The University of Wisconsin
Department of History
Fall 1994

History 573
Wednesdays, 2:00-4:00
2221 Humanities
office hours: 4-5 Tues & Thurs

Undergraduate Seminar

African Christianity

One of the most significant influences on Africa during the colonial period was that of Christianity, introduced by Christian missionaries who sought to convert Africans to their particular versions of the faith. But why should Africans want to adopt a foreign faith? As soon became apparent, they had their own reasons and adapted Christianity to their own cultural needs. One of the most dynamic examples of this was the creation of Independent Christian Churches by Africans seeking to establish churches free from white domination or to establish their own interpretations of Christianity. In some, established congregations simply split from their mission forbearers; in others, African prophets, inspired by the world of God and their own needs, founded their own churches. The seminar will explore the manifold ways Africans appropriated Christianity and interpreted it within their own cultural contexts to produce a distinctive African Christianity.

Requirements: The seminar will meet for two hours once a week to explore readings and interpretations in a seminar format. Students will be expected to read the assigned readings and prepare weekly journal entries on the reading before class, to participate actively in class discussions, to write a research paper on a topic of their choice, and to present a critique of a fellow student's paper. There will be no final examination.

Journal: a weekly intellectual diary commenting on the reading and your own developing thoughts about the subject. You should include a short (paragraph or two) summary of the main argument of the reading together with your own critique, responses, and thoughts. Feel free to experiment to find a format that works best for you. While I will collect the journals weekly, comment on them, and give you credit for submission, they will not be graded formally.

Research Paper: you will be expected to write a major research paper on a topic of your own choice in consultation with me. This will be presented initially in class. For class presentation, you must provide a copy of your paper for each member of the class (and two for me) by Monday noon before you are scheduled to present. After presenting, you will rewrite your paper for final submission at the end of the term.

Critique: Each student will also present a critique of another student's paper. You should write your critique and bring two copies to class, one for the author and one for me.

Readings: Required readings are available from the University Bookstore, in a course packet (cp) available from the Humanities Copy Center (Room 1650), or on Reserve in the Helen C. White Library. (A copy of the course packet is also available on Reserve.) Recommended readings are in the stacks of the College and Memorial libraries. The following are available at the University Bookstore:

David Chidester, Religions of South Africa
Chinua Achebe, Things Fall Apart
David Lan, Guns and Rain
**Class Schedule**

**9/7**  
**African Religious Thought**

*Who are the *egwugwu* and what do they represent? What do they tell us about African religious thought?*

C. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*  
D. Chidester, *Religions of South Africa*, 1-34.

**recommended**  
C. Geertz, 'Religion as a Cultural System' in his *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 87-125.

**9/14**  
**Religious Responses to Colonialism: millenarianism & anti-witchcraft movements**

*Why did people search for sources of evil within their own societies when confronted with colonial conquest and rule?*

M. Marwick(ed.), *Witchcraft & Sorcery*, 164-198 (arts. by Richard, Marwick, Willis) (cp)

**recommended**  
J. Fernandez, *Bwiti*.

**9/21**  
**Religious Responses to Colonialism: spirit mediums and guerillas**

*Why did the spirits of the ancestors side with the guerillas against their descendants, the chiefs, during Zimbabwe's war of liberation?*

D. Lan, *Guns and Rain* (you may find Chaps 5-6 hard going & may skim them)

**recommended**  
T. Ranger, *Peasant Consciousness & Guerilla War in Zimbabwe*  
N. Kriger, *Zimbabwe's Guerilla War*

**9/28**  
**Missionaries and Colonial Christianity**

*What were the main features of colonial Christianity? What were the relationships between Christianity & European culture? Christianity & colonial rule?*

D. Sandgren, *Christianity & the Kikuyu*, 9-29 (Reserve).

**recommended**  
R. Gray, *Black Christians & White Missionaries*  
R. Strayer, *Making of Mission Communities in East Africa*  
J. & J. Comaroff, *Revelation & Revolution*  
L. Sanneh, *West African Christianity*  
T. Beidelman, *Colonial Evangelism*
10/5 Conversion

*Why did Africans convert to Christianity? How did they do so?*

R. Baum, 'The Emergence of a Diola Christianity,' *Africa*, 60(1990), 370-398. (cp)
J. Brierley & T. Spear, 'Mutesa, the Missionaries, and Christian Conversion in Buganda,' *IJAH*, 21(1988), 601-618. (cp)
D. Sandgren, *Christianity & the Kikuyu*, 31-98 (Reserve).

**recommended**
L. Sanneh, *Translating the Message*
J. Taylor, *Growth of the Church in Buganda*

10/12 Struggles for Control: Ethiopians and Millenarians

*Why were political struggles often couched in Christian terms? What was really at stake?*


**recommended**
B. Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*
H. Turner, *African Independent Church*
J. Webster, *African Churches among the Yoruba*
G. Shepperson & T. Price, *Independent African*
N. Long, *Social Change and the Individual*
W. Johnson, *Worship and Freedom*

10/19 Quest for an African Christianity: Zionists

*What are the roles of prophets & prophecy, spirits, and healing in Zionist churches?*


**recommended**
D. Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa*
J. Peel, 'Syncretism and Religious Change,' *CSSH*, 10(1968), 121-141.
M. Field, *Search for Security*
J. Peel, *Aladura*
S. Walker, *Religious Revolution of the Ivory Coast*
F. Welbourn & B. Ogot, *A Place to Feel at Home*
F. Welbourn, *East African Rebels*
E. Anderson, *Messiantic Popular Movements in the Lower Congo*
M. Martin, *Kimbangu: An African Prophet and his Church*
W. MacGaffey, *Modern Kongo Prophets*
M. Daneel, *Zionism and Faith Healing in Rhodesia & Independent Churches in Rhodesia*
B. Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa and Zulu Zion*
J. Comaroff, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance*
10/26 Women and Christianity

Account for the appeal of mission Christianity and independent churches for women.

Lewis, Ecstatic Religion, 66-126. (Reserve)
Review Sandgren, Fields, & Baeta re. role of women

Paper topics & preliminary bibliography -- due in class.

11/2 Dualism and Interdependence

Why were mission Christians likely to continue consulting 'traditional' healers and mediums, while Zionists were less likely to do so?

W. MacGaffey, Religion and Society in Central Africa, 189-251 (Reserve).

recommended
N. Sithole, Obed Mutezo: The Mudzimu-Christian-Nationalist

11/9 Nationalism and Black Theology

What is the Christian contribution to the development of nationalist thought in Africa? How does Black Theology/Consciousnes differ from liberal nationalism?

D. Chidester, Religions of South Africa, 222-261.
S. Biko, I Write What I Like, 19-60, 87-98. (cp)

recommended
J. Lonsdale, 'Some Origins of Nationalism in East Africa,' JAH, 9(1968), 119-146.
R. Rotberg, The Rise of Nationalism in Central Africa
J. Cone, A Black Theology of Liberation.
B. Moore, Black Theology.
G. Gerhart, Black Power in South Africa.

11/16 paper presentations
11/23 paper presentations (We may want to reschedule this class.)
11/30 paper presentations
12/7 paper presentations
12/14 final submission of research papers