Historians once studied Christianity as a tool of colonial oppression and alienation, or as a platform for African resistance and cultural appropriation. Recently, the conversion of Africans and the translation of the Bible in the vernacular have been explored as mutually transformative processes, impacting European missionaries and the Church at large. Beyond the significance of ritual and material culture in the life of the converts, historians have learned to approach African Christianity as a genuine spiritual experience, and a site where important aspects of modern African intellectual history can be investigated. In the last twenty years, the exuberant spread of Pentecostal Churches and Born-Again Christianity in Africa has captured the scholarly imagination, and led scholars to engage in new debates on the spiritual imagination of modern Africans.

The seminar will help students to read seminal studies on African Christianity, contextualize the vast and ever-expanding literature on the topic, and discern the major debates that occur among scholars. After several weeks of reading, students will conduct research and write a paper on a topic of their choice.

Requirements and Grading

1) Leading the discussion for one session (you can choose to do this with another seminar member). This involves being able to contextualize the required readings by looking at some of the recommended readings for that week (listed under “also”).

2) Five-page critique (week 3 to 8): For the week you lead discussion, you will submit a five-page critical analysis of the week’s reading. Rather than summarizing the reading, your paper should engage it by raising critical questions about the methods, theories, and conclusions put forward by their authors. In short, you should critically assess and analyze the contents of the book, discuss their significance, and the contribution the book makes to the history of Christianity in Africa. You are encouraged in their papers to build upon the readings from previous weeks and the supplementary readings listed under “also”. A hard copy of the paper will be due in class on the day of discussion. Electronic copies of your critique should be distributed to other seminar members by Tuesday noon preceding the relevant class.

3) Writing a 20-30 page research paper on a select topic chosen in consultation with me. A preliminary outline and bibliography for your research paper is due in class on week 6.

Grading will be based on your participation to the discussions, your work as a session leader, your five-page critique of a week’s reading, and your final paper.

Research

• I recommend that you start your research as early as possible, as some archives and sources, available though interlibrary loan, can take a while to arrive.

• Memorial Library owns microfilms of the huge missionary archives of the CMS (Church Missionary Society). This is a key source for British colonies in East, Central and West Africa. There are also archives in French on Congo-DRC and French Africa in the Department of Special Collections: look at the Memorial Library website, and search for “Miscellaneous Collections.” Several other resources exist (for instance, the American Historical Society holds the diaries of American missionary William Walker who served in Gabon at the end of the 19th century).

• Browsing through the Memorial Library bookshelves in the DT section, by region or country, will yield many published memoirs, books, reports, and fictions (missionary novels: a favorite genre among white ministers) dating from the 19th century. Look also for African writers.

• Look also at the Center for Research Libraries, which houses the Cooperative Africana Microform Project (CAMP): http://www.crl.edu/area-studies/camp.

• You can also search around the catalog for the Herskovits Library at Northwestern, particularly the vertical files collection: http://www.library.northwestern.edu/libraries-collections/evanston-campus/africana-collection.

• I’ll bring a copy of the Africana Archival Materials, a catalog edited by David Henige in the mid-1980s that describes various resources in the US, in Europe and in Africa. David Henige can help you in locating material (dhenige@library.wisc.edu).
• You may be able to find private collections located in US cities (particularly in Kansas) if you look for specific churches or missionary congregations.


![Lady Missionaries in Uganda (CMS), n. d.](image)

**SCHEDULE**

**Week 1. 01/20** Conversion


Also: Horton, R. “African Conversion,” *Africa* 41-2, 1971
Sanneh, L. *Translating the Message* (1989)*

Week 2. 01/27. **Mission Life**

Mongo Beti, *The Poor Christ of Bomba* (1956)

Also: Harries, P. *Butterflies and Barbarians* (2007)*
Martin, P. *Catholic Women in Catholic Brazzaville* (2009)*

Week 3. 02/XX. **Material And Spiritual Engagements**

Sandra Greene *Sacred Sites and the Colonial Encounter* (2002)

Also: White, L. “Roast Mutton Captivity,” in *Speaking With Vampires* (2000)*

Week 4. 02/10. **New Perspectives on African Christianity**


Critique of the Comaroffs by J. D. Y. Peel: “For Who Hath Despised the Day of Small Things?” *Comparative Studies of Society and History*, 1995

Week 5. 02/17. **Independent Churches and Healing Movements**


Also: Fields, K. *Revival and Rebellion in Central Africa* (1985)*
Lan, D. *Guns and Rain* (1985)*

Week 6. 02/24. **Literacy, Translation and Vernacularization**

Derek Peterson, *Creative Writing* (2004)

***Preliminary outline and bibliography due in class***

Sandgren, D. *Christianity and the Gikuyu* (1989)*
Week 7. 03/03.  The Devil


Longman, T. *Christianity and Genocide in Rwanda* (2010)*


Week 8. 03/10.  Pentecostal Converts as Modern Subjects and Citizens


Also: Gifford, P. *Christianity, Politics, and Public Life in Kenya* (2009)


Week 9. 03/17.  Spring Break

Week 10. 03/24  No meeting- work on your research

Week 11. 03/31  --

Week 12. 04/07  --

Week 13. 04/14  --

Week 14. 04/21  Presentations in Class

Week 15. 04/28  Presentations in Class

Week 16. 05/05  Work on Paper

***Final Paper (two copies, please) due on Friday May 6 by 12:00 pm***

[students passing prelims can arrange for a later deadline]
Journals

Journal of Religion in Africa
Journal of Religious History
Journal of Religion and Health
The Journal of Religion
Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion
Cahiers d’études africaines
African Affairs
Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History

Selected Readings on 19th -21st Centuries

Anderson, A. An Introduction to Pentecostalism (2004)
Bockie, S. Death and the Invisible Powers (1993) [superb on Kongo beliefs]
Ellis, S. and ter Haar, G. Worlds of Power (2004) [mostly on witchcraft]
Elphick and Davenport, Christianity in South Africa (1997)
Fabian, J. Jaama: A Charismatic Movement in Katanga (1971)
Gray, R. Black Christians and White Missionaries (1990)
Magaziner, D. The Law and the Prophets (2010)
Maxwell, D. Christians and Chiefs in Zimbabwe (1999)
Mbembe, A. Afriques indociles (1988) [on Xty as resistance to colonialism]
MacGaffey, W. Modern Kongo Prophets (1983)
Peires, J. The Dead Will Arise (1989)*
Ranger, T. Peasant Consciousness in Guerilla War in Zimbabwe (1985)
Schoeffeleers, M. “Christ as the Medicine Man and the Medicine Man as Christ,” Man and Life (1982)
Sundkler, B. Bantu Prophets in South Africa (1961)
Sundkler, B. Zulu Zion (1976)
Taussig, M. The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America (1980) [crucial]
Tonda, J. La guérison divine en Afrique Centrale (2002) [divine healing in Congo and Gabon]

**Early Christianity**

Thornton, J. *The Kongoese St Anthony* (1995)