 1950 only around 25% of the population of sub-Saharan Africa had become Christians (Pew Forum 2010).

The influence of the missionaries in Africa, of course, went far beyond religious change. In what follows, just some of their most important impacts on Europe-Africa relations will be discussed, namely their roles in calling for the abolition of slavery, in the provision of modern education, as early agents of ‘development,’ and as the suppliers of information about Africa to European audiences.

Nineteenth-century European missionaries were active in the abolitionist movement that sought to end slavery and the African slave trade. Shocked by what they saw in Africa and in the plantation colonies in the Americas, these Christian missionaries, and their associates back in Europe, were among the first to start advocating for the abolition of slavery (Ward 2000). They formed voluntary societies back in Europe to campaign against the slave trade and sent news of what they saw happening overseas in order to ignite popular sentiment. They were thus instrumental in the end of the transatlantic slave trade, and in the process they developed the rudimentary institutional forms of what we know today as ‘transnational activism’ (Stamatov 2010).

It was European missionaries, rather than colonial officials, who provided education and healthcare to Africans during the colonial era. Over 90% of Western education in sub-Saharan Africa during the colonial period was provided by missionaries (Gallego & Woodberry 2010). In this way missionaries were critical to the early spread of literacy and Western scientific thought on the continent. These efforts helped to create a modernizing African elite, and several graduates of this missionary education later went on to become the first generation of African nationalist leaders (Maxwell 2006: 401). The mission background of many of the first generation of African leaders added a significant Christian content to the development programmes they sought to implement after independence – Julius Nyerere’s socialist programme of Ujamaa (collectivization) in Tanzania owed much to his Catholicism, Kenneth Kaunda’s Presbyterian heritage shaped his brand of humanism for Zambia, and Canaan Banana, formerly a Methodist minister and then first president of Zimbabwe, developed an explicit theology of development (Maxwell 2006: 414).

By mid-century, Catholic and mainline Protestant missionaries had become increasingly involved in social matters and were working closely with colonial administrations to carry out what was coming to be called ‘development.’ Following the 1940 British Colonial Development and Welfare Act, which set out a vision and funding mechanism for the provision of welfare in the colonies, the classical missionaries in the British colonies shifted their activities from a narrow focus on education and health to work more broadly on ‘developmental’ activities, such as agriculture and welfare, in order to capitalize on the government grants that were made available by the Act (Hughes 2013: 824). Similarly, Catholic missionaries began to receive funding from the French government’s Fund for Economic and Social Development to carry out development activities in their African colonies (Foster 2019: 3). Thus during this period both Protestant and

Catholic organizations became important sub-state agents working for 'development' in Africa (Walker-Said 2015: 34). This was rather in contrast to the evangelical missionaries, who remained singularly focused on spreading the gospel to the 'unreached people' and only engaged in education and health care activities as a means to that end. This division was to become more significant in later years, as will be discussed below.

European missionaries also played an important role in providing information about Africa to Europeans. Much of what the average European person knew about Africa in the late 19th and early 20th centuries came from reading the bulletins and periodicals of the missionary societies, which during the Victorian era were the most widely circulated literature (Harries & Maxwell 2012: 1). Each missionary society maintained its own publishing arm and distributed a primary journal to keep their supporters informed. They also disseminated pamphlets and hosted meetings and exhibitions that were designed to stimulate involvement with missions. Missionary influence also extended into politics as mid-20th-century British missionaries encouraged their supporters to stay apprised of British involvement in Africa and urged them to express Christian opinions on colonial politics by writing to their member of Parliament or contacting the BBC (Hughes 2013: 827).

Protestant and Catholic missionaries were also responsible for much of the scientific knowledge produced about Africa prior to the establishment of university disciplines. Many considered themselves to be scientists and explorers as well as religious agents. They collected samples of exotic plants, specimens of rare animals, objects of indigenous material culture, and information on a wide range of subjects and sent them back to scholars, museums and botanical gardens in Europe (Harries & Maxwell 2012: 4). They made contributions to linguistics, anthropology, botany, ethnology, zoology, medicine, geography, cartography, hydrology, archaeology, and palaeontology. Many wrote books about the local cultures. Some, such as Livingstone, corresponded with many of the leading scientists of the day, including the director of Kew, the president of the Royal Geographical Society, and the director of the British Museum (Harries & Maxwell 2012: 12).¹

Thus in many and various ways, Christianity was one of the most important mediums of contact between Europeans and Africans during the colonial era. While Christianity of course cemented and legitimated European colonial domination, it also ameliorated some of its harshest elements. And while missionaries initially went with the sole aim of winning converts, they ultimately played a key social role through the provision of education, healthcare, and development services. This interplay between the secular and spiritual activities of Christian organizations in Africa would transform in important ways after the colonial era came to a close.

Shifting Christian relations in the post-colonial era

In the 1960s, when most African states gained independence, there was a significant re-organization of religious relations between Europe and Africa. Decolonization was a process that stretched far beyond the change of power from European

states to newly independent African states and also involved transformations in various power systems outside of the state apparatus, including religious systems (Foster 2019). After independence the churches had to be extricated from European colonial rule and Africanized, and European Christian organizations had to find a new rationale for their continuing presence in Africa. As this section will show, one result of this re-organization was that European Christian influence in Africa began to focus mainly on secular activities such as development. In contrast, as American Christian influence expanded in Africa during this period, it focused mainly on more strictly religious matters. These shifting geo-politics of religion in African external relations led to major changes in African Christianity and ultimately in African society and politics.

Decolonizing the church and Africanizing Christianity

In the waning years of colonialism and into the era of African independence, both the Catholic and the mainline Protestant churches began to re-think their role and position in Africa. African Christian leaders were calling for more power and autonomy, while European Christians sought to retain their influence and connections in Africa. Both churches sought to transnationalize, to include Africans into their leadership structures, but ultimately to retain control in Europe.

After World War II the Vatican tried to extricate Catholicism from the colonial order and create a church manned by indigenous clergy. The Second Vatican Council in the early 1960s grappled with the question of how the Catholic church should position itself regarding colonial and post-colonial Africa. It decided to stress that the Catholic Church was ‘the church of the poor’ and expressed a new approach of rooting Catholicism in traditional cultures and also of engaging in humanitarian social action or ‘development’ (Foster 2019).² It developed globalist ideas of a ‘supranational church’ that would be embedded in local cultures, with the pope as a ‘universal father’ and an increasing number of indigenous bishops taking over from Europeans in the former colonies. While some African Catholics tried to resist this universalist approach, in which transnational Catholic organizations would direct religious and humanitarian work in Africa, and pushed for more authority to sit with African religious leaders, for the most part power continued to reside in Rome. Even as growing numbers of African clergy took office, bishops continued to be appointed in Rome, most African bishops went to Rome to study, and a large and growing number of foreign Catholic missionaries continued to serve in Africa (Gifford 1994: 522; Walker-Said 2015: 36).

The mainline Protestants also started to set up transnational structures, but in contrast to the globalist approach of the Catholics, they took a more ‘internationalist’ approach. In 1948 they established the World Council of Churches (WCC), with headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, and between the 1940s and 1960s they established national Councils of Churches in most European and African countries, and also regional councils at the continental level. Throughout the 1960s discussions in the WCC centred on re-thinking of the role of European missionaries, acknowledging their complicity with colonial regimes, and formulating a new

vision for how the church would take a more humanitarian role in Africa in the post-colonial era. For many Africans this did not go far enough, and in the early 1970s some African Protestant leaders called for a moratorium on missionaries because they felt that foreign assistance was creating undesirable dependency and stifling African leadership. In 1974 the All Africa Conference of Churches issued a block on Western missionaries and money sent to Africa (Cabrita & Maxwell 2017: 6; Reese 2014). In the following years African and European Protestants re-thought their respective roles and vied for power and the control of resources and decisions. While the moratorium was never implemented to any significant extent, the debate led to a shift in European funding away from support for European missionaries to much more direct support for African churches and their staff. Thus in the following years there was a massive decline in the number of European mainline Protestant missionaries in Africa.

Evangelical Protestants negotiated the end of colonialism in a rather different way. Less concerned with earthly politics, they remained focused on the core task of evangelizing the world and saw the end of colonialism as evidence that “the holy spirit . . . was opening the world to Christianity in preparation for the second coming of Christ” (Robert 1990: 31). As evangelicalism grew rapidly in the United States, American evangelicals began to far outweigh those in Europe in terms of numbers, resources, and influence (Carpenter & Shenk 1990). When the World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF) was established in 1951, its headquarters were located in the United States, and for many decades its leadership was dominated by Americans. In contrast to the globalist vision of the Vatican or the internationalist approach of the WCC, the WEF established only loose structures and saw itself more as a fellowship of individual Christians and churches. WEF evangelicals did not initially follow the Catholics and mainline Protestants into greater involvement in humanitarian development activities but stayed resolutely focused on the task of converting the peoples of the world to Christianity. Major conferences on the topic of ‘world evangelization’ were held in Lausanne in 1974 and 1989, and the number of American evangelical missionaries in Africa began to rapidly increase.³

As well as the de-colonization the mainline churches, there was also a major process of the Africanization of Christianity as Africans took this European religion and began to shape it into a form which fit better with their spiritualities and social realities. The modern, dualistic worldview of mainstream Protestantism, in which the material and the spiritual spheres were seen as firmly separate, never made much sense to Africans whose traditional beliefs were based on a holistic ontology in which material problems and material success were considered to have spiritual causes. And many of the ascetic ideas within both Protestantism and Catholicism were at odds with traditional African values. Thus the European forms of Christianity that the missionaries brought were rarely fully embraced despite decades of mainstream Protestant and Catholic intervention (Meyer 2007: 13). When the colonial period came to an end in the 1960s, European missionaries thought that Africans had only embraced Christianity to a rather limited and ‘shallow’ extent and they worried that African churches were ‘immature.’ They feared that after independence Christianity would soon decline in Africa.

Instead, African Christianity grew rapidly once it was more in African hands. Africans took over the local leadership of the historic churches and African evangelists started to spread a more Africanized form of Christianity. At the same time there was also a massive growth of African Independent Churches (AICs), which sought to fuse Christianity with traditional African beliefs to make a syncretic religious form which fit better with African sensibilities (Anderson 2001; Barrett 1968; Sundkler 1961). While AICs had started to form in the early 20th century, thousands more were birthed across the continent after independence. As Christianity became increasingly 'Africanized' it spread more rapidly, and by 1970 almost 50% of sub-Saharan Africans had become Christian (Pew Forum 2010).

New alignments: religious organizations and development

Just as in the colonial period, when European religious organizations had gained access to African communities and legitimacy in the eyes of the state by aligning themselves with the interests of the colonial powers and providing useful services, so in the post-colonial period they continued this approach even as state power re-organized. In the aftermath of independence most European states sought to retain, or increase, their involvement and influence in Africa by giving development aid to the newly emerging African governments. The discourse of 'development' was fairly new at this time and was publicized widely in President Truman's speech in 1949, when he presented it as the rather more benign idea that the richer or 'developed' countries should help the poorer or 'under-developed' countries in the post-war and post-colonial era (Rist 1997: 70–79). Understood in these different ways, the idea of 'development' caught on massively in the post-colonial era and was popular with both European governments and much of their populace. Development NGOs formed and grew and European citizens gave to them generously in the hope of alleviating poverty in Africa and elsewhere in the 'developing world.' In 1960 the United Nations launched the Decade of Development, and many European governments set about putting new 'development infrastructures' into place. In the UK, for example, the Disasters Emergency Committee was established in 1963 as an umbrella body for collective fundraising appeals by the large NGOs responding to overseas disasters; in 1964 the government created a Ministry of Overseas Development; and in 1965 the Voluntary Committee on Overseas Aid and Development was set up to coordinate the work of the NGOs and to liaise with the new ministry. It was in this context that many European religious organizations decided to re-position themselves as providers of development services.

While Catholic and mainline Protestant churches in Africa had long provided education and healthcare services, they now chose to expand this type of work and to embrace the discourse of development. Throughout Africa many of these churches 'NGO-ized' and become major providers of health services, water, and rural livelihood interventions (Maxwell 2006: 412). Several of the mainline mission agencies also re-positioned themselves as providers of development services and began to downplay their religious nature in order to conform to mainstream

development paradigms (Ager & Ager 2011: 457; Salemink 2015: 51). In Europe, Catholic and mainline Protestant development NGOs blossomed alongside their secular peers. Caritas Internationalis was established in 1951 and is now a network of over 160 Catholic relief and development organizations focusing mainly on humanitarian aid. CIDSE (Coopération Internationale pour le Développement et la Solidarité) was founded in 1967 to coordinate the development priorities identified by the Second Vatican Council. Today it has 16 member organizations in Europe (and a further two in America), including Trocaire in Ireland, Misereor in Germany, Fastenopfer in Switzerland, CAFOD in the UK, Cordaid in the Netherlands, and Manos Unidas in Spain. Protestant development NGOs also flourished – Christian Aid was formed in the UK in 1942, Brot für die Welt was founded in Germany in 1959, Bread for All was established in Switzerland in 1961, and the Inter-Church Organization for Development Cooperation (ICCO) was formed in the Netherlands in 1964, among many others. Thus in the post-colonial era non-state Christian networks between Europe and Africa expanded and transformed, as large sums of money were transferred from European Christians to Africans mainly for the purposes of development rather than for evangelism.

European evangelicals were slower to embrace the discourse of development, and for several decades they continued to focus solely on evangelism. But as the field of 'development' began to grow, and as Catholic and mainline Protestant development NGOs became more prominent, they too decided to set up evangelical development NGOs. Tearfund was established in the UK in 1968, TEAR Netherlands was founded in 1973, Tearfund Belgium in 1979, and Tearfund Switzerland in 1984. Dorcas was established in the Netherlands in 1980, Signs of Hope was set up in Germany in 1983 followed by World Relief Germany in 1998, among many others. While the Catholic and mainline Protestant development NGOs focused entirely on development work, evangelical development NGOs existed somewhere between the development world and the missionary world and sought to combine development work with evangelism (Freeman 2019).

In the 1980s and 1990s, in the context of structural adjustment programs which forced the liberalization of African economies and the 'New Policy Agenda' in which there was a drastic reduction in foreign aid given directly to African governments as bilateral assistance, European governments started to channel increasing amounts of official aid through development NGOs, including the Catholic and mainline Protestant NGOs (Edwards & Hulme 1996: 961). African states suffered serious financial decline and had to roll back many of their welfare services, which now came to be carried out increasingly by churches and NGOs. During this period there was thus a further NGO-ization of the mainline churches as they increasingly received money from Europe to carry out what had previously been the state's welfare activities in Africa. Many mainline churches and National Christian Councils set up development wings and "effectively became development NGOs" (Gifford 1994: 521). European governments imposed strict rules that their funds could not be used for evangelism or by organizations that evangelized and for this reason rarely gave funds to evangelical churches or development NGOs.

Thus even though significant sums of money were flowing from European states and European Christians to African churches, these funds were earmarked almost exclusively for development work. As will be shown later, this approach to Christian relations between Europe and Africa was very different to the approach taken by American Christians, as they sought to expand US-Africa Christian relations in the context of a general US expansion of power and influence.

***The shifting geography of Christian influence in Africa:
from Europe to America***

During the 20th century Europe went through a major process of secularization, while Christianity became increasingly salient in the public and political life of America. These contrasting trends have impacted religious life in Africa through the changing nature of Europe-Africa and US-Africa Christian relations. Following the rise of the Evangelical Christian Right in the United States in the 1980s, there was a huge influx of evangelical missionaries and evangelical development NGOs into Africa (Gifford 1994: 517, 1998; Williams 2010). There have been major crusades in Africa by American evangelists such as Billy Graham and Oral Roberts, and more recently by Benny Hinn, Kenneth Hagin, and John Avanzini, and increased activities by para-church bodies such as Women's Aglow, the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International, and the Haggai Institute (Maxwell 2006: 408). By 2000 the US evangelical missionary project had an annual income of \$2 billion, and this had further increased to \$5.7 billion by 2008 (Hearn 2002: 40; Paras 2014: 443). Huge numbers of Americans travel overseas on 'short-term mission' trips and the number and size of American evangelical development NGOs has risen tremendously. As Robert Wuthnow has argued, American influence over global Christianity has grown massively since the 1980s as American churches have ridden the tidal wave of globalization to connect with the church around the world to an unprecedented degree (Wuthnow 2009).

This surge of American evangelical influence in Africa has been largely responsible for a major change in African Christianity since the 1980s, namely the phenomenal growth in Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity across the continent. Pentecostalism is now broadly believed to be the fastest growing Christian movement today (Anderson 2004: 1; Burgess & van der Maas 2002; Hollenweger 1997). It is an exuberant and spirit-filled form of Christianity which fits well with both African traditional ontologies and the realities of life in neoliberal times.⁴ Across Africa, young people have left the mainline Protestant and Catholic churches in droves to join these new churches. African elites have formed their own neo-Pentecostal churches, such as Mensa Otabil's International Central Gospel Church, founded in Ghana in 1984, and David Oyedepo's Living Faith Church Worldwide (also known as Winners Chapel), founded in Nigeria in 1983, and several mainline churches have 'Pentecostalized' in order to try to retain their members. Pentecostal Christianity has been creatively marketed across the continent by appropriating contemporary marketing methodologies that combine advertising with entertainment. African Pentecostals have harnessed new media

and technologies and combined them with the logic of consumer advertising to spread the word far and wide, through music, film, and teleserials, by tape cassette, DVD, online chat forums, and Facebook (Hackett 1998; Pype 2009). The resultant growth in this form of Christianity has been phenomenal. It is estimated that since 1980 some 126 million Africans have joined Pentecostal and charismatic churches, and by 2000 around 25% of all African Christians were Pentecostals and charismatics (Barrett & Johnson 2001: 287).

As the Evangelical Christian Right increased its influence on US politics during the 1990s, the US government began to give more funds to faith-based organizations to carry out development work. In 2001 this approach was formalized in the Faith Based and Community Initiatives Act, which removed many of the previous barriers and facilitated a far wider range of faith-based organizations to apply for funding from the US government for overseas relief and development work even if they were actively involved in evangelism activities (Clarke 2007: 82; Deacon & Tomalin 2015: 74).⁵ As a result, the proportion of US government aid going to American faith-based NGOs almost doubled between 2001 and 2005, from 10.5% to almost 20%, and increased to an annual sum of around \$1.5 billion (Lloyd 2007: 31; Occhipinti 2015: 332). Much of this funding went to evangelical development NGOs, many of whom combined development with evangelism.

In 2005 President Bush established the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) which committed \$15 billion in humanitarian aid over five years to address the international AIDS epidemic in select countries in sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere. Under the influence of the Evangelical Right, when Congress authorized PEPFAR it placed three conditions on the distribution of funds – at least one-third of all prevention funds should be spent on the promotion of sexual abstinence before marriage; faith-based organizations should be exempted from participating in prevention strategies which they found morally objectionable; and funding should not be given to any organization that refused to publicly state its opposition to prostitution and sex trafficking. These conditions have meant that many traditional, secular organizations have been excluded from receiving PEPFAR funds and has instead led to a situation in which US evangelical organizations and African Pentecostal and charismatic churches have been the principle beneficiaries of this funding windfall (Cooper 2014: 55). This in turn has led to increasing state support for Pentecostal and charismatic churches from African political leaders and the development of a “politico-theological rationale of the state,” which increasingly blurs the separation of church and state in many African countries (ibid: 68). Thus the mutually reinforcing relationship between the US Evangelical Right and African Pentecostalism, and the role of US development funding in underwriting this relationship, has been noted by several scholars (Cooper 2014: 71).

Many European governments and the EU itself have recently started to re-consider the role of religion in development and to fund research into the possibility of partnering more closely with faith-based organizations. In 2005 the Netherlands Ministry for Foreign Affairs created a ‘knowledge forum for religions and development policies’ in order to engage religious leaders and faith-based

organizations in the discussion of development policies. In 2006 the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) funded a £3.5 million research project about 'Religions and Development' that was carried out by scholars at the University of Birmingham. In subsequent years further research studies were initiated by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Swiss Development Cooperation, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, and others. The EU has also expressed cautious interest in partnering more closely with religious institutions in development interventions, and between 2007 and 2016 it gave some €150 million to faith-based development NGOs, around 9% of the total budget for the Thematic Programme on Civil Society Organisations and Local Authorities (Perchoc 2017: 9, 11)

However, in contrast to the US approach, the EU's support of faith-based development NGOs has been strictly restricted to development activities only. The EU and the European governments continue to place rigorous barriers between development work and evangelistic activities. For example, the UK Department of International Development's Civil Society Challenge Fund clearly states that projects containing any element of proselytizing or evangelizing will not be considered and its Global Poverty Action Fund will not consider applications from organizations "actively involved in proselytising" (Bradbury 2013: 423). Thus the European approach to the intersection of religion and development has been rather different from that of the United States. While the United States appears to seek to instrumentalize development activities for the purpose of spreading a particular type of religion, the European states and the EU are primarily interested in instrumentalizing religious networks for the purpose of development.⁶

As a result of these dynamics, and others, Christianity has continued to spread in Africa in the second half of the 20th century and into the 21st century. By 2015, over 63% of sub-Saharan Africans were Christian (Hackett et al. 2011: 19; Pew Forum 2010). Thus over the past hundred years there has been a quite remarkable shift in religious identity and practice in Africa. Two-thirds of sub-Saharan African countries (34 of 51) now have a Christian majority.⁷ While the existence of a robust and thriving African Christianity is surely one of the most tangible legacies of European expansion into Africa, its further growth and shift towards Pentecostal and charismatic forms owes rather more to the shift in the bulk of African Christian external relations from Europe towards the United States and the concomitant secularization of Europe-Africa Christian relations as they have turned to focus on development.

Reverse mission

The 20th-century process of secularization in Europe has been called 'the exceptional case,' as it is the only world region where religion is in decline (Davie 2002). The proportion of Europeans who identify as Christian has dropped from 95% in 1910 to 76% in 2010 (Hackett et al. 2011), and falling rates of church membership and attendance indicate a far greater decline. Over this same period Christianity has grown and flourished elsewhere, particularly in Africa and the

Americas, leading to a major southwards shift in the centre of Christianity. While Europe was once the home and heartland of Christianity, the centre of Catholicism has now numerically shifted from Europe to the Americas, and the centre of Protestantism has shifted from Europe to Africa (Hackett et al. 2011).⁸ Thus the global map of Christianity, and the respective places of Europe and Africa in it, has changed dramatically over the past hundred years.

With European Christianity in decline and African Christianity flourishing, some Christians in both Europe and Africa have begun to believe that the time has come for African missionaries to re-evangelize Europe, thus turning the traditional religious relationship between Europe and Africa on its head. This has led to a new discourse of 'reverse mission,' understood as the sending of missionaries to Europe and North America by churches and Christians from the non-Western world, particularly Africa, Asia and Latin American, which were at the receiving end of Catholic and Protestant missions as mission fields from the 16th to the 20th century (Ojo 2007: 380).

Leaders of many European Catholic and mainline Protestant denominations have started to look to Africa for committed and inspiring church leaders. African Catholic priests come to France 'in droves' to fill empty pulpits, and many Catholic churches in Belgium have African clergy and an African choir (Foster 2019: 20; Maxwell 2017: 48). In the UK, the current archbishop of York was born in Uganda and there are numerous Ugandan priests serving in the Church of Wales. In Germany there are many Tanzanian clergy serving in the Lutheran church (Freston 2010).

Mainline Protestant churches in the UK also regularly invite music groups, performers, and speakers from Africa to tour the UK with special church programs aimed at enlivening Christian communities (Catto 2012a). And some of the historic European mission agencies, such as the Anglican Church Mission Society (CMS), have also started to bring African missionaries to Europe in an attempt to 'challenge and encourage' British Christians (Clark 2000: 337). Many of these African missionaries are placed in deprived working-class communities or minister to the African diaspora living in the UK (Catto 2012b).

But the most dramatic form of reverse mission has been the self-conscious attempt by African evangelicals and Pentecostals to send missionaries to re-evangelize Europe. In many cases such missionary work is started by Africans who migrated to Europe for other reasons and then decided to start a church or to re-conceptualize themselves as 'missionaries' rather than 'migrants,' while in other cases large churches in Africa actively devise missionary strategies and fund and send their own missionaries to Europe for the sole purpose of evangelism.

To take just one example, the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) is a large Pentecostal church founded in Nigeria in 1952. Since then it has sought to expand around the world and now has branches in some 140 countries. It has close to 700 churches in over 40 European countries. It opened its first church in the UK in 1988 and now counts some 85,000 members across the country (Burgess 2011: 431). Its Nigerian pastors see themselves as carrying out 'reverse mission'

back to the UK. For example, Burgess (2011: 435) quotes a Nigerian pastor from the RCCG in Birmingham:

The story we heard was that Britain came to Africa to evangelise the place, brought the gospel, and whoever has sown deserves the right to reap. And because Britain has done this in the past, we are now looking at Britain as a place which itself needs to be evangelised. So we have seen that so many people no longer go to church in Britain. It is therefore the plan of the Redeemed Christian Church of God to do as much as they can to evangelise the land. And what they have given to us in the past, bring it back to them.

Nonetheless, despite their desire to evangelize indigenous Europeans, the RCCG and other African churches like them which are spreading across the continent, minister overwhelmingly to the African diaspora living in Europe. Similar dynamics are found in the UK, Germany (Währisch-Oblau 2008), the Netherlands (Van der Laan 2006), Italy (Brack 2017), Portugal (Formenti 2018), and elsewhere. At present, the cultural differences, resource imbalances and racial (or racist) issues make African evangelism of Europeans extremely difficult. In a mirroring of the European missionary experience, African missionaries in Europe are beginning to realize that they cannot just export African religious styles but will need to learn about the local culture and values as they try to construct more culturally appropriate forms of evangelism. While for the time being their efforts have borne little fruit, the long-term results still remain to be seen.

Conclusion

In 1910, about two-thirds of the world's Christians lived in Europe, where the bulk of Christians had been for a millennium. Today, in stark contrast, only about a quarter of all Christians are found in Europe, with a further quarter now found in Africa (Johnson & Ross 2009; Hackett et al. 2011). Europeans have spread Christianity to Africa, and indeed around the globe, and yet have increasingly secularized at home. Americans have witnessed the growth of the Evangelical Right at home and have then exported this form of Christianity to Africa and elsewhere. And most recently, Africans have recently started to try to export this form of Christianity (back) into Europe. Thus perhaps the story of Christian interactions between Europe and Africa is not simply one of mission followed by 'reverse mission' as much contemporary discourse would suggest, but rather one of the spread of Christianity from Europe to Africa, its Africanization by Africans and then its charismatization under the influence of the American Evangelical Right while Europe-African Christian relations secularized and focused on development, and finally the attempted export of this hybrid American-African form of Christianity into Europe. As African countries further develop and as European countries face years of austerity, it remains to be seen how Europe-Africa Christian relations will develop in the future.

Notes

- 1 The flow of people between Europe and Africa was not entirely one-way during this period. A small number of the African, largely Christian, elite also spent time in Europe during the colonial period, as students, politicians, interpreters, etc. Some of them even trained as missionaries and returned to Africa in that capacity (Grillo & Mazzucato 2008: 178).
- 2 Foster has recently argued that the pope's thinking during Vatican II was influenced by some of the African intellectuals residing in France in the 1940s and 50s who formed the anti-colonial Negritude movement, which sought to establish a pan-African black consciousness. She argues that there was an avowedly Catholic strand of negritude, composed of African Catholic intellectuals and priests led by Alioune Diop, who called for a truly universal Catholicism that embraced both black people and African cultures, and that their ideas were heard by the pope and taken on board during Vatican II (see Foster 2019).
- 3 During this time Latin American evangelical theologians such as René Padilla and Samuel Escobar began to develop a new theology of mission which sought to integrate both evangelism and socio-political involvement on behalf of the poor and oppressed into a holistic version which they called 'mision integral' or integral mission. They sought to promote this approach at international evangelical conferences, with limited success. Their ideas were however picked up and further developed by some evangelical development NGOs (Carpenter 2014: 274; Clawson 2012: 792; Freeman 2018).
- 4 A full discussion of the appeal of Pentecostalism to contemporary Africans is beyond the scope of this chapter (but see Freeman 2012). However, it is interesting to note that much of its attraction lies in the way in which it relates to traditional African beliefs. In contrast to the dualistic worldview and ascetic ideas of mainstream Protestantism, Pentecostalism incorporates a holistic ontology that fits well with the lived experience of many Africans and accords with most traditional African ontologies (Meyer 2007: 13). While the historic missionary churches brought European styles of Christianity and rejected traditional African religion, and African Independent Churches combined Christian and African religious elements in syncretic mixtures, Pentecostal and charismatic churches offer a form of Christianity which acknowledges the validity of traditional African beliefs – in witches, spirits, ancestors – while at the same time, providing a way to break free from them (Freeman 2017; Meyer 2004; Robbins 2004). It also offers a focus on personal transformation and the instillation of behaviours well-suited to surviving in the neoliberal economy (Freeman 2012, 2015).
- 5 In contrast to other governments, the United States allows its grantees to carry out evangelistic activities as long as they are separated in time and space from the USAID funded elements (Bradbury 2013: 423).
- 6 In recent years the EU has also become more interested in religion in its external relations in the areas of freedom of religion and inter-religious dialogue. In 2013 the EU published guidelines to mainstream its approach to the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) and since then it has monitored the FoRB situation in all countries where it has a delegation. It also conducts political dialogue on this issue with local authorities in this field and during bilateral visits and offers FoRB training to other government officials and religious literacy training for EU delegations and diplomats from member states (Perchoc 2017: 6). It has also become concerned about increasing religious conflict in the world, particularly in Africa, where in the coming years there is expected to be a rapid growth in both the number of Christians and the number of Muslims. It has therefore also started to provide training and funding for the promotion of inter-religious dialogue. For example, it currently funds the Central African Republic Interfaith Platform, in which Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim religious leaders work for peace (Perchoc 2017).
- 7 Across the continent as a whole there are roughly similar numbers of Catholics and Protestants, while in sub-Saharan Africa the majority of Christians are Protestant (57%),

Proof

- with significant minorities of Catholics (34%) and Orthodox (8%) (Johnson & Ross 2009; Hackett et al. 2011; Maxwell 2006: 401). While there are Catholics and Protestants in most African countries, the highest proportion of Catholics are found in central and west Africa, while Protestants predominate in eastern and southern Africa.
- 8 Only 24% of the world's Catholics live in Europe, while 48% live in the Americas. And only 17% of the world's Protestants live in Europe, while 37% live in Africa (Hackett et al. 2011: 25, 29). Of Europe's Christians, 46% are Catholic and only 18% are Protestant (with most of the rest being Orthodox) (Hackett et al. 2011: 48). Nonetheless, the bulk of the financial resources associated with churches and Christian organizations has remained in the wealthy countries of Europe and North America (Wuthnow 2009).

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