I. West North Africa – Niger Delta of Nigeria (Yoruba, Edo, Asante & Igbo peoples) in parts of modern Ghana and Benin, Liberia, Sierra Leone – 153

A. Atlantic coast – trade with Europeans began in late 15th c. Led to slave trade.

B. In spite of slave trade, tribes remained strong (155).

C. Liberia – settled by Black Americans and Christianity was part of their identity (155).

D. Most successful missionaries in 19th & 20th c. were Africans. West African missionaries were often isolated and victims of racism, some were not employed by missionary societies (156).

E. Early converts in West Africa often from enslaved, poor, disabled.

F. Missionary presence created class conflict and chiefs feared it would lead to revolution. Leaders of military states feared it would threaten unity and warrior ethos (157).

G. Christianity led to conflict of values and loyalties. Christianity undermined children’s obedience to their parents and elders.

H. Sophisticated arguments made against accepting Christianity including idea that all religions are equally true (158).

I. Christianity was exclusive, but African religions were more adaptable (158).

J. Christianity exposed repressive aspects of local cultures (e.g. sacrifice of slaves at funerals of affluent).

K. Not all conversions were due to socioeconomic issues, some were affected by doctrine of eternal life. Fear of hell was sometimes deterrent. Literacy also attracted converts (159).

L. Ongoing problem – plural marriage. Addressed by Lambeth Conference of 1888. Obstacles to monogamy:
   1. Loyalty to existing wives
   2. Bible study revealed existence of polygamy in Old Testament
   3. Christians evaded prohibition by sending wives and offspring to different churches (159).

1. William Wade Harris – most famous West African missionary spent time as political prisoner in Monrovian prison (166).

2. 4 denominations in Monrovia – Baptist, Methodist Episcopalian, Protestant Episcopalian, and Presbyterian.

N. Independent churches in West Africa (179) – largest concentration in areas of highly educated. Result of – white discrimination vs. black missionaries, disputes over resources, feeling among educated Africans of being marginalized. Moves toward secession from mission churches. United Native African Church (1891) and African Church (Bethel) 1901 seceded.

1. Independent churches created islands of autonomy but African elite had paradoxical identity – devoted to British Empire, but resented white racism, sought respectability keeping them in a western mold (180).

O. Little white settlement in West Africa. British administrators didn’t like western educated Africans and preferred villagers (264). After WWI, change from German colonies to British and French disrupted local Christians (265).

P. British disliked western-educated Africans (264).

Q. In British colonies where there were no traditional rulers, British created them (indirect rule) by bolstering “traditional” rulers (266)

R. Different views about acculturation – some missionaries xenophobic, other exhibited knowledge of African culture 267.

S. African views of marriage:

1. Mission churches’ strict views of monogamy caused some to go to AIC or prophetic churches 268.

2. Some people in Nigeria practiced serial polyandry; initial marriage arranged very young.

3. Christian influences caused some problems with traditional African views of polygamy and bridewealth 269.

T. Education:
1. Teachers and clerks elite of new colonial period. Varying responses of colonial govts towards education, some supported it, others provided minimal assistance.
2. In British colonies, missions controlled education, view reached secondary school 270.
3. Schoolchildren wanted education in English not vernacular (271).

U. Growth of prophetic churches in West Africa from 1920s, most Christians remained with traditional churches 277.

1. Growth of prophetic churches since independence, founders rejected traditional African religions 278.
2. William Wade Harris – most successful West African evangelist 278.
   a) Harris had vision in 1910 in Liberian prison, from Kru tribe of stevedores/fishermen, later was teacher, interpreter. He began his ministry in the Ivory Coast. Wore white gown with black bands, baptized 100,000. He claimed to be the last prophet of God, miracles occurred around him with his opposers dying suddenly. French officials worried about his influence and he was deported from Ivory Coast in 1914 and remained in Liberia until his death in 1929. (284-5)
   b) Many Harrist Christians attracted to Methodism when it arrived in 1924.
   c) Unique theological emphases of the Harrists: Condemned plural marriage, western style of worship, rejected sex in open air, eating human flesh, and communion service 286. Harrists began as uneducated villagers but rose in social scale and began to join mission churches.
3. Prayer used as technology, like rituals – saying the right word at right time and place, certain consequences expected 278. Same view also seen in denominational churches (Catholic Nigerian churches recite psalms at certain times and use then with green scapulars [amulets]).
4. Some prophetic churches had problems with colonial govts due to their popularity, attacks on witchcraft and traditional shrines 279.
5. Aladura (Nigerian “owners of prayer”) – founded by elite Africans with influx of poor and uneducated in 1930s. Aladura pray for prosperity, healing, fertility 279. Aladura churches began as prayer groups in response to societal crises (plague, smallpox, & world depression) 280

V. Syncretistic and Neo-traditional movements (293):

1. Movements formed by educated depicted as a form of cultural patriotism:
   a) Reformed Ogboni – Yoruba archdeacon in Lagos, Nigeria in 1914 – reshaping of traditional cult honoring the earth 293
   b) National Church of Nigeria – founded as a wing of the National Council of Nigerian Citizens, a political party, rejected foreign
missionaries and their power in church schools 293. Patriotic cults like this were formed by educated and never attracted large following like the prophetic churches.

2. Neo-traditional ritual groups which incorporated elements of Christianity:
   a) Godianism – interethnic religion based on traditional view of African Supreme God, founded by Igbo Chief Onyioha, membership small 293.
   b) Neotraditional cults tend to be small and attract one ethnic group or locality, sometimes using Christian objects (such as the Bible) as a cult object. 293.

3. Secret knowledge (esotericism)
   a) Rosae Crucis (AMORC) – estab. in Nigeria in 1925 including its Book of Moses, a collection of spells to conjure spirits (295).
   b) Quest for hidden knowledge and its association with power rooted in traditional religion.
   c) Freemasonry also popular in parts of Africa 295.
   d) Theme in Africa is that Europeans kept secret their keys to wealth and technology, as proved by contents of the Apocrypha and other Gnostic writings 295.
   e) Society of the Secret Power of Jesus – goal to find out secret of Jesus’ miracles,
   f) Legend of a lost Bible originally given to Isoko Christians 296.
   g) Ijebu king joined Seraphim because they knew the secret names of Jesus and could call him anytime 296 (builds on ancient tradition that to know a God’s name was to have power over him, cf. Ex. 3, Moses & the burning bush).

4. New Age spiritualities often blend with traditional religions (uses of amulets, talismans, astrology, love potions etc.) 296.

II. West Central Africa (Congo, Zaire, Gabon, Shaba, Angola, Camerun, Tanganyika, see map p. 184)

A. Setting:

1. Zaire River and its tributaries (Ubangi, Kasai, and Lualabala) – area depicted in Conrad’s Heart of Darkness – rivers, equatorial forest – this Congo basin area received large influx of missionaries between 1880-1920 (183)

2. Rainforest merges into savanna woodland to north, south, and east, and transportation and cultivation are easier in these regions and was site of development of central Africa’s large states (183).
3. Kongo kingdom flourished by distributing tribute from various ecological zones, but majority of equatorial Africa lived in small decentralized communities.

4. By late 19th c. copper mines of Shaba and Zambia and gold mines of Zimbabwe had long history of exploitation and providing resources for large kingdoms (183).

5. Population density low, infertility and child mortality high in Congo and Ogowe basins. This may have made them more receptive to new religious movements.

B. Modern Missions in West Central Africa:

1. Began with American Board of Commissioners in Gabon in 1842 (black American printer B.V. James and African Christian teachers), but was preceded by Catholic priests of Sao Thome and Italian Capuchins’ sporadic presence in 16th and 17th c. (185).

2. ABC converts and converts of Catholics drawn from poor, enslaved, or lepers (185). Women of Gabon were hostile at first.

3. In 1913, Albert Schweitzer came to Lambarene, sent by Paris Evang. Missionary Society on condition that he wouldn’t discuss his theology (185).

4. 1850s, King of Kongo, Lunga ordered burning of traditional religious emblems, later a Kongo youth was collaborator for the Baptists and one of their first converts (186).

5. Minkwikizi (believers) – religious customs of African Christians which emphasize the material nature of salvation using religious objects (186)
   a) Chinaka DomNwachukwu, APU professor in his discussion of African soteriology among AICs pointed out that African independent Christians use physical objects as ritual objects of worship and consecration (similar to Eastern Orthodoxy) (2007).
   b) Objects often have symbolic significance as well as concrete reality. Such as the cross which is seen as an object of healing and deliverance.
      (1) According to DomNwachukwu “the cross is a point of encounter with the redemptive power of Jesus Christ,” (2007)
      (2) According to AICs, it is believed that physical contact with a cross is capable of facilitating physical healing as well as a
salvific instrument from demonic oppression (Oosthuizen, 1979, 16).

3) Notice the contrast between classical Christianity's emphasis on the nonmaterial nature of salvation (Luther's discussion of the inner man or soul) (Volf, 451).

6. Competition between Baptists and Catholics in Kongo – Catholics told the king of the Kongo they had first claim and that others were heretics, but the king was confused by their rivalry, so he avoided church on Sundays (186).

C. Influence of colonial powers on Christian mission:

1. Missionary endeavor in W. C. Africa occurred in context of spread of colonialism which divided area into Belgian Congo, three French colonies, German Kamerun, and Spanish and Portuguese (Angola) territories (187).

2. With different denominations isolated to certain areas, it created sense of monolithic ethnic identity which had negative consequences later (such as in Angola) Portuguese govt associated Protestantism with political dissent. Missionaries left areas when colonial govt changed. Demonstrates link between church and state (187).

3. Belgian Congo & the red rubber controversy – King Leopold of Belgium distrusted French and Portuguese missionaries, but favored British Baptists to advance his economic/political agenda. He supported Baptists, giving them tax concessions and land grants, and they ignored controversy of red rubber. (Sap of rubber vine financed 1st stage of colonial rule, but its use disrupted refugee communities already negatively impacted by slave and ivory trade (188).

4. General Act of the Berlin Conference forced colonial powers to accept missions of opposing religious groups, but the dual legal/religious nature of Catholic documents posed problems in some territories (189)

D. Fundamentalist missions in W. C. Africa

1. Comity arrangements formed among fund. Missions to prevent competing in same areas (193).

2. Rapid spread of Christianity in Angola, but education lagged behind conversion with less than 1% of Africans in Portuguese colonies viewed as assimilados (193)

3. Universalizing missionary methods that lacked insight in some areas – e.g. non-Swahili speakers forced to learn catechism in Swahili (194).
4. Some feared missionaries would bring disaster, including drought or that the white men were brought by the dead.

5. Veneration for tradition and past made acceptance of new religion difficult (195).

6. Missionaries often founded Christian villages believing converts needed to live apart from traditional society (set converts up immediately to be cut off from their people) (195).

7. By 1914, Christian village abandoned since it was clear it wouldn’t transform society. Catholic boarding schools preserved some of this separateness, as well as catechetical instruction (196).

8. Attitudes among missionaries of rural romanticism – antagonistic against urban settings. Practical implications – they encouraged ability to read Bible, but not to use education to gain salaried occupation (197).

9. In spite of racism and mission ethnocentricity, 2/3 of Angolan population drawn to Christianity due to mission’s control of education (198).

E. Simon Kimbangu (1889-1951) and Kimbanguism (199)

1. Narrative of Kimbangu’s mother giving water to an exhausted missionary (build son traditional Kongo cosmology that water lies between the worlds of the living and dead) but also builds on biblical concept of giving cup of water in Jesus’ name.

2. Kimbangu began having visions to be a healer and apostle in 1918, but he resisted for a while. Many Christian prophetic movements arose in 1918 around time of flu epidemic. In 1921, he healed a woman.

3. Kimbangu’s emphases: monogamy, obedience to authority, forgiveness of enemies. Belgian authorities in western Nigeria were alarmed by his popularity and by prophets (bangunza) who preached in his name for the overthrow of white authority (200). Kimbangu was imprisoned for 30 years.

4. Belgians outlawed Kimbanguism but it led to further spreading of its message beyond the Kongo, persecution continued until 1959 when it was recognized by the govt (201). Core teachings of the Kimbangu church: monogamy, abstinence from alcohol and drugs, reject traditional religion 201.

5. Bangunza – later prophets who claimed to speak in Kimbangu’s name or to incarnate him. Stressed faith healing and ecstatic experience, close to cargo cults stressing new age of blessing 202.

6. When Salvation Army arrived in 1934, some drawn thinking they were related to Simon Kimbangu (202).
F. Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965)

1. Quest for the Historical Jesus – Jesus was a zealot who mistaking believed in the end of the world, but Schweitzer built theology based on Christ’s ethics (realized eschatology).

2. Ministered to the Fang of Gabon, had racist attitude towards Africans including viewing them as unreliable children, didn’t learn their language, didn’t care about their culture, viewed Africans as the inferior other (208).

For Further Reading:

DomNwachukwu, Chinaka S. “Soteriology of the African Independent Churches (AICs),” presentation to faculty of the Haggard School of Theology, Fall 2007.
