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GEORGE CAREY

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# The Growth and Future of African Christianity: A Personal View

**Although Africa is regarded as the ailing continent, representing only 4% of the world's GDP, it is a place of beauty and heroic faith. George Carey explores the contribution of Anglicanism in five countries he knows well, tracing the development of Anglicanism from the end of the colonial period and reflecting on the successes and failures of its mission. He shows that, without intending it to be so, the legacy of colonial Christianity, for all its well-meaning intentions in South Africa – and to a lesser degree in Sudan – placed a burden on the emerging African leadership. Nonetheless, the Anglican tradition in Africa is now strong, resilient and growing. It reminds European Christians of the great truths of apostolic faith that growth arises not from ease and costless believing, but from sacrificial following and living the way of the cross.**

It is difficult for Western Christians to grasp the expansion of world Christianity. Situated as we are in secular cultures that combine strong networks of folk religion with large swathes of indifference towards institutional Christianity, we find triumphant and assertive faith puzzling and challenging. However, wherever we look outside western Europe the picture is very different. There is growth that ranges from steady to startling and then spectacular increase of congregations.<sup>1</sup> If we took South America as an example, in 1900 there were barely a million Christians on this continent. Today there are reckoned to be in the region of 460 million, and there is no sign that the growth is slowing down.

However, as it is Africa that I know best from many visits to this amazing continent, my intention is to explore the growth of African Christianity, to analyse some of the causes of this growth and to salute some of the pioneers of Christian mission. During my official visits to the continent I have been moved, thrilled, shocked and challenged in equal measure by so many different encounters. Though Africa is diverse and multi-layered, I believe these insights and experiences can direct attention to some of the challenges that African Christianity presents to European Christians.

## The legacy of colonialism

It is in the last fifty years that African Christianity broke from the yoke of European Christianity. Yoke, rather than family dependence, is my chosen description because

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<sup>1</sup> Davie 2002 challenges the common view that faith is dying out in the world today. She comments not only on the prevalence of

faith but also on the steady growth of Christianity throughout the non-European world.

families usually expect children to grow up and establish their independent families. In 1950 there was very little sign of that happening and, as far as I can ascertain, no Western leader expected it. The colonial yoke was firmly in place and missionaries and white bishops were the order of the day. To be sure, their ministry was often exemplary, sacrificial and compassionate but, sitting as I did in the pews of Dagenham Parish Church in the early 1950s, it was easy to conclude that the African church was largely an extension of English Christianity. The young people of the parish listened with fascination to BCMS missionaries<sup>2</sup> speak of black Christians who seemed to be emerging as much from ignorance as paganism. The presentations, aided often by flickering and unfocussed slide shows of Africans performing savage dances (or scenes that were no doubt chosen to show the startling differences between English and African social life), gave us all the unintended impression of the conquest of British cultural life more than actual conversion to a faith.

In 1954, when I did my National Service in Egypt and Iraq, the world's attention was scarcely on Africa at all. The continent was the 'quiet' continent, giving little trouble to the rest of the world, apart from a few local uprisings in Nigeria, Kenya and Uganda which scarcely got a mention in the English press. It is true that a prescient journalist, J.H. Huizinga, had described Africa in 1950 as 'the continent of tomorrow's troubles'<sup>3</sup> but there was little evidence to back this claim. It was all to change.

## South Africa

If we take South Africa as an example, colonial Christianity would receive in the few decades to come such a testing that its claim to offer a relevant faith to black Africans came as close as it can to collapse.

I recall my first visit to South Africa in 1993 as the Anglican Consultative Council gathered in Cape Town. Together with Desmond Tutu, Archbishop Robin Eames (of Ireland) and Ed Browning (Presiding Bishop of the United States), I paid a courtesy call on President de Klerk. After the initial friendly exchanges were completed, the conversation got serious and slightly unpleasant. I asked the President directly, 'Did he not agree that apartheid was a cruel and evil policy?' The President's genial demeanour changed. 'My father was a Dutch Reformed Minister. Are you calling him and my people evil?' he asked. The President then launched into an explanation of South Africa's racial policy. Desmond, intervening in the discussion, stated that as long as apartheid existed, he and his people were stateless and ruled by white people with no electoral support from the majority black population. As the meeting ended, the President conceded that the experiment of apartheid had failed; it had to be repealed.

That evening in Bishopsthorpe, as I gazed at portraits of some of Desmond's predecessors – Archbishops such as Frank Grey, Geoffrey Clayton and Ambrose Reeves – I could not but reflect on the great heroes of the colonial period as they stood up for the legacy of authentic Christianity and, just as importantly, the real interests of black people. The list of such 'heroes' includes people like Trevor Huddleston, Michael Scott, Raymond Raynes, Gonville Aubie French-Beytagh. Their

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2 BCMS, Bible Churchman's Missionary Society, was renamed Crosslinks in 1992.

3 Huizinga 1950.

contribution was little short of outstanding. Indeed, as I stood there considering their contribution, I remember not only noting the direct link between Clayton, Huddleston and Tutu – in terms of influence – but recall being assailed by the unsettling thought: ‘If this Province had been evangelical in character, would the story have turned out as advantageous to black people, as it had with Anglo-Catholicism leading the way?’ No answer can be given to that hypothetical question, although there is no doubt that in other areas of Africa where evangelicalism was influential during the colonial period, Christian leaders with prophetic and courageous ministries were also to arise.

Perhaps it was the case that Anglo-Catholicism, with its incarnational theology, firm intellectual commitment and sacramental base was ideally suited to give leadership to courageous black people. Possibly celibacy gave a greater freedom to clergy like Scott and Huddleston, who were unencumbered by worries about implicating wives and children in the cost of political opposition.

Sadly, Michael Scott is all but forgotten these days. He is an outstanding example of an ordinary single clergyman made strong by his heroic commitment to the gospel. A man without a university degree, swayed by personal doubts and fears, unclear in his political views, no great shakes as a preacher or public speaker, Scott simply cared about justice for the poor, because that was what the gospel was about, so he believed. In the 1950s, practically disowned by the Church of England, his name was connected with the plight of African people. His fierce, uncompromising preaching drew him into the limelight that he dreaded as much as the direct opposition he got. ‘It is perhaps no exaggeration to say that his name is known to a greater number of people than anyone else of any race connected with Africa’ is the judgement of a journal of the period.<sup>4</sup> Scott’s pioneering work drew Christian attention to the separation of black Africans from their lawful rights as leaders, landowners, and citizens. From the 1950s onwards, in many parts of Africa, and particularly in South Africa, the gospel could not be divorced from political rights and obligations.

Trevor Huddleston’s magnificent book, *Naught for your Comfort*,<sup>5</sup> came as a searing indictment of white supremacy in a largely black society. Its white-hot condemnation of apartheid will remain a timeless indictment of the cruelty of that structured society, as much as it should remain a devastating criticism of Anglicanism and of the entire Christian world for our inability at the time to see the evil of viewing black people as inferior.

I recall a remarkable moment at the Inauguration of Nelson Mandela in Pretoria in 1994. I had been invited along with Prince Philip, representing Her Majesty, and Douglas Hurd, the then Foreign Secretary. In an official reception, prior to the Inauguration I met Trevor Huddleston looking frail and alone in a wheel chair. We talked about this great epochal moment in the history of South Africa. I observed that I had no doubt that ‘his (Trevor’s) legacy to South Africa would never be forgotten’. Suddenly, as Trevor replied, his voice trembled and he broke down in tears, crying ‘Oliver should be here to enjoy this moment! Oliver’s legacy is greater than anybody else’s’. It was a reminder that Oliver Tambo, senior partner in the Tambo-Mandela Law Firm, had been a major figure in the ANC and a great

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4 Huizinga 1950.

5 Huddleston 1956.

influence on his younger partner. Tambo, a leading Anglican believer, was deeply influenced by his Christian faith, as were so many in the ANC movement, along with Nelson Mandela himself. On a later visit to South Africa I met Oliver Tambo's widow, Adelaide, and we travelled together to Oliver's tomb at Wattville. Speaking directly to the television cameras she addressed the current social situation in the country with rising levels of violence, crime and drug. 'Oliver and his generation did not give their lives so that you (the young people) should do these terrible things. We are dying within!' she exclaimed, 'they fought for freedom – your freedom so that you could live with dignity and without exploitation'. The tears in her eyes revealed her sadness at the way her people were betraying the ideals of the first generation of the ANC.

Another of that generation who deserves a mention is Archbishop Geoffrey Clayton. Like many a colonial bishop, Geoffrey Clayton's commitment to South Africa was total. He had been Bishop of Johannesburg since 1934 until becoming Archbishop of Capetown in 1948. A traditionalist Anglo-Catholic, Clayton seemed an unlikely reformer,<sup>6</sup> indeed, he disliked intensely the populist methods of both Scott and Huddleston to gain support for their cause. Yet, it was under Clayton's leadership and with his direct approval that the report *The Church and the Nation* addressed not merely symptoms of apartheid but the underlying system itself.

Although existentially removed from the plight of black Africans, Clayton was able from the vantage point of incarnational Christianity to perceive the devastating evil of apartheid which deprived black people of basic human rights. From that moment on Clayton became a voice of protest against the regime. His final and perhaps most significant moment came when, on the eve of retirement, Clayton was confronted by a new law that Verwoerd's Government was about to introduce which would compel segregation of black and white in worship. Clayton was appalled that, if made law, it would be an offence to admit black people to a white church. In the name of the Church, Clayton wrote to the Prime Minister: 'We feel bound to state that if the Bill were to become law in its present form we should ourselves be unable to obey or counsel our clergy and people to do so'. Having done so, Clayton said to his loyal colleague, Bishop Ambrose Reeves: 'Reeves, I don't want to go to prison. But I'll go if I have to'. There can be little doubt that that apocalyptic moment caused his death the following day, Ash Wednesday 1957. Clayton was typical of many white Christians in the South African church whose loyalty to the gospel influenced profoundly their opposition to apartheid.<sup>7</sup>

Yet, it would be a mistake to conclude from this that white leaders were alone in campaigning on behalf of black people who were entirely passive and supine. We have only to think of the fine Christian Zulu leader, Albert Luthili, who, in the 1950s, was apolitical but became more outspoken as the apartheid policy began to harden. Later to lead the African National Congress, Luthili became the dignified representative of black people in the 1960s. Indeed, black thinking within and without the church was being hardened into passive and active resistance in

6 'Without doubts and without any striking originality of mind' is Adrian Hastings verdict (Hastings 1979: 22).

7 Hastings 1979: 106 which includes the statement that 'the last decade of the British Raj was also the last decade of the spirited and imaginative, if also frequently de haut en bas, leadership which the wider church owes Anglicanism'.

opposition groups such as Black Theology and the Black Consciousness Movement. Such groups were convinced that churches were not doing enough and Stephen Biko's disappointment with mainstream churches is well known.

## **Sudan**

Sudan is a nation greatly influenced by Britain and that legacy endures in all kinds of ways. Most of the British focus was on developing the economy and infrastructure of the north. In this they were largely successful by strengthening the power of two prominent Muslim parties, the Khatmiyya and Ansar sects. Southern political arrangements were left largely as they had been prior to the arrival of the British. From the 1940s on, the British government began preparing the north for self-rule. Then, suddenly, in 1946 it reversed its policy, deciding to integrate north and south under one government. The government of South Sudan was informed, at a conference called at Juba in 1947, that south and north would be governed by a common administrative authority at Khartoum. Many southerners felt betrayed by the British because they were largely excluded from the new government. The language of the new government was Arabic, but the bureaucrats and politicians from southern Sudan had, for the most part, been trained in English. Of the eight hundred new governmental positions vacated by the British in 1953, only four were given to southerners. The scene was therefore set for deep disagreements between north and south which were also deeply affected by religion and race: Muslim and Arab largely in the north, and Christian/Animist and African in the south.

In 1957 colonial rule ended when Sudan became an independent nation. Very shortly afterwards, an aggressive policy of removing all forms of colonialism began with the nationalising of all mission schools, particularly in the south. While this did nothing to improve standards of education – indeed, the reverse happened – it seemed to the Christian south to be an undisguised attack on Christianity and was one of the factors that led into the forty years of war between north and south.

As for Christianity itself, the faith had been planted very early; indeed, Acts 8: 26-40 records that the first Sudanese to be converted to Christ was the treasurer of Queen Candace of the kingdom of Meroe in AD37. From this time on, Christianity came to be increasingly embraced by the intellectuals and royal households. Certainly by the fourth century, Christianity was well established in the north and flourished for some thousand years until, weakened by successive waves of Muslim attacks, it faded from public life.

Today Islam is dominant in the north and Article 1 of Sudan's Constitutional Decree (October 16, 1993) states: 'Islam is the guiding religion...it is a binding code that directs the laws, regulations and policies of the State'. The government of Sudan's leaders regularly proclaim their goal of transforming Sudan – south as well as north – into an Islamic state with one language, Arabic, and one religion, Islam.

Anglican work in the Sudan started in 1899 when the Church Missionary Society began work in Omdurman. Christianity spread rapidly among black Africans of the southern region where today the majority of Anglican Christians now live.

Our first visit over New Year 1994 was surrounded by controversy. Shortly before Christmas 1993, Roger Symon, my officer for the Anglican Communion, was informed by the Sudanese Ambassador to the UK that the Islamic Republic of Sudan was keen to welcome the Archbishop of Canterbury to the country and that it had taken over the arrangements and programme from the Episcopal Church of Sudan. This was definitely not on; it was a takeover of the programme and made me a dupe of the Government. Roger was instructed to express a polite refusal and say that my wife and I were coming as guests of the church, and that was the established practice of such visits. The response was surprising to say the least – the UK's Ambassador to Sudan, Peter Streams, was expelled and our visas were withdrawn. I responded by saying that we were still coming. It meant, of course, that we could only visit the south where war was still going on between the Government army and the forces of the SPLA (Sudan Peoples Liberation Army).

What a visit it turned out to be! We flew into the south on a small Cessna plane piloted by Heather Stuart, a remarkable woman pilot, and landed on a dirt runway at Nimule to be welcomed by many thousands of people, Christian in the main, but also a large number of Muslims who considered themselves to belong to the south. There followed several days of dramatic meetings and services with leaders of the south. We were impressed by the Anglican Bishop of the diocese of Bor, Bishop Nathaniel Garang, a distinguished looking man with an attractive open face and a wispy grey beard, dressed in a shabby but brilliant red cassock. With him was a Roman Catholic bishop, Bishop Paride Taban, who was well regarded as one of the most significant Christians of the south because of his consistent moral authority. The two bishops enjoyed a great friendship and co-operated together in all essential matters to do with political and social witness, a fact I noticed in other contexts in Sudan where Catholicism and Anglicanism are strong. In this short visit – in which we lived among the people and slept under the stars – we saw the true horror of the war between the north and south. A war, indeed, in which some two million people, mainly Christian, have lost their lives. I saw the enduring value of the Christian faith as the church was the only institution left in the south, struggling to educate and provide health care.

Strangely, that visit was to change us in many different ways. It was in this visit that I learned that the office of Archbishop had, at certain points, to be uncomfortably political! I had to stand up for the poor and disadvantaged; I had to raise my voice in condemning atrocities done in the name of governments or religion; I had to speak the truth, as I saw it. It strengthened my resolve to do so whenever faced with wrong.

Four other visits to Sudan were to follow and the second one was not less interesting and important than the first. In October 1995 I flew to Khartoum where I hoped, for the sake of the Sudanese church, to build bridges with the Sudanese government and the Muslim world. The visit raised much excitement and great crowds followed wherever we went. A public rally was arranged for Green Square where I was able to speak freely about the grievous situation facing Christians in both north and south. It was a very long event in the boiling sun and representatives of government and all churches were there. My address was punctuated with

applause, shouts, and drum banging. I could not avoid being political at this point if I tried – I could not keep silent about the victimization of Christians and the persecution of those who simply wanted to walk with Christ.

That evening I met for the first time the infamous Dr.Hassan al Turabi, radical Islamist theologian, a slight man of 63 with a white beard, who is perceived as the intellectual giant behind the Islamisation of the country. A laughing, highly articulate man, he hardly seemed the kind of man whose name is synonymous with terrorism. He greeted me warmly, and the following day we had an exchange of views about faith which got nowhere because Dr.Turabi refused to entertain any notion that Sudan's Christians were victimized in any respect.

An even more difficult conversation took place soon after with one of our own bishops, Gabriel Rorik, Bishop of Rombek, who was also a minister in the Government. A huge embarrassment to all Christians for his identification with the Islamic government, he was impervious to my entreaties, which became sterner the more he resisted my appeals to resign. He had never visited his diocese of Rombek and had no intention of doing so. It was clear that Archbishop Benjamin Wani Yugusuk found him a huge problem but such was Gabriel's influence in the government that I was told there was little anybody could do.

Finally, on the last day of my visit I had the opportunity to meet the President of Sudan, Omar Hassan al Bashir, whose direct interference a year earlier had prevented my visit to the north taking place. I was greeted warmly and we had a useful exchange for about an hour. However, it was clear that he was angry with aspects of my visit and launched into a defence of Sudan's human rights record which, he insisted, was far better than that of the United Kingdom. At several points I had to interrupt his long perorations which made him even more irritated. The meeting made me aware that there could be no fair treatment of minorities as long as bullies like this ruled poor countries like Sudan.

## **Uganda**

If the colonial influence was powerful in South Africa from 1950 until the middle of the 1970s it was certainly so in other places in Africa. In my study I have a photograph of the great Alfred Tucker, missionary bishop to Uganda. Taken around 1910 it is a picture of a confident looking man with a mop of tousled hair sitting incongruously in a garden dressed in black convocation robes. Tucker was the first bishop to Uganda; a man who firmly believed that Ugandans had the capacity to lead God's mission. He founded the College that was to bear his name and in 1896 the first Bugandans were ordained. However, it took many years for Uganda to fulfil Tucker's dream and he certainly never saw it completed in his lifetime. Nevertheless, the firm biblical basis for theological training that the evangelical Tucker insisted upon had its results in the growth of a vibrant and growing Episcopal Church.

The Church in Uganda had had its spell of suffering in the nineteenth century with the martyrdom of forty-six young Bugandan youths, Anglican and Catholic, who resisted the tyranny of the Bugandan ruler in 1884. When Bishop John Taylor was appointed Principal of the Bishop Tucker College to heal the divisions created

by the East Africa revival, there was still no sign of episcopal leadership emerging in the church. His classic book *The Growth of the Church in Buganda*<sup>8</sup> describes a powerful rural church with priests looking after as many as fifteen congregations. It was also a troubled church because the East African Revival which rooted itself in Uganda in the 1950s was a controversial presence in the land, even though it was undeniably the case that many were blessed by the Revival with its triumphant cry *Tukutendereza Ywzu*: 'We praise you, Jesus'. The Revival divided Bishop Tucker College, resulting in the resignation of the Principal, the Rev J.C. Jones who returned to the Church in Wales to become Bishop of Bangor in 1948.<sup>9</sup> The appointment of John Taylor as his replacement led to the college settling down and benefiting from a remarkable missionary teacher and theologian. Among the fruits of such scholarship – including, of course, Ugandan students studying in English theological Colleges such as St. John's Nottingham, Oak Hill, Tyndale and Clifton – were powerful leaders like Festo Kivengere and Janani Luwum.

In 1974 Janani Luwum became Archbishop of Uganda. His term of office was to overlap with that of General Idi Amin, a Muslim who came to power in a coup in January 1971. At first Amin's leadership seemed to be a relief to Milton Obote's autocratic reign. Against Obote, who had weakened the power of the Bugandan people by running the Kabaka (the king) out of the country, Amin reassured the Bugandans of his good will and welcomed the Kabaka's body back from London where he had passed away. In a splendid service in Namirembe Cathedral the Kabaka was honoured and Christians declared General Amin a great man. Amin followed this up by calling upon the Anglican Church of Uganda to reconcile the Buganda diocese to the whole.

But support for this apparent genial giant soon fell away when his dictatorial policies began to be revealed. His pro-Muslim agenda was soon made clear as the Muslim voice was preferred over others, and as conversion to Islam was rewarded. Prominent leaders began to disappear from public life. Lawyers were particularly targeted, with Benedicto Kiwanuka, a prominent Catholic lawyer, seized from his office and murdered. People fled the country in great numbers, including John Sentamu a High Court judge. I was in Rome in 1977, representing the Church of England at the Anglican Centre, when news of the murder of Archbishop Janani Luwum was made public. The Uganda representative at the Ecumenical Conference was Bishop Miseri Kauma, bishop of Namirembe diocese, and one of Janani Luwum's closest friends. We gathered in Miseri's room to pray and weep for the church of Uganda, now leaderless. Miseri told us that his Archbishop was prepared for his death and he was ready to pay the ultimate sacrifice. 'The power of prayer', writes Adrian Hastings, 'gave Janani Luwum the divine calm to face Idi Amin, the Thomas of Canterbury of the twentieth century'.<sup>10</sup>

In my three visits to Uganda since 1991 I have seen the Anglican Church of Uganda grow under the leadership of its own people since Luwum's death. Archbishops Sabiti (the earlier first black Archbishop of Uganda), Livingstone Nkyoyo and now Henry Orombi, have made distinctive contributions in different ways. Their clear evangelical message which calls for a change of heart is being heeded remarkably by the people of the land. The fruit of such endeavour is

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8 Taylor 1958.

9 Wood 2002.

10 Hastings 1979: 266.

witnessed in many different ways, not least in improvements in the education of the clergy and laypeople. In 1998 I had the immense pleasure of laying the foundation stone of the Christian University of Uganda on the site of Bishop Tucker College. Present in the great crowd was John Taylor. I admit I was not optimistic about the progress of a University which was starting out with a mere 120 theological students! How wrong I was to doubt. I returned ten years later to commemorate the anniversary and to celebrate the astonishing growth of the place – now a University with two other satellites and consisting of some 9000 students. Education, theology, health science, law, computer technology are among the branches of learning being taught. The influence of the Vice Chancellor, Dr. Stephen Noll, has shaped the University into becoming an outstanding centre of education. Eileen and I have established our own ‘George and Eileen Carey Bursary Fund’ to support women at the University who seek higher learning.

## **Kenya**

Kenya, also, is a province known to us and which we have visited three times. David Gitari’s bold ministry is a strong feature of the Anglican Province of Kenya and his clear witnessing to the faith against corruption in high places is still spoken about. Our visit early in 2009 showed impressive social work being done by the Anglican Church through water projects, HIV/Aids programmes, agricultural development schemes. The educational programme developed by Mount Kenya East diocese is called the Participatory Evaluative Progress (PEP). This trains lay leaders to go into isolated villages and work with the churches in training people to improve the quality of their work and so improve the quality of life. One church water project at Wakamango is now delivering clean water to 13,000 people. A dairy project at Mugmango has brought some thirty small farmers to supply milk to the surrounding area which has yielded remarkable profits to these farmers. We heard the refrain so often: ‘Before the PEP programme we did not know our destiny’. The results we found often led to church growth as at Rang’ang’a, near Emuru, where the Anglican church’s contribution to the neighbourhood has led to impressive growth in numbers.

## **Rwanda**

The terrible genocide of the Tutsi tribe by the Hutu which began on April 6<sup>th</sup> 1994 led to the death of some 800,000 people. There had been several previous inter-tribal clashes between the dominant Tutsi overlords and the Hutu tribe which comprised 80% of the population. The effect of colonialism certainly did play some part in the unrest as the Belgian government and white leaders of the powerful Catholic Church openly supported Tutsi rule. In 1959, Hutu anger at Tutsi rule led to the burning of many Tutsi homes. Thousands of Tutsis fled into exile – to Uganda and Burundi in the main. From time to time the Tutsis launched desperate retaliatory invasions which were largely impotent. In 1963, more than 10,000 Tutsis were murdered by the Hutus. Even so, the Tutsis were dominant in leadership positions in society and in the churches. The genocide of 1994, which eclipsed all previous skirmishes, was a veritable blitzkrieg to wipe out all trace of Tutsi people. The prelude to the genocide was the murder of Juvénal Habyarimana, the President

of Rwanda, and of the President of Burundi, when the airplane they were in was shot down close to Kigali airport. In the circumstances of panic that set in, a Hutu power group known as the Akuzu directed the ensuing operation that would in the following 100 days wipe out nearly 20% of the entire population of Rwanda.

I went to Rwanda early in 1995 and was told by Dr. Lillian Wong, secretary of the British Mission (the Ambassador had not yet returned) that Eileen and I were among the very first outsiders to visit the country. We found a nation traumatised and an Anglican Church deeply divided and ashamed. It appeared that every part of society had been caught up in the violence, including leaders of all denominations. If everyone seemed to be victims, so everyone appeared to be aggressors also. We found that a simplified version of events was not wholly adequate. We were told of Christian Hutus who went to their deaths with Tutsis, and Hutus who heroically rescued Tutsis from certain death.

The aim of my visit, however, was not only to support the Anglican Church of Rwanda. It was also to listen to its voice as it tried to come to terms with the fact that in one of the most Christian nations in Africa such a terrible thing had happened. The bishops I met uttered their profound regrets and anger, tears and contrite prayers were expressed in the many meetings I held with the leaders of our church and bishops of the Roman Catholic Church who were similarly leaderless. While it was true that the Catholic Church was much more implicated in events because it was the bigger church, Anglicans took sides as well. Even the Archbishop of Rwanda, Augustin Nshamihigo, was known to have played a role in the atrocities. He was in hiding in Nairobi but I was able to send a message asking him to meet me at Nairobi airport on my way home.

In my team was the wife of the Dean of Kigali, Thacienne Karuhije, who was there to grieve the death of her husband, Alphonse, who had been one of my students at Trinity College Bristol. Alphonse was an outstanding student who had a most promising ministry in the church. As far as we know, he was murdered in his cathedral and his body never found. Thacienne felt it necessary to be there not only to mourn his death but, as she said, 'to forgive his murderers'. It is difficult for me, even some fourteen years later, to come to terms with that horrific visit. In the places we went to we heard harrowing accounts – of murders, of heroic rescues, of savagery beyond belief – which defy rational explanation in terms of humanity, let alone faith. The visit to the Roman Catholic Cathedral at Nyarubuye was a horrifying experience because many of the bones of women and children who were slaughtered by the Rwandan army remained where they fell as a memorial to the tragedy. Accounts of numbers killed there vary from 5,000 to 20,000 and most descriptions veer to the upper figure.

Roger Bowen, a distinguished former General Secretary of Mid-Africa Ministries, believes that some weaknesses of African evangelicalism were revealed by the failure of Anglican leadership before and during the crisis: 'The issue, which in the past in times of revival had been addressed so powerfully, was allowed to remain unresolved. The challenge to find a deeper, more fundamental identity "in Christ" where there is no Jew nor Greek, Hutu nor Tutsi, seems to have been forgotten by many'.<sup>11</sup> Bowen quotes Max Warren's critique of the East African Revival that with

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<sup>11</sup> Bowen 2005: 41.

such theology, 'sin tends to be simplified to the individual...the corporate nature of man is lost to view and the full magnitude of evil most seriously underestimated'.<sup>12</sup>

There is no doubt much truth in that criticism but we should not overlook the sheer paralysing effect of such an evil perpetrated in a crowded little country where tribalism played such a serious part in the social make-up of community life. One Roman Catholic bishop put it bitterly in one of the meetings I chaired: 'The blood of tribalism is thicker than the waters of baptism'. So it seemed, but even that as a comment is too simplistic because many Hutu Christians transcended tribalism.

My meeting with the then Archbishop, Augustin Nshamihigo, in the VIP lounge of Nairobi airport revealed a leader who had given up all pretence to be Archbishop but still loved the title. I appealed to him to return to his people and chided him that he had fled the country in the early days of the genocide. He made no attempt to defend himself of the charges widely reported of his complicity. The meeting became intensely unpleasant as I appealed to him, and another bishop, Adonijah, that unless they returned there was no meaning to being a bishop. 'But they will kill me if I return' said Augustin. My reply was that just as being a shepherd had no meaning without a flock, so being an Archbishop or bishop on one's own was nonsensical. Whatever the consequences, he had to return – or resign. The High Commissioner to Kenya who sat in on this meeting was very helpful in also pointing out that there could be no healing for the Church unless new leaders were appointed quickly.

Looking back on that period I believe I am right in stating that the visit was a major step in assisting our Church to move on. Later I was able to appoint an American, Bishop David Birney, as a special emissary to assist the Church and, a few months on, I sent a lawyer, Martin Cavender, to help the Church of Rwanda create a new Constitution. Fourteen years later, the Church of Rwanda is much stronger and in much better shape than it was in 1995. It will never – and indeed must not – forget the shaming experience it went through, but it is now a more united body and its contribution to the nation is rich and significant.

## **Lessons about African Christianity**

Africa: war-torn, so poor, so beaten down by colonialism, poor and corrupt leadership – yet blessed with beautiful countries and magnificent people. Above all, it is a continent remarkable for its deep commitment to the Christian faith, making it the continent of tomorrow. What are some of the lessons I draw from my visits to Africa? There are three that stand out:

First, that African Christianity is far from perfect – there is just the same tendency to compromise and become captive to culture as the history of western Christianity shows. Whereas Rwanda illustrates what may happen if Christian leaders get too close to power – as may be possibly the case of the Dutch Reformed Church with respect to the issue of apartheid – the examples of Sudan and South Africa reveal nobility of faith when the gospel is truly followed.

Second, that powerful, courageous indigenous leadership has emerged in the wake of colonialism which has on the one hand spoken truth to power, but has also had a message of hope and redemption to wider society.

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12 Bowen 2005: 43.

Third, that the unashamed conviction of the gospel, common to these Anglicans leaders of both catholic and evangelical heritage is most powerfully lived through sharing the experiences of their people.

## **Challenges from Africa to European Christianity**

And what might African Christianity offer us? A final three challenges may come out of Africa to European Christianity.

*First, uncompromising faith in Christ.* There is nothing wishy-washy about African Christianity. The faith has penetrated deeply into the life of those who call themselves Christian and affects the way they live. Sudan has shown me how superficial is the common retort that 'if you have nothing, then faith is your only hope' (echoing the Marxist mantra that 'religion is the opiate of the people'). In Sudan there are real choices you can take to move from poverty; you can become a Muslim and receive free drugs, get your children into schools and get offers of help for housing. But people choose to remain Christian, in spite of such inducements.

*Second, commitment to the Bible.* 'He believes the Bible literally!' was the awed comment of a western bishop about a well known African bishop at the Lambeth Conference of 1998. It would have been more accurate to say that the said bishop trusted the Bible as relevant to every moment of every day. Indeed, it is, perhaps, a comment on western Christianity that African clergy are still viewed as fundamentalists by many of us. But clergy in Africa are trained far better these days and many senior clergy have advanced theological degrees from first-world universities. What we can more accurately say is that the Bible is seen as contemporaneous with African life. It speaks of poverty – a daily fact of African life, as most of those who live under one dollar a day live in Africa. But it also speaks of the reality of God in suffering and abasement. Christians who visit Africa often are more likely to look at the Bible in a new way, and see it in personal terms.

*Third, an awareness of the spiritual as dominating life.* Whereas so many in first world countries have relegated the realms of spiritual powers and that of miracles to the attic of Christian believing, no African would be so cavalier about good and evil. A personal devil is taken for granted and exorcism is regularly practised in most churches at some time or another. But it is in the realm of prayer that the greatest difference between the West and Africa is seen. In so many different contexts I have stood with African Christians as they have poured out their hearts to God in prayer, and expected to have those prayers answered.

## **The future**

And what of the future? If we are seeing in our own time the centre of Christianity moving from the northern hemisphere as Philip Jenkins particularly has observed,<sup>13</sup> I think we can with confidence trust God to honour his work. While I, in no form, wish to suggest that African Christianity is above criticism, I honour its remarkable endurance and capacity to absorb pain, persecution and poverty for the gospel. I trust it will learn the lessons of failure that have hindered the mission of western Christianity and I trust it will listen to its one of its own martyrs, the young Bernard

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<sup>13</sup> Jenkins 2007.

Mizeki, who, in 1891 when Bishop Knight Bruce asked for volunteers to do pioneer Missionary work in Mashonaland, offered to go as part of that group. His friends and teachers asked if he was not afraid to go so far from his home. His response was simple:

Why should I be afraid? It is my will to serve God, because He first did so much for me. Only now can I really start work, and Mashonaland is no further from heaven than Cape Town.

That is the spirit of African Christianity I know.

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