

# History of Christianity in Africa

## Joel E. Tishken

Spring 2002  
Southwestern University  
HIS 16-303-03; REL19-303-03  
MW 3-4:15 CB 23  
Office: MB212  
Phone: 863-1858

Email: joelt@mail.utexas.edu (this is the most reliable means of contacting me; I check my email several times daily)  
Office Hours: M 4:20-5:00

### Course Description

This course surveys the history of Christianity in Africa from the advent of various North African churches in the ancient era, to the growth of Afro-Christian Churches in the contemporary era.

The first half of the course will explore some North African variants of Christianity such as Gnosticism, Donatism, and Coptic Christianity, including prominent early theologians such as Origen and Cyprian. Africa was central to the demographic and theological evolution of early Christianity, despite its eclipse from most of Northern Africa in subsequent centuries. It will additionally examine Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa before 1800 including the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and Kongo Catholicism. Reasons will be explored for the relative marginality of Christianity in most of Africa before the nineteenth century.

The second half of the course investigates Christianity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries when Africa once again became a central part of global Christianity. Various themes will be examined including: mission impulses, race, indigenous agency, conversion techniques, and religious change, in a variety of regional contexts. Our primary case studies will be drawn from Southern and West Africa. The course will close with an exploration of Afro-Christian Churches; churches that have indigenized Christianity to suit their own cultural and theological needs. The course will look at reasons for the creation of these churches, examine a variety of Afro-Christian Churches, and analyze some documents from them.

### Course Objectives

- 1) Familiarize students with the basic history of Christianity on the African continent at all points in time.
- 2) Foster an appreciation for the central role of Africa in global Christian history.
- 3) Foster critical and synthetic thinking.
- 4) Expose students to the concept of religious syncretism.

### Course Guidelines

- 1) Format for grades is: 100-97 A+, 96-93 A, 92-90 A-, 89-87 B+, 86-83, B, 82-80 B-, 79-77 C+, 76-73 C, 72-70 C-, 69-67 D+, 66-63 D, 62-60 D-, below 59% F
- 2) To be eligible for any make-up quizzes or assignments you must contact the instructor *before* the due date. Late assignments or unexcused quiz absences will be penalized 15 points for every class day they are late.

- 3) Though attendance will not be recorded, regular attendance and participation is central to your successful performance in this, or any, course. You are responsible for all material covered in class whether you are there or not.
- 4) It is your responsibility to keep track of all due dates. Reminders will be given in class, but ultimately this is your own responsibility.
- 5) Any changes to the class calendar will be announced in class at least twice.
- 6) The Honor Code applies to all quizzes and assignments in this class. Violations of the Honor Code will be dealt with according to the principles outlined in the Southwestern Univ. Faculty Handbook.
- 7) In accordance with Southwestern University's Office of Academic Services, students with documented disabilities should be registered with this office. The professor should be notified at least two weeks in advance of any special accommodation needs.

**Instructional Resources** (reading assignments should be read by the day on which they are listed in the calendar)

Hoehler-Fatton, Cynthia. *History, Faith, and Gender in Roho Religion in Western Kenya*.

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. ISBN: 0195097912

Isichei, Elizabeth. *A History of Christianity in Africa: From Antiquity to the Present*.

Lawrenceville, NJ: Africa World Press, 1995. ISBN 0865434433

Salisbury, Joyce E. *Perpetua's Passion: The Death and Memory of a Young Roman Woman*.

New York; London: Routledge, 1997. ISBN: 0415918375

Coursepacket (CP)

**Evaluation**

Exam 1 30%

Exam 2 30%

Paper 1 15%

Paper 2 15%

Participation&Attendance 10%

**Class Calendar**

**1/14** Class Introduction

**1/16** Introduction to Africa, Isichei, 1-11

**1/21** *No class: MLK Day*

**1/23** Coptic Christianity, Isichei, 13-20, 26-29

**1/28** Gnosticism and Valentine, CP: Gerd Lüdemann and Martina Janssen. John Bowden, trans.

*Suppressed Prayers: Gnostic Spirituality in Early Christianity*. (Harrisburg, Penn: Trinity Press International, 1998), 17-36

**1/30** Origen and the Alexandrian school, Isichei, 20-26

**2/4** Monophysitism, Isichei, 29-36

**2/6** Donatism and Cyprian, Isichei, 36-44

**2/11** Ethiopian Orthodoxy, Isichei, 45-52; CP: Adrian Hastings. *The Church in Africa, 1450-1950*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 3-45

**2/13** Ethiopian Orthodoxy (cont.)

**Paper 1 Due**

**2/18** Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa before 1800, Isichei 52-73

**2/20** *No class*

2/25 Kongo and the Antonian Movement, CP: John K. Thornton. *The Kongolesse Saint Anthony: Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita and the Antonian Movement, 1684-1706*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 105-128

**2/27 Exam 1**

3/4 Mission Impulses and Strategies, Isichei 74-97

3/6 Missionaries: Evangelists or Colonizers?

3/11 *Spring Break*

3/13 *Spring Break*

3/18 South Africa, Isichei 98-127

3/20 West Africa, Isichei 153-82

3/25 Afro-Americans and Missions, CP: J. Mutero Chirenje. *Ethiopianism and Afro-Americans in Southern Africa, 1883-1916* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 50-83.

3/27 South Africa, Part II, Isichei 299-322

4/1 West Africa Part II, Isichei 264-298

4/3 Religious Change

4/8 Ethiopianism, CP: Hennie Pretorius and Lizo Jafta, "A Branch Springs Out': African Initiated Churches" in *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social, and Cultural History*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 211-26

4/10 Zionism

**Paper 2 Due**

4/15 Between Mission and ACC, *Rise Up and Walk: The Life and Witness of the African Indigenous Churches* Video 276 R492; CP: Christopher Comoro and John Sivalon, "The Marian Faith Healing Ministry: An African Expression of Popular Catholicism in Tanzania." *East African Expressions of Christianity*, Thomas Spear and Isaria Kimambo, eds. (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1999), 275-95

4/17 Shembe and the Nazareth Baptist Church, CP: Hexham, Irving and G. C. Oosthuizen, eds. Hans-Jurgen Becken, trans. *The Story of Isaiah Shembe: History and Traditions Centered on Ekuphakameni and Mount Nhlankakazi*. (Sacred History and Traditions of the Amanazaretha Vol. 1) Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1996, 10-36

4/22 Kimbangu Simon and l'Église de Jesus Christ sur le Terre par le prophet Simon Kimbangu, CP: John M. Janzen and Wyatt MacGaffey. *An Anthology of Kongo Religion: Primary Sources from Lower Zaire*. Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, Pub#5, 1974

4/24 Nontheta Nkwenkwe, CP: Robert R. Edgar and Hilary Sapire, *African Apocalypse: The Story of Nontheta Nkwenkwe, a Twentieth-Century South African Prophet*. (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000), 1-32

4/29 Summation

**5/1 Exam 2**