

The University of Wisconsin  
Department of History  
Fall 1994

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

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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 Schedule9/7 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*

- R. Horton, 'African Trad. Thought & Western Science,' Africa, 37(1967), 50-71, 155-87.  
R. Horton, 'The Kalabari World View,' Africa, 32(1962), 197-220.  
B. Ray, African Religions.  
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?*

- J. Peires, 'The Central Beliefs of the Xhosa Cattle-Killing,' JAH, 28(1987), 43-63. (cp)  
J. Iliffe, A Modern History of Tanganyika, 168-202 (Chapt. on Maji Maji). (cp)  
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 Chpts 5-6 hard going & may skim them)

*recommended*

- T. Ranger, Revolt in Southern Rhodesia, 1986-7  
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. Chidester, Religions of South Africa, 35-111.  
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. Horton, 'African Conversion,' Africa, 41(1971), 101-108. (cp)  
 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,' IJAHS, 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?*

- D. Chidester, Religions of South Africa, 112-131.  
 D. Sandgren, Christianity & the Kikuyu, 99-160 (Reserve).  
 K. Fields, Revival & Rebellion in Colonial Central Africa, 3-23, 91-162 (Reserve).

*recommended*

- B. Ray, African Religions, 192-217  
 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?*

- D. Chidester, Religions of South Africa, 131-147.  
 J. Beattie & J. Middleton (eds.), Spirit Mediumship & Society in Africa, xvii-xxx. (cp)  
 H. Gerth & C.W. Mills, From Max Weber, 245-252. (cp)  
 C. Baeta, Prophetism in Ghana, 9-67. (cp)

*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, Messianic 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.*

H. Ngubane, 'Some Notions of 'Purity' and 'Impurity' among the Zulu,' Africa, 46(1976), 274-283. (cp)

T. Ranger, 'Godly Medicine' in S. Feierman & J. Janzen, The Social Basis of Health & Healing in Africa, 256-282. (cp)

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).

M. Murphree, 'Religious Interdependence among the Budjga Vapostori' in D. Barrett (ed.), African Initiatives in Religion, 171-180. (cp)

*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

C. Rosberg & J. Nottingham, The Myth of 'Mau Mau': Nationalism in Kenya

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