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**RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA**

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Identifying Religious Extremism in Africa

Distinguishing between ethnic, political, or any other form of extremism and “religious extremism” is not an easy task particularly in the African context. The first problem that must be faced is to decide what is and what is not “religious extremism”. To the extent that Christianity and Islam have spread throughout sub-Saharan Africa it is relatively easy to recognize extremist movements that grow out of these world traditions even if it is always possible to argue that “religion is used to mask political and other motives”. Nevertheless, when someone preaches the destruction of property because “Christ’s return is imminent” or calls for a jihad it is possible to legitimately speak about “religious extremism”. The case of African traditional religions is more complex and much harder to identify.

## 1.2 Some Definitions to Help Identify Religious Movements

Before discussing the impact of religion on African society it is necessary to define several key terms to allow us to identify different types of religious movement.

African traditional religions will be identified as oral traditions seeking the health and well being of the individual and community through ritual action understood in terms of myths that promote beliefs about the living dead, or ancestors, witchcraft and sorcery.<sup>1</sup> They are the historic religions of African peoples that developed within various African cultures without being influenced by major world religions such as Christianity, Hinduism or Islam.

Although there is an infinite variety of traditional religions in Africa, beliefs such as witchcraft and the role of the ancestors seem to be common themes in many societies. Healers, prophets and other ritual specialists play an important role in African traditional religions although not all have people easily identified as priests. The main religious divisions in Africa follow geographic lines and are West Africa, East Africa and Southern Africa. In many ways East and Southern African traditional religions, which lack professional priests, share common elements that make them quite distinct from West African religions, where professional priests play an important role in traditional religious practices.

Traditionalists are people and groups that reject Christian, Muslim and secular beliefs as “foreign” or “alien” impositions on Africa. African traditional religions tend to unconsciously identify the individual with his or her ethnic group and the group’s leader with the State making no distinction between “Church” and State. The term Traditionalist needs to be distinguished from tradition and traditional. Many Christian, Muslim and even secular Africans follow traditional health practices and consult spirit mediums on appropriate occasions without embracing Traditionalism.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. King, N., *African Cosmos*, Belmont: Wadsworth, 1986, p. 4; Blakely, T. D., van Beek, W.E.A., and Thompson, D. L., *Religion in Africa*, London: James Currey, 1994, p. 17. The best systematic description of African religion is Welbourn, F.B., *Atoms and Ancestors*, London: Edward Arnold, 1968. Available at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/~nurelweb/books/atoms/fred.html>

Cults are controversial religious groups that are in tension with established religious traditions and society generally. Sociologist Rodney Stark defines cults as: “Religious movements that represent faiths that are new and unconventional in a society.”<sup>2</sup> Because the word “cult” has negative connotations most scholars today prefer to use the term “new religious movements” or NRMs. When this is done it becomes clear that most NRMs are complex religious movements that often blend beliefs and practices from other cultures and religious traditions to create a unique mix of their own.<sup>3</sup>

Millenarian cults are religious movements that believe in a future period of peace and prosperity in which the Kingdom of God, as they understand it, will flourish on earth. Usually, this period is set at one thousand years, hence the term millenarian. Generally, any religious movement that hopes for the imminent, collective, salvation of the group that will enjoy living on a totally transformed earth after intervention by God or supernatural agencies is viewed as a millenarian movement.

Traditionally mainline churches have held what is known as a post-millennial viewpoint. They teach that while Christ will return in judgement at the end of time, his return will be preceded by a thousand year reign of peace. Therefore, they have built for the future believing that they are creating the Kingdom of God on earth. Millennial cult movements on the other hand tend to be pre-millennial. They teach that judgement is imminent and that until Christ returns things can only get worse. Therefore, Christians must prepare for the end and as far as possible abandon the things of this earth.

Although the most common millennial beliefs are of Christian origin, similar ideas exist in other world religions. Buddhist sects awaiting the imminent return of the Maitreya, Jewish movements expecting the Messiah, and Muslim groups looking for the Mahdi are often millenarian in nature. So too are numerous nativistic movements, often known as “cargo cults”, that flourish throughout the world without owing allegiance to any major religious tradition.<sup>4</sup> It also needs to be noted that millenarian movements have a disturbing history of turning violent.<sup>5</sup>

The word “church” comes from the Greek “Ekklesia” employed in the New Testament to designate the community created by the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Theologically, “church members” are people who participate in baptism and gather together for common worship to celebrate holy communion. Sociologically, “church” is used to refer to a religious organization that is universal in its scope and at peace with its surrounding society.

A “sect” is a religious group that has broken away from an older tradition to develop its own distinctive ideas and practices. Sociologically the term is contrasted with church and used of groups that live in relative tension with the surrounding society.

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<sup>2</sup> Stark, R., *Sociology*, 6 ed., Belmont: Wadsworth, 1996, p. 453. For a more complex discussion of terms like church, cult, sect see Stark, R. and Bainbridge, W. S., *A Theory of Religion*, Toronto: Peter Lang, 1987

<sup>3</sup> Hexham, I., and Poewe, K., *New Religions as Global Cultures*, Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1997

<sup>4</sup> Burridge, K., *New Heaven, New Earth: A Study of Millenarian Activities*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971

<sup>5</sup> Barkum, M., *Millenialism and Violence*, London: Frank Cass, 1996; cf. Wilson, B. R., *Magic and the Millennium*, London: Heinemann, 1973

The term “revitalization movement” is used for any movement that seeks to revitalize an older tradition by adapting it to the changing situation of the modern world. “Revivalism” refers to outbreaks of intense, often mass religious excitement, during which preachers seek to revive and restore a religious tradition that is believed to be in decline. Revivalism often takes the form of a revitalization movement. Most Traditionalist groups are revitalization movements.

The term “mainline churches” will be used to identify the older churches founded by American and European missionaries from major denominations such as the Anglicans, Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians and Roman Catholics. These churches are often referred to as “mission churches” even though today they may be entirely run by Africans with little or no contact with foreign missionaries.

“Fundamentalists” maintain a rigid interpretation of the Bible as the Word of God and a social exclusiveness that often decries “secular” education. “Evangelicals” are Christians who share many traditional beliefs with Fundamentalists but are socially more open and willing to embrace modern education. Pentecostals draw upon the basic beliefs shared by both Fundamentalists and Evangelicals, but place a greater emphasis on things like healing and the role of the Holy Spirit in daily life. The Word of Faith Movement is a form of Pentecostalism that has strongly influenced Charismatic Christianity world-wide. It emphasizes the power of faith to heal sickness and promote the prosperity of the believer and is one of the most influential Christian religious movements in Africa.

African Independent or Indigenous Churches (AICs) are churches founded by African leaders that in their origins lack ties to mission churches or other non-African groups. Most AICs combine orthodox Christian beliefs with African cultural practices rejected by mainline churches and earlier missionaries.<sup>6</sup>

By Islam we mean the religion founded by Muhammad (571-632 AD). Muslims preach that there is One God and Muhammad is his Prophet. After Muhammad’s death his followers divided into two main groups, the *sunni*, or orthodox and the *shi’a*. The *sunni* find solutions to problems not discussed in the Quran by appealing to the *sunna*, meaning custom or practice of Muhammad and the *hadith* or traditions about his life and teachings. They are the dominant group in most of the Muslim world. The *shi’a* accept the claim that Muhammad’s son-in-law Ali inherited the mantle of leadership that was then passed on through Muhammad’s descendants. The *shi’a* settle disputed issues by appeal to the teachings of religious leaders known as *imams*. The *shi’a* are the majority in Iran and a minority, often persecuted, in many other Muslim countries. A third group that in some ways resemble Christian fundamentalists, is the Wahhābiya. They are an eighteenth century revitalization movement that dominates Saudi Arabian Islam.

### 1.3 Geographic Divisions

Geographically we will divide sub-Saharan Africa into three main, sometimes

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<sup>6</sup> Sundkler, B., *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*, Oxford: Institute of Race Relations, 1948; Welbourn, F.B., *East African Rebels*, London: SCM Press, 1961

overlapping, regions. These are: Southern Africa including South Africa, Angola, Mozambique and Zimbabwe; West Africa including western parts of the Congo, and countries on the west coast of Africa such as Ghana, the Gambia, Nigeria, and Senegal; East Africa including Ethiopia, Kenya, the Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.

## **2 Historical Background**

### **2.1 Spirit Mediums and Traditionalists in Africa**

African traditional religions are the historic religions of traditional African societies. Although the specifics of African religions vary from society to society, healing and the restoration of well being is a common theme. So too are explanations of illness and both personal and communal misfortune in terms of witchcraft and sorcery necessitating the intervention of ritual experts to protect against and heal the illness and misfortune of individuals and groups.

Given the belief that illness and misfortune are caused by psychic forces against which individuals and communities can protect themselves through appropriate ritual action it is easy to see how witchcraft eradication movements can arise promoting extreme actions and violence against individuals accused of being either witches or sorcerers.

### **2.2 Christianity in Africa**

Christianity entered Africa in the late first century and quickly spread across North Africa and south through Nubia, Upper Egypt and part of the Sudan, and across the Red Sea to Somalia and Ethiopia which was converted to Christianity by Syrian missionaries in the fifth century. In the seventh century Muslim armies, which quickly overran Christian communities in North Africa, cut off Nubia and Ethiopia. Nubia was conquered in 1315 and Alwa around 1500 while Ethiopia remained a Christian outpost in Africa.<sup>7</sup> During the fifteenth century the Portuguese and Spanish missions were established along the Atlantic coast and in the sixteenth century the Kingdom of the Congo converted to Christianity, flourishing for almost one hundred years before it was destroyed by civil war and raiding Arab slavers.<sup>8</sup> Other missions were launched in Sierra Leone, along the Gold Coast, Benin, Angola, Mozambique and the Swahili Coast of East Africa.<sup>9</sup> The modern missionary thrust into Africa began in 1792. Originally quite separate and often opposed to European colonization and expansion missionaries gradually became more sympathetic to imperial schemes as the century progressed, although they were never quite as committed to European imperialism as many critics claim.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Isichei, E., *A History of Christianity in Africa*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995, pp. 30-3, 46-52; Sundkler, B. and Steed, C., *History of the Church in Africa*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 30-41

<sup>8</sup> Grey, R., *Black Christians & White Missionaries*, New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1990, pp. 1-56

<sup>9</sup> Isichei, pp. 52-70; Sundkler and Steed, pp. 44-64

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Heyden, U. van der, and Becher, J., (eds.), *Mission und Gewalt*, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2000; Porter, A., 'Commerce and Christianity': The Rise and Fall of a Nineteenth-Century Missionary Slogan, *Historical Journal*, Vol. 28, 1985, pp 597-621

One of the most significant developments in African Christianity during the twentieth century was the rise of so-called African Independent or Indigenous Churches (AICs), founded and led by Black Africans free from mission or European control. Although these movements have their roots in the nineteenth century it was not until the 1960s that they began to experience exponential growth. Today they are the largest Christian grouping in Africa. The example of South Africa typifies what happened throughout the continent. In 1960 approximately 15% of the Black population belonged to AICs.<sup>11</sup> By 1990 this figure had risen to 30%.<sup>12</sup> During the same period membership of African traditional religions dropped from 22.6% of the Black population to 16%.<sup>13</sup>

Today AICs and a growing fundamentalist/charismatic movement characterize the rapid spread of Christianity throughout sub-Saharan Africa. Essentially peaceful these movements have the potential to develop radical millenarian sects that can turn violent or more usually self-destruct through the suicide of their members. More common problems, however, are the rejection of Western medicine, particularly vaccinations, in favour of spiritual healing, and the financial exploitation of their followers by charismatic leaders.

### 2.3 African Islam

Following the Arab conquest of North Africa in the seventh century, Islam slowly spread south across the Sahara, through the Nile valley into the Sudan, and by sea along the East coast of Africa with Arab traders.<sup>14</sup> The spread of Islam along the East African coast and into West Africa across the Sahara appears to have followed a peaceful pattern with Islamization beginning in the courts of local kings and eventually spreading to their subjects through the activities of traders with a fairly tolerant form of Islam establishing itself over several hundred years.<sup>15</sup> Only in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries did the peaceful conversion of African peoples develop into a jihad understood in the sense of Holy War.<sup>16</sup>

During the colonial period from at least 1880 to the 1960s both British and French colonial powers tended to favour traditional Islamic rulers and encouraged the spread of Islamic education.<sup>17</sup> During the Italian invasion of Ethiopia the spread of Islam was encouraged to counter resistance from traditional Christian leaders.<sup>18</sup> Recently Iran,<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Human Sciences Research Council, *Religion, Intergroup Relations and Social Change in South Africa*, Pretoria, 1985, p. 27

<sup>12</sup> Chidester, David, *Religions of South Africa*, London: Routledge, 1992, p. 114

<sup>13</sup> The figure of 16% is an estimate made by Professor G.C. Oosthuizen. In terms of available census data traditional African religious believers declined from 22.6% in 1960 to 18% in 1980, Cf. Human Sciences Research Council, p. 27

<sup>14</sup> Levzion, N., and Pouwels, R. L., *The History of Islam in Africa*, Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000, pp. 118-29; 228-50

<sup>15</sup> *Idem*, pp. 37-59; 251-71; 63-91

<sup>16</sup> *Idem.*, pp. 85-6; 106-8; 133-

<sup>17</sup> *Idem.*, pp. 169-82; 156-9; 209-13; 238-9; 293-7

<sup>18</sup> *Idem*, pp. 239-40

<sup>19</sup> Haynes, J., *Religion and Politics in Africa*, London: Zed Books, 1996, pp. 221-2

Libya,<sup>20</sup> and Saudi Arabia<sup>21</sup> have poured millions of dollars worth of aid into African countries to promote Islamic education and the spread of their own versions of Islam, creating in the process, either by design or as an unintended consequence of their work, various forms of Radical Islam.<sup>22</sup> Today Islam is spreading rapidly throughout Africa where it appears to be becoming increasingly militant.<sup>23</sup>

### 3 Thematic Issues

#### 3.1 Spirit Mediums and Traditionalists in Africa

Witchcraft beliefs are found throughout sub-Saharan Africa and even though they differ in minor details from society to society, and even from lineage to lineage, they share certain commonalities. In some societies, for example, the powers of witchcraft are inherited. In others they are consciously acquired. Sometimes the evils associated with witchcraft are involuntary, sometimes deliberate.<sup>24</sup> Most Africans share the belief that witchcraft is evil, however much the particulars of witchcraft beliefs may differ.<sup>25</sup> In traditional African thinking witches and witchcraft are responsible for all misfortune and death.<sup>26</sup> Further, witchcraft beliefs have profoundly disruptive social consequences that often lead to great suffering when individuals are accused of practising witchcraft.<sup>27</sup>

Ritual specialists, spirit mediums, and healers take many forms throughout Africa. Traditionally they protected people from the influence of evil spirits and the effects of witchcraft. Today these functions are often combined with the acknowledgement that some illnesses also need treating with modern medicine, enabling traditional ritual specialists to reach an accommodation with Christianity, Islam, and even secular thought.<sup>28</sup>

Positively, traditional healers, spirit mediums and ritual specialists function like psychologists and herbalists in Western society, forming a vast network of alternative medicine that is readily available and far less expensive than Western medicine. On the negative side traditional beliefs and practices are sometimes linked to witchcraft

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<sup>20</sup> *Idem*, pp. 124-5

<sup>21</sup> *Idem*, pp. 221-2

<sup>22</sup> Levtzion and Pouwels, pp. 241; 352; 386;

<sup>23</sup> *Idem*, pp. 219-20; 315-19

<sup>24</sup> Marwick, M. (ed.), *Witchcraft and Sorcery*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Lagerwerf, L., *Witchcraft, Sorcery and Spirit Possession*, Gweru: Mambo Press, 1987; Mutungi, O. K., *The Legal Aspects of Witchcraft in East Africa*, Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1977

<sup>26</sup> The best account of this is the classic work by Evans-Pritchard, E.E., *Witchcraft Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937

<sup>27</sup> The best detailed study of the impact and social effects of witchcraft beliefs in an African society is Parin, P., Morgenthaler, F., and Parin-Matthey, G., *Fear Thy Neighbor*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980

<sup>28</sup> Jensen, G., *The Doctor-Patient Relationship in An African Tribal Society*, Assen: Van Gorcum, 1973; Bührmann, M. V., *Living in Two Worlds: Communication Between a White Healer and Her Black Counterparts*, Cape Town: Human and Rousseau, 1984; De Rosny, Eric, *Healers in the Night*, New York: Orbis, 1985; Oosthuizen, G. C., *The Healer-Prophet in Afro-Christian Churches*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992



eradication movements and ritual murder.

Because terms like “ritual murder” and “witchcraft eradication movements” are both highly charged emotionally and easily misunderstood it is important to understand what they mean in the African context. Ritual murders and witchcraft eradication movements both result in the killing of innocent people. They are, however, quite distinct and unrelated except in so far as the reality of ritual murder fuels belief in witches leading to, or justifying the killing of those accused of witchcraft.

Ritual murders are grizzly deaths where body parts are removed or the blood of the victim is drained to be used in other rituals or to make traditional medicines. Usually the victims are children, although recently a growing number of adults have died as a result of ritual murder. In most cases of ritual murder the murderers are never found or arrested by the police and tried for murder. Apart from children there is no clear class of victim. These cases are police matters and widely reported in the African press. There appears to be no way to identify potential victims in advance.<sup>29</sup>

The frequency of ritual murder throughout Africa shocks anyone who reads African newspapers. In some African societies witchcraft and sorcery are completely separate. In others the witch and the sorcerer appear in the same person, while in yet other societies witches and sorcerers may be, but are not necessarily, the same person. Regardless of the actual relationship between witches, sorcerers, rainmakers, and even some healers, there is no doubt that throughout Africa there are traditional ritual experts who use “medicines” that require human body parts. These “body parts” are frequently obtained through the ritual murder of young children who are often boys.<sup>30</sup>

Witchcraft eradication is a completely different issue. Here individuals are targeted because other people identify them as witches. Once identified they are subject to lynch violence that often results in “necklacing”, i.e. the placing of a tyre soaked in petrol around their necks before it is set on fire. Usually the person accused of being a witch and subsequently killed is a particular individual. Family members sometimes appear to participate in such accusations. There is little evidence that the families of people accused of witchcraft are also targeted, although in East Africa there are a few cases where it seems that larger groups were targeted.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Boy’s Mutilated Body Found, *The Times of Zambia*, 18 March 2002; Blood in the Shrine, *Tempo* [Lagos], 7 March 2002; Soldier Killed for Ritual, *P.M. News* [Lagos], 7 February 2002; The Upsurge in Missing Persons, *Vanguard* [Lagos], 17 January 2002

<sup>30</sup> Reports of ritual killings abound in African newspapers. Here are a few examples: Ritual Killings: Angry Mob Goes on Rampage, *This Day* [Lagos], 24 December, 2001, The Man Eater of the Delta, *The News* [Lagos], 10 September 2001; Mukono Cautions on Ritual Murder, *New Vision* [Kampala], 8 October 2001; ‘Balokole’ Arrested over Murder Confession, *New Vision* [Kampala], 9 March 2000; Mongu Police Pick Dead Body with Missing Private Parts, *The Post* [Lusaka], 31 August 2001; Livingstone’s Bizarre Murder, *The Times of Zambia*, 27 December 2000; Ritual Murder Starts in Koinadugu, *Concord Times* [Freetown], 23 August 2001; Wanted: Hangman for Swaziland, *African Eye News Service*, 5 March 2000; A Sangoma Couple in Court for Sacrificing Child to Ancestors, *African Eye News Service*, 15 April 1998

<sup>31</sup> Attempted Ritual Killing Sparks Off Riot In Hadejia, *Weekly Trust* [Kaduna], 3 January 2002; South African Press Association [Johannesburg], Witches Stoned, Burned to Death, 6 September 2002; Rumour Plunges Lives of Elderly Women in Danger, *The Herald* [Harare], 15 August 2002; Fourteen Arrested for Killing of Headman, *The Namibian*, 4 July 2002; Murder She Wrote, *Tempo* [Lagos], 22 October 2001; Enduring Taboos ‘That Cause Killer Lightning’, *The Nation* [Nairobi], 29 March 2002

The extent of witchcraft eradication in Africa is rarely reported and is staggering in its proportions. Every year hundreds of people die horrible deaths because they are believed to be witches.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, it is important to understand the nature of African witchcraft and witchcraft eradication beliefs. From Kenya to the Cape, and the Cape to Senegal, witchcraft eradication movements are a recurring event leaving hundreds, if not thousands dead every year. Countering such movements is therefore a major task facing anyone seeking to promote social welfare in Africa.<sup>33</sup> Christian and Muslim clergy alongside the leaders of major African Independent/Indigenous churches play a key role in countering witchcraft eradication movements.<sup>34</sup>

Thus the reality of ritual murder fuels beliefs about the evil of witchcraft and sorcery and serves to provide witchcraft eradication movements with the catalyst their leaders need to mobilize popular support. Therefore, good detective work is a prerequisite for undermining the whole complex of belief that promotes both ritual murder and witchcraft eradication. In the meantime innocent people die as a result of both ritual murder and the accusation that they carried out ritual murder.<sup>35</sup>

### 3.2 Millenarian Sects and the Problem of Cults in Africa

Recent concerns about “cults” in Africa result from the murder-suicides in Uganda of March 2001 that were blamed on the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God. Whether these tragic deaths were actually murder-suicides, as the Ugandan Government claims, is highly debatable. Instead of a “cult suicide”, there are strong indications that this was a case of murder.<sup>36</sup>

For example, all the reports agree that members of the group were very traditional Africans practising an equally traditional form of Roman Catholicism that strongly

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<sup>32</sup> Democratic Republic of the Congo: Witchcraft Hunt Leaves Hundreds Dead, 12 July 2001, <http://iafrica.com/news/worldnews/515480.htm> [accessed 21 January 2002]; Northern Province Targets ‘Witch’ Killers, *Weekly Mail & Guardian* [Johannesburg], 27 September 1996

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Harnischfeger, J., Witchcraft and the State in South Africa, [http://www.africana.ru/biblio/afrocentrism/12\\_Harnischfeger.htm](http://www.africana.ru/biblio/afrocentrism/12_Harnischfeger.htm) [accessed 21 January 2002], originally published in German in *Anthropos*, Vol. 95, 2000, pp. 99-112; Niehaus, I. A., Mohlala, E., and Shokane, K., *Witchcraft, Power and Politics: Exploring the Occult in the South African Lowveld*, Cape Town: David Philip, 2001; Ogembo, J., The Rise and Decline of Communal Violence: An Analysis of the 1992-94 Witch-hunts in Southwestern Kenya, (Harvard University Ph.D. thesis, 1997). Witch hunting seems to have resumed on a large scale post 1994; cf. Old Women Fall Foul of Mobs Fuelled by Witchcraft Hysteria, *The Irish Times*, 13 January 2000; Suspected Witches Stripped, Whipped in Meru, *East African Standard*, 6 January 2002; Tucker, N., In Parts of Africa, Witches Are to Blame: Some Believe, Some Don’t, But All Have Heard Stories of Fearful Demons, *Detroit Free Press*, 26 July 1999

<sup>34</sup> See Hayes, S., A Christian Response to Witchcraft, *Missionalia*, November 1995, <http://www.ucalgary.ca/~nurelweb/papers/hayes/witch.html> [accessed 23 February 2002]. Laws against witchcraft eradication seem to be having a positive effect in South Africa, see Singer, R., New South African Law Targets Old Fears of the Occult, *The Christian Science Monitor*, 6 December 2000

<sup>35</sup> One Nigerian case illustrates how sensational reporting and bizarre stories raise doubt about the impartiality of the process, see, Girl 13, Confesses to Ritual Killing of 48 People, *Vanguard* [Lagos], 26 July 2001

<sup>36</sup> Mass Murder, Rather Than Suicide, *The Economist* [London], 1 April 2000

condemned suicide. Further, the victims were said to have set themselves alight using petrol. This claim goes against everything we know about traditional African societies, where witches are burnt to kill what Europeans usually call the soul. Other evidence supports the murder thesis, including the fact that the group had recently completed building a new stone church and was planning to install a newly imported generator. "The work they put into new construction signalled an investment in the future at odds with the leader's prediction that the world would end in 2000", noted one correspondent.<sup>37</sup>

Another reporter illogically observed the "cult members appear to have nailed the doors and windows *from the outside*. Then they went inside and set themselves alight." (italics added)<sup>38</sup> The same reporter commented that although the police described members of the group as "the poorest of the poor", in African terms they were a relatively prosperous community. Adding, "the church buildings were set in plantations of pineapples and bananas. Cows grazed on the hilly land." This hardly fits the picture of a cult whose members were dissatisfied with the failure of its leaders - another official explanation given for the murders.

A good case can be made that these deaths resulted from a witchcraft eradication movement envious of the group's success. This implies that they were murdered by local people rather than so-called cult leaders.<sup>39</sup> To many the thought that local villagers could set fire to a church with around five hundred people in it seems unbelievable. Surely, someone would have talked. But, as a BBC reporter observed when visiting a village in Gujarat after the Muslim area was gutted and many people burnt alive in March 2002, "Nobody saw or heard anything. Nobody remembers anything."<sup>40</sup>

A further source of concern comes from West Africa, particularly Nigeria, where a growing number of people have died as a result of "cult murders". Here it seems that the media indiscriminately applies the word cult to a wide range of groups. Consequently, the word cult refers to traditional secret societies, Traditionalist movements, and gangs involved in murder.<sup>41</sup>

These incidents suggest widespread concern about cults in Africa. Yet, as many African newspapers have observed, not all groups accused of being dangerous actually are.<sup>42</sup> The problem here is that in the past European administrators feared revolts fomented by traditional religious leaders and millenarian preachers as can be seen from John Buchan's novel *Prester John*,<sup>43</sup> therefore they treated all African

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<sup>37</sup> Vick, K., Silent Apocalypse of a Ugandan Cult, *Washington Post*, 20 March 2000

<sup>38</sup> Borzello, A., Mass Cult Deaths Shocks Uganda, *Daily Mail and Guardian* [Johannesburg], 20 March 2000

<sup>39</sup> This case was examined in detail by Irving Hexham in his article What Really Happened in Uganda?, *Religion in the News*, Vol. 3, No. 2, Summer 2000, pp. 7-9 and 24

<sup>40</sup> Reported on *BBC World Service Television*, 9 o'clock news, Mountain Region, Canada, 2 March 2002

<sup>41</sup> Save Universities from Cults and Dictators, *Tempo* [Lagos], 21 July 1999

<sup>42</sup> Not All African Churches Are Cults, *The Times of Zambia*, 6 April 2000

<sup>43</sup> Buchan, J., *Prester John*, London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1962 (first published 1910)

religious activity, particularly AICs, with great suspicion.<sup>44</sup> At the same time Christians argued that AICs were “sheep stealers” who led unwary Africans astray with “syncretistic” beliefs and practices.<sup>45</sup>

Therefore, there is a great need to be very careful not to confuse legitimate AICs with “cults”. One of the first people to recognize the legitimacy of AICs was the South African Liberal politician Edgar Brooks, who argued that African Independent Churches ought to be treated respectfully and recognized as “separated churches”.<sup>46</sup> Today a growing number of academic studies dealing with AICs in general,<sup>47</sup> as well as case studies of specific cases such as the African Israel Church Nineveh in East Africa, the Church of the Lord Aladura in West Africa, the Central African Kimbanguists, and the amaNazaretha of South Africa,<sup>48</sup> have established the claim of AICs to be taken seriously.

Finally, as some African writers point out, the issue of “cults” is not that simple because granting religious freedom to legitimate churches is one thing, allowing sects to engage in practices like female circumcision is quite another.<sup>49</sup> Thus a lively debate exists throughout sub-Saharan Africa on what it means to live in a secular state and how far religious groups ought to be tolerated.

### 3.3 Church and the State in Africa

Traditionally, Jesus’ words “Give unto Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s” (Matthew 22.21 NIV) provided the basis for the separation of Church and State in Christian society. This view was reinforced by the teachings of St. Paul in Romans 13 where Christians are instructed: “Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established (Romans 13.1, NIV). In general, therefore, Christians tend to interpret the New Testament in a quietistic manner believing that they are obliged to “obey” their rulers and pay taxes etc. without giving offence. Although this type of interpretation is challenged by liberation theologians, the effect on the Church in Africa of the quietistic tradition has been immense. Most Christians simply want to live in peace and tend to avoid politics as something “of this world” that is unworthy of serious attention.

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. Ethiopianism, 1904, report no. 513, CO 537, Public Record Office, London

<sup>45</sup> An early view of African Independent Churches is found in editorials in *The Christian Express*, The Ethiopian Church, April 1897, and *The Negro Spirit*, April 1900; reprinted in Wilson, F. and Perrot, D. (eds.), *Outlook on a Century*, Alice: Lovedale Press, 1973, pp. 153-5; 158-60

<sup>46</sup> Brookes, E. H., *The Colour Problems of South Africa*, Alice: Lovedale Press, 1934, p. 34

<sup>47</sup> The classic studies are: Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets*; Schlosser, K., *Propheten in Afrika*, Braunschweig: Albert Limbach Verlag, 1949; Welbourn, *East African Rebels*; Baëta, C.G., *Prophetism in Ghana*, London: S.C.M., 1962; Oosthuizen, G.C., *Post-Christianity in Africa*, Stellenbosch: T. Wever, 1968; Barrett, D. B., *Schism and Renewal in Africa*, Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1968; Becken, H.J., *Wo der Glaube noch jung ist: Afrikanische unabhängige Kirchen im südlichen Afrika*, Erlangen: Verlag der Ev.-Luth. Mission, 1985; Daneel, I., *Quest for Belonging*, Harare, Mambo Press, 1987

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Welbourn, F.B., and Ogot, B.A., *A Place to Feel at Home*, Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1966; Turner, H.W., *The History of an Independent Church: The Church of the Lord Aladura*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967; Martin, M.-L., *Kimbangu: An African Prophet and his Church*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987; Oosthuizen, G. C., *The Theology of a South African Messiah*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976

<sup>49</sup> Mathiu, M., Sects Have a Right to Be Here, But ..., *The Nation* [Nairobi], 28 June 1998

From African newspaper reports it is clear that many African political leaders are ambivalent in their attitude towards Christian churches; nevertheless they all take religion far more seriously than European or North American politicians. Thus in countries like Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Kenya, and most other African countries, politicians often participate in church affairs by speaking at denominational conferences and other church meetings.<sup>50</sup>

### 3.4 African Jihad and the Problem of Radical Islam

By contrast to the quietistic tradition of Christianity no division is made between religion and the State in traditional Islam, which has a well developed doctrine justifying Muslim government as the only true form of government. Until recently, however, most African Muslims accepted the idea of a secular State as the only way to organize a multicultural society.

One of the biggest problems in Africa today is the spread of new forms of revolutionary politics that identify with Islam. These movements we will call Radical Islam. Some observers identify Radical Islam as a bastardized form of Marxism.<sup>51</sup> No doubt Marxism, mediated through writers like Franz Fanon, whose works are popular among African and other Third World intellectuals, is an important factor in creating contemporary revolutionary movements.<sup>52</sup> Further, contemporary Islamic militancy has complex historical roots that reach back into colonial times and rivalries between different colonial powers.<sup>53</sup> These facts allow many sincere Muslims to question whether it is really Islam at all.<sup>54</sup>

The sad truth, however, is that today social conflict and tension involving Radical Muslims occur throughout Africa in places as distinct as Capetown,<sup>55</sup> Mozambique,<sup>56</sup> Malawi,<sup>57</sup> Congo,<sup>58</sup> Tanzania,<sup>59</sup> Kenya,<sup>60</sup> Uganda,<sup>61</sup> Liberia,<sup>62</sup> Sierra Leone,<sup>63</sup> and,

<sup>50</sup> VP Tembo to Open Church Conference, *The Times of Zambia*, 7 October 1999; Standard Plus-Church Leaders Make Fools of Themselves, *The Zimbabwe Standard*, 20 January 2002; President Preaches Virtue and Peace, *The East African Standard* [Nairobi] 31 December 2001

<sup>51</sup> *The National Post* [Toronto], 10 October 2001

<sup>52</sup> *The National Post* [Toronto], 2 February 2002

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Strachan, H., *The First World War. Volume I: To Arms*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 694-813

<sup>54</sup> Okon, O., Religion as Political Weapon, *This Day* [Lagos], 14 November 2001

<sup>55</sup> Holy Warriors Behind Pagad, *Weekly Mail & Guardian* [Johannesburg], 16 August 1996; Jihad Talk Fuels Local Muslim's Emotions, *Weekly Mail & Guardian* [Johannesburg], 12 October 2001

<sup>56</sup> Mozambique Fears Growth of Islam, *Weekly Mail & Guardian* [Johannesburg], 5 July 1996

<sup>57</sup> Muslim-Christian Tensions Rise in Malawi, *Mail & Guardian* [Johannesburg], 2 September 1998

<sup>58</sup> Congo Muslims in Sudan Back Kabila, *Mail and Guardian* [Johannesburg], 3 September 1998

<sup>59</sup> United Nations Integrated Regional Information Network, *Tanzania: Dar es Salaam Demonstrations Fail to Materialise*, 4 September 2001, <http://www.irinnews.org> [accessed 30 March 2002]

<sup>60</sup> Muslim Groups Tell President Moi to Tread Carefully, *The Nation* [Nairobi], 9 October 2001

<sup>61</sup> Bishop Right on Country, Islam, *The Monitor* [Kampala], 2 February 2002; Don't Provoke Muslims, Bishop Told, *The Monitor* [Kampala], 13 February 2002

<sup>62</sup> Daily News Bulletin, *Star Radio* [Monrovia], 7 February 2000

unfortunately, most other sub-Saharan African countries.<sup>64</sup> Thus, almost 40 years after most African countries gained independence there is a frightening upswing in violence between Muslims and their non-Muslim neighbours, Christians and traditionalists alike, throughout Africa.

Violence associated with Radical Islam is called “jihadism”<sup>65</sup> in places like Nigeria. Academics cringe at the use of terms like “jihad” and “holy war” in popular Western newspapers. Jihad, we are told, means “inner struggle”, not “holy war.”<sup>66</sup> Defending this view some contemporary Muslims argue that the notion of “holy war” was “actually coined in Europe during the Crusades” and is a Western misunderstanding of the term.<sup>67</sup> The problem with accepting this sophisticated academic interpretation is that for the man and woman on the streets of Africa it is often false. As H.A.R. Gibb pointed out jihad means “holy war” for most Muslims.<sup>68</sup>

Another important factor enabling Radical Muslims to gain support is the fact that traditionally Islam has divided the world between the realm, or abode, of war and the realm, or abode, of peace. That is between the world of the unbeliever and the world of believers, between the non-Muslim and Muslim world. The world of the unbeliever is the realm of war and those areas that are under Muslim control belong to the realm of peace, the abode of Islam. Therefore only by submitting to the demands of Islam can true peace be established on earth.<sup>69</sup> Beliefs like this clearly root Radical Islam in a historic tradition that is both easy to demonstrate and very appealing to alienated young people.

Acknowledging the existence of Radical Islam is not to say that Muslims are particularly violent or that the people involved in such conflicts are “true Muslims” inspired by genuine religious ideals. Indeed there is a unique semi-pacifist tradition in African Islam<sup>70</sup> and many traditional Muslim leaders throughout Africa have spoken out against violence.<sup>71</sup> It is also true that many ordinary Muslims are strongly opposed to the growth of militant Islam<sup>72</sup> and matters like the imposition of *sharia* law. Indeed, even though *sharia* law has been imposed on 19 northern Nigerian states there is

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<sup>63</sup> Religious Clash at Kissy, *The Standard Times* [Freetown], 12 December 2001

<sup>64</sup> Numerous articles from local newspapers on <http://www.allafrica.com>

<sup>65</sup> Jihadism is commonly used in West Africa to refer to radical Islam. Cf. The ‘Jihadists’ of Osogbo, *Vanguard* [Lagos], 7 December 2001

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Esposito, J. L., *Islam: The Straight Path*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 36; Cf. *Globe and Mail* [Toronto], 19 September 2002; *The Economist*, 20 September 2001

<sup>67</sup> Cf. article Jihad published on the internet by British Muslim students, <http://www.unn.ac.uk/societies/islamic/jargon/jihad1.htm> [accessed 20 February 2002]

<sup>68</sup> Gibb, H.A.R., *Mohammadanism: A Historical Survey*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969, pp. 45-6, 117

<sup>69</sup> Martin, R. C., *Islamic Studies: A History of Religions Approach*, Upper Saddle River NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1996, p. 8

<sup>70</sup> Sanneh, L., *The History of the Jakhanke People of Senegambia: A Study of a Clerical Tradition in West African Islam*, University of London, 1974 (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation)

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Muslims Warned on Extremism, *The Nation* [Nairobi], 18 December 2001; and Islamic Scholars Preach Tolerance, *P.M. News* [Lagos], 12 December 2001

<sup>72</sup> Violence: The Position of Islam, *Daily Trust* [Abuja], 29 October 2001

considerable evidence that the vast majority of Nigerians, including a large number of Muslims oppose this development.<sup>73</sup>

Nor does acknowledging the reality of militant Muslim involvement in social conflicts deny Ali Mazrui's argument that many "religious conflicts" involving Muslims in Africa are the legacy of colonialism.<sup>74</sup> Although it can be overstated there is little doubt that the way Africa was divided up by Imperial powers at the Berlin Conference in 1884-1885 paid little attention to the ethnicity and religious affiliations of Africans. Rather Africa was divided in terms of existing Imperial over-rule, colonization, or prospective colonization, and geographical features.

The result was the creation of multi-ethnic and multi-religious states like Nigeria that make little sense except in terms of a colonial ideology and British conquest. The preservation of separate states based on traditional boundaries, although economically less viable from an administrative perspective, might well have served the people better in the long run by leaving Muslims to run their own Islamic states while Christians and traditionalists were allowed to develop secular states. Thus, even today, the borders of modern African States make little sense beyond drawing neat lines on a map. Equally clear is the fact that some politicians throughout Africa use ethnic and religious conflicts for their own ends.<sup>75</sup> Yet when all of these factors are taken into account we are still left with the stark reality that Radical Islam is spreading at an alarming rate in many African countries threatening moderate Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

## **4 Religious Extremism in Southern Africa<sup>76</sup>**

### **4.1 Spirit Mediums and Traditionalists in Southern Africa**

Spirit mediums played a very important role in the revolt against White rule in Rhodesia during the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>77</sup> Traditional religious beliefs and spirit mediums led by Manuel Antonio also played an important role encouraging local resistance to Renamo rebels who were fighting against the Frelimo Government in Mozambique in the early 1990s. Antonio claimed to have experienced a resurrection when he was a child of twelve leading to his mission to end the civil war. After he was killed in a battle with Renamo troops in 1992, Frelimo realized the value of spirit

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<sup>73</sup> Cleveland, M., *The Acceptance of Sharia Law in Nigeria*, Lagos: RMS Media Services, [1999], <http://www.internews.org/rmsmedia/sharia/sharia.html>

<sup>74</sup> Mazrui, A. A., *The Africans: A Triple Heritage*, Boston: Little, Brown & Co, 1986, pp. 136-7, 208-10, and 284-93

<sup>75</sup> Okon

<sup>76</sup> Basic statistics on religious affiliation are to be found in United States, Central Intelligence Agency, *World Fact Book 2001*, <http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/> [accessed 3 March 2002]: Zimbabwe: adherents of syncretic (part Christian, part indigenous) beliefs 50%, Christian beliefs 25%, indigenous beliefs 24%, Muslim and other 1%; Mozambique: adherents of indigenous beliefs 50%, Christians 30%, Muslims 20%; South Africa: Christians 68% (includes most Whites and Coloureds, about 60% of Blacks and about 40% of Indians), Muslims 2%, Hindus 1.5% (60% of Indians), adherents of indigenous beliefs and animists 28.5%. These figures do not mesh very well with the official South African census figures and ignore AICs totally.

<sup>77</sup> Ranger, T., *Peasant Consciousness and Guerrilla War in Zimbabwe*, London: James Currey, 1985; Lan, D., *Guns and Rain: Guerrillas & Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe*, London: James Currey, 1985

mediums and changed its previously hostile policies towards traditional culture and religion towards one that actively sought to co-opt traditional leaders for the Frelimo cause.<sup>78</sup>

Traditionalists appear to have reached an accommodation with Christianity in Southern Africa. Thus in South Africa and Zimbabwe there are clear indications of traditionalist healers working in conjunction with African Independent Church movements and modern hospitals.<sup>79</sup>

## **4.2 Millenarian Sects and the Problem of Cults in Southern Africa**

Today African Independent Churches abound in Southern Africa where the older, larger, churches like the Zion Christian Church, and the amaNazaretha of the “Prophet” Isaiah Shembe, are treated with great respect.<sup>80</sup> In fact, only three “cult” problems have appeared to disturb Southern Africa in recent years. First, public concern about the “danger of cults” following the murder/suicides in Uganda in March 2000 led the South African police to issue a statement that as far as they knew there were no suicide cults in South Africa. Second, about the same time the International Church of Christ, an extremely aggressive American evangelical group, which is often in the news in North America for its activities on campuses, aroused the concern of parents at the University of Cape Town.<sup>81</sup> Finally, there was a short lived flurry over the dangers of “Satanism” in Zimbabwe in early 1999, but the press quickly lost interest in it.<sup>82</sup> This latter “concern” was probably the result of news reports about a Kenyan Government Commission into the “dangers of Satanism” that reported later that year.<sup>83</sup>

## **4.3 Church and the State in Southern Africa**

Throughout the apartheid years in South Africa, from 1948 to 1990, South Africa’s mainline churches, the Anglicans, Methodists, Roman Catholics, Presbyterians and even some members of the Dutch Reformed Churches, played an important role in opposing the implementation of apartheid policies.<sup>84</sup> Although ultimately supporting sanctions the churches urged an essentially non-violent response to apartheid and worked as the conscience of a nation to bring about peaceful change. Following the

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<sup>78</sup> Haynes, p. 184

<sup>79</sup> Oosthuizen. G.C. Personal communication

<sup>80</sup> Mbeki, Zuma to Meet Religious Leaders, *Bua News* [Pretoria], 13 December 2001; Kings and Priests Star at Provincial Inauguration Ceremonies, *African Eye News Service* [Nelspruit], 14 June 1999; New Culture of Hope in KwaZulu, *Weekly Mail & Guardian* [Johannesburg], 18 July 1997; ‘Liberation Tours’ to Write Missing History, *The Mercury* [Pietermaritzburg], 23 September 2001

<sup>81</sup> Concern Growing over Church ‘Cult’, *The Cape Times* [Cape Town], 26 April 2000

<sup>82</sup> All Africa News Agency [Harare], New Trends: Is Satanism Taking Root in Zimbabwe, 3 May 1999

<sup>83</sup> Satanism: Just How Far Should We Go?, *The Nation* [Nairobi], 8 August 1999

<sup>84</sup> The role of the churches is virtually overlooked in Dan O’Meara’s otherwise excellent *Forty Lost Years: The Apartheid State and the Politics of the National Party, 1948-1994*, Athens OH: Ohio University Press, 1996; although it is recognized by Rodney Davenport and Christopher Saunders in *South Africa: A Modern History*, 5 ed., London: Macmillan, 2000, pp. 397-8 and 446-7; the fullest account of the early response of churches to apartheid is found in Gruchy, J. de, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979; and Paton, A., *Apartheid and the Archbishop*, Cape Town: David Philip, 1979



transition of power to Black rule the churches continued to play an important role in South Africa through the unique Truth and Reconciliation Commission which stands as an example to the world in the way it sought to create national unity by healing old and deep wounds.<sup>85</sup>

As a result of the role churches played in the struggle against apartheid, “the Church” is highly respected by many Africans. Recently, however, the warm relationship between the churches and various governments, particularly that of Zimbabwe, has begun to wane, as ideas derived from liberation theology are applied to African governments themselves. On 4 May 2001, for example, Zimbabwe’s Roman Catholic bishops criticized the Mugabe government, which, they said, had “lost the moral right to govern by permitting violence and lawlessness”.<sup>86</sup> More recently the Presiding Bishop of the powerful Methodist Church in Southern Africa, Mvume Dandala, called upon President Robert Mugabe to “step down” and asked the leaders of neighbouring African States to help President Mugabe “do so with dignity”.<sup>87</sup> When Robert Mugabe ignored these requests the Zimbabwe Council of Churches issued a statement “castigating the government for unleashing a reign of terror on innocent citizens”.<sup>88</sup> The same body had also issued a strong statement already in 1998 deploring the “deteriorating social and economic environment.” This despite the fact that they had already received a warning from the ZANU PF secretary for administration, Didymus Mutasa, to avoid meddling in political issues.<sup>89</sup>

The early good relations between particular Church leaders and various politicians in certain parts of Africa did not go unnoticed by the press. In one devastating criticism of African clerics Zimbabwean journalist Wellington Mbofana declared “Clerics Who Sleep With Dogs Shall Wake Up With Flees”. The dogs, of course are Africa’s political elite and the clerics any religious leader who gets too close to them. In Mbofana’s view the Pope outlined the correct path for Christian leaders when he challenged the Catholic bishops of Zimbabwe in 1998 to “have the courage to look the truth in the face and call things by their proper name, without yielding to convenience, compromise or self-deception”. In other words journalists like Mbofana believe that Christians must speak out against corrupt political leaders.<sup>90</sup> The same sentiment was echoed by other African newspapers that see the alliance of religious groups with the state as a “worrying trend”.<sup>91</sup>

The only real problem relating to missionaries in recent Southern African history

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<sup>85</sup> Cochrane, J., Gruchy, J. de, and Martin, S., *Facing the Truth: South African Faith Communities and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, Cape Town: David Philip, 1999; a somewhat broader perspective is to be found in Walsh, T. G., and Kaufmann, F., *Religion and Social Transformation in Southern Africa*, St. Paul MN: Paragon House, 1999

<sup>86</sup> United Nations Integrated Regional Information Network, Bishops Denounce Mugabe, *IRIN-SA Weekly Round-up*, 17, 28 April - 4 May 2001; <http://reliefweb.int> [accessed 30 March 2002]

<sup>87</sup> South African Press Association [Johannesburg], Mugabe Should Step Down, 23 January 2002

<sup>88</sup> ZCC Deplores Terror Campaign, *The Zimbabwe Standard*, 27 January 2002

<sup>89</sup> Churches Warn on Growing Discontent, Social Unrest, *Zimbabwe Independent*, 31 July 1998

<sup>90</sup> Mbofana, W., Clerics Who Sleep with Dogs Shall Wake Up with Fleas, *The Financial Gazette* [Harare], 17 January 2001

<sup>91</sup> Worrying Trends in Church-State Links, *The Nation* [Nairobi], 25 January 2000

concerned three Americans belonging to the “Oregon-based Harvestfield Ministries”,<sup>92</sup> who smuggled handguns into Zimbabwe on their way to the Democratic Republic of the Congo.<sup>93</sup> After a fair trial they were found guilty of illegal possession of firearms and sentenced to a “symbolic” five years imprisonment after they were earlier expelled from the country.<sup>94</sup>

The church struggle against apartheid in South Africa was the catalyst for the development of various new types of theology in Africa. The best know of these are Liberation Theology, Black Theology, and African Theology. On the whole White South Africans participated with Black South Africans to produce both Liberation Theology and some forms of Black Theology while African Theology was the work of Black Africans like Professor Gabriel Setiloane.<sup>95</sup> The main source of Liberation theology in Africa was a conference organized by the Revd. Basil Moore, the General Secretary of the Universities’ Christian Movement, who circulated a paper *Towards a Black Theology* in May 1970. Later, in March 1971, he organized a conference at Roodepoort, to which he invited various speakers from South Africa and North America. The results of the conference were published in *Essays on Black Theology* edited by Mokgethi Motlhabi.<sup>96</sup> Two months later the book was banned by the South African Government.

Throughout Africa North of the Limpopo river, which forms the boundary between South Africa and Zimbabwe, Liberation Theology never really took hold. Instead various writers developed forms of African and Black theology both of which had strong overtones of Liberation Theology but which were quite distinct from Liberation Theology proper.<sup>97</sup> At the same time some able African theologians strongly attacked the very idea of Liberation, Black and African theology.<sup>98</sup> It should also be noted that even during the apartheid years some Evangelical Christian groups, like the South African based Africa Enterprise, which was supported by people like Desmond Tutu, took an active role in encouraging inter-church cooperation and social responsibility among Christians throughout Africa.<sup>99</sup>

To the extent that a tradition of Liberation Theology was encouraged outside of South Africa it was largely the work of European scholars like Paul Gifford, who saw the prevailing Pietistic traditions and growth of Charismatic Churches as a threat to both religious and political life.<sup>100</sup> At first Gifford appears to have believed that it was

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<sup>92</sup> US Evangelist Warned Not to Enter Zim, *The Star* [Johannesburg], 30 August 1999

<sup>93</sup> Judgment Day for American ‘Missionaries’, *The Star* [Johannesburg], 9 September 1999

<sup>94</sup> US Evangelist Warned ...

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Gabriel M. Setiloane, *The Image of God Among the Sotho-Tswana*, Rotterdam, A.A, Balkema, 1976

<sup>96</sup> Motlhabi, M., (ed.), *Essays on Black Theology*, Durban, Universities Christian Movement, 1972

<sup>97</sup> Pobee, J. S. (ed), *Religion in a Pluralistic Society: Essays Presented to Professor C. G. Baeta...* , Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976. Cf. Pobee, J. S., *Religion and Politics in Ghana*, Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1991.

<sup>98</sup> Kato, B. H., *Theological Pitfalls in Africa*, Kisumu: Evangel Publishing House, 1975

<sup>99</sup> Cf. Cassidy, M. and Ose-Mensah, G. (eds), *Together in One Place: The Story of PACLA, the Pan African Christian Leadership Assembly*, Kisumu: Evangel Publishing House, 1978

<sup>100</sup> Gifford, P., *The Religious Right in Southern Africa*, Harare: Baobab Books, 1988

possible to reverse this trend. In his latter works he appears to have accepted that the Pietistic-Charismatic tradition has prevailed throughout most of sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>101</sup>

#### 4.4 African Jihad and Radical Islam in Southern Africa

According to the 1996 census 1.5% of South Africans are Muslims.<sup>102</sup> This means that around 15,000 Black African, 165,000 so-called Coloureds, and 190,000 people of Indian descent are Muslims in South Africa.<sup>103</sup> Until the mid-1980s South African Muslims tended to be a relatively prosperous, well educated, peaceful group. During the last years of the apartheid era radical forms of Islam began to infiltrate the campuses of the University of the Western Cape and Durban-Westville, when pro-ANC, non-White, faculty were verbally abused by some Muslim students.<sup>104</sup>

In 1994, Muslims in the Cape Flats area near Cape Town organized the vigilante group PAGAD, People Against Gangsterism And Drugs. It was responsible for attacks on suspected gang members and criminals as well as a series of mass demonstrations. PAGAD soon spread to other South African cities, becoming increasingly militant as it did so.<sup>105</sup> In addition to carrying out extra judicial executions of at least 26 people accused of being “gang leaders”, PAGAD is also thought to have murdered a local magistrate,<sup>106</sup> and a member was caught allegedly transporting bomb making equipment.<sup>107</sup> Later the Government claimed that PAGAD leaders had branded the South African state “satanic” because of its attitudes towards abortion and homosexuality.<sup>108</sup> Some sources claim that PAGAD is the public arm of the radical Muslim group Qibla, which was founded in 1979 to overthrow the South African Government and establish a Muslim State in South Africa. Significantly most South African Muslim clerics have denounced both PAGAD and Qibla as dangerous organizations.<sup>109</sup>

In 1998 South Africa’s *Radio Islam* was closed down because it called for the application of *sharia* law and excluded women from broadcasting. This action revealed deep splits in the South African Muslim community between radicals and

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<sup>101</sup> Brouwer, S., Gifford, P., and Rose, S. D., *Exporting the American Gospel*, New York: Routledge, 1996

<sup>102</sup> Forgey, H. et. al., *South Africa Survey*, Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 2001, p. 65

<sup>103</sup> These figures are an estimate based on the 1991 census, which gave the numbers as 12,000, 158,000, and 167,000 respectively. See, Cooper, C., *Race Relations Survey, 1993/94*, Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1994, p. 89

<sup>104</sup> Information from non-White colleagues at these universities

<sup>105</sup> Sidiropoulos, E., et. al., *South African Survey 1996/97*, Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1997, pp. 72-4, 87-8

<sup>106</sup> Forgey, p.82

<sup>107</sup> Forgey, p. 140

<sup>108</sup> Forgey, p. 579

<sup>109</sup> Holy Warriors ...

more moderate Muslims.<sup>110</sup> It also appears from the arrest of a South African Muslim in Bangladesh on terrorism charges in January 1999 that the Al Qaeda network is actively recruiting South African Muslims.<sup>111</sup> Finally, the US attacks on Afghanistan were reported to have “exposed the fault lines” within the South African Muslim community with Radicals calling for a *jihad* against the West.<sup>112</sup> Similar reports about the rise of Radical Islam are found in most other Southern African countries. In Mozambique, for example, pressure by Muslim members of Parliament created fears of Islamization<sup>113</sup>.

## 5 Religious Extremism in East Africa<sup>114</sup>

### 5.1 Spirit Mediums and Traditionalists in East Africa

The role of spirit mediums in politics seems particularly important in East and Southern Africa. In the 1950s spirit beliefs and spirit mediums played an important, if often overlooked role, in the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya.<sup>115</sup> In Kenya traditionalists and Christians cooperated to have Mount Kenya declared a “national shrine”.<sup>116</sup> More recently when Christians, encouraged by their local pastor, chopped down a *mugumo* (fig) tree regarded by traditionalists as sacred, the denomination’s bishop apologized to the traditionalists. He said: “It is sad. Our minister failed us ... Intolerance is not and has never been our policy.” Nevertheless, local elders cursed the minister for performing this act of sacrilege and enforced the closure of three local churches.<sup>117</sup>

In Kenya a Traditionalist revitalization movement is led by former Mau Mau members, who seek to restore African values and village life.<sup>118</sup> A similar movement in nearby Uganda, however, provoked the wrath of the Government, which accused it

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<sup>110</sup> Nazeer, Y., Is Radio Islam Behind Anonymous Pamphlets and Death Threats?, *al-Qalam* [Durban], April-May 1998, <http://mandla.co.za/al-qalam/1998/AprilMay98/Radio%20Islam.htm> [accessed 30 March 2002]

<sup>111</sup> SA Muslim Held on Terror Charges, *Cape Argus* [Cape Town], 28 April 1999

<sup>112</sup> Jihad Talk ...

<sup>113</sup> Mozambique Fears ...

<sup>114</sup> Basic statistics on religious affiliation are to be found in United States, Central Intelligence Agency, *World Fact Book 2002*, <http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/> [accessed 3 March 2002]; Zambia: Christians 50%-75%, Muslims and Hindus 24%-49%, adherents of indigenous beliefs 1%; Sudan: Sunni Muslims 70% (in the North), adherents of indigenous beliefs 25%, Christian 5% (mostly in the South and Khartoum); Malawi: Protestant 55%, Roman Catholic 20%, Muslim 20%, indigenous beliefs 5%; Tanzania: mainland - Christian 45%, Muslim 35%, indigenous beliefs 20%; Zanzibar - more than 99% Muslim; Democratic Republic of the Congo: Roman Catholics 50%, Protestants 20%, Kimbanguists 10%, Muslims 10%, adherents of other syncretic sects and indigenous beliefs 10%; Kenya: Protestants 38%, Roman Catholics 28%, adherents of indigenous beliefs 26%, Muslims 7%, others 1%; Uganda: Roman Catholics 33%, Protestants 33%, Muslims 16%, adherents of indigenous beliefs 18%

<sup>115</sup> Ranger, T., University of Manchester. Personal communications, 1970s, 2002

<sup>116</sup> Group Declares Mt. Kenya a National Shrine, *The Nation* [Nairobi], 5 January 2000

<sup>117</sup> Bishop Extends Olive Branch in Shrine Row, *The Nation* [Nairobi], 23 January 2002

<sup>118</sup> Sect Promotes Village Values, *Weekly Mail and Guardian* [Johannesburg], 19 November 1999

of fomenting unrest and recruiting a “spiritual army”. One of the more interesting features of the Ugandan movement is its ability to attract followers from Tanzania.<sup>119</sup>

The growing antagonism between Traditionalists and Christians is also evident in Zambia where some Traditionalist leaders are seeking to counter claims that leaders of the fight against colonialism in Africa, like Kenneth Kaunda and Nelson Mandela, were Christians. Instead they recently began to argue that African traditional religions “never taught racism,” while Christianity is a racist religion.<sup>120</sup> These claims are significant because at present all of Zambia’s major political leaders claim to be Christians and rely on the churches for support, suggesting that a political agenda may lie behind the criticisms of Traditionalists.

## **5.2 Millenarian Sects and the Problem of Cults in East Africa**

Governments in Uganda and Kenya appear to be seriously concerned about the “problem of cults”<sup>121</sup> and are using the Ugandan suicide/murders of 2000 as an excuse to crack down on dissident religious movements. The terror caused in earlier years by the rebellion associated with the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) of Joseph Kony fuels calls for “action against dangerous cults”.<sup>122</sup>

Since the 1999 Ugandan Amnesty Act, however, the LRA appeared to be becoming a spent force. Some problems still remained, but, in general, the prospects for peace looked good,<sup>123</sup> because many former members were reintegrating into Ugandan society.<sup>124</sup> More recently, however, there has been a renewal of conflict in both Northern Uganda and the Southern Sudan. At the time of writing the situation appears very bleak with aid workers and ordinary people threatened by rebel groups.<sup>125</sup> Former members of other millenarian groups like that of Alice Lakwena seem more committed to accepting an amnesty and are gradually returning peacefully to Uganda.<sup>126</sup>

On the other hand in Zambia the role of the Lumpa Church, now known as the Jerusalem Church, in apparently fomenting rebellion and bloodshed in 1964 has been reassessed,<sup>127</sup> and Church members actually began to sue Kenneth Kaunda for his role in the affair, blaming the bloodshed on the heavy handed approach of Kaunda’s

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<sup>119</sup> Xinhua News Agency [Cape Town], 21 December 2001

<sup>120</sup> Religion and Racism, *The Post* [Lusaka], 12 September 2001

<sup>121</sup> Are MPs About to Choose Religions for Citizens? *The East African Standard* [Nairobi], 3 December 2001; State, Church Urged to Wage Battle on Cults, *The Nation* [Nairobi], 8 January 2002; cf. Let’s Ban Public Preaching, *The East African* [Nairobi], 5 November 2001

<sup>122</sup> State, Church Urged ...

<sup>123</sup> Govt Rejects LRA’s Terms for Peace, *The East African* [Nairobi], 9 July 2001

<sup>124</sup> United Nations Integrated Regional Information Networks, *LRA ‘Colonel’ Returns to Kampala*, 4 February 2002, <http://www.reliefweb.int> [accessed 30 March 2002]

<sup>125</sup> United Nations Integrated Regional Information Network, *Renewed LRA Attacks Threaten Aid Deliveries*, Nairobi, 6 September 2002; MPs Insist North Should Be Declared Disaster Area, *The Monitor* [Kampala], 6 September 2002

<sup>126</sup> Lakwena Fighters Return Next Week, *New Vision* [Kampala], 20 February 2002

<sup>127</sup> Who Was to Blame for the Use of Force on Lumpa Sect? *The Times of Zambia*, 10 April 1999

government.<sup>128</sup> Thus once wild millenarian sects appear to be becoming normal religious groups.

Still some problems remain as can be seen from the fact that early in 2001 the Roman Catholic Bishops of Uganda warned against the “mushrooming” of cults claiming miraculous cures and other miracles.<sup>129</sup> More recently some Ugandans expressed concern about “the number of religious cults coming up in the Buganda area under the guise of culture and tradition”.<sup>130</sup> These groups appear to be Traditionalist movements that are seeking to revive traditional political authorities and are therefore seen as a threat to the Government.

### 5.3 Church and the State in East Africa

During the late 1950s and early 1960s several African church leaders attempted to challenge the Church’s other-worldly tradition and form Christian political parties that cut across “tribal” boundaries. But, such efforts were strongly opposed by established authorities, like the Archbishop of Canterbury, leaving politics to secular leaders who drew on local ethnic support.<sup>131</sup> Later, most Christians in Uganda supported the regime of Idi Amin until his persecution of Christians became unbearable.<sup>132</sup>

The cordial relations between politicians and religious groups often give way to strong criticisms of “the Church”, or a particular denomination, when African politicians feel that they are not getting the support they deserve. Thus when Evangelical leaders criticized proposed changes to Kenya’s constitution they received a sharp rebuke from government supporters.<sup>133</sup>

An issue of concern today are the large numbers of American missionaries, who are working in Africa on the assumption that to make converts they must adopt the way of life of the people they are trying to reach. Many of these people have adopted the missionary theory known as “contextualization”. This idea originated with Donald McGavran who developed a theory of “church growth”, which argued that people join churches where they can associate with people like themselves. Therefore, he called for “people group evangelism” based on the principle of the “homogeneous social unit”.<sup>134</sup> McGavran’s ideas, which were similar to those of the nineteenth century German missiologist Gustave Warneck,<sup>135</sup> were strongly criticized by the South

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<sup>128</sup> Ex-Lumpas Drag Kaunda to Court, *The Times of Zambia*, 6 April 1999

<sup>129</sup> Ignore Cults, Warns Bishop, *The Nation* [Nairobi], 13 March 2001

<sup>130</sup> Mengo Warns on Religious Cults, *New Vision* [Kampala], 14 January 2002

<sup>131</sup> Welbourn, F.B., *Religion and Politics in Uganda: 1952-1962*, Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1965, p. 28-9

<sup>132</sup> Comments based on author’s first hand observations and conversations with people working in Uganda and South Africa at the time.

<sup>133</sup> Churches Insincere, Says Ghai, *The Nation* [Nairobi], 9 May 2001

<sup>134</sup> McGavran, D., *Understanding Church Growth*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970

<sup>135</sup> Warneck, G., *Outline of a History of Protestant Missions from the Reformation to the Present Time: A Contribution to Modern Church History*, Edinburgh: Oliphant Anderson & Ferrier, 1901

African dissident and professor of missions, David Bosch, who saw in the homogeneous church principle the roots of apartheid.<sup>136</sup>

Practically, there is something appealing about McGavran's arguments even if it is only that they tend to work. Therefore, many younger theologians, and missionaries, accepted and developed his thinking in the late twentieth century. Foremost among these was Charles C. Kraft who argued that in the past "the Church" failed because it presented Christianity as indistinguishable from Western culture. Consequently, Kraft argued, future missionaries must "contextualize the gospel" so that it blends with local cultures.<sup>137</sup>

At first this assumption seems reasonable. Indeed it might even appear enlightened until its full implications become clear. Practically what this means is that when many Protestant missionaries move into Muslim areas of Africa they adopt local modes of dress and build their churches according to local architectural styles. In other words they dress like Muslim clerics and build churches that look like Mosques. No wonder local Muslim leaders are infuriated by what they see as outright deception by Christians seeking to lead astray unwary and ill educated people on the fringe of Islam. No wonder too that Muslim youths attack such churches and their occupants. Such practices are clearly provocative and dangerous.<sup>138</sup>

#### **5.4 African Jihad and Radical Islam in East Africa**

The civil war between the Muslim North and Christian/traditionalist South in the Sudan, which has caused millions of deaths and created thousands of refugees since 1983, is fairly well reported.<sup>139</sup> Usually, this war is blamed on a "process of Islamization in Sudan" that "began in the early 1980s".<sup>140</sup> Actually Islamization began with the Sudan's independence in 1956, and massacres of Southern Christians began as early as 1965 creating a de facto civil war that has raged ever since. Thus 1983 is the date that the Sudanese Government officially adopted *sharia* law<sup>141</sup> for the entire country. It does not mark the date when hostilities against Southern Christians and traditionalists actually began.<sup>142</sup>

In Malawi the banning of two opposition newspapers in 1998 raised the spectre of Islamization by the Muslim President and his supporters, provoking protests from various Christian groups including the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>143</sup> Attacks in Dar es

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<sup>136</sup> Bosch, D., *Transforming Missions*, Maryknoll: Orbis, 1992, p. 415-20; the comment about apartheid comes from personal conversations with Bosch

<sup>137</sup> Kraft, C. H., *Christianity in Culture*, Maryknoll: Orbis, 1979

<sup>138</sup> English and German missionaries working in both East and West Africa. Personal communications. For their own safety they wish to remain anonymous.

<sup>139</sup> Millions Dead in Sudan Civil War, *BBC News*, 11 December 1998; Harding, A., Oil and Sudan's Civil War, *BBC News*, 21 April 2001

<sup>140</sup> Haynes, pp. 100-2

<sup>141</sup> The meaning and implications of *sharia* law are discussed in the section on West Africa.

<sup>142</sup> Sundkler and Steed, p. 101; Alley, S.A., *Persecution of Christians in the Sudan*, New York: Coalition Against Slavery in Mauritania and Sudan, n.d., <http://members.aol.com/casmasalc/persecut.htm> [accessed 23 February 2002]

<sup>143</sup> Muslim-Christian Tensions...

Salaam, Tanzania, by Radical Muslims on Christians attending church services in late August 2001 are a further indication of a deteriorating situation throughout East Africa.<sup>144</sup> Muslims from the Congo are said to have taken refuge in the Sudan and were active in supporting the rebellion of the People's Revolutionary Party of Laurent Kabila.<sup>145</sup> Kenya Muslims are active in groups opposed to President Moi who openly favours Christians<sup>146</sup> and in Uganda the situation is growing increasingly tense.<sup>147</sup>

## **6 Religious Extremism in West Africa<sup>148</sup>**

### **6.1 Spirit Mediums and Traditionalists in West Africa**

In West Africa the Government of Benin is attempting to use traditional beliefs to legitimate its political power through acknowledging the importance of Voodoo as a mainstay of traditional society and the source of contemporary democratic institutions.<sup>149</sup> At present it is impossible to know what effect this official announcement will have on both Benin and other African states, although it is likely that it signals the beginning of a new pattern of thinking among African rulers.

A more serious picture presents itself in Ghana where recently there were outbreaks of violence involving youths belonging to Christian and traditionalist organizations. In particular a group known as the "Ga Youths" have attacked churches in Accra. One of the main demands of the traditionalist movement is an annual month of silence during which time Christians must refrain from loud singing and the beating of drums. This situation is particularly disturbing because there are some indications that the traditionalist movement is aligning itself with opposition political parties while the Government is taking the side of Christians.<sup>150</sup>

### **6.2 Millenarian Sects and the Problem of Cults in West Africa**

In West Africa cults and sects are more of a nuisance than a threat. Thus in Ghana various "churches" and "cult" groups opposed a polio immunization program in 1997 to the horror of Government officials.<sup>151</sup> Two years later the Government of Jerry Rawlings attempted to "curb the activities of 'religious charlatans' in charismatic churches" who promised but did not deliver miraculous healing.<sup>152</sup> Similarly, in

<sup>144</sup> United Nations Integrated Regional Information Networks, *Tanzania: Dar es Salaam Demonstrations ...*

<sup>145</sup> Congo Muslims ...

<sup>146</sup> Muslim Groups ...

<sup>147</sup> Bishop Right ...; Don't Provoke ...

<sup>148</sup> Basic statistics on religious affiliation are to be found in United States, Central Intelligence Agency, *World Fact Book 2001*, <http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/> [accessed 3 March 2002]; Benin: indigenous believers 50%, Christians 30%, Muslims 20%; Ghana: indigenous believers 38%, Muslims 30%, Christians 24%, others 8%; Liberia: Christians 40%, adherents of traditional religions 40%, Muslims 20%; Nigeria: Muslims 50%, Christians 40%, adherents of indigenous beliefs 10%; Sierra Leone: Muslims 60%, adherents of indigenous beliefs 30%, Christians 10%; The Gambia: Muslims 90%, Christians 9%, adherents of indigenous beliefs 1%

<sup>149</sup> Associated Press, Benin Maintains Homage to Voodoo, 3 March 2001

<sup>150</sup> 'Traditionalist' Strike in Accra, *The Ghanaian Chronicle*, 21 May 2001

<sup>151</sup> Religious Cult Threatens Mass Immunization Program, *Ghana Focus*, 10 November 1997

<sup>152</sup> Panafrikan News Agency [Accra], Rawlings Seeks to Curb Activities of Charlatans, 10 August 1999



Nigeria mainline church leaders have recently expressed their concern about “the claims of miraculous healings” made by “healing churches”.<sup>153</sup>

Only in Nigeria are “cults” a major problem where whole areas appear to be terrorized by groups identified as “cults”.<sup>154</sup> One problem that prevents a clearer understanding of this issue is that in Nigeria the word “cult” is applied indiscriminately to traditional initiation and other secret societies<sup>155</sup> that practice ritual murder<sup>156</sup> as well as to AICs and other NRMs. From the available evidence it seems that various secret societies linked to Traditionalist groups and criminal gangs are particularly active on university campuses<sup>157</sup> and that they deliberately target and kill Christian opponents.<sup>158</sup>

### 6.3 Church and the State in West Africa

Most West African states are officially “secular states”. Nevertheless, religion plays an important role in the political process. Thus President Charles Taylor of Liberia was forced to back off from a statement he made about praying directly to God after Christian leaders questioned his orthodoxy.<sup>159</sup>

The so-called Word of Faith Movement has established numerous New Charismatic Churches throughout West Africa. According to some observers Word of Faith teachings, known alternatively as “the faith gospel” and “the gospel of prosperity”, now constitute the main teaching in every Liberian denomination, including old established mainline churches. The same situation exists in many other African countries.<sup>160</sup> Word of Faith teachings originated in America with the Pentecostal preacher Kenneth Hagin<sup>161</sup> whose works are known throughout Africa, and often are the only books other than the Bible that many people read.<sup>162</sup> The rapid spread of Word of Faith teachings seems to be due to the fact that many “Faith” type churches in America actively seek to “partner” with African churches as a means of promoting mission and giving themselves an international presence. Apart from supporting individual congregations American Faith churches also provide financial support for numerous Bible Colleges and their students throughout Africa at a time when financial support from mainline denominations is in decline. Given the fact that a few American dollars go a long way in a poor African country the effect of such support is to promote Word of Faith teachings on a vast scale.

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<sup>153</sup> Cleric Dismisses Claims of Miracles in Churches, *This Day* [Lagos], 24 January 2002

<sup>154</sup> Terror in Ogunabali as Cultists Scare Community, *P.M. News* [Lagos], 28 March 2000

<sup>155</sup> Ifijeh, G., Cults, Evil with No Redeeming Features – Don, *This Day* [Lagos], 2 January 2002

<sup>156</sup> Ibadan Cult Killings: 25 Suspects Arrested, *This Day* [Lagos], 12 February 2002

<sup>157</sup> Panafrican News Agency [Lagos], State Urges Universities to End Cultism from Campuses, 21 July 1999

<sup>158</sup> Police Hunt Lasu Cultists, *P.M. News* [Lagos], 19 February 2002

<sup>159</sup> ‘Jesus Christ Is God’ Taylor Backs Off from Debate, *The News* [Monrovia], 14 January 2002

<sup>160</sup> Brouwer, S., Gifford, P., and Rose, S. D., *Exporting the American Gospel*, New York: Routledge, 1996, pp. 142-5, 157-68, and 171-3

<sup>161</sup> Barron, B., *The Health and Wealth Gospel*, Carol Stream: InterVarsity, 1978; Harrell, D. E. Jr., *All Things Are Possible*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975

<sup>162</sup> Brouwer, Gifford, Rose, p. 167

The most serious problem in West Africa as a result of Word of Faith teachings is the aggressive form of evangelism that their preachers adopt. According to Word of Faith teachings it is important for Christians to “confront the demons” that “enslave” people. Therefore, Word of Faith evangelists, like the German evangelist Reinhard Bonnke,<sup>163</sup> accuse African Traditionalists and Muslims of being “under demonic control” and loudly call upon them to “repent”.<sup>164</sup> Surprisingly such preaching is remarkably successful in attracting converts from African traditional religions and Islam. Thus the very success of the Word of Faith message often creates a strong backlash that leads to violence.<sup>165</sup>

#### 6.4 African Jihad and Radical Islam in West Africa

Ethnic and religious violence has raged at least since 1987 in Nigeria and gets relatively good media coverage.<sup>166</sup> So serious is the situation in Nigeria that in February 2000 one local reporter described the country as “the Road to Lebanon”.<sup>167</sup> The situation is tense because the country is almost equally divided between Muslims on the one hand, and Christians and members of African traditional religions on the other. Further, most Muslims live in the North of the country while most Christians live in the more affluent, and better educated, South.

At the heart of these conflicts are Radical Muslim movements seeking to impose Islamic law known as the *sharia*.<sup>168</sup> Technically, *sharia* means “the road to the watering place, the clear path to be followed”.<sup>169</sup> Although called “law” it is actually “an infallible doctrine of duties” and therefore quite unlike Western concepts of law. Rather it is something that has to be accepted “without criticism” although some leeway is allowed for its correct interpretation. As such it is totally applicable to all Muslims and, in a more restricted sense, to non-Muslims living under Muslim control. Thus its application is limited by both personal profession and territorial government as well as specific circumstances and local modes of interpretation.<sup>170</sup>

When the imposition of *sharia* law is discussed in places like the northern states of Nigeria the focus is usually on the “barbarity” of its punishments. Thus cases of mutilation for theft and the execution of women for adultery are common themes in press reports. Far more serious, however, is the fact that where the *sharia* is imposed on a non-Muslim population then the word of a Muslim believer is counted as twice the value of that of a non-believer, and the testimony of a man is worth twice the

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<sup>163</sup> Michael Cassidy, African Enterprise evangelical agency, Pietermaritzburg. Personal communications, 2002. Cassidy believes that Bonnke is one of the greatest orators alive today

<sup>164</sup> Brouwer, Gifford, Rose, pp. 1-2, 151

<sup>165</sup> *Idem*, pp. 172-3

<sup>166</sup> Haynes, pp. 212-21; cf. McGreal, C, Militants Wrestle for the Soul of Nigeria, *The Guardian* [London], 15 September 2001; Isaacs, D., Analysis: Nigeria’s Spiral of Violence, *BBC News*, 31 October, 2001

<sup>167</sup> The Road to Lebanon, *The News* [Lagos], 29 February 2000

<sup>168</sup> For a brief history of the *sharia* debate in Nigeria see: Clarke, P.B., *West Africa and Islam*, London: Edward Arnold, 1982, pp. 250-4

<sup>169</sup> Gibb, H.A.R., Kramers, J. H., *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974, p. 524

<sup>170</sup> *Idem* p. 525-8

value of the testimony of a woman. Thus believers and non-believers, men and women, are no longer equal before the law.<sup>171</sup>

In practice those parts of Nigeria where the *sharia* has become law allow for different courts to try Muslims and non-Muslims and it is even possible for a Muslim to convert to Christianity to avoid mutilation or some other punishment. Nevertheless, non-Muslims are actually only exempt from the provisions of *sharia* law “in private matters”. When “they commit a public crime like theft, they too [... can] be subject to it”.<sup>172</sup> Further, as Professor Sam A. Aluko points out, the application of *sharia* law in Nigeria will have a profound impact on economic life, restricting the activities of both Muslims and non-Muslims living in areas where the *sharia* is applied.<sup>173</sup> Not surprisingly many Christians and traditionalists are fleeing northern Nigerian states, like Kano, where Muslims have told them to “live with Sharia or leave”.<sup>174</sup>

A major problem for non-Muslims in Muslim dominated areas or where the *sharia* is imposed is the threat of blasphemy accusations. For orthodox Muslims God, and God alone, is the object of worship and the Prophet Muhammad is his Messenger. The significance of this at the popular level, i.e. on the street, is that any mention of God, or the Prophet Muhammad, by non-Muslims, in terms that Muslims consider less than deferential, can ignite a spark that leads to an outburst of violence in areas that are predominantly Muslim. Therefore, non-Muslims in parts of Africa where there are large Muslim populations are under constant pressure to behave according to the norms of Islam. Thus whenever they speak about the Prophet Muhammad, Jesus, or religion generally, they have to be very careful in what they say and where they say it.

To many in the West influenced by the philosophy of multiculturalism this might seem fairly reasonable. After all in a multicultural society surely it is expected that people respect each other's religion. The problem is that what a Muslim and a non-Muslim consider insulting can be very different. Thus for a Christian to speak of Jesus in the way Christians normally speak about him carries numerous dangers for anyone living in a predominantly Muslim area. This is because Christian language with respect to Jesus implicitly makes him superior to the Prophet Muhammad and that is tantamount to blasphemy, which is a serious crime, punishable by death under *sharia* law. But, for Christians living under Muslim rule or in areas where there is a large Muslim population it is almost impossible to avoid uttering statements that are blasphemous in Muslim ears. Consider the popular Christmas carol “Hark! The herald angels sing.” It contains many lines that are outright blasphemy to Muslims. For example, in the second verse, we find the line “Christ, the everlasting Lord”. Yet for a Muslim only Allah is Lord. Therefore, the singing of this hymn is an insult to both the

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<sup>171</sup> Bannerman, P., *Islam in Perspective: A Guide to Islamic Law and Politics*, London: Royal Institute for International Affairs, 1988, pp. 22-3, 126, and 161-2; Neusner, J. and Sonn, T., *Comparing Religions through Law: Judaism and Islam*, London: Routledge, 1999, p. 122

<sup>172</sup> Nigeria's Kano State Celebrates Sharia, *BBC News*, 21 June 2000

<sup>173</sup> Aluko, S. A., The Social and Economic Implications of Sharia Law, seminar paper, The Archbishop Vining College of Theology, Akure, Ondo State, Nigeria, 28 November 1999, <http://www.dawodu.com/aluko1.htm> [accessed 22 February 2002]

<sup>174</sup> Kano Muslims Tell Christians to Live with Sharia or Leave, *Project Open Book: Documenting the Persecution of Christians in the Islamic World*, 2 March 2000, <http://domini.org/openbook/nigeria20000303.htm> [accessed 22 February 2002]

## Prophet Muhammad and God.

Many Muslims argue that provided Christians restrict their hymn singing to churches where no Muslims are present they are prepared to tolerate “the people of the Book”. But, things are not that simple. Clearly, carolling in the English sense of walking through the streets singing carols at Christmas is out of the question. So too are many other phrases routinely used by Christians to express their faith. Thus to talk about Jesus as anything but a prophet who preceded the Prophet Muhammad, who is the Seal of the Prophets, can be taken as blasphemy and potentially spark a riot in areas where *sharia* law is not enforced or lead to imprisonment and, if proven guilty, death in areas where it is enforced.<sup>175</sup> Further, the charge of blasphemy gives Muslim Radicals the perfect excuse to call for a *jihad* against unbelievers.

In other parts of West Africa Radical Islam is also on the rise. Recently Muslims have demonstrated against alleged persecution in Liberia where conflict has broken out between Muslims and Christians.<sup>176</sup> Attacks on churches in Sierra Leone have also taken place with Muslim leaders describing Christians as “crusaders”.<sup>177</sup> Equally serious in terms of human rights is the fact that under *sharia* law in the Gambia “a male child inherits twice what a female child inherits irrespective of their age and a widow inherits only one eighth of the deceased’s estate”.<sup>178</sup>

## 7 Conclusion and Future Prospects

Sub-Saharan Africa presents a dismal picture of numerous states on the verge of disintegration apparently locked in a spiral of decline where the slightest spark can ignite ethnic and religious violence.

Although millenarian movements exist throughout Africa they do not appear to present a real threat to anyone but themselves.<sup>179</sup> Nor does it seem that any African governments are seriously persecuting them today.

Far more serious than the problem caused by religious “cults” is that of ongoing conflicts between Muslims, Christians and Traditionalists in numerous African states. Despite goodwill and calls for tolerance from many religious leaders all the indications are that Muslim/Christian/Traditionalist conflicts will represent the real flashpoint in the next decade. Here the activities of naïve Word of Faith missionaries and more sophisticated missionaries who have adopted theories about “contextualization” are particularly troubling.

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<sup>175</sup> Forte, D. F., *Studies in Islamic Law*, Oxford: Austin & Winfield, 1999, pp. 164-78; cf. Eagle, W., *Sharia Law – Penalties*, *Voice of America*, 14 March 2000

<sup>176</sup> *Star Radio* [Monrovia]

<sup>177</sup> Religious Clash ...

<sup>178</sup> Lana, M. F., Freedom from Discrimination, Constitutional Limitations in this Country, *The Independent* [Banjul], 21 January 2002

<sup>179</sup> A somewhat less optimistic evaluation is to be found in Rosalind I.J. Hackett’s recent article Prophets, ‘False Prophets’ and the African State: Emergent Issues of Religious Freedom and Conflict, *Nova Religio*, Vol. 4, No. 1, April 2001, pp. 187-212

In particular Nigeria seems on the brink of civil war or internal collapse while the ongoing civil war in the Sudan has the potential to spill over into Uganda and Kenya despite intermittent peace talks and ceasefire proposals. The implementation of *sharia* law in particular poses a major civil rights problem for both non-Muslims and women. Therefore one may expect a flow of refugees from areas where the *sharia* is enforced.

Other traditional practices carried out by both Christians and Muslims, such as female circumcision, might also provide a cause for women to seek refuge elsewhere.<sup>180</sup> Female genital circumcision, or mutilation as many prefer to call it, exists across the whole of the area from Nigeria to Kenya among all religious groups. Although it is impossible to say in which religion women are more at risk it is clear that better educated women are the ones who usually object to the practice. Consequently, because girls living in Christian areas are more likely to receive equal education with boys it is probable that Christian women will object to undergoing the operation more readily than their Muslim or traditionalist sisters. At the present time there is no clear evidence about the way this complex and troubling issue is developing.<sup>181</sup>

The situation therefore does not look promising. To avoid further major human tragedies in Africa it is necessary to strengthen the economies of states like South Africa, Kenya and Uganda, and work for social stability in Nigeria in the hope that by creating islands of prosperity other African states will eventually also experience a real recovery. Finally perhaps the only real solution is to convene a second Berlin Conference. This time the aim ought to be to provide Africa with sustainable long term aid on the model of the Marshal Plan, not divide up a continent that is already in danger of fragmentation.

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<sup>180</sup> Cf. Marshall, P., *Their Blood Cries Out*, Dallas: Word, 1997; and Marshall, P. (ed.), *Religious Freedom in the World*, Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000

<sup>181</sup> An interesting discussion of female circumcision and the ritual initiation of women is found in Langley, M. S., *The Nandi of Kenya: Life Crisis Rituals in a Period of Change*, London: C. Hurst, 1979

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