

information, were not always able to consent to the surgery and furthermore, did not receive adequate healthcare during and after the procedure. Due to the efforts of external organizations to uncover the unlawful practices behind the AQV campaign, the government of Peru has acknowledged responsibility for actions undertaken in the name of family planning and has made significant changes to its to try to improve the availability and the quality of all modern methods of family planning. However, despite reports that implicate them as well,

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the UNFPA and USAID continue to affirm that their actions in no way supported the violation of rights that occurred. While the Peruvian government was ultimately responsible for carrying out the AQV campaign, it would not have been possible without funding from these agencies. Therefore, program funding comes with the responsibility of ensuring that no harm will come to those who take part in the programs. Both organizations need to review their monitoring process of programs that are funding activities that could potentially be linked to a violation of basic human right. In 2011, the Peruvian government reopened the case and is conducting a review of the criminal activities undertaken during this period. In the same manner, USAID and the UNFPA should also conduct a thorough review of the funding of the procedures and the implications of their support for the program.

Environment and Gender in Africa's Christian Revolution

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Christianity is growing rapidly in Africa: over the last hundred years the number of Christians has increased from nine percent of the continent's population to 46 percent, or around 360 million people.¹ Contrary to popular assumption in the global north, much of this growth has occurred since the end of the colonial period. Africans have actively sought out older denominations that no longer represent the oppressor and are creating their own churches based on Africanized understandings of Scripture. This is an African Christian revolution, alongside which another revolution is taking place: the growing influence of the churches of the global south. The global character of Christianity is changing. The ways in which it dialogues with contemporary development issues, such as environmental sustainability and gender equality, will likely have a strong southern influence in the future. Africans are continuously building bridges between traditional beliefs and the new faith. I argue that this represents a revolutionary form of alternative development over which Africans may have greater ownership.

Both traditional denominations and new African churches play an important role in the countries of southern Africa with predominantly Christian populations. In the first section of this paper, I trace the history of Christianity on the continent. I focus on the developmental trajectory of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) and then the rise of the African Independent

¹ Philip Jenkins, *The next Christendom* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 2-3.

Churches (AICs) in southern Africa. In the next section, I examine each of these churches' views on key environmental and gender issues. In the final part of the paper, I discuss the bridging of Christian Scripture and traditional beliefs and the potential for a revolution in global Christianity. Ultimately I conclude that an understanding Christianity in Africa is vital for development practitioners.

THE EVOLUTION OF AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY *Ancient Roots*

Christianity has been present in Africa since the first or second century. After being brought to Alexandria, Egypt, it spread south to present-day Ethiopia and west to the rest of North Africa, where it became the religion of resistance to the Roman Empire.² Egypt had a gospel and Psalter in the local language, Coptic, by 300 B.C.E.³ and the Coptic Church continues to have a sizeable presence. The Ethiopian church has similarly long roots: an Ethiopian noble is mentioned in the New Testament as one of the first converts to Christianity,⁴ and in the fourth century Christianity was officially declared the national religion.⁵ While these ancient roots are limited to the northern part of the continent, it is important to recognize the religion's non-European history and African precedents.

Colonialism and Catholicism

As colonial powers sought to increase their control and influence over the African continent, they often cited the introduction of Christianity as a justification of their actions.⁶ The commercial opportunities for resource extraction, cheap labour, and new markets were probably the

most important motivators. However, Edward Saïd, the renowned Palestinian-American literary theorist, aptly indicates that "neither imperialism nor colonialism is a simple act of accumulation and acquisition [...] out of imperialism, notions about culture were classified, reinforced, criticised or rejected."⁷ The Christian colonizers certainly classified Africans and told them that "their societies were backward, their religious traditions sinful, their agricultural practices primitive, their systems of government irrelevant, and their cultural norms barbaric,"⁸ insisting on bringing them Christian salvation.

The RCC arrived in Western and Central Africa with the Portuguese in 1458. These first missionaries, for the most part Jesuits, attempted to adapt Christianity to local traditions by using the local language, incorporating native elements into the liturgy, and allowing for married and even polygamous African clergy. This conciliatory attitude fell apart at the end of the seventeenth century as enemies of the Jesuits turned the pope against them and new orders with stricter views took over the missionary activity.⁹

Philip Jenkins, a professor at Pennsylvania State University who has researched Christianity in the global south extensively, argues that Christianity spread through a networking effect at the grassroots. It attracted diverse groups of people who tended to travel: "Commonly the key African converts were the younger members of society [...] the ones most likely to travel to cities, ports, or trading posts during the first great age of globalization from 1870 - 1914."¹⁰ These young converts would also bring the new

² "The Coming of Christianity," Narr. Hugh Quarshie, *The Story of Africa*, BBC World Service, n.d., http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/africa/features/storyofafrica/index_section8.shtml

³ Jenkins, 2007, 21.

⁴ Acts 8:26-40 (Authorised Version).

⁵ "The Coming of Christianity."

⁶ Jenkins, 2007, 35.

⁷ Edward Saïd, *Culture and Imperialism*, 1994, 9, quoted in "Africa and Europe," *The Story of Africa*, BBC World Service, n.d., http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/africa/features/storyofafrica/index_section11.shtml

⁸ Wangari Maathi, *The Challenge for Africa*, (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 2009), 34.

⁹ Jenkins, 2007, 32-33.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 43.

religion back to their communities, spreading it through the interior. It could be associated with modernity, power, and prosperity and thus appealed to the elite, but it also addressed the marginalized members of African society, those who were powerless or outcast.¹¹

Wangari Maathi, a Kenyan environmental activist and Nobel Peace Prize recipient, presents an alternate view of missionary activity. She states that Christianity led Africans to believe they were inferior because God had not directly revealed himself to them, but had come through the Europeans.¹² She argues that this inferiority complex facilitated colonial domination and delayed political and cultural resistance.

There is overwhelming evidence that, whatever the good intentions of some of the individual missionaries involved, Christianity served as an active partner in the colonial project of domination and assimilation. However, Christianity itself was not to be entirely rejected by Africans along with the colonial regimes. Something in it did resonate with them: "[I]f the faith had been a matter of kings, merchants and missionaries, then it would have lasted precisely as long as the political and commercial order that gave it birth and would have been swept away by any social change."¹³ Instead of being swept away, Christianity has been growing and changing in fascinating ways.

Post-Colonial Catholicism

The RCC is the most populous form of Christianity on the continent. Its members outnumber those of the independent churches by three to one.¹⁴ This growth has occurred both because of population growth and because of new conversions. In 1955, there were 16 million African Catholics; as of 2002, there were 120

million,¹⁵ representing around 13 percent of the total global Catholic population.¹⁶ By 1999, three million of the 18 million Catholic baptisms worldwide took place in Africa, and 37 percent of these were of adults, representing "an important gauge of evangelistic efforts."¹⁷ Remarkably, there are now more people baptized annually in Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo than there are in Italy, France, Spain, and Poland.¹⁸

The continued appeal of Catholicism can be explained by several factors beyond sincere religious conviction. Firstly, with the withdrawal of colonial powers, Catholicism could lose its association with the repression of the formal political regimes so that an acceptance of Christianity "did not imply submission to a foreign political yoke."¹⁹ Many of the first generation independence leaders were Christians and had been educated in Christian mission schools. In some cases, the RCC was able to redeem itself from its collabouration with the colonial regimes by facilitating peace negotiations in ensuing postcolonial civil wars, in countries such as Mozambique,²⁰ Kenya, and Uganda. The 1985 Kairos Statement, released by Catholic and Protestant Churches, argued against the Apartheid regime and placed its repression in an apocalyptic context.²¹ Churches were also amongst the most active groups in

¹¹ Jenkins, 2007, 42-43.

¹² Maathi, 2009, 38.

¹³ Jenkins, 2007, 43.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁵ Jenkins, 2007, 58.

¹⁶ Sophie Arie, "Global south as growing force in Catholic Church," *The Christian Science Monitor*, 5 April 2005, <http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/0405/p01s03-wogi.html>.

¹⁷ Jenkins, 2007, 194.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 195.

¹⁹ Throughout *The next Christendom*, Jenkins refers to how aspects of the Christian expansion in the global south mirror the expansion of Christianity in Europe. For example, in describing how Christianity became more attractive to Africans after the withdrawal of colonial powers, he reminds readers that the same process occurred in Medieval Europe after the collapse of the Roman Empire (59).

²⁰ G. Jan van Butselaar, "The Role of Churches in the Peace Process in Africa: The Case of Mozambique Compared," In *The Changing Face of Christianity: Africa, the West and the World*, Ed. Lamin Sanneh and Joel A. Carpenter (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 97.

²¹ Jenkins, 2007, 148.

pressuring companies to disinvest in Apartheid South Africa. This kind of action helped revive popular support and suggested a future political role for the Church in Africa.

In addition, under Pope John Paul II, the RCC became active in debates on social and economic justice. In the late 1990s, the Pope called for rich countries of the global north to address global poverty and helped inspire the Jubilee 2000 campaign for debt relief.²² Africans could thus see the RCC advocating for poverty relief; they could also see churches providing poverty relief. The term "maize Christians" refers to converts who are primarily motivated by the material support the church can supply, including free food and education in seminaries.²³ Indeed, with restricted state social programmes imposed by structural adjustment programmes in the 1980s, "to be a member of an active Christian church today might well bring more tangible benefits than being a citizen of Nigeria or Peru."²⁴ Or, in other words, religious affiliation may be more integral to everyday survival than any other identity.

While traditional denominations such as Catholicism remain strong forces in African Christianity, a new variety of churches has emerged as significant players, particularly in southern Africa. These AICs base themselves in new prophetic revelations that help to assimilate the Gospel into traditional African culture.

African Independent Churches

AICs grew out of charismatic North American sects from the late 1800s in North America and tend to be associated with the Pentecostal tradition. They share many of the characteristics

of Pentecostal churches, such as reliance on "deep personal faith and communal orthodoxy, mysticism and Puritanism, all founded on clear scriptural authority."²⁵ A belief in miracles and material success through faith is pervasive,²⁶ as is the consciousness of a supernatural world that serves as the source of both divine revelations and evil spirits that affect their everyday lives.²⁷ However uncomfortable ideas about witchcraft, miraculous healings, and visionary dreams can be for Christians of the global north, these elements are strongly rooted in African culture and the present-day African experiences of poverty, illness, and misfortune, as well as of community and social change. There is also a great deal of precedent for prophetic revelation, miracles, and holy men in the Old Testament.²⁸

Jenkins describes a common pattern of prophetic revelation and formation of AICs across Africa:

An individual is enthusiastically converted through one of the mission churches, from which he or, commonly, she, is gradually estranged. The division might arise over issues of church practice, usually the integration of native practices. The individual receives what is taken as a special revelation from God, commonly in a trance or vision [...] then begins to preach independently, and the result might well be a new independent church.²⁹

²² Jane Lampman, "A strong pope, a broad impact," *The Christian Science Monitor*, 4 April 2005. <http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/0404/p01s01-woeu.html>

²³ Bruce Buursma, "Roman Catholicism Adapts as it Spreads in Africa," *The Ottawa Citizen*, 11 Jan 1986. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/238943410/134DD662F463F11A083/1?accountid=12599>

²⁴ Jenkins, 2007, 76.

²⁵ Jenkins, 2007, 8.

²⁶ Lamin Sanneh, "Introduction: The Changing Face of Christianity: The Cultural Impetus of a World Religion," In *The Changing Face of Christianity: Africa, the West and the World*, Ed. Lamin Sanneh and Joel A. Carpenter (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 10.

²⁷ Todd M. Vanden Berg, "Culture, Christianity, and Witchcraft in a West African Context," In *The Changing Face of Christianity: Africa, the West and the World*, Ed. Lamin Sanneh and Joel A. Carpenter (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 58.

²⁸ Jenkins, 2007, 127; Philip Jenkins, *The new faces of Christianity: believing the Bible in the global south* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 56.

²⁹ Jenkins, 2007, 48.

AICs have seen rapid growth and popularity across Africa. A notable example is the South African Zion Christian Church (ZCC), founded by Engenas Barnabas Lekganyane in 1910. It is a major political and religious force in the country, and draws over a million pilgrims to its Easter meeting at Zion City, South Africa. Jenkins points out that this is a larger crowd than that which greets the Pope in the Vatican on Easter morning.³⁰ The ZCC is one of many AICs to adopt African customs such as polygamy, ritual taboos, exorcism, witchcraft, and possession by evil spirits.³¹ In the 1990s, there were at least four thousand AICs in South Africa, with five million members. Soweto alone had around nine hundred congregations.

Naturally, AICs vary widely in their beliefs and practices, and such generalizations about one may not necessarily be applicable to the others. However, they do represent the influence of African traditions and realities on Christianity. While the traditional denominations may allow some Africanization of peripheral issues, they are very opposed to alterations that may affect the core Christian beliefs, such as those related to the spirit world.³² AICs "define[d] a significant front line in the culture clash with the West" by embracing a "crowded, dynamic universe of persons, souls, spirits and evil."³³ This overturns the idea that Christianity continues to be imposed from the outside on passive African populations. The diversity and intensity of responses suggest a genuine religious fervour and cultural relevance for the religion on the continent.

AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY AND CONSERVATISM: PERSPECTIVES ON ENVIRONMENT AND GENDER

African Christianity is known to be more socially

conservative than that of Europe and North America, where there is higher emphasis on religious pluralism. The primary reason for this is that southern Christians tend to view Biblical texts as literal and authoritative. There are several reasons for this approach to the Bible, which I will briefly outline below.

One reason why the Bible is taken more literally in Africa is that it tends to resonate with the world they live in. Famine, poverty, debt, and disease and healing are all dealt with in the Bible and so many African communities can identify with the social, political, and economic realities it presents.³⁴ Whereas northern churches emphasize the new covenant of the New Testament, southern churches tend to hold the Old and New Testaments in equal regard and to observe similarities between Old Testament societies and their own traditions.

The history of the Bible's arrival in colonial Africa must also be taken into account. Often the Bible was the only book Africans were exposed to, and thus carried "certain revolutionary assumptions about the nature of reading and the means of communicating information."³⁵ Written texts thus have a different sort of power and authority that comes at the expense of the oral traditions with which Africans preserved their cultural and historic knowledge.³⁶ Indeed, the African relationship with texts has ambiguous dimensions, in that elites often manipulate documents for oppressive purposes. Texts are thus "held in awe, but not entirely trusted;" spiritual revelation and mystical visions must confirm their authenticity,³⁷ bringing strong oral dimensions into African Christianity.

The importance of scriptural knowledge and authority is true of both the RCC in Africa and the AICs. For the latter, oral knowledge and

³⁰ Jenkins, 2007, 68.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 52.

³² Vanden Berg, 2005, 47.

³³ Sanneh, 2005, 8.

³⁴ Jenkins, 2006, 5.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

³⁶ Maathi, 2009, 40.

³⁷ Jenkins, 2006, 23.

memorization of psalms and sermons represent a direct insertion of the Bible into the social consciousness of the people, another feature of the AICs' Africanized approach. For the former, scriptural reading and interpretation in liturgical life has become of paramount importance.³⁸ The Bible as a link to the divine and as a direct guide for everyday living is an integral part of most African Christianity. The question I now seek to explore is how this Scripturally-based conservatism affects environmental sustainability and gender equality.

Christianity and Environmental Sustainability

Traditional African religions³⁹ had a deep respect for the earth and a theology that supported sustainable use of resources. Land was given to the people by God, and ownership of land ultimately lay with the divine. Individual families were given rights of use to certain areas and the resources therein, but they used this in trust with their ancestors.⁴⁰ Furthermore, there was an obligation to protect the land for their descendants.⁴¹ It was believed that the ancestors would be angry if holy places were abused and that misfortune would befall future generations if God was displeased by their misuse of his gifts.⁴²

Wangari Maathi links poverty, environmental degradation and loss of culture together.⁴³ She believes that colonization and Christianity

delegitimized the traditional beliefs in ancestors and spirits of the land. She relates the story of Mount Kenya, known as Kirinyaga, the sacred home of God to the locals in pre-Christian times:

When Christian missionaries arrived in the area toward the end of the nineteenth century they told the local people that God did not live on Mount Kenya, but rather in heaven, and that the mountain and its forests, previously considered sacred grounds, could be encroached upon and the reverence accorded to them abandoned.⁴⁴

This story exemplifies a common accusation held against Christianity: that at best, its theology gives humans complete dominion over the earth, and at worst, Christianity promotes environmental degradation. In 1967, the American scholar Lynn White Jr. published an essay in the magazine *Science* entitled "The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis." This essay criticized Christianity's anthropocentric view⁴⁵ of the world as the root of the environmental problems and was the catalyst for wide debate within Christianity on the faith's ecological teachings.⁴⁶ Since then, almost every denomination of Christianity has issued a statement on faith and the environment. Most Christian responses have centred on the concept of stewardship.

Stewardship refers to the idea that God has made people caretakers and protectors of the

³⁸ Jenkins, 2006, 26.

³⁹ Throughout this paper I refer to "traditional African religions" in a broad sense. This is done to facilitate the flow of the writing, and is by no means intended to disregard the diversity of beliefs and practices that such a phrase might encompass. Nor is it meant to imply these traditions are purely a thing of the past; I refer to these "traditional religions" in the past tense because the scholars I cite refer mostly to practices and beliefs as they were in the pre-colonial times. The changing dynamics of traditional belief structures in Africa is also quite revolutionary; however, it is not the focus of this paper.

⁴⁰ C.K. Omari, "Traditional African Land Ethics," In *Worldviews, Religion and the Environment: A Global Anthology*, Ed. Richard C. Foltz (Belmont CA: Wadsworth, Thompson Learning Inc, 2003), 98.

⁴¹ Maathi, 2009, 162.

⁴² Omari, 2003, 99.

⁴³ Maathi, 2009, 165.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁴⁵ Anna Peterson, "In and of the World? Christian Theological Anthropology and Environmental Ethics," In *Worldviews, Religion and the Environment: A Global Anthology*, Ed. Richard C. Foltz. (Belmont CA: Wadsworth, Thompson Learning Inc, 2003), 321. The basis of this view is found in the first chapter of Genesis: "And so God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves on the earth'" (1:26-28). Historically most have understood this chapter as "legitimizing human domination over and utilization of the natural world" without any specific obligation to care for the earth as something with intrinsic value.

⁴⁶ Peterson, 2003, 319.

rest of creation. This still allows for humans to be distinct from the natural world and to have a special relationship with God, but places limits on human freedom and dominion over the rest of nature.⁴⁷ Many are critical of this perspective because it continues to view humans as somewhat distinct and separate from the natural world around them. More radical understandings have tried to explore the continuity between spirit and body, or the divine and the earthly.

For example, the feminist theologian Sallie McFague roots her understanding of ecological Christianity in the incarnation and the person of Jesus. If God came into the world and became fully human while remaining fully divine, then he valorized not only the human body, but all matter. He made nature sacramental.⁴⁸ Thus, the earth is like the body of God and whatever is done to the land is done to God.⁴⁹ While this is an important theological development for the RCC, and Christian thought in general, Christian ecology has stemmed mostly from European and North American contexts. The most radical forms which have emerged within Africa have been in the AICs.

In many AICs, care for the environment is a lifestyle, not a written code of conduct.⁵⁰ The Earthkeeping Churches of Zimbabwe are an interesting case study for how AICs have Africanized Christianity in a specifically ecological way. In Zimbabwe, the Association of African Earthkeeping Churches (AAEC), an assembly of around one hundred and fifty AICs with a combined membership of two million,

has joined together with the Association of Zimbabwean Traditionalist Ecologists (AZTE)

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under the Zimbabwean Institute of Religious Research and Ecological Conservation (ZIRRCON) to form a "green force" that has planted three to four million trees over the last decade. Marthinus Daneel, a professor at the Boston University School of Theology, describes this as "the largest grassroots ecological movement in all of Southern Africa, operating on the basis of religious motivation and mobilization."⁵¹ While considering themselves Christian and using biblical scripture in their worship, these Earthkeeping churches conduct tree planting liturgies that serve as earth healing ceremonies conducted at the behest of the "creator, keeper, and saviour of creation."⁵² Jesus is understood not only as saviour but also as part of the ancestral world, a guardian of the land, and the lord of creation.⁵³ The central figure of Christianity is thus rooted in African ancestral traditions around veneration of the land:

Jesus said, "I leave you my followers, to complete my work!" And that task is the one of healing! We, the followers of Jesus, have to continue with his healing ministry. So, let us all fight, clothing and healing the earth with trees!⁵⁴

Peterson expounds upon the relationship of religious ethics and cultural beliefs. Religious ethics are not "isolated systems of moral

⁴⁷ Peterson, 2003, 328.

⁴⁸ Sallie McFague, "An Ecological Christology: Does Christianity Have It?" *Worldviews, Religion and the Environment: A Global Anthology*, Ed. Richard C. Foltz (Belmont CA: Wadsworth, Thompson Learning Inc, 2003), 338.

⁴⁹ Peterson, 2003, 326.

⁵⁰ Mathinus L. Daneel, "Earthkeeping Churches at the African Grassroots," In *Worldviews, Religion and the Environment: A Global Anthology*, Ed. Richard C. Foltz (Belmont CA: Wadsworth, Thompson Learning Inc, 2003), 512-513.

⁵¹ Daneel, 2003, 504.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 506.

⁵⁴ Bishop Wapendama, leader of the Signs of the Apostles Church, quoted in Daneel, 2003, 505.

reasoning," but are "integrated into a complex cultural whole."⁵⁵ At the same time, ideas about God and salvation cannot be disregarded in a discussion of cultural values and ethics. This is particularly true of AIC theology since it is "enacted and lived, [and] finds expression in the throb of celebration, spontaneous proclamation, holistic cleansing of the body, spirit and earth, in rousing songs and the rhythm of dancing feet."⁵⁶ An understanding of the strength and power of religious convictions and how these relate to the lived reality of many Africans is thus vital to progress on environmental issues.

The AICs demonstrate the kinds of interactions that can occur between the Bible and African understandings of the world.⁵⁷ This is something with which other churches need to reconcile their theology. While Christianity generally rejects localized sacredness, John Mbiti, a distinguished African theologian, insists that "African Christianity needs a theology of the land [...] This is probably the most urgent theological issue facing the church in our continent today."⁵⁸ This is an unfinished project, but one whose completion could help Africans dealing with the contradictions of tradition and "modernity" so that they, like their ancestors, don't have to feel "alienated or adrift in a meaningless, highly materialistic world [...] because their world [is] animated by the spirits of God."⁵⁹ Only in this case, it is the Christian God who is present in their world.

Christianity and the Role of Women

There is a wide range of relevant gender issues that could be examined from an African Christian perspective. In this paper, I will focus on the general role of women in the church and the implications for their social roles and individual rights. The conservatism and biblical literalism of southern churches certainly defines

the roles of women in the church in ways that appear oppressive to northern feminists. However, women form the core of most of the congregations in the global south and are widely active in lay organizations.⁶⁰ This is true for both the RCC and the AICs.

The restrictions placed on women by the RCC are fairly well known: women are not allowed to be ordained as church leaders, they are not granted complete control over their bodies and sexuality,⁶¹ and the image of the submissive wife and good mother remains the female model. These are really "the contemporary replay of themes and issues familiar to us under the rubric of Christian origins in the Mediterranean world and beyond"⁶² and issues that the global north has not fully finished debating. However, even in the AICs, whose origin is more African than Mediterranean, conservatism predominates.

Jenkins argues that conservative trends in the newer churches reflect previously existing social gender norms in African society and that "they naturally gravitate to Bible passages that support these ideas."⁶³ The idea that women should be submissive, pious, and unquestioning, particularly as wives, has biblical foundations 1 Corinthians 7 and Ephesians 5⁶⁴ but also in traditionally patriarchal structures. However, by providing a "new and exalted view of the family and of domesticity" the church places greater emphasis on male responsibility, fidelity, and

⁶⁰ Jenkins, 2006, 158.

⁶¹ Bridget Walker, "Christianity, Development, and Women's Liberation," *Gender and Development*, Vol. 7, No. 1, (Mar., 1999):17. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4030366>.

⁶² Sanneh, 2005, 5.

⁶³ Jenkins, 2006, 159.

⁶⁴ 1 Corinthians 7 concerns marriage, virginity, and widowhood. Some of the relevant verses include "It is good for a man not to touch a woman" (7:1), "The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body but the wife does" (7:4), and "But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: it is good for them if they can remain even as I am [celibate]" (7:8). Ephesians 5 contains shorter admonitions on marriage, the most oft-quoted section of which is "Nevertheless, let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband" (5:33). Generally greater emphasis has been placed on the expectations of women rather than the mutuality of submission and respect.

⁵⁵ Robin Lovin and Frank Reynolds, *Cosmogony and Ethical Order*, 1985, 3-4 quoted in Peterson, 2003, 331.

⁵⁶ Daneel, 2003, 504.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ John S. Mbiti, *Bible and Theology in African Theology*, 1986, quoted in Jenkins, 2006, 52.

⁵⁹ Maathi, 2009, 162.

chastity. This does not imply equality, but it can drastically change the⁶⁵ everyday lives of married women and the way in which genders relations are understood.

A more nuanced view of the role and rights of women may thus be applicable to the African context. Bridget Walker points out that "on the one hand, religious teaching preaches women's subordination through imposing social codes regarding their roles, behaviour, and relationships with men," while at the same time, the church is a key place in which women can meet and talk amongst themselves.⁶⁶ Indeed, many women in Africa feel the church has had a positive effect in their lived experience, as it affirms their identities, allows them to express themselves, and encourages them to form bonds with other women. A particularly notable answer can be found in the case of the Earthkeeping churches in Zimbabwe.

ZIRRCON has a Women's Desk that coordinates seventy-five rural women's clubs comprised of around 30 to 40 adult women. These clubs "combine the objective of earth care with income-generating projects and female emancipation."⁶⁷ Women in these clubs describe feelings of assertiveness and community. They feel that they are co-restorers of Eden alongside God and that this grants them an honour and dignity equal to that accorded to men:

Here in ZIRRCON the women are now redefining their status [...] they are treated as equals by the men and they have their own insights and plans in the movement without interference or domination from the side of men [...] we women have our own things here. I am so happy because we know these things are really ours [...] You fathers, who have come here today

are in support of *our* endeavours.⁶⁸

While this may seem like an incomplete form of equality in the framework of Western feminism, it shows how participation in Christian-based organizations can fill African women with a sense of pride, self-worth, and power. From this position of strength, women can often further assert the nature of their role in society. Across Africa, "women find in the new churches the power to speak and often to lead [...] Christianity is transforming women's role and aspirations."⁶⁹ These groups are often able to discuss issues that might be considered subversive or indecent, such as rape and infidelity, through Bible studies focusing on select passages.⁷⁰ They regularly use their own interpretations of biblical texts to counter gender prejudices. Old Testament and traditional African taboos on impurity concerning blood and women's menstrual cycles⁷¹ are contrasted with Jesus' willingness to associate with the marginalized, often including women who are prostitutes or who are ill.⁷² They also look for examples of strong female leadership in the Bible in the characters of Deborah,⁷³ Esther,⁷⁴ the female community around Jesus, and Mary, the mother of Jesus.⁷⁵ These women are presented as having integral value for being who they are; this includes their identities as wives and mothers.

Feminist Christian scholars in Africa have

⁶⁵ Jenkins, 2007, 75.

⁶⁶ Walker, 1999, 15.

⁶⁷ Daneel, 2003, 511.

⁶⁸ Raviro Mutonga, chairperson of Women's Desk, quoted in Daneel, 2003, 512.

⁶⁹ Jenkins, 2006, 158.

⁷⁰ See the rape of Tamar in 2 Samuel 13:1-22 (AV).

⁷¹ Jenkins, 2006, 162.

⁷² A key text for African feminists is the story of the healing of the woman with the issue of blood. This woman, considered impure because of her ailment, is healed through her faith as she reaches out and touches Jesus' robe. Rather than being angry at this brash breaking of social conventions, Jesus tells her, "Daughter be of good cheer [...] go in peace" (Luke 8:43-48).

⁷³ Judges 4:4-24 (AV).

⁷⁴ Esther 1-10 (AV).

⁷⁵ Walker, 1999, 19.

formed the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (CCAWT). Active since 1989 with chapters in 13 African countries, the CCAWT wants to develop a new African feminism: "as women of Africa we came to a realization that our own liberation partially depends on us [...] we must stretch our theological imagination, our reading of the Holy Scriptures to take cognizance of our presence as women of Africa."⁷⁶ These women focus on increasing literature on the role of African women in the church written by and for African women. However, the influence of Western feminism and their scholarly approach may not fully reflect the lived experience of the women who form the majority of Christians in Africa.⁷⁷ African women on the ground may be less committed to fighting existing structures and more inclined to find unique and fulfilling roles within them, as the examples of ZIRRCO and other women's faith organizations demonstrate. These are not necessarily any less fulfilling or worthwhile than the more scholarly or radical assertions of African women within the church.

TRADITIONALIZING CHRISTIANITY AND CHRISTIANIZING TRADITION: IMPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT

Wangari Maathi writes that poverty, environmental degradation, and loss of culture are inextricably linked. She argues that colonialism and the Christianity that accompanied it took away Africans' culture and replaced it with racialized hierarchies and a new religion that saw God as external to the world; as a result Africans became passive, poor, and abusive of their environment. I agree that these are features of the colonial legacy and that any attempt to deal with crucial development goals

must take into account this history. However, in the postcolonial period the religion of the colonizers is becoming Africanized and that this must be recognized and given importance in development efforts.

This transformation also has implications for global understandings of Christianity. European scholar Walbert Buhlmann refers to the southward shift of Christianity as "the third church," giving this revolution prominence as an equal and unique tradition outside the common division of western and eastern traditions.⁷⁸ There is also now talk of an African (or Latin American) Pope, with Nigerian Cardinal Francis Arinze widely considered a frontrunner following the death of Pope John Paul II in 2005.⁷⁹ In an ironic twist, Africans are now being sent north to re-evangelize Europe.⁸⁰ This could mean the transplanting of some of the trends from an Africanized RCC or the AICs to the rest of the world. Jenkins believes that the growth of churches in the global south "portends a conservative shift in theology and in attitudes toward biblical authority" with revolutionary repercussions for religious attitudes, particularly towards sexuality.⁸¹ Jenkins warns against Christians in the global north manipulating these trends for their own purposes, either to justify more social activism or to validate their own conservatism;⁸² it is likely, however, that conservatives in the global north will see their morals increasingly reflected in global religious thought.

Conservative tendencies and literal readings of the Bible may also cause ruptures and conflict within traditional denominations with

⁷⁶ "Profile," *The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians*, n.p. n.d. <http://www.thecirclecawt.org/profile.html?PHPSESSID=a796boedoa4552e2e85a53799b655ec1>

⁷⁷ Jenkins, 2006, 164.

⁷⁸ Walbert Buhlmann, *The Coming Of The Third Church*, 1976, 3, quoted in Jenkins, 2007, 3.

⁷⁹ David Blair, "Centre of Christianity Moves to Africa," *Calgary Herald*, Mar 13 2005, <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=807557021&sid=1&Fmt=3&clientId=13370&RQT=309&VName=PQD>

⁸⁰ Buursma, 1986.

⁸¹ Jenkins, 2006, 10.

⁸² Jenkins, 2007, 14.

a presence in both north and south. This has already happened in the Anglican Church, where southern Christians rejected the ordination of a homosexual bishop in the United States and moves to allow blessings of homosexual unions. Other denominations are watching this situation with trepidation,⁸³ aware that such problems could equally arise in their churches whenever northerners choose to interpret a biblical passage "in context" while southerners read it as literal and authoritative.

For those interested and working in development issues, understanding the evolving dynamics of African Christianity represents both a necessity and a potential opportunity. Bridget Walker emphasizes this, insisting that while religion may seem remote or irrelevant in the European and North American contexts, it plays an important role in much of the global south.⁸⁴ In Africa we can see that Christianity specifically is a young mass movement, with many new converts.⁸⁵ It thus represents a significant element of the context in which development work is undertaken.

As seen in the discussion above, Christianity can be interpreted in ways that are detrimental to environmental sustainability and to gender equality, or it can be harnessed as a convincing motivator for leadership on these issues. I suggest that it is important not to dismiss or disparage people's religious convictions, even if some of the beliefs they hold appear to be regressive from the viewpoint of the global north. Rather, development workers should initiate dialogue on the issues, bringing together people of different perspectives. Bridget Walker describes a workshop on the roles of men and women organized by Oxfam Great Britain:

There was a lively discussion of these issues, with much use by participants

of scriptural references to support their points of view. A proverb which suggested that beating and love were connected was firmly repudiated by a participant who quoted the Bible. Love, she said, is patient and kind.⁸⁶

As seen in this example, Christian scripture contains statements that can be interpreted in many ways and that sometimes contradict each other. African Christians, with their strong tradition of oral scriptural knowledge can engage in discussions about biblical messages on development issues and develop understandings that are relevant to their reality. Bringing people together, as churches and church organizations do, can create assertive communities. These pre-existing networks, bound together by something as significant to the people as their faith, can be used by development workers as the basis for starting discussion and encouraging widespread mobilization.

The growth of the AICs and the Africanization of mainstream denominations such as the RCC show that Christianity cannot be dismissed as a static colonial remnant but must be considered a dynamic force that can accommodate these kinds of discussions even when they challenge conventional conservative interpretations. These notions may not be as easily or quickly dispelled, but Jenkins points out that "Southern Hemisphere Christians would not avoid political activism but they would become involved strictly on their own terms."⁸⁷ Trying to force more liberal ideas on environmental sustainability and gender equality on African Christians (or Africans in general) is thus a faulty effort.

Moreover, African churches have shown the capacity to bridge the traditional spiritual and cultural beliefs with Christianity. This ability to bridge the traditional and the present is a

⁸³ Jenkins, 2006, 4.

⁸⁴ Walker, 1999, 15.

⁸⁵ Jenkins, 2007, 137.

⁸⁶ Walker, 1999, 17.

⁸⁷ Jenkins, 2007, 7.

powerful tool for development. Walker states that "religion offers alternatives to the dominant models of social, economic, and political development"⁸⁸ and Maathi concludes that culture, poverty, environmental degradation, and women's rights are linked.⁸⁹ Thus, for many Africans, cultural loss may be reclaimed through new iterations of traditional beliefs and customs incorporated into a faith that is often familiar and

very relevant to their current lived experience. This religious revolution can thus serve as an alternative development model, facilitating reclamation of culture, while asserting Africans' abilities to discuss and develop an approach towards environmental sustainability and gender equality on their own terms.

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have argued that Christianity has taken on a revolutionary role in postcolonial Africa and that its continued growth is likely to shape global Christian thought, creating yet another kind of revolution. This influence currently tends towards conservative positions, particularly on matters of sexuality, but African churches both mainstream and independent must be seen as developing their viewpoints to bridge traditional beliefs and Christian scripture through the mobilization and assembling of congregants. This context must be understood by development practitioners working in Africa. However, beyond understanding the context, I suggest that these networks can and do serve as places for dialogue on key development issues, such as environment and gender. Negotiating varying opinions on these topics through religious organizations could be an alternative form of development, one that allows Africans to take ownership of the discussion while reclaiming and interpreting lost cultural aspects through their new faith.

⁸⁸ Walker, 1999, 15.

⁸⁹ Maathi, 2009, 165.

Children in Armed Conflict:

An Analysis of International Efforts to Prevent the Use of Child Soldiers

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In many parts of the world today, children are engaged in extreme conflict as part of rebel factions, paramilitaries, and in some cases, government armed forces. Many of these children are trained to serve as armed combatants, forced labourers, and sex slaves. Over the past few decades, the international community has mobilized to combat the issue of child soldiering, calling it a basic human rights abuse. To support this mobilization, multiple documents have been drafted and implemented by both government and international organizations. The most prominent international document dedicated to the protection of children and the restriction of child soldiering, is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was adopted by the General Assembly in 1989. Following this was the creation of its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict in 2000.¹ Yet, despite this increased international awareness, the global use of children as armed combatants appears to be rising, and "the recruitment and employment of child soldiers [continues to be] one of the most flagrant violations of the norms of international human rights."² Although the international community has drawn attention to the issue, there has been little success in stopping or even reducing the practice of child soldiering.

¹ Christine Lundy. *An Introduction to the Convention on the Rights of the Child* (Ontario, Canada: Full Circle Press, 1997), 86.

² P.W. Singer, *Children at War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2005), 37.