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from Jerusalem to Jericho for all we know.
I would like to put my hand on your shoulder
and say to you, "Comrade,
there is One who died for us
and dying made us blood brothers."
But I am filled with the cowardice of the well-dressed—
for clothes are by no means flimsy
when it comes to erecting barriers
between man and man.
I am afraid you will wake with a start
and betray resentment in your eyes
as you see in me what I really am—
your well-dressed enemy.
And then you will acknowledge defeat
and put on your mask of patient stupidity.
You will jump up and dust the seat
and grin and point to it with a flourish of your hand.
You will want us to sell our brotherhood
for eight *annas*.

Day after day I pass you by,
you the man by the roadside
and I the priest and the Levite rolled in one,
passing you by.

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The Challenge of African Independent Churches

Andrew F. Walls

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"In the end the history of African Christianity will be a single story, in which the missionary period is only an episode". Is Professor Andrew Walls right in thinking that the distinction between the "older" and the "independent" churches will become meaningless?
Editor

We are just beginning to understand the complexity of African Christianity. Twenty years ago, while one could find missionaries and churchmen complaining of the activities of "sects", the African independent churches were not a subject of general interest. There was Bengt Sundkler's seminal study *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* (1948, revised 1961),

and there were one or two area studies (notably Efraim Andersson's *Messianic Movements on the Lower Congo)*. Terminology was very loose, words like "messianic," "separatist," "millennial", "syncretistic," and "prophetic" being used with great abandon as though they were interchangeable; indeed it was a great merit of Sundkler's book that he distinguished what he called "Ethiopian" from "Zionist" movements. Ten years later the situation had changed. On the one hand, H. W. Turner's two volumes on the Church of the Lord (Aladura) (*History of an African Independent Church and African Independent Church*, 1967) had given us not only a full and sympathetic account of one of these movements, but in the process the fullest account yet published of the life and worship of *any* group of African Christians. Partly by his influence, and aided by an International Missionary Council study (V. E. W. Hayward, ed., *African Independent Church Movements*, 1963), vocabulary was being tightened up. The phrase "independent churches" was now being widely used for those new movements that were recognizably Christian, by contrast with "older churches" (i.e., those that had maintained their mission connection); and Sundkler's earlier distinction (which had been designed for South Africa only) between "Ethiopian" and "Zionist" movements was being sharpened and p. 226 made more widely applicable by the use of "prophet-healing" as a category. No longer could it be said that the subject was a minority interest: such floods of articles appeared that there was a real danger that the solid block of African Christianity that could not be comprehended within the "independent" category would be neglected. The significance of the movements as vehicles of national identity excited some students; their significance as a bridge with the old religion attracted others. Among observers with a "missiological" interest, there was a notable change of attitude (compare Marie-Louise Martin's hardline *Biblical Concept of Messianism and Messianism in Southern Africa* (1964) with her *Prophetic Christianity in the Congo* (1968), and later, her *Kimbangu* (1975); and D. B. Barrett attempted a continent-wide survey (*Schism and Renewal in Africa*, 1968) producing on the one hand tables of the variables that one might think could be used to predict the appearance of new movements scientifically, and on the other a religio-theological explanation of many of them in terms of (generally missionary) "failure of love."[1]

NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

We are now, I think, in a new situation, where we must consider, first, What is the place of these movements within the history of religion as a whole? and second, What is their place within African Christianity? In both considerations, Turner has been a pioneer. In a series of studies less noticed than his African contributions, he has shown that the new religious movements in Africa, of which the independent churches are a part, have their analogues elsewhere—in North and South America, in Oceania, some in Asia, even a few in Europe. He has produced a carefully circumscribed definition: "a historically new development arising in the inter-action between a tribal society and its religion and one of the higher cultures and its major religion, and involving some substantial departure from the classical religious traditions of both the cultures concerned, in order to find renewal by reworking the rejected traditions into a different P. 227 religious system" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1975, "Tribal Religious Movements, New"). His Project for the

[1] "The root cause common to the entire movement of independency may therefore be seen in this single failure in sensitivity, the failure at one small point of the version of Christianity brought in by the missions to demonstrate the fulness of the biblical concept of love as sensitive understanding towards others as equals, together with the dawning African perception from the vernacular Scriptures of the catastrophic nature of this failure" (D. B. Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa*—London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1968—pp. 269f.).

Study of New Religious Movements in Primal Societies, within the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Aberdeen, has identified and documented thousands of such movements.

The worldwide nature of the phenomenon of new religious movements in primal societies should not, however, blind us to the fact that the distinction between the independent churches—which represent some of the many forms of new religious movements—and other forms of African Christianity can be exaggerated. It is worth considering Turner's definition again. "A historically new development arising in the inter-action between a tribal society and its religion" on the one hand, and an invader culture and its religion on the other, involving a substantial departure from both and a reworking of rejected traditions into something new—something like this is bound to happen whenever the Christian faith is effectively planted across a cultural frontier. Where it is thoroughly at home, where it has repaired the rent fabric of a shattered pattern of community life, where it is not simply an undigested "foreign body," African Christianity is likely to be a "new religious movement," reworking the old and the new. If this is true, the distinction between "independent" and "older" churches may be of decreasing value. We may also suspect that, when viewed as an aspect of Church history, the "historically new" movements are not "qualitatively new" but are new manifestations of "old religious movements" identifiable elsewhere in the Christian story.

It is perhaps necessary once again to indicate that "new religious movements" is a term much wider than "independent churches." Some of the movements are essentially renewal or adjustment movements within the old religion; one or two (even some called "churches") are abstractions from a romanticized tradition, patronized by intellectuals, attempts at a reformulated "intellectual" traditional religion; a good number are what Turner calls "Hebraist," making a clear and conscious break with vital aspects of the old religion, but without Christ holding any such place in their scheme as to enable them to be regarded as clearly Christian manifestations; a few (like Bayudaya of Uganda, who moved from mission Christianity via a "Hebraist" movement to a recognizable form of Judaism) represent developments into other major religions. Indeed it is vital to remember that motion is of the essence of movements; countless histories illustrate how new movements develop, sometimes toward a classical type of Christian affirmation, sometimes away from it. p. 228

FROM PARA CHURCH TO CHURCH

We are concerned here only with those movements that are churches—organized expressions of Christian faith or practice—whether or not they originated as such. Along with these it is sensible to group the "para-churches," movements that do not claim to be churches but have the feature of churches. Many important independent churches began in this fashion: not with a conscious desire to set up a new church, but with a society or movement within the old one. The Aladura churches of Western Nigeria spring from the Precious Stone Society—within the Anglican church until the church authorities took action on account of the members' views of infant baptism. On the other hand, the Martha Davies Confidential and Benevolent Association of Sierra Leone has remained throughout its substantial history, and despite its possession of a separate building, a supplement to the life of Freetown churches rather than a substitute for them. The *Kereke ea Mosheshoe* of Lesotho perhaps represents a transitional phase, a (well-established) movement in process of becoming a separate church; while the complex history of Kimbanguism in Zaire reflects one large church, the Eglise de Jésus-Christ sur la terre par la Prophète Simon Kimbangu (EJCSK), emerging, with some smaller ones, from the much more diverse

Ngunzist movement, and effectively claiming legitimacy as the sole lawful legatee. It would not be hard, of course, to find parallels for each of these situations in Western Christian history: the history of Methodism and of the Salvation Army—each of which in its time was abused by churchmen as roundly as any African independent church has been—spring readily to mind.

CONFUSING TERMINOLOGY

Even accepted terminology, which has been so helpful in sorting out past muddles and making clear distinctions, is now facing new strains.

First, what is an "independent" church? Nowadays most African churches are independent in the sense that their leadership is African, their ministry overwhelmingly African, and missionary direction minimal. Except, perhaps, in countries with white settlement, there seems therefore no longer any obvious reason for "Ethiopian" secessions: virtually all African churches are now "Ethiopian." It has long been the case that life in the so-called "African" churches of Yorubaland (United Native African Church, Native Baptist Church, etc.) is virtually indistinguishable from that of the "mainline churches from p. 229 which they sprang: they are "new religious movements" only in a historical and no longer in a qualitative sense at all. (The end of the Ethiopian motive does not, of course, imply the end of schism, or even of ethnically or communally based schism—but that is another question.)

Second, the term "independent" must not obscure the fact that many (not all) "independent" churches consciously maintained a missionary legacy; they are often "mission-derived" churches as fully as the "older" churches. Some even claim fidelity to a particular form of missionary tradition as their raison d'être.

Again, with the passage of time, we now have independent churches with a substantial history. Many "independent" churches, with roots in the prodigious religious development of 1916–1930, are now in fact older than many "older" churches, some of which have achieved real independence of missionary control only in the last few years.

CHANGING CONDITIONS

Present conditions help further to reduce the qualitative gap between "older" and "independent" churches.

The period when anyone desired complete assimilation to western cultural norms is now well past. One effect of this is to enhance the appeal of the independents, or of what they stand for, to *évolués* and intellectuals who in former times would have been embarrassed by any association with "primitivism." Partly for this reason, partly through a "routinization of charisma" in many older independent churches, the constituency of the independents is changing; some are institutionalizing, and developing along the well-known lines of the older churches.

Further, the search for African identity, and the question of continuity of the African Christian present with the traditional African past raised by that search, are exercising younger leaders of the "older" churches. Some are evincing sympathy and respect for the independents as better reflecting or maintaining that continuity than some churches of the main line.

RÔLE OF SACRAMENT AND WORD

But the most cogent factor working toward the reduction of the differences between "independent" and "older" churches is the presence in both of Word and sacrament within the same general cultural contexts. P. 230

The sacrament, indeed, has not been a prominent feature of many African independent churches; but it is also true that it is not prominent in African Christianity as a whole. This results from the fact that the mission churches, Catholic and Protestant, have insisted on the practice of their countries of origin, that only a priest or minister is permitted to officiate at the sacrament: and there have never been enough of these to make sacramental worship more than a periodic experience for most African Christians. In some areas a further feature has been that church discipline in conflict with local marriage custom restricts the Communion in practice to a minority,[2] often an older minority, of the congregation. It is not surprising if the independents have often taken the sacrament—and the creeds—as something that is part of being a church, part of tradition, but not as something near the heart of religious life. The EJCSK in effect kept the Communion service in cold storage for years: and then installed it, with great solemnity and an indigenization of the elements. But the communal meal, long prominent in African societies, has blossomed independently of the Eucharist. For instance, South African Zionists will break the Lenten fast with joy and gusto on Easter morning: but without the bread and wine or the words of institution. The Eucharist came to Africa without emphasis on its aspect as a communal meal, and the Christian communal meal has gone on, in older and independent churches alike, developing without the Eucharist.

The Word, however, has been central to African Christian experience. The independents have been marked above all by a radical biblicism—daring Christians in effect to live by what the Bible says. The Word is even visibly present when the charismatic person speaks, led by the free Spirit. Its visible presence is exalted even among groups who can barely read it; and more than one notable spiritual man has been anxious to demonstrate that, although illiterate, he can quote the Bible accurately and appositely. In some ways, the radical biblicists among the independents may be compared to the Anabaptists in Western Church history: the same wild variety, the same strong cohesion as "people of God," the same insistence on following the Word as they hear it. p. 231

This concern for the Word has perhaps been the main "catholicizing" factor for the independents, giving them a point of reference (and thus a potential source of change) and a recognizable common ground with the other churches. African Christianity has been from the beginning book-religion. The most effective bridge-building between independents and others has probably been in the area of shared Bible teaching—and is it coincidental that Mennonites, successors of the Anabaptists, have been so prominent in this? At this point, at any rate, the independents have simply heightened a feature which is common to most forms of African Christianity.

SOME CONVERGING DISTINCTIONS

Where, then, are the differentia between independents and older churches? Many external features of the independents come to mind when someone is asked to

[2] Cf. J. V. Taylor's words about one Anglican area: "The rubric in the Prayer Book concerning the exclusion of the 'open and notorious evil liver' is applied to 87 per cent of married men in the church, and about 80 per cent of married women, and this quite irrespectively of the fact that in almost all peoples the congregation is not the least 'offended' by what they have done." (*The Growth of the Church in Buganda*—London: SCM, 1958—p. 244).

characterize them. We take here an arbitrary selection of them, and ask how far these are characteristic of African Christianity in general.

Other sources of revelation: A prominent feature of the independents has been the use of vehicles of revelation other than Scripture. Indeed, part of their appeal has been the accessibility of a direct personal "Word of God" to the enquirer. The background of this can be sought in two factors: the use of mediumistic trance in indigenous culture, and the presence of prophecy and revelation among the gifts of the New Testament.

A study of the "revelations" given in some churches, however, suggests that they are less integral to the life of the church than might be supposed. Most have a formal, stereotyped character, even though uttered in ecstasy or received after rolling in the sand or some other technique for heightening the consciousness (and after all, did not the Old Testament prophets sometimes also employ techniques for the purpose? Cf. 2 Kings 3:15).

Dispute over the sources of revelation has been a regular feature of Christian history: and often enough the gap in practice between the "literals" and the "spirituals" was narrower than one would guess from the vituperation on the topic. In the early fourth century A.D. Phrygia (another culture where spirit mediumship was entrenched) developed, in Montanism, an indigenous form of Christianity. The orthodox fulminated against Montanus and his prophetesses. But they had reluctantly to admit that they used the same Scriptures as themselves. And when we try to find out what was done as a result of p. 232 the New Prophecy nothing more dramatic is alleged against the Montanists than the institution of some supernumerary fasts.

As for dreams, certainly they are prominent in any profile of independency, and their interpretation is much sought after in African societies from any proficient person. But as Bishop Sundkler has illustrated,[3] dreams are important in the mainline churches too; countless of their priests or ministers first recognized their vocation in a dream in which they saw themselves robed, at altar or pulpit according to their tradition. And the independents point those who demur at these direct forms of revelation to the stories of Joseph or Daniel or other biblical examples.

Marriage: It is commonly said that the members of independent churches are fugitives from older churches with stricter discipline on marital matters, but it is hard to prove this. In fact, some independents, notably the EJCSK, preach monogamy as rigorously as anyone, and there must be few who consciously encourage polygamy. It is simply that the subject is not high on the agenda; they accept the facts of African married life as they are. Childlessness and its causes will rank higher in the minds of most couples. Now the older churches themselves are reappraising their own discipline amid changing economic circumstances. It is unlikely that the marriage question will long be an unbridgeable gulf between churches.

Healing: In traditional Africa, healing was usually performed in a religious context; the time and manner in which medical missions developed prevented (in most areas) a smooth transition from the old religion of healing to the new. It was the independents who made the logical connection; If the Christian was to trust Christ and not entreat the old Powers, should he not trust Christ for all the things for which he once entreated the Powers? But there is again nothing here that is incompatible with the life of the older Churches. What the independents have done time and again is to challenge the half-Christian who goes to church respectably, but then in secret, and with guilty feelings, goes off to the diviner to seek the cause of sickness and the way of healing. The earthiness of African life demands that African salvation shall be as solidly material as biblical salvation.

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[3] B. G. M. Sundkler, *The Christian Ministry in Africa* (London: SCM 1960), pp.25–31.

Examination of a whole range of other features of independents might be revealing, if followed by search of the same features in other forms of African church life. The sacredness held to attach to certain places and objects is strange—until one remembers that the same strictness of observance may attach to, say, many an Anglican sanctuary p. 233 in Africa, where no lay person, above all no woman, may sit beyond those rails. The prescriptions laid down by independents often seem a strange mixture of African tradition and Levitical law (and indeed very often it is African tradition reasserted on the basis of the Levitical law). But in how many African Anglican or Methodist or Presbyterian churches are women simply quietly absent from Communion during the menstrual period, or do men in effect observe the rules of ritual purity laid down in the Old Testament?

One of the remarkable features of the independent churches for a westerner is their combination of the ritual and hierarchical with the charismatic and spontaneous. The West knows both types of religion, but—at least until recently—identifies them with different traditions: the independents combine them in the same tradition. But both features are part of African life. African life is ordered, has a sense of the appropriate time, place, and person; but it is also spontaneous, improvisatory, responsive. What is both more ordered and more spontaneous than the dances of Africa?

In the end, the history of African Christianity will be a single story, in which the missionary period is only an episode. The judgment of the churches of Africa will not be whether one can denominate them "older" or "independent"—that distinction, I believe, will in time, and perhaps soon, become meaningless. Their judgment, like that of all the churches, will be by the Lord of the Church on the basis of his Word.

SOME IMPORTANT BOOKS

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The attention of readers is drawn to an excellent survey article of the literature on primal societies in Africa, "The Study of New Religious Movements in Africa, 1968–1975" by Dr. Harold W. Turner in *Religion* Journal of Religion and Religions, Vol 6, Spring 1976. Dr. Turner is also of the Department of Religious Studies, University of Aberdeen. p. 235

The CLADE II Letter

To the Evangelicals of Latin America

Beloved Brothers in Christ:

May the grace and peace of the triune God be with each one.

Ten years after the celebration in Bogotá, Colombia, of the First Latin American Congress on Evangelization, 266 participants coming from different sectors of the evangelical church in Latin America gathered in Huampani, Perú, from October 31 to November 8, 1979. Our purpose has been to consider together the task of evangelization that we are called to fulfill in the corning decades in our historical context.

We came to reflect on our mission, in subjection to the supreme authority of the Sacred Scriptures, the sovereign direction of the Holy Spirit, and the lordship of Jesus Christ, in an atmosphere of fraternal love. In this spirit we reaffirm our adhesion to the Declaration of the First Latin American Congress on Evangelization and the Lausanne Covenant of the International Congress on World Evangelization celebrated in Lausanne, Switzerland, July, 1974.

We are profoundly thankful to God for our evangelical heritage and for the endeavour and sacrifice of the pioneers, both national and foreign. We have determined to renew our pledge of loyalty to the Gospel and of faithfulness to the task of evangelization in the context of the Latin American people. At the same time we are moved to respond to the missionary challenge which on a worldwide scope represents the millions of people who do not know Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

We have heard the Word of God who speaks to us and who also hears the cry of those who suffer. We have lifted our eyes to our continent and contemplated the drama and tragedy in which our people live in this hour of spiritual unrest, religious confusion, moral corruption, and social and political convulsion. We have heard the cry of those who hunger and thirst for justice, of those who are destitute of that which is essential for their subsistence, of marginated ethnic groups, of destroyed families, of women stripped of their rights, of the youth given to vice or pushed to violence, of children who suffer hunger,