I. Intro to African Christianity

A. Overview of Christianity in Africa from antiquity:

1. Intellectual center of Christianity in early centuries – Tertullian, Origen, Augustine (Isichei 1) but then lost.

2. Next phase of encounters 16th to 18th centuries (Kongo & Niger delta); West African coast, Zambezi valley (I 2).

3. Late 18th c. evangelical revival (1st Great Awakening) led to proliferation of Protestant missions.

4. Majority of growth occurred in early to mid 20th c. with independence of African states and Africanization of leadership and church praxis, e.g. Zaire Rite approved by Rome in 1983 (I 2).

5. Trends towards indigenization of leadership - African (called Ethiopian) churches founded between 1880-1920 began religious organizations run by Africans, later trend – proliferation of prophetic or Zionist churches (I 3).

B. Modern trends in African Christianity:

1. Modern Christian intellectuals concerned with inculturation and search for identity as reaction against past white racism.

2. Implications of quest for autonomy:
   a) Older churches torn between members’ poverty & desire for independence – raises question of receiving outside aid. Quest for inculturation can become form of false consciousness.
   b) Prophetic churches – self-supporting.
   c) Liberation/contextual theology developing in S. Africa only (I3)
   d) One response to poverty – influence of cult of prosperity from American televangelism (I4).

3. Dialectic between cultural presuppositions of disseminating culture & practices of the African culture where it is located. Problem: Contextualization vs. syncretism.
   a) Shorter – syncretism is absence of dialogue. Constant exchange of meanings required.
   b) Peel – need to harmonize old and new
c) Boulaga – syncretism involves transmission of objects, rites, or institutions and refusal to modify them (I4).

4. Prophetic churches - emphasis on biblical religion:
   a) Reclaims lost aspects of Christian praxis such as dreams, visions, healing, prayer that expects answers, Old Testament taboos.
   b) Others view prophetic churches as neo-pagan, engaged in non-Christian rituals (I5). (Is there rationalistic influence from western bias of those making this assessment?)
   c) Strength of modern prophetic churches – offer deliverance from evil and spiritual remedies for afflictions (I6)

5. Competing concerns – exclusivist claims of Christianity vs. deference to other faith traditions.
   a) Some believe religious pluralism erodes content of faith traditions (I5).
   b) Question – is there an essential core of Christian beliefs unchanged by historical circumstances, or
   c) Does reality differ in societies and different ages
   d) When Christianity becomes a social framework – 1) old ethnic religion eliminated; 2) elements of ethnic religion incorporated into Christianity; 3) ethnic religion may survive though changed.

6. Question - are traditional divinities an illusion or are they real but evil? (I6) 19th c. missionaries viewed them as demons, but some modern Africanists see this as racism and see spirits as having no objective existence.

7. Christianity influenced by African culture, African religions absorb aspects of Christianity (I7) Seen in concepts of God, regional cults, and in translation of local names for God.

8. Critique – western analysis is invention of Africa, creating categories of thought not used by African cultures, describing them from outside (etic). For example: Western discussions group Africa as a monolithic entity rather than acknowledging the distinctive of individual African nations & tribal affiliations.

C. Isichei’s approach – history of religion approach that focuses on belief, ritual, and the religious community (I8).
D. Various questions arise in study of the history of Christianity in Africa and its relationship to traditional and hybrid religious movements:

1. Are new religious movements vehicles of protest or alternative communities offering an alternate explanation of reality in symbolic or ritual terms? (I 10)

2. How is meaning formed in old and new African churches:
   a) Create new communities
   b) Challenge hegemony of colonialism
   c) Offer healing and protection against evil.

II. African Churches – 1500-1800 (Isichei 45-73)

A. Christianity of Maghrib (N. Africa) disappeared by 11th c. (I45)

B. Modern missionary activity in Africa – Baptist Missionary Society 1792.

C. Christianity in Africa 4th to 19th c. themes:
   1. Continuing life of Coptic and Ethiopian churches
   2. Unsuccessful attempts to convert Muslim North Africa
   3. Catholic churches founded in Africa by Portuguese.
      a) 1st Portuguese in Kongo in 1483.
      b) Christianity in Niger Delta among Warri in 1570s

D. History of Christian missions – interaction of cultural packaging of missionaries and of the host African culture (I 46).

E. Ethiopia – 10th c. Aksumite kingdom crisis caused by Muslim pressures from north and attacks from traditionalist Agaw queen (I 46) led to Zagwe rule (1150-1270) then to Amharic dynasty claiming descent from Solomon (I47).
   1. Solomonic legend – Kebra Negast (The Glory of Kings) 14th c. – Queen of Sheba bore son from Solomon who became Menelik I of Aksum, he later returned to Jerusalem and took Ark of Covenant back to Ethiopia. Ethiopians view themselves as chosen people of God.
   2. Ethiopian Christianity –
      a) Hebraisms in Ethiopian Christianity believed to be gradual adoptions rather than ancient survivals.
b) Commonalities with Hebrew Bible – dreams, visions, ritual prohibitions, Sabbath observance, dietary laws.

c) Priests may marry before ordination. (I 49).

d) Monks – cutting edge of Ethiopian spirituality (I 50)

e) Controversies of Ethiopian church –
   (1) Monks denounced royal polygamy
   (2) 15th c. monks iconoclastic – refused to venerate image of Mary or cross
   (3) 17th c. monk za-Krestos claimed to be Christ of the Gentiles.

f) Criticism vs. Ethiopian church
   (1) It supported corrupt monarchy and nobility
   (2) Amharic culture despised Oromo and Shankilla lowland blacks.
   (3) Strengthened dominance of husband/father in family
   (4) Despised Falasha Jews forbidding them to own land, accused them of sorcery.
   (5) Christianity spread by force of arms (I 51)

g) Christian Ethiopia was not a mission field, it was ancient Africanized Christianity.

h) First contacts with Europe when Pero de Covilha came to Ethiopia in 1494 and died there.

i) Pedro Paez – Jesuit came in 1603, linguist who converted Amharic king Susenyos to Catholicism in 1622 (I 51). Paez’s successors rejected neutral cultural practices (pork tabu and circumcision) while insisting on Latin calendar and liturgy leading to popular protests. Customs separated Ethiopian and Catholic missionaries, not issues of doctrine such as the nature of Christ (I52).

F. Portugal in Africa

2. Vasco da Gama sought route to India in 1498 to avoid Muslim control of routes to the near East. In 1469, trade of Guinea leased to Fernando Gomes who reached the Gold Coast. (I 53).

3. Portuguese Christianity was not seen as differentiated from their economic concerns, and their lifestyles were often lacking (I 54).

4. Portuguese missions organized as *padroado*, giving the crown the right to appoint Portuguese Catholic clergy and laypersons in exchange for their financial support (I 54).

G. Sporadic Christian efforts in Africa – most efforts were linked to attempts to obtain African resources (minerals such as gold etc.) and slaves (17th c.) until the 18th c. Protestant efforts.