

African Catholicism in the Global Context

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The question

What is it about Africa that is currently attracting so much attention the world over? Many of the sources of curiosity are negative. Though, indeed, founded on fact, they are spread often in exaggerated and even malicious forms by the international mass media. They include seemingly interminable social conflict, endemic corruption and political misgovernance, and perhaps above all, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, apparently uncontrollable in sub-Saharan Africa. From this hopeless perspective, sometimes called Afropessimism, there is little good to be expected from the African continent.

But Africa seems to confound the Afropessimists. Developments in African Christianity, among other things, now shape a subject of discussion within global Christianity in academic, missionary, and pastoral circles. This is an interest that does not seem to be confined purely and strictly within Christian religious boundaries, or to be concerned only with internal church issues. In its current form it goes beyond them to touch also on the wider questions of Christian relations with other religions and faiths, especially Islam. The debate embraces also the extent to which the Christian churches influence current African political orientations and decisions, their involvement in economic, social, and cultural development issues such as education and health in the continent, either on their own initiative or in partnership with global non-

governmental organisations, and so on. Clearly, the role of the Christians churches in the future of the African continent is something that cannot be ignored.

The pertinent question in all of this discussion, it seems to me, has been concerned with two important issues: numbers on the one hand and theology on the other. The fundamental issues of the debate might briefly be phrased in this way: Is it demographics or internal theological dynamics that is thrusting African Christianity to the attention of the world? The following discussion deals specifically with Catholic Christianity in the debate, and for this purpose we might phrase the issue succinctly. What is it, between the demographic and theological factors that is drawing the attention and interest of global Catholicism to developments within African Catholic Church and their potential consequences to the wider, global church?

The demographic factor

Until very recently the factor of interest for Catholicism and Christianity in general was demographics. This was not without good reason. Since the second half of the twentieth century Christianity has grown phenomenally in numerical terms in the global South, leading many students of world Christianity to want to have a closer look at developments there. "While every day in the West, roughly 7,500 people in effect stop being Christians," a columnist, J. O. Mills wrote in an English Catholic periodical *New Blackfriars* in January 1984, "every day in Africa roughly double that number become Christians" (see Isichei 1995:1). Most scholars of Christianity now speak of a "shift" in Christianity's centre of gravity from Europe and North America toward the

Southern Hemisphere. Some three decades ago the missiologist Walbert Buhlmann (1977) already made some predictions about this shift, a forecast that has proved to be essentially correct. We can safely use it here as graphic illustration of the trend that has taken place a decade into the third millennium.

If, according to Buhlmann (1997:20), the Southern Hemisphere or what he calls the Third Church boasted of only 37 percent of the global Christian population in the mid-1960s, by the turn of the third millennium things would change drastically. He predicted that in the 35-year period between 1965 and 2000, the proportion of Christians living in the Southern Hemisphere would rise to 58 percent. And whereas Catholics in the Southern Hemisphere made up only 48.5 percent of global Catholicism in 1960, Buhlmann projected the number would rise to 70 percent by the year 2000. That is an increase of 21.5 percent in two generations.

The numerical shift in the ratio of Christians world-wide to the South is also indicative of a shift in denominational terms within Christianity itself. By all indications the movement of Catholic Christians globally is still in favour of the South. More than anywhere else, apart from Latin America where it has been more or less established for centuries, Catholicism is today growing fastest in Africa. This is so despite the rise of the numerous Pentecostal movements in global Christianity, a situation that also is affecting the continent, as well as the increasing numerical strength of the African Initiated Churches (AICs) there. On account of these movements and the fluidity of Christian identities caused by them (many operate on an ad hoc basis in Africa) the dominance of Catholicism in its stable, institutional, post-Tridentine form may indeed not be easy to

define or gauge. Increasingly, more and more people tend to define their Christian identity implicitly not in “either/or” denominational terms, but in a “both/and” perspective. A person may variously attend services in different Christian denominations without guilt or sense of betrayal of his or her faith. Still, at the level of explicit self-definition, it appears that most African Christians do identify themselves as Catholic.

Whatever the causes of the geographical-demographic shift-- and Buhlmann (1997:19-24) mentions several of them— such spectacular and rapid growth in numbers of Christians (and Catholics) in the Southern Hemisphere, and in Africa in particular, is a phenomenon that could not be easily ignored. Christians and church leaders all over the world, as well as scholars with an interest in religion everywhere, were bound to sit up and notice it. There is strength in numbers. Consequently, we may correctly argue that African Christianity’s place and influence in world Christianity also is based on its growing numerical strength. This is something that definitely cannot be disregarded or downplayed.

As a way to illustrate this point, let us take the example of the recent and ongoing debate about the issue of homosexuality in the world-wide Anglican Communion (for example, see Asaju 2006:325-339). We are referring here specifically to the question of accepting openly gay people to the church’s ministerial positions, the episcopate in particular. Although there are notable exceptions to this position even in these regions, many of the Anglican churches in the United States and Europe would generally seem to accept, or at least tolerate, this situation both within the church in general and in ministry in particular. Part of the most unmitigated opposition against it,

one that has seriously threatened to split the unity of the world-wide Anglican Communion, has come from Africa and from Nigeria in particular. The reason for the muscle the Nigerian church can flex in this matter is not so much on account of the correctness of its interpretation of the Bible on this question— the jury seems to be still out on that— but because of the strength of the Nigerian Church’s numbers. It should be noted that numerically, Nigeria is the second biggest of all Anglican provinces in the world. Consequently, when its primate, Archbishop Peter Akinola, speaks definitively for the Nigerian Church against homosexual ministers in the church, the global Anglican Communion, as well as the wider Christian community, cannot help but take notice.

Numerical strength must therefore be given due importance in determining the policies and direction of the churches. To this, it must quickly be added that, though important, numerical strength alone cannot definitively and always be the determining factor of a church’s strength and influence. The foundational history of Christianity itself offers a clear lesson on this matter. The movement for the Kingdom of God initiated by Jesus of Nazareth at the beginning of the first century, and the churches his disciples (the Apostles) founded shortly after his death at about the middle of the same century, were by no means huge sociological realities demographically. Within the Jewish population, from which the movement began, it was a small sect. In the context of the Roman Empire in the midst of which it took root and grew, it was similarly a minority movement. Christianity thus began as a virtually negligible group in terms of numbers.

The local Jewish religious and Roman colonial authorities initially saw the Christian movement to be a minor political and cultural nuisance in both instances, and

this was to remain so until around the first half of the fourth century. Yet, even after Constantine embraced Christianity as the religion of the Empire, culminating with the Council of Nicea in 325, it could not be said that Christianity finally commanded a dominating numerical presence in the Roman Empire in relation to the rest of the population. The pagan religions continued to dominate popular spirituality. The remarks of Jesus in the Gospels would remain true for the most part. He warned that his disciples' influence would be actualised within the population in the form of leaven or salt in relation to dough or food, a small amount of which permeates the larger mixtures into which they are introduced.

Africa's Christian and Catholic population may be large and growing rapidly compared to the same reality globally, but it remains small in relation to the total population of the continent, amidst Islam, African Traditional Religion, and other faiths combined. Even with growth in numbers, there must therefore be something else that brings Christianity here in Africa to the attention of world Christianity. This "something" can be found in elements of its own internal dynamics. Let me discuss some of them in relation to African Catholicism.

Cultural resilience: apparent "triumph" turned upside-down

When in the late fifteenth century, precisely on 3 May 1491, Portuguese missionaries baptised Nzinga Nkuwu, *Mani* Kongo or King of the vast African kingdom of the Kongo as Joao I, they had great expectations for the ascendancy of Catholicism in the whole region, numerically and spiritually. Here, they thought, was an opportunity, to wipe out

what they described as the “paganism” and “fetishism” of these black people, and instead substitute it with the Catholic religion and Portuguese culture. In short, they interpreted their mission as being to offer the people of Kongo “civilization.” Of course, the missionaries were elated when the Queen, Nzinga a Nlaza, insisted on baptism the same day, and took the name of Eleanor (or Leonor). The king’s eldest son, Prince Mvemba a Nzinga, was at the same time christened as Afonso. A section of the nobility followed in the king’s family’s footsteps and received baptism. Afonso became an ardent Catholic. Only the king’s other son by another wife, Prince Mpanzu a Kitima or Mpanzu a Nzinga, refused baptism and held tenaciously to his people’s ancestral traditions. It was soon to emerge that in this stance the great majority of the population and nobility of the kingdom supported him. However, in the struggle for succession following the death of the king, Afonso, with the help of the Portuguese, ultimately defeated and killed Mpanzu (see Baur 2009 edition: 55-77).

With the death of Mpanzu, the whole population of the Kongo kingdom thereby was not converted to Catholicism although the new religion enjoyed sizeable but intermittent gains. By hindsight, however, we do realise now that the Portuguese missionaries’ expectations were unrealistic and that, in the long run, the “pagan” Prince Mpanzu and his majority supporters in the population intuitively held onto the theologically more tenable position. As a matter of fact, in 1494, barely a short three years after his baptism, King Nzinga Nkuwu himself came around. Realising the error of attempting to abandon the entirety of his ancestral culture and religious beliefs in the name of Catholicism, he reverted to his people’s traditional religious customs. Among

the most important of these was the veneration of the ancestors, something that the Portuguese had tried to discourage by publicly destroying ancestral cult objects.

No doubt with the reputed feat of the Old Testament prophet Elijah against the prophets of Baal in mind (see 1 Kings 18:20-46), the missionaries acted similarly. They collected ancestral artefacts and other symbolic representations of the spirit world as the people understood, visualised, and objectified it, and burned them on bonfires to demonstrate the superior spiritual power of Catholicism as a religion and the God it stood for. The missionaries counted this as “triumph” of Catholicism. But this so-called success was only external. Deep down, the people of the Kongo remained true to their culture despite their apparent conversion to Catholicism. This theological dynamic has remained a challenge to Catholicism in Africa since then, one that for various reasons similar to the misconceptions of the Portuguese missionaries of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Catholicism in Africa has generally failed to resolve.

Of course, the Nzingas lived during what has been called the second wave of the Christianization of Africa, lasting from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century. (The first wave lasted from the early second to about the seventh century. The third wave, beginning with the colonisation of Africa at the end of the nineteenth century, is the one currently in place). For Catholicism, the contemporary outlook and practices are mainly a direct result of the church as designed by the Council of Trent (1545-63), whose main tenets both the first Vatican Council (1869-70) and, with some significant modifications, the second Vatican Council (1962-65) retained, confirmed, and explicitly affirmed. Like the Portuguese missionaries in Afonso’s Kongo, the Council of Trent had been called to

confront the “unmitigated evil” of the Protestant Reformation, and the Counter-Reformation the council set in motion could not compromise with anything Protestant. When Catholicism arrived in sub-Saharan Africa in this third attempt, after the Berlin Conference of 1884-5, it brought with it Trent. It was combative and triumphalist in the manner of that council, neither willing nor ready to hear of any kind of compromise with anything African, which it generally regarded as heathen and unmitigatedly evil. The only solution was to uproot African religiosity root and branch, wipe it away, and replace it with “Catholic civilisation,” by which was meant, in practice, European ways of believing, praying, and behaving. This erroneous approach to evangelisation has been well scrutinised and criticised.

It also has failed. While Africans in great and ever-increasing numbers profess Catholicism, as indicated in our introductory discussion, they live and often express their faith in Jesus Christ not according to strict Catholic prescriptions. It is clear now that, often in spite of themselves, they do so according to their cultural vision about the relationship between God and humanity. It is a vision that includes, apart from God, many spirits, good and evil, and, centrally, the ancestors. We are reminded of the cultural tenacity of Prince Mpanzu a Nzinga and the quick cultural reawakening of King Nzinga Nkuwu (Joao I) in their own circumstances. It is a reminder to Catholic evangelisers that God only can be understood and authentically worshipped culturally. Authentic religion is cultural or must have cultural roots. In Jesus, God became incarnate as human. Jesus himself, and initially the Christian movement, were incarnate in Jewish culture. And wherever it went outside of Palestine, including throughout Europe, the

movement could not help but become rooted in those cultures to be appropriated. This is the true triumph of Christianity and Catholicism, one that that must be consciously replicated on the African continent. Closely examined, perhaps the comment of Symmachus in the late Roman empire in support of the old gods had a grain of truth after all: "There cannot be only one path to such a great secret," the Universal God (see Isichei 1995:13). Humans can only approach the truth of God from many directions. And Africans, as exemplified by the Nzinga saga, also have a certain approach.

Inculturation and African Catholicism: two faces

Accordingly, what is attracting global attention to African Catholicism is the transformation that is going on within it, first of all in the area of inculturation. As far as the Catholic Church in Africa is concerned, the inculturation movement is an internal theological dynamic of which African theology is both a result and an inspiration. A subject of discussion and debate among African Catholic theologians is the fundamental theological question concerning the shape and direction of African Catholicism as a faith and institutionally as a church. Will the church insist on retaining in Africa, formally and informally, the same ways of thinking about God and Jesus Christ, about church structures and discipline, about relations with other religions and faiths as the Council of Trent imposed upon it? Or, following up on the window opened up by Vatican II, will it reshape these realities of the faith according to the African vision?

It may strike some as a surprising assertion, but it is factual. There are two aspects of the phenomenon of inculturation: one has a real and authentic face, the

other sports a mask. The real or authentic face of the theological dynamic of inculturation has occurred in Africa since the beginning of evangelisation among the general faithful, the mass of the people who came to accept the Catholic faith and the authority of the Church as its true manifestation. These were people without much “education” yet, if indeed any at all in the modern Western sense of the term. Rather, they were people whose life consisted of the basic human struggle to provide for themselves and their families, physically and spiritually. This struggle was their world, this was their context, and they relied for guidance to see them through on the totality of their life’s endeavours on the beliefs, customs, and practices, or in a word, on the culture received from their ancestors and therein preserved. To put it very briefly, theirs was a context composed of several fundamental realities. It was one of pervasive and pervading benevolent and malevolent spirits, of concerned ancestors who were constantly present with them, and of an all powerful but rather remote God, who was content to let the universe God created operate in the harmonious manner that God established from the beginning.

Whatever language and symbols the missionary evangelisers employed, the Catholic faith was brought and received inevitably in this theoretical and practical context by the general faithful. How could it be otherwise? Thus long before African theologians began to articulate it in the mid-twentieth century, Jesus was already cast by the general Catholic imagination into the images of potent chief, powerful healer, or solicitous brother-ancestor, images familiar in their world. The language of Jesus as “saviour” and “redeemer” favoured by the missionaries was indeed mouthed, as we all

know, but it had no great practical impact; the impact came from the contextual images just mentioned. Neither the benevolent and malevolent spirits nor their concomitants of good magic and witchcraft disappeared from the African worldview. Rather, they were ingeniously fused with the angels and devils of Catholicism, and “ngangas” or medicine men and women, diviners, and witches, as incarnations of evil thrived in the religious imagination of the population. God remained the Great Overseer, but in day-to-day life it was more realistic and more comfortable to deal with the Catholic saints, unconsciously representing the ancestors. You could rely on them on the basis of their proximity both to you on the one hand and to God on the other. They could and would, if you petitioned them, contact God on your behalf, and all would be well.

Late has Catholicism paid attention to this dynamic and taken it as seriously as it should be taken. Indeed, up to the present time, perhaps only a fragment of the theologians, those involved with African theology within the teaching church, seem to be sufficiently concerned about its importance and necessity. Most members of the African Catholic hierarchy, on the contrary, are still operating with a masked face, preferring to ignore such clear writing on the wall in favour of the intolerant and pugilistic attitudes of Trent against African religion. Although they use the word inculturation liberally in their documents and exhortations, they do not make the notion go far enough. It does not touch the deepest realities of the faith of the general, that is how, given their physical and spiritual God-given environment, people have translated and appropriated Jesus and the God he represents in their minds and hearts.

Is inculturation in Africa an instance of dangerous syncretism founded on unacceptable theological relativism? Some in the hierarchy certainly describe it as such and seek as much as possible to discourage it in favour of what they characterise as “pure,” “unadulterated,” “orthodox” Catholic teaching. But what are they actually saying by this assertion? Do they mean by it a teaching unaffected at all by culture, or perhaps as expressed only through a specific (Greco-Roman-North Atlantic) cultural medium? But what culture can be advanced theologically as possessing the *best* conceptual, linguistic, and symbolic ability to express the reality of God or the gospel message? Indeed, “What language does God speak?” But God is infinitely versatile and full of surprises. As D. Crawford writing in 1913 reports, a Shaba Christian in about 1905 was “startled to find that Christ could speak Chiluba!”, (see Isichei 1995:183) having been given the impression all his life that that was impossible. At any rate, popular Inculturation in the African Catholic Church functions as a solution to a debilitating “double religious consciousness,” a life of perpetually straddling two parallel spiritualities simultaneously. It is not difficult to see how such a life can be both psychotically debilitating and spiritually stunting.

The contradictions brought to the fore by these two faces of Catholicism in Africa are getting noticed within the world-wide church, making the situation a subject of frequent papal and Vatican Congregational reflections. But, again, while theoretically the Vatican and local bishops and conferences of bishops urge African Catholics to live their faith as *truly Africans and truly Catholics*, to paraphrase Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II – the latter saying this very frequently— in practice “the brakes are

generally on.” With very few exceptions— one could mention the late Cardinal Joseph Malula of Kinshasa, DRC (then Zaire) and Archbishop Peter Sarpong of Kumasi, Ghana (but even they had to tread very carefully and so could not go far enough)— the practice of inculturation does not get beyond the superficial at the official church level. All this amounts to saying that the contradictions remain, causing some rather unexpected but quite perceptible tremors in the Catholic body in Africa.

Are the sheep being stolen or straying away?

“Who is stealing our sheep?” This is how some Catholic leaders phrase the question looking at the “exodus” of many from the Catholic Church to the new religious movements spreading across the African continent (see Shorter and Njiru 2001:54-67). Father Richard J. Quinn, author of the booklet by the same title, alleges that in Kenya alone “thousands upon thousands” of Catholics “have defected to Pentecostal Evangelical Churches” while the sociologists Aylward Shorter and Joseph N. Njiru, on the other hand, think that the allegation constitutes an “unsubstantiated impression” (see Shorter and Njiru 2001:56-57). Yet even the latter, when asked whether there is such defection happening on some scale, reply affirmatively (Shorter and Njiru 2001:57). Where there is smoke there is fire. The phenomenon is not restricted to only a few African countries; is quite widespread throughout the continent. The truth is that, although aggressive tactics of proselytisation by new religious movements through face-to-face contact, literature, and the mass media (especially television) are often part of their campaigns to win Catholics over, many Catholics join them without much external

pressure. Usually on their own accord they “stray away” from the Catholic Church to join these movements.

The reason why this happens is what is interesting and attracting attention. The causes can be grouped into two categories: Catholics embrace these movements in search of “greener pastures” and “a place to feel at home” in both a physical/material sense and in a spiritual sense. Is there something lacking in the current African Catholic environment that its faithful seek elsewhere in the new movements?

The African masses are economically poor. Some new religious movements in Africa have manipulated this fact and tried to offer Africans, in the name of religion and Jesus, “quick fix” solutions out of this predicament, as Shorter and Njiru point out. “Believe in Jesus,” seems to be the mantra, “and he will make you wealthy.” This is the basis of the attraction to and success of the prosperity gospel churches. As Shorter and Njiru again argue, promises are cheap and the attraction is usually short-lived since most of these promises indeed, cannot be realised. Thus some converts may hold on to their new allegiances and identity for awhile in the hope of cashing in financially, but eventually they become disillusioned and either move onto other movements of a similar kind “to try gain” or return to the Catholic Church. What this highlights in terms of world Catholicism is the poverty that is the life of the majority of the African Catholic faithful, so much so that it sometimes induces them to question their faith.

Much more intense for many, however, is the quest for a spiritual home, a community whose language and customs they can understand and which can understand their hopes, frustrations, and suffering. Although the exact numbers are

obscure, there is no doubt that many Catholics have joined the myriad of African Initiated Churches (AICs) across the continent, some as founders of these churches. Their proliferation is a subject of intense interest in world Catholicism. Why do they multiply so quickly in Africa? There are at least three factors that are especially attractive to Africans in these churches on account of their close connection to the African worldview of disease aetiology, spirits, and the imperative of relationships in terms of healing, deliverance, and reconciliation. Since in the African worldview disease ultimately has a human cause, this cause must be shown for healing to take place. Since, again, spirits are everywhere and can be malevolent, it is often important to cast them away for human wellbeing. And since, finally, the fundamental order of the universe rests on human relationships, being in good relationship to one another is absolutely essential for the harmony of life. Thus, because they speak the language related to these realities and practice rituals that directly address them, this is what makes the African Catholic, whose life-context is precisely this worldview, spiritually at home there.

From a spiritual point of view, the fundamental elements these churches address and the manner in which they address them are more permanent than the Western-inspired Pentecostal movements we have just discussed. Even though some of the AICs may be transient because of lack of firm structures, depending for their survival only on a charismatic founding figure, the concerns necessitating their establishment are ever-present in the African world. Tridentine Catholicism does not confront them in the manner that AICs do. The former's approach to disease is more scientific-pragmatic and analytical than holistic, to the spirits rather hesitant and rationalistic than

foundational, and to reconciliation more legalistic and punitive than affective. The African soul craves for wholeness or harmony in all three, and it finds it captured best in AICs.

Cracks in the wall: openly questioning discipline

Apart from the phenomenon of AICs which started quite early in the history of Catholicism (and Christianity in general) in Africa in the third wave of evangelisation there, there now are new cracks appearing in the wall of “Rome’s most faithful daughter” (Baur 2009:392), the African Catholic Church. These are as major as those related to AICs, and they are appearing at the very centre of the church’s structure, the priesthood. Local hierarchies may attempt to ignore them, assuring their faithful that they are peripheral occurrences, the result of a few disgruntled rebellious individuals. But, all the same, it must be a worrying development overall, one which is tied directly to international Catholicism. Reference here is to the movement for a married priesthood, once thought to be a concern mostly of North Atlantic Catholicism. However, it has surfaced most conspicuously in Kenya in the last few years, and there is no reason to think that it will be confined there.

In Kenya it has constituted itself in two institutions – the Ecumenical Catholic Church of Christ and the movement called Married Priests Now. As just mentioned, both have international Catholic connections, making it difficult to ignore them. Both institutions now have bishops ordained validly, though illegally or illicitly. Former Archbishop of Lusaka, Zambia from 1969-1982, Emmanuel Milingo, himself now

married, ordained Father Daniel Kasomo of Machakos as bishop of Married Priests Now. Archbishop Karl R. Rodig from the United States did the same for the Reformed Catholic Church, with Fathers Godfrey Shiundu and Benedict Simiyu being ordained bishops. Given the African Catholic Church's traditional fidelity to Rome, and coming at a time when Rome has proscribed all discussion on clerical celibacy in the universal Church, these are not insignificant developments.

There is, of course, a world of a difference between the events in Kenya and the Society of St. Pius X of Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, in that the latter does not advocate a married clergy. But in a sense, the Society's dissent is doctrinally much more serious in nature in that it rejects (at least initially) the authority of a council (Vatican II), whereas the former two are dissenting from a discipline. Understandably, therefore, Pope Benedict XVI recently caused an uproar among some sectors in the church by lifting (on January 21, 2009) the sanctions in the form of excommunication previously imposed on four Lefebvrist bishops, allowing them to use the "Tridentine Mass." Some interpreted this as appeasement, but in his letter of March 10, 2009, the Pope explained the motive for his move, saying he was extending a "gesture of mercy" and that his concern was for "reconciliation," describing reconciliation as a central aspect of the pastoral ministry of the Church. Disunity among Christians, the Pope wrote, "their disagreement among themselves, calls into question the credibility of their talk of God." Is it too far fetched to ask whether a similar spirit of compassion, a similar extension of the hand to "meet half-way the brother who 'has something against you'," in the very words of the Pope, could be extended to the members of the two cases in Kenya, inviting them to dialogue in the

interests of Catholic unity? The Pope justified his act of compassion in the letter by arguing that it was pastorally unconscionable to be “indifferent” towards a group with a large following such as the Society of St. Pius X has. It appears that the movements in Kenya, in their own way, may not have an ignoble following either. The Pope’s warning inspired by the Letter to the Galatians 5:13-15 against Christians, specifically in this case Catholics, “biting and devouring” one another should be prophetic.

But even if the cracks are not always so radical they are there all the same, and perhaps in a much more fundamental way. According to the historian of African Christianity John Baur (2009:399), “Since independence a great change in the priestly image has taken place in Africa as elsewhere in the world. In Africa however, the secularized lifestyle of the young clergy clashed with the sacred image that the people still had of the priest, and which he himself usually tried to maintain in an official way!” According to Baur, “This contrast has led to crises of confidence, although rarely mentioned in public.” Speaking on this and related issues in the context of his national church of Congo Cardinal Malula warned, “If our young Congolese clergy do not quickly come to their senses on this point, there will be a catastrophe” (Baur 2009:399). The cardinal was speaking in reference to issues of sexuality, wealth, and influence that are a human phenomenon but that obviously manifest themselves in the African church in specific ways on account of specific circumstances, leading to further questioning of some customs and discipline received from western Catholicism.

If the issue of married clergy may be what attracts much public attention and theological reflection, within clerical circles themselves power and money are questions

of no less concern. Jostling for positions of leadership is not unknown in many an African diocese, but what is causing bigger cracks in the wall is a financial problem. As sources of funding from Europe and America for African dioceses and diocesan priests dry up, tensions between priests and their bishops become pronounced as priests turn to alternative ways of earning a living, ways that may not be looked at favourably by traditional Catholic guidelines for priestly life. What the priests are doing, however, is adjusting to circumstances.

Mission: from Africa to the world

Still, it is through its clergy and women and men religious that African Catholicism is engaging most directly with world Catholicism. As the historian Elizabeth Isichei (1995:84) observes, "Contemporary [Western] Catholic religious orders are, internationally, in a state of crisis and decline. Their members sometimes take comfort from the fact that religious orders [in Europe] experienced a still more traumatic crisis in the late eighteenth century, which was followed by a period of revival, when new orders were founded on an unprecedented scale."

But at present there is not as yet such "revival" in sight, except perhaps in Africa. There was sustained reluctance in these European founded religious orders to admit African members often citing, as in the case of the South African Sotho Benjamin Makhaba who was rejected by the Marianhill Society, the unsuitability of the natives "at their stage of development" to live religious life. The Cistercians similarly rejected an "exemplary Nigerian priest," according to an Irish bishop writing on his behalf in 1949

(see Isichei 1995:86). Gradually, however, circumstances forced the doors to open. Although many Africans preferred to remain in their dioceses, hundreds have now joined religious missionary congregations and societies of North Atlantic origin, as the numbers of new candidates there dwindle almost to nil, leaving only the elderly. Some new religious societies of a missionary orientation are also being founded in Africa. One of the larger of these is the congregation of the Apostles of Jesus with its headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya. Many of these are sending missionaries to the rest of the world, their vision for mission, as exemplified by the motto of the Apostles of Jesus, being "To Africa and the World." Although there is some reluctance in some churches in the North to receive these missionaries from Africa, sometimes dubbing them pejoratively as "imports" or economic "immigrants" who "don't understand our culture," still they are making a difference. The appreciation of the significance of small Christian communities in some European and North American churches as a way of being church is but one example.

The point, however, is that the Catholic Church in Africa is now not simply a receiving church, especially in terms of personnel (missionaries). In 1969 the *lus commissionis* whereby dioceses in Africa as part of the mission territories were apportioned to missionary congregations to govern and financially and pastorally take care of them was abolished. Responsibility for evangelisation in all of these spheres was entrusted to the local dioceses. Still, African dioceses continue to depend for guidance on the Congregation for the Evangelising of Peoples (formerly Propaganda Fide,

established in 1622 and reorganised in 1816). Besides being something of a contradiction of the 1969 Vatican decision, one wonders what purpose this serves.

Conclusion

On account of both the numerical growth and internal theological developments, the Catholic Church in Africa is attracting attention within global Catholicism. The latter, however, is the more significant factor and is the one that, in the end, will influence and contribute to changing the face of Catholicism worldwide. It is yet to be seen what the second Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops or the second African Synod on Justice, Peace, and Reconciliation will produce as a way of contribution to universal Catholic theology. The first African Synod of 1994 on evangelization and inculturation advanced the rich image of the Church as “Family of God,” the practical implications of which are inexhaustible. In any case, given current developments, the global Catholic Church’s focus on Africa is definitely not about to fade any time soon.

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