THE GAP BETWEEN WESTERN, SECULAR-ADJACENT[1] MISSIOLOGY AND ANIMIST CULTURES

Jennifer B. Rosania
In Touch Ministries, United States of America
jennifer.rosania@intouch.org

Abstract

Although Christianity has spread and flourished throughout the African continent, discipleship efforts at times have not shown converts how to grow in certain aspects of their newfound faith, which has resulted in syncretism. At the root of the problem is the secular-adjacent philosophical orientation of many missionaries who initially sought to spread Western Christian civilization among animist cultures and failed to address common questions new believers expressed. This article investigates the secularization of Western Christianity and the resulting ontological shifts in worldview. It then analyzes the disparities in enchanted-disenchanted perspectives, the transcendent-immanent dissimilarities in kingdom views, the sacred-secular divisions, and the supernatural-political variances in power-focus between animists and Western missionaries. This examination assists in defining many of the differences between African and secular-adjacent Western Christians and how syncretism was not only possible but became seemingly unavoidable to Africans due to the gaping deficiencies in practical instruction.

Keywords: Western Christianity, Africa, secular-adjacent, syncretism, animist.

Christianity in Africa has often been described as an inch deep and a mile wide—shallow in its depth but diverse in its expression.[2] Though the Christian message has spread and flourished on the African continent, the unchanged attitudes, practices, and mores of

---

[1] The term "secular-adjacent" coined here signifies the phenomenon whereby Christian missionaries may express a belief in Jesus Christ and regard His mandates as the reason for their ventures; but who may, all the same, have secular (i.e., temporal, worldly, or unrelated to religion) goals such as colonialism or the spread of civilization as their ultimate motives instead of spiritually transformative objectives. In other words, they may have had a worldview shaped by Christendom.

[2] This saying may have originated with Tokunboh Adeyemo, who said, "The church in Africa is one mile long, but only one inch deep," as reported by David Neff in "Make Disciples, Not Just Converts," *Christianity Today*, 25 October 1999, Vol. 43, No. 12, https://tinyurl.com/y8urvndn (accessed 23 November 2018). A Google search of this saying (accessed 23 November 2018), renders more than three thousand results, with numerous citings in books such as *Papers on Language and Culture* by Mary Muchiri and *From Trials to Triumphs: The Voice of Habakkuk to the Suffering African* by Faustin Ntamushobora.

Likewise, Gideon Para-Mallam, Lausanne international deputy director for Anglophone Africa, in his article, "Theological Trends in Africa: Implications for Missions and Evangelism," discusses this topic and attributes this phrase to: "several theologians and missiologists, including the Rev. Dr. John Stott," *Lausanne Reports,* March 2008, https://tinyurl.com/yaq5vgs7 (accessed 23 November 2018). Para-Mallam writes, "One major result of the disjuncture between belief and practice is the lack of depth found in many Christians. Religiosity is widespread; however, godliness is scarce.

Africans[3] indicates that transformation of adherents—which Christianity professes to accomplish—has fallen short.[4] At the root of this problem are discipleship efforts that have not shown converts how to grow in certain aspects of their newfound faith. Or as "a respected Christian leader in Francophone Africa" once "declared with the enthusiastic amen of many others that 'you missionaries brought us Christ but never taught us how to live.'"[5]

This research analyzes why some mission efforts failed to pass on the Christian faith in a holistic manner by comparing the vastly differing worldviews held by many Western Christians and animists.[6] Many missionaries taught a civil, basic Christianity—one that appeared devoid of a spiritually-transformative aspect and which resulted in a Christian faith that is both superficial in its profundity and influenced by external forces.[7] This

---

[3] Mary Nyambura Muchiri, *Papers on Language and Culture: an African Perspective* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2009), 72. Google Play. Muchiri cites a conference in Nigeria entitled "Religion and Society in Africa 21," where scholar B. J. van der Walt said, "In spite of the phenomenal growth of Christianity on the continent, African Christians today are schizophrenic. In their personal or church life they think and behave as Christians, but in politics, economics, etc., they are lost. More and more African Christians do not even see any relevance of the gospel for the real and burning issues on our continent—they have capitulated to a secularist religion, living as if God does not exist. One of the basic reasons for this is the lack of a clear, Biblically-inspired philosophy of society." This is not to say Christ directly addressed issues of politics, economics, and government; however, He did speak extensively about relational interactions, stewardship, and authority, which would ultimately influence how believers would function in these areas.

[4] See Rom 8:29. This statement is not to imply that the Christian message has failed. Believers are justified by Christ (Rom 5) and given a new nature (2 Cor 5:17). However, the process of *sanctification*—or *spiritual development*—is stalled (1 Thes 4:1–8), and often syncretism creeps in.

[5] James F. Engel and William A. Dyrness, *Changing the Mind of Missions: Where Have We Gone Wrong?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 22. These broad generalizations should not be taken as representative of the whole African continent. John S. Mbiti notes concerning Christianity, "In Nubia and other parts of the Sudan it lingered on for many centuries until fairly recently when it succumbed to opposing forces." Mbiti explains, "These then are the two main areas in Africa today where Christianity is rightly 'African', indigenous and traditional, with its roots deeply established in the history and traditions of those who profess it there," *African Religions and Philosophy* (New York, NY: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., Publishers, 1969), 231.

[6] John Mbiti explains, "The missionaries who began this modern phase of Christian expansion in Africa, together with their African helpers, were devout, sincere and dedicated men and women. But they were not theologians; some of them had little education, and most of the African evangelists and catechist were either illiterate or had only little formal learning. These workers were more concerned with practical evangelism, education and medical care, than with any academic or theological issues that might arise from the presence of Christianity in Africa. Mission Christianity was not from the start, prepared to face a serious encounter with either the traditional religions and philosophy or the modern changes taking place in Africa. The Church here now finds itself in the situation of trying to exist without a theology," *African Religions and Philosophy,* 232.

This is not to imply that all missionaries were responsible for these omissions. Many forsook colonial goals and taught Scripture by the power of the Holy Spirit, discipling those in their charge.

[7] Charles Kraft admits to as much concerning his mission efforts in Nigeria in *Christianity with Power: Your Worldview and Your Experience of the Supernatural* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1989). "In the name of Christ, as if this was the best we could offer, we had simply reproduced Western secularized approaches to illness, accident, education, fertility, agriculture, and every other problem of life. We acted as though Western scientific methods were more effective than prayer. We did pray, of course, calmly for ordinary things and fervently when things got really bad. But Western secular techniques were our first choice, God was our last resort. Without meaning to, we taught our African converts that the Christian God works only through Western cultural ways (though they soon learned that our methods couldn't handle many of their needs). We claimed that we were working in the name and power of God,

deficiency in addressing the supernatural dimension of the Christian life emanates from the philosophical orientation of many of those missionaries—with their cultural bearings that betray a disenchanted, humanist bent.[8] However, many of these missionaries also went amiss in some respects because the philosophical, cultural, and religious orientation of the animistic societies they were reaching were so diametrically unlike their own. As such, it is necessary to analyze both the secular-adjacent and immanent alignments of the missionaries and the enchanted, animist worldviews of the African people in order to understand their vast differences and how syncretism was not only possible but became seemingly unavoidable to Africans due to the gaping deficiencies in practical instruction.[9]

The Secularization of the Western Christian Mind

When Christ commissioned the first disciples to take the gospel to the world, He admonished them to wait in Jerusalem until the presence of the Holy Spirit empowered them to take the message of salvation to "Jerusalem and in all Judea, and Samaria, and as far as the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).[10] The endeavor of taking the good news of Christ's provision on the cross was thereby framed as a spiritual task requiring His supernatural power.[11] There was no division between clergy and congregants or minister and spectator—all who followed Christ were considered to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit and called to serve.[12] Additionally, an understanding existed that there were both earthly and spiritual forces that would oppose the preaching of the gospel and the work of the Church, but also

---

that it was because of his blessing that these techniques were successful. But by observing Western doctors, agriculturalists, and teachers who were not Christian, they discovered that there seemed to be little difference in the results of what was done by Christians and what was done by non-Christians—beyond the fact that Christians often applied the same techniques more lovingly. This was an important difference in approach, but the power seemed to be in the techniques and not in the God we talked about. The God of power portrayed in the Scriptures seemed to have died," 5.

[8] Charles Taylor traces this disenchantment and secularization of Christianity in his book, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007). Kindle. Taylor writes, "Missionaries brought Christianity to the non-Western world, often with the sense that they were also bringing the bases of future prosperity, progress, order, and (sometimes also) democracy and freedom. It became hard for many to answer the question, what is Christian faith about? The salvation of humankind, or the progress wrought by capitalism, technology, democracy? The two tended to blend into one. Even harder did it become to distinguish between salvation and the establishment of good moral order," 736.

[9] Although there are many other differences between animist cultures and Western rationalism—such as community orientation, views of time, their relation to ancestors, etc.—the focus of this study is on the secular-supernatural divide as a cause of syncretism.

[10] The NASB translation is quoted throughout this paper unless otherwise noted.

[11] The *Africa Bible Commentary* explains, "The task facing the disciples is so vast that they will only be able to perform it through the power of the Holy Spirit. He would stay with those who received him and provide power from within (the Greek word used for 'power' is the same one that is at the root of the English words 'dynamo' and 'dynamite'). The rest of Acts recounts the mighty acts performed by the disciples in the power of the Holy Spirit. Some have even argued that the book should be called 'the Acts of the Holy Spirit' rather than 'the Acts of the Apostles,'" Tokunboh Adeyemo, *Africa Bible Commentary* (Nairobi, Kenya: WordAlive Publishers, 2006), 1326. Kindle.

[12] Rom 8:11; 12:1–8; 1 Cor 12; 1 Pet 4:10. Michael Green, writing of Mark's and Paul's admonishments about the *euaggelion*, reports, "Its furtherance is a task in which all Christians must be involved; an athletic contest, so to speak, in which all Christians are required to take an active part," *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 862–863. Kindle.

confidence that the Lord God could defend against and overcome them.[13]

Throughout the years, however, disparate perceptions of the Christian task took shape, which would fundamentally alter the foundation and objective of the mission endeavor in the doctrine and practice of the Church. For the purposes of this particular discussion, the first of those changes occurred in the fourth century and was noted by Eusebius, who suggested,

> Two ways of life were thus given by the law of Christ to His Church. The one is above nature, and beyond common human living; it admits not marriage, child-bearing, property nor the possession of wealth, but wholly and permanently separate from the common customary life of mankind, it devotes itself to the service of God alone in its wealth of heavenly love! And they who enter on this course, appear to die to the life of mortals, to bear with them nothing earthly but their body, and in mind and spirit to have passed to heaven.[14]

In other words, the bishop of Caesarea proposed the existence of two distinct categories of individuals—those who functioned in what was considered the *sacred* roles and others who operated in the *secular*.[15] However, Eusebius' stance was a shift because it was neither demonstrated in the Judaic system of beliefs,[16] nor was it taught in the New Testament as a part of the Christian life.[17] This new doctrine would further the

---

[13] Matt 12:27–28; 16:18; Luke 10:17; 2 Cor 4:4; Eph 6:10–20; 1 John 4:1. Joseph Klausner comments, "Satan is the 'god of this world.' He—as in the book of Job and in Talmud and Midrash—is the one who seduces men, leading them astray and driving them into temptation; and he is the deceiver who takes advantage of men, being a master of trickery, distinguishing himself as the angel of light. Also, he is the one who hinders Paul from doing right things. Obviously, Satan is for Paul 'the prince of the powers of the air,' to whom are subject all kinds of evil spirits and powers of darkness. . . . Paul can offer no better prayer for the 'brethren' in Rome than this: 'And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly'" *From Jesus to Paul* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1943), 471.

[14] Eusebius of Caesarea and William John Ferrar, *The Proof of the Gospel: Being the Demonstratio Evangelica of Eusebius of Cæsarea,* Vol. 1 (New York, NY: The Macmillen Company, 1920), 48. It should be noted that the following discussion of the secularization of the Church is a brief and general overview. A fuller treatment is beyond the scope of this study.

[15] Taylor explains, "In the term 'sacred', I'm pointing to the belief that God's power is somehow concentrated in certain people, times, places or actions. Divine power is in these, in a way it is not in other people, times, etc., which are 'profane,'" *A Secular Age,* 76.

[16] To clarify, the discussion here is concerning aspects of Jewish life in God's service. This analysis does not include inanimate objects, as there were indeed sacred vessels set apart for use in the temple, which were separate from those employed for ordinary practices. Nosson Scherman, *The Stone Edition: The Chumash,* The ArtScroll Series (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 2009). Clarifying Exodus 19:6, *The Chumash* reports, "*A kingdom of ministers . . .* Although usually translated as *priests,* the word *kohanim* in the context of this verse means that the entire nation of Israel is to be dedicated to leading the world toward an understanding and acceptance of God's mission. In the ritual sense, priests, too, can be seen as having this function. *And a holy nation.* The 'holiness' of the verse refers to separation and elevation. A holy person is apart from others because he tries to remove himself from the temptations and urges that drag human beings down from the estate to which they should aspire," 403. Every Israelite was called to exhibit the character of sacred service.

[17] Charles H. Spurgeon explains, "To a man who lives unto God, nothing is secular—everything is sacred! He . . . goes forth to his labor, and exercises the office of the priesthood; his breath is incense, and his life a sacrifice; he sleeps on the bosom of God, and lives and moves in the divine presence! To draw a hard and fast line and say, 'This is sacred and this is secular,' is, to my mind, diametrically opposed to the

professionalization of the clergy and demotivate Church members in their service to Christ, as they would now see their roles as temporal and many of the details of their lives as somewhat unconnected to their faith.[18] Indeed, by the mid-fifth century, the moral state of the Church had disintegrated so considerably that the Gallic elder Salvianus admonished, "The church . . . which ought everywhere to propitiate God, what does she, but provoke him to anger? How many may one meet, even in the church, who are not still drunkards, or debauchees, or adulterers, or fornicators, or robbers, or murderers, or the like, or all these at once, without end? It is even a sort of holiness among Christian people, to be less vicious."[19] Eventually, the cleft between secular and sacred roles undermined ecclesiastical efforts in a manner that the Church would be compelled to amend.[20]

In addition, with the onset of the Constantinian emperorship (A.D. 306–337), there was a politicization of the Church that had not been present previously.[21] Predictably, after sustaining numerous persecutions at the hands of Roman emperors, Christians were amenable to cooperative alliances with their leaders—and were willing to sacrifice for them.[22] Having the emperor favorably disposed to Christianity had its benefits in terms of the freedom of believers and the resources available to the Church.[23] The effect was such a contrast that Gonzalez reports that even the theology of the Church shifted: "The scheme of history that Eusebius developed led him to set aside a fundamental theme of early Christian preaching: the coming Kingdom of God. Although Eusebius does not go as far as to say so explicitly, in reading his works one receives the impression that now, with Constantine and

---

teaching of Christ and the spirit of the gospel!" "All for Jesus" (Sermon, Metropolitan Tabernacle in Newington, November 29, 1874).

[18] "This equilibrium involved accepting that masses of people were not going to live up to the demands of perfection. They were being 'carried', in a sense, by the perfect. And there is something in this which runs against the very spirit of Christian faith," Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 61–62.

[19] Philip Schaff, *The History of the Christian Church: Nicene and Post-Nicene Christianity,* Vol. 3 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 88.

[20] Taylor writes, "We clearly set the renunciative vocations above the ordinary lay ones. There are first- and second-class Christians; the second being in a sense carried by the first . . . Whereas the crucial truth that we wanted to hold on to was the complementarity of all lives and vocations, where we all serve under God, and can't put some above others. So there seems to be a dilemma here, between demanding too much renunciation from the ordinary person, on one hand, and relaxing these demands," *A Secular Age*, 81. Additionally, a problem arises when the demands are relaxed. "We know even these will often be broken; so in the end the minimum demands simply that you repent in time," 81.

[21] "The reign of Constantine the Great marks the transition of the Christian religion from under persecution by the secular government to union with the same; the beginning of the state-church system," Schaff, *The History of the Christian Church: Nicene and Post-Nicene Christianity,* 4.

[22] Many noteworthy persecutions shook the early Church, including those by Nero (A.D. 54 to 68), Domitian (A.D. 81 to 96), Trajan (A.D. 98 to 117), Hadrian (A.D. 117–138), Marcus Aurelius (A.D. 161 to 180), Severus (A.D. 193 to 211), Maximus (A.D. 235 to 238), Decius A.D. (249 to 251), Valerian (A.D. 253 to 260), Aurelian (A.D. 270 to 275), and Diocletian (A.D. 284 to 305). Justo L. Gonzalez discloses the stark reality that when the professed Christian convert "Constantine became sole emperor . . . persecution came to an end," *The Story of Christianity, Volume 1: The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins Publishers, 1984), 108.

However, Gonzalez also notes, "Repeatedly, even after [Constantine's] conversion, he took part in pagan rites in which no Christian would participate, and the bishops raised no voice of condemnation," 121. Though this may have been because Constantine had not been baptized, it is apparent that politics and self-preservation may have played a part in the bishops' decision to remain quiet.

[23] Jonathan Hill, *The History of Christianity: The Early Church to the Reformation* (Oxford, UK: Lion Hudson Limited, 2020), https://tinyurl.com/98uuu6u8 (accessed 14 July 2021), 55.

his successors, the plan of God has been fulfilled."[24]

The notion that the kingdom of God could be established on earth acted as a secularizing factor on the Church, moving the focus from the eternal, transcendent realm ruled by the Almighty, to that which was immanent and governed by men.[25] Indeed, the emperor's partiality toward Christianity created many dynamic factors that redeployed the Church away from her heaven-honoring purposes and earthward in her trajectory. For example, the Church was flooded by those who would be Christians at the behest of the emperor, rather than in genuine faith and allegiance to Christ.[26] Additionally, "the immunities and privileges, which were conferred upon the catholic church in the Roman empire from the time of Constantine by imperial legislation . . . led many to press into the clerical office without inward call, to the prejudice of the state."[27]

Furthermore, by A.D. 800, the papacy had gained so much earthly power that Pope Leo III took the unprecedented step of both choosing and crowning Charlemagne emperor of Western Christendom—what was to be known as the Holy Roman Empire.[28] The Church was not only openly influencing the political sphere but was actively working to take control of it, becoming kingmakers and the overarching authority over nations in the process.[29] Moreover, under the Church's authority, rulers such as Charlemagne and Otto I

---

[24] Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity, Volume 1,* 134. Allen Brent confirms, "Eusebius has taken the events of Constantine's victory out of the course of secular history, and set them firmly in the context of a new epoch in salvation history. . . . The last and final persecution had come and gone, with the Tribulation woes, all that was now left for the completion of salvation history was Christ's second coming," *A Political History of Early Christianity* (New York: NY: T&T Clark International, 2009), 284.

[25] Schaff reports, "The organization of the church adapts itself to the political and geographical divisions of the empire. The powers of the hierarchy are enlarged, the bishops become leading officers of the state and acquire a controlling influence in civil and political affairs, though more or less at the expense of their spiritual dignity and independence," *The History of the Christian Church: Nicene and Post-Nicene Christianity,* 7.

[26] "The mass of the Roman empire was baptized only with water, not with the Spirit and fire of the gospel, and it smuggled heathen manners and practices into the sanctuary under a new name," Schaff, *The History of the Christian Church: Nicene and Post-Nicene Christianity,* 93. Gonzalez affirms, "The fact that the emperors declared themselves Christian, and for that reason people were flocking to the church, was not a blessing, but rather a great apostasy," *The Story of Christianity, Volume 1,* 124.

[27] Schaff, *The History of the Christian Church: Nicene and Post-Nicene Christianity,* 96. It is important to note here that this is the point in which the income streams of clergy shifted as well. "Hitherto the clergy had been entirely dependent on the voluntary contributions of the Christians, and the Christians were for the most part poor. Now they received a fixed income from the church funds and from imperial and municipal treasuries," 100. In time, the Roman Empire would provide legal enforcement of tithes and offerings to the Church. This moved the motivation for making such contributions from obedience to God to the requirements of the state.

[28] Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity, Volume 1,* 266.

[29] Brent reports, "When Leo III crowned Charlemagne, an ideological assault began with the object of establishing the subordination of *imperium* to *sacerdotium*. Certainly revisions of the coronation rites, in the hands of the papacy and its liturgists, increasingly suggested that subordinate status of emperor to pope," *A Political History of Early Christianity,* 289. Indeed, Philip Schaff confirms that this eventually formed the structure. "The emperor and his nobles were under the power of the bishops, and the bishops were secular lords and politicians as well as ecclesiastics," *The History of the Christian Church: Mediaeval Christianity,* Vol. 4 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 391.

However, Brent points out that the clergy that was intended to follow the Old Testament pattern of the priesthood, was now in violation of it. "It . . . failed because, in terms of Cyprian's ecclesiology, Christianity constituted the New Law fulfilling the Old. If the *sacerdotium* was to be the antitype of Old Testament type, then it must conform to an Old Testament polity in which kings were never priests nor priests kings: *sacerdotium* and *imperium* could never be exercised by the same persons," 290.

engaged in wars to forcibly Christianize the region.[30] Instead of Paul's admonition, "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom 10:9), souls were compelled to submit to the Church by the blade of a sword.[31] The focus of the Church was increasingly on the carnal materialism of the world and less on the transcendent goals of the kingdom of God,[32] which would be demonstrated through increasing corruption and debauchery of the Roman Catholic hierarchy.[33] As Dalberg later famously declared about the papacy, "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely."[34]

   Yet, despite the sacred-secular division of roles between clergy and congregation, the transcendent-immanent shift through belief that God's kingdom could be established on earth, and the transition from an eschatological and supernatural to an earthly and political power-focus of the Church, there was still a pervasive belief in the spiritual—or *enchanted*—realm.[35] This cognizance of the *enchanted* world would not begin to wane in

---

[30] Tobias Brandner writes, "Force was a significant element in the extension of the Christian church. Compulsory extension included wars for the specific purpose of mission, that is, wars that aimed to subject people to the Christian faith," *Pilgrims and Popes: A Concise History of Pre-Reformation Christianity in the West* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009), https://tinyurl.com/m7ezkpwc (accessed 18 July 2021), 98. Ebsco.

[31] Brandner explains, "An example is Charlemagne's conquest of the Saxons in the 770s and 780s and the subsequent imposition of the Catholic faith on them; baptism turned into a sign of submission under the rule of Charlemagne," *Pilgrims and Popes*, 98. Michael P. Riccards confirms that Charlemagne "waged a continuing series of battles against a variety of tribes, most especially the Saxons, whom he vanquished and then gave them a choice—baptism or death," *Faith and Leadership: The Papacy and the Roman Catholic Church* (Plymouth, United Kingdom: Lexington Books, 2012), https://tinyurl.com/mjp355pp (accessed 16 July 2021), 43. Ebsco.

[32] John Bright explains this was a problem because, "The fact that the ethics of Jesus are the ethics of the Kingdom of God, and thus cannot be made into a program for the kingdoms of this earth, cannot be used as an excuse to absolve us of the burden of them. . . . The ethics of Jesus are the ethics of the Kingdom; and Jesus expected his followers to take them seriously, not only in his generation but in all generations. For in New Testament theology the Kingdom of God is not only the goal of all history and the reward of all believers, not only the norm by which all human behavior is judged, it is a new order which even now bursts in upon the present one and summons men to be its people. Its summons demands response, and that response is obedience and righteousness here and now. Christ intended his followers to live each day in the light of the Kingdom which is intruding into the world, to live each day as if they end were tomorrow. It is a call to "eschatological living," if we may use the term," *The Kingdom of God: The Biblical Concept and Its Meaning for the Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1953), 222–223.

[33] Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity, Volume 1,* 274–276. This is not to imply that all the popes or bishops engaged in dishonorable practices. Rather, the immorality of some of the leadership is cited here to demonstrate that the Church increasingly reflected the ethos of the world, rather than the transformative standards of Christ. As Schaff declares, "The world overcame the church, as much as the church overcame the world, and the temporal gain of Christianity was in many respects cancelled by spiritual loss," *The History of the Christian Church: Nicene and Post-Nicene Christianity,* 93. The corrupt intrigues of some members of the papacy are well documented and are beyond the scope of this study. See E. R. Chamberlin, *The Bad Popes* (Sapere Books, 2020). Kindle. Also, Eamon Duffy, *Saints and Sinners: A History of the Popes*, Fourth Edition (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), https://tinyurl.com/ndrhvyw (accessed 16 July 2021).

[34] John Emerich Edward Dalberg, Lord Acton, *Acton-Creighton Correspondence: Letter 1* (Cannes, April 5, 1887), https://tinyurl.com/t97yzjdc (accessed 18 July 2021).

[35] In describing the state of Western Christendom before the 1500s, Taylor states, "People lived in an 'enchanted' world. . . . The enchanted world in this sense is the world of spirits, demons, and moral forces which our ancestors lived in," *A Secular Age,* 25–26. Henceforth, this research assumes Taylor's definition of the term *enchanted*; and its opposites, *disenchanted* and *disenchantment,* as meaning a lack of belief in the spiritual dimension.

a significant manner until the Renaissance, when the onset of *humanism* displaced focus on the spiritual world.[36] Perhaps the most influential voice at the commencement of this shift was Thomas of Aquino (1225–1274), who suggested a discontinuity—albeit incomplete—between grace and nature.[37] Thomas amplified the doctrine of the sacred-secular divide begun by Eusebius, reasoning that a partition existed between the natural and supernatural, reason and faith, the seen and unseen, and the body and spirit.[38] This detachment would widen throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries with the Reformation, when evangelistic efforts centered on filling the immanent needs of individuals rather than the ultimate spiritual goal of making them right with God, and the study of Scripture became more devotional and personal instead of an avenue for the contemplation of the transcendent glories of God.[39] Additionally, the political focus and investiture of the Church would continue on both sides of the Reformation crisis as governments sought to tame and channel the resources and strength of their citizens. Taylor explains,

> While late mediaeval élites, clerical of course, but with a growing lay component, were developing ideals of more intense devotion, and were coming to demand church reform, members of the same élites—sometimes others, sometimes the same people—were developing/recovering the ideal of civility, with its demands for a more ordered, less violent social existence. There was some tension between the two, but also symbiosis, and they came to inflect each other; and indeed, came to have an overlapping agenda. Thus,

---

[36] Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity, Volume 1,* 365–366. Gonzalez explains that *humanism* "is the name given to the tendency to place humans at the center of the universe, and to make them the measure for all things," 366.

[37] Francis Schaeffer credits Thomas' discussion of nature versus grace with this shift to humanism. "Prior to Thomas Aquinas there was an overwhelming emphasis on the heavenly things, very far off and very holy, pictured only as symbols, with little interest in nature itself. With the coming of Aquinas we have the real birth of the humanistic Renaissance," *Escape from Reason: A Penetrating Analysis of Trends in Modern Thought* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), https://tinyurl.com/ykp2refa (accessed 11 July 2021), 10. Thomas work marked a revival of Aristotelian philosophy, this time applied to theology.

[38] Thomas of Aquino (also known as Tommaso d'Aquino or Thomas Aquinas) presents these arguments throughout *The Summa Theologica: Complete Edition* (New York, NY: Catholic Way Publishing, 2014), https://tinyurl.com/2ku7kxvt (accessed 19 July 2021). GooglePlay. For example, he reports a dichotomy between the knowledge of God and the reason of science, "It seems that the existence of God cannot be demonstrated. For it is an article of faith that God exists. But what is of faith cannot be demonstrated, because a demonstration produces scientific knowledge; whereas faith is of the unseen (Heb. 11:1). Therefore it cannot be demonstrated that God exists," 85. Although science cannot controvert the existence of God, to find proofs of His being within the scientific realm would not invalidate the faith propositions of Scripture. Indeed, Romans 1:20 states, "Since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, that is, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, being understood by what has been made." If God's divine attributes are perceivable, then it is conceivable that they are measurable and, consequently, fall within the realm of scientific discovery. Therefore, the Thomist dichotomy here is unsustainable. Faith must never rely on science, but it may exist in consensus with it. There is no reason for them to be mutually exclusive as Thomas suggests.

[39] Taylor rationalizes, "It is not altogether surprising that this attempt to bring Christ to the world, the lay world, the previously unhallowed world, should inspire a new focus on this world," *A Secular Age*, 94. None of these new aspects of Christian disciplines were without merit—there was undeniably a need to personalize evangelistic and devotional practices. However, the ever-increasing focus was to the human experience rather than on the relationship between that individual and the living God.

in this context, there is a complex causal story behind the fact that the ideal of civility develops an active, transformatory agenda. As time goes on, it is undoubtedly powered by the escalating demand for military, and hence fiscal power, and hence economic performance by industrious, educated, disciplined populations.[40]

The aforementioned dynamics and increasing demand for civility had significant ongoing ramifications for the Church following the Reformation—both in her Catholic and Protestant iterations—because of the increasing dependence on human reason, natural laws, moral order and scientific knowledge, which provided a seeming counterbalance to the phenomenological claims of Scripture.[41] Eventually, the prevailing viewpoint was that to be a "good Christian," one must be a dignified, educated, morally upright, productive citizen of a Christian nation, without reference to the supernatural.[42] Many in the missions movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries would be influenced profoundly by this rational philosophy and would spread civilization in the name of Christ.[43] Indeed, Newbigin proclaims, "Missionaries in Asia and Africa have been agents of secularization even if they did not realize it."[44]

The Fissure: Disenchanted Missions in Enchanted Territory
This secular-adjacent, civilizing, morals-based Christianity made its incursion into

---

[40] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 107. "This process continues over four centuries, until by 1800, a normal 'civilized' country is one which can ensure continuing domestic peace, and in which commerce has largely replaced war as the paramount activity with which political society concerns itself; or at least shares the pre-eminence with war. . . . They included a certain development of the arts and sciences, what we would call today, technology (here again, like our 'civilization'). It included the development of rational moral self-control; and also, crucially, taste, manners, refinement; in short, sound education and polite manners," 101.

[41] Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity, Volume 2: The Reformation to the Present Day* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins Publishers, 1985), 185–186.
Schaeffer writes, "Whereas men had previously spoken of nature and grace, by this time there was no idea of grace—the word did not fit any longer. Rationalism was now well developed and entrenched; and there was no concept of revelation in any area. Consequently the problem was now defined, not in terms of 'nature and grace,' but of 'nature and freedom.' This is a titanic change, expressing a secularized situation. Nature has totally devoured grace," *Escape from Reason,* 25.

[42] Taylor reports, "It barely invoked the saving action of Christ, nor did it dwell on the life of devotion and prayer. . . . Whence this narrowing? I believe it reflects in part the hold of the new idea of moral order. It was perhaps more than understandable that, after the terrible struggles around deep theological issues to do with grace, free will, and predestination, many people should hunger for a less theologically elaborate faith which would guide them towards holy living. . . . What is significant is that the plea for a holy life came to be reductively seen as a call to centre on morality, and morality in turn as a matter of conduct. . . . Much preaching, is less and less concerned with sin as a condition we need to be rescued from through some transformation of our being, and more and more with sin as wrong behaviour which we can be persuaded, trained or disciplined to turn our backs on. This concern with a morality of correct conduct has been observed by many historians of the period. Religion is narrowed to moralism," *A Secular Age,* 225.

[43] Evanson N. Wamagatta notes, "Their aim was not to educate Africans to compete with the white man, but rather to equip them to become useful subjects of the crown," "Changes of Government Policies Towards Mission Education in Colonial Kenya and Their Effects on the Missions: The Case of the Gospel Missionary Society," *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 38, 3–26 (2008), 4.

[44] Lesslie Newbigin, *Honest Religion for Secular Man* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1966), 18.

Kenya in the mid-1800s.[45] Chukwudi Njoku reports,

> In general, Europe was in a buoyant mood and understandably excited by its cultural and material achievements. European missionaries generally participated in this buoyancy and cultural pride and went to the missions walking as on heels. It is therefore not surprising that the missionaries fully embrace the idea of a 'civilizing mission,' the idea of being heirs of a culturally superior people going out to share the riches and glories of their culture with people from cultures they generally assume to be inferior to their own.[46]

However, the steps that much of western Christendom had taken away from the worldview of the early church crippled its effectiveness in these animist cultures in significant ways.[47] Therefore, to clarify the dilemma, a comparison between the secular-adjacent beliefs of many Western missionaries and the animist worldview—as it relates to African traditional philosophy—is necessary.[48] Because, as John Mbiti notes, "To ignore these traditional beliefs, attitudes, and practices can only lead to a lack of understanding African behaviors and problems."[49] Consequently, to explore this contrast, the shifts enumerated in the first section of this chapter will be discussed, including: (1) the difference in *enchanted-disenchanted* standpoints, (2) the *transcendent-immanent* dissimilarities in kingdom views, (3) the *sacred-secular* divisions, and (4) the *supernatural-political* variances in power-focus.

The Gap Between Enchanted and Disenchanted

---

[45] Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa: 1450-1950* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1994), 242.

[46] Chukwudi A. Njoku, "The Missionary Factor in African Christianity, 1884–1914," in *African Christianity: An African Story,* ed. Ogbu U. Kalu (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc., 2007), 196.

[47] Ogbu Kalu affirms, "Some have assumed that African Christians have manufactured demons and enlarged their provenance. But they abound in Jewish literature as defecting angels or as sired giants who were drowned in the flood, although their spirits lived on as demons, evil spirits, or 'powers of Mastema.' Their leaders were variously called Azazel, Mastema, Satan, and Beliar. Early Christians devised elaborate instructions on how to discern them," *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2008), 182.

Similarly, Gailyn Van Rheenen notes that, "Most early converts into the Christian Church in Gentile contexts were also animistic," *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts* (Pasedena, CA: William Carey Library, 1991), 29. Early Christianity was able to answer the questions of animists—specifically their inquiries concerning deliverance from demonic powers. See Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, 1938–1941.

[48] This examination will be brief and general, as a comprehensive study of animist worldviews and African traditional religious and philosophical systems are beyond the scope of this study. As Van Rheenen states, "Although broad generalizations can be made about animistic beliefs, practices vary widely from society to society," *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts*, 26.

Likewise, as John S. Mbiti asserts, " Animism means the system of belief and practices based on the idea that objects and natural phenomena are inhabited by spirits or souls. It is true that African peoples in their traditional setting acknowledge the existence of spirits, and that some of the spirits are thought to inhabit objects like trees, ponds, and rocks. There are many stories told about such spirits. This is, however, only a small portion of the many beliefs held in African Religion," *Introduction to African Religion* (New York, NY: Praeger Publishers, Inc., 1975), 17.

[49] John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 1.

In broaching this subject matter, it is essential to have a viable working definition of *animism*, which Van Rheenen provides as such: "The belief that personal spiritual beings and impersonal spiritual forces have power over human affairs and, consequently, that human beings must discover what beings and forces are influencing them in order to determine future action and, frequently, to manipulate their power."[50] From the animist's viewpoint, the spiritual or *enchanted* world is intertwined with every facet of his or her life and has a direct influence on it.[51] As indicated above, such a perspective was shared by early Christians, who understood that there were "rulers," "powers" and "spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph 6:12).[52] However, Ezeanya further elucidates that in animist thought, "It is the spiritual beings which actually control the world; indeed, the world is a spiritual arena in which the categories of spiritual beings display their powers. Man, in particular, is entirely dependent upon these spiritual beings."[53]

These animist beliefs of a unified reality between the seen and unseen are in sharp contrast to the Western philosophy, which, due to the influence of the Enlightenment, had divided the two domains of the physical universe with its natural order from the supernatural realm which bestowed existential meaning, and had adjudicated that they do not coalesce.[54] As time progressed, the fissure between the two dominions widened, with concern for the spiritual fading as the material world and scientific discoveries engendered greater focus.[55] As such, because of the *disenchanted* rationalism of the Western church, many came to believe in a Deist view of God—one in which He was all but completely removed from the immediate concerns of humanity.[56] In other words, to many Westerners, humankind was not

---

[50] Van Rheenen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts*, 20. It should be noted that the earliest definition and study of animism originates with Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom,* Vol. 2 (London, UK: John Murray, 1871).

[51] Mbiti confirms, "The spiritual universe is a unit with the physical, and these two intermingle and dovetail into each other so much that it is not easy, or even necessary, at times to draw the distinction or separate them," *African Religions and Philosophy,* 75.

[52] David W. Bercot quotes early believers such as Clement of Rome (c. A.D. 35–99), Ignatius (c. A.D. 35–107), Irenaeus (c. A.D. 130–200), Clement of Alexandria (c. A.D. 150–215), Tertullian (c. A.D. 160–230), Origen (c. A.D. 185–255), Cyprian (c. A.D. 200–258), Lactantius (c. A.D. 250–325), and many more in his entries concerning angels (14–20), demons (201–205), and spiritism (632–633). *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2000).

[53] Stephen N. Ezeanya, "God, Spirits, and the Spirit World," in *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs,* eds. Kwesi Dickson and Paul Ellingworth (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1969), 36.

[54] Paul G. Hiebert, Tite Tienou, and R. Daniel Shaw, *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 16–17. Also, Van Rheenen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts*, 53. "Most missionaries taught Christianity as the answer to the ultimate and eternal questions of life, and science based on reason as the answer to the problems of this world," 19.

[55] Taylor elucidates the progression, "At first, the social order is seen as offering us a blueprint for how things, in the human realm, can hang together to our mutual benefit, and this is identified with the plan of Providence, what God asks us to realize. But it is in the nature of a self-sufficient immanent order that it can be envisaged without reference to God; and very soon the proper blueprint is attributed to Nature. . . . Following a path opened by Spinoza, we can also see Nature as identical with God, and then as independent from God. The Plan is without a planner. A further step can then be taken, where we see the Plan as what we come to share and adhere to in the process of civilization and Enlightenment," *A Secular Age*, 543.

[56] M. H. Macdonald, "Deism," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), 304. MacDonald explains that deism "refers to what can be called natural religion or the acceptance of a certain body of religious knowledge acquired solely by the use of reason as opposed to knowledge gained either through revelation or the teaching of a church... It would

dependent upon God; indeed, he or she might not count on Him for the essentials at all.[57] E. Bolaji Idowu comments, "The masses of Westerners appear to be losing their sense of God, and Western theology is in conflict because it has become too theoretical: God according to it has largely become a theoretical concept."[58]

Into this vast middle expanse, animists presented their questions to missionaries concerning the spiritual realities that produced earthly questions and challenges.[59] Through this basic foundation of animist worldview the following issues addressed here emerged because, as Ezeanya explains, "The world of men and the world of spirits are not two independent worlds; for one has no meaning without the other—they are complementary."[60] Hiebert notably writes about his realization concerning this gap, which he has named *the flaw of the excluded middle*. "I had excluded the middle level of supernatural this-worldly beings and forces from my own worldview. As a scientist I had been trained to deal with the empirical world in naturalistic terms. As a theologian I was taught to answer ultimate questions in theistic terms. . . . I had given little thought to spirits of this world."[61]

The Cleft Between Transcendent and Immanent

Perhaps the first issue that arises from the gap between enchantment and disenchantment is the source of human flourishing—whether meaning and significance are found *within* the mortal experience or *beyond* it.[62] In the preceding discussion, the Church demonstrated a shift from serving the *transcendent* kingdom of God in heaven, to attempting

---

reduce God's function in creation to that of first cause only. According to the classical comparison of God with a clockmaker, which is found as early as Nicholaus of Oresmes (d. 1382), God wound up the clock of the world once and for all at the beginning, so that it now proceeds as world history without the need for his further involvement," 304.

[57] Taylor reveals, "Modern materialism takes up this legacy . . . in this purposeless universe, we decide what goals to pursue. Or else we find them in the depths, our depths, that is, something we can recognize as coming from deep within us. In either case, it is we who determine the order of human things—and who can thus discover in ourselves the motivation, and the capacity, to build the order of freedom and mutual benefit, in the teeth of an indifferent and even hostile universe. We are alone in the universe," *A Secular Age,* 367.

[58] E. Bolaji Idowu, "God," in *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs,* eds. Kwesi Dickson and Paul Ellingworth (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1969), 21.

[59] This interaction between the physical and spiritual world can be observed in John S. Mbiti's book, *The Prayers of African Religion* (London, England: SPCK, 1975). "The spirit are innumerable, 'thronging together like swarming mosquitoes in the evening.' Some are called 'friendly ones,' being part of the family, and are asked to help; but some may cause havoc to people if they are spirits of persons who are killed in battle or unjustly. . . . People appeal to spirits for various types of help, particularly in connection with sickness. Indeed many of the prayers address to the departed spirits or appeals for help in times of sickness in distress," 8–9.

[60] Ezeanya, "God, Spirits, and the Spirit World," 36.

[61] Paul G. Hiebert, "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement, 4th Edition*, eds. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C Hawthorne (Pasadena, CA; William Carey Library, 2009), 411.

[62] Taylor defines human flourishing as: "What constitutes a fulfilled life? what makes life really worth living?" *A Secular Age*, 16. However, for the believer he says, "There remains a fundamental tension in Christianity. Flourishing is good, nevertheless seeking it is not our ultimate goal. But even where we renounce it, we re-affirm it, because we follow God's will in being a channel for it to others, and ultimately to all," 18.

to establish the *immanent* kingdom of God on earth.[63] Taylor reports concerning the West, "A way of putting our present condition is to say that many people are happy living for goals which are purely immanent; they live in a way that takes no account of the transcendent."[64] In essence, this is the same question as that of human flourishing because, as Mark 8:36 queries, "What does it benefit a person to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?" Christ's indication is that there is legitimate and lasting loss when exceeding focus is placed on the temporal or *immanent* to the detriment of the eternal or *transcendent*.[65]

In terms of the animistic viewpoint, belief in an enchanted world organically leads to a concern for the transcendent. Eugene Nida reveals, "For most animists, an important fact about souls is not just that each person has at least one, without which he will sicken and die, but that such souls live on after death. A soul after death is often a major concern, for such a soul must be cared for properly. If a man possesses great power while he is alive, how much more powerful he becomes once he enters the spirit realm!"[66] Therefore, the animist will seek to enjoin power in the transcendent domain in order to add value to his or her life. Steyne expounds that for the animist, "Meaning in life springs from the fact that the world is spiritually alive and can be channeled to serve man's purpose."[67] Here again, the vast dissimilarities between animists and Westerners can be observed in how they answer the questions of meaning and fulfillment.[68] While many Westerners may seek the exclusively earthly forms of security and worth that immanent sources can provide, the animist finds his or her bases for significance and succor from the transcendent.[69]

However, consideration of the immanent nature of Western religion would be

---

[63] Further clarifying the meanings of immanent, Taylor writes, "The great invention of the West was that of an immanent order in Nature, whose working could be systematically understood and explained on its own terms, leaving open the question whether this whole order had a deeper significance, and whether, if it did, we should infer a transcendent Creator beyond it," Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 15.

[64] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 143.

[65] Taylor expounds on this dilemma, "In terms of a central image of Christian history, a judgment intervenes before our full entry into the Kingdom. In some way or other, our life will be weighed, and can be found wanting. Now there is a reason to fear death; death as the end of life, therefore as the completion, as it were, of the dossier with which we will affront judgment," *A Secular Age,* 67.

[66] Eugene A. Nida and William A. Smalley, *Introducing Animism* (New York, NY: Friendship Press, 1959), 12.

[67] Philip M. Steyne, *Gods of Power: A Study of the Beliefs and Practices of Animists* (Columbia, SC: Impact International Foundation, 2005), 59.

[68] Here it should be noted that one area of agreement between animists and secular Westerners is the aspect of *humanism.* Steyne writes, "Man exists for himself and carries within himself the justification of his existence and of his religious and moral perfection . . . His religion is humanistic. His existence is the most significant fact of his reality," *Gods of Power*, 62. However, as Hendrick Kraemer notes, "The dominating interest of life is to preserve and perpetuate social harmony, stability, and welfare," *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (London, UK: Edinburgh House Press, 1947), 151.

[69] This does not mean animists are immune to the temptations of earthly wealth, status, control, etc. On the contrary, their interest in the spiritual dimension is often to ensure success in these areas. Rather, it is the *source* of their flourishing which is different than many Western rationalists. Mbiti explains the ontology, "Expressed anthropocentrically, God is the Originator and Sustainer of man; the Spirits explained the destiny of man; Man is the center of this ontology; the Animals, Plants and natural phenomena and objects constitute the environment in which man lives, provide a means of existence and, if need be, man establishes a mystical relationship with them," *African Religions and Philosophy,* 16. In other words, animists understand that the source of their flourishing is established and dependent upon forces *outside* their influence. The relationship between the animist's quest for spiritual power will be discussed further in the section regarding the chasm between the supernatural and political—as will Western efforts at earthly control.

incomplete without addressing the fact that just because one dismisses the transcendent, does not mean its role in reality loses its consequence.[70] The internal drive for higher meaning and redemption remain.[71] This is one of the reasons that a belief in Christianity as an exclusively moral paradigm falls short. Another is that a demythologized Christianity that is purely ethical in nature logically leads to deliberations regarding religious pluralism and syncretism.[72] If Christ's redemptive work merely makes better, more civilized people—and Jesus has not, as Colossians 1:13 teaches, "rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom,"—then the idea that many paths lead to salvation (i.e., redefined as moral rectitude) is not only reasonable, but essential.[73] The concept of a supreme being would be necessary to raise the behavioral bar of the individual, produce hope, and act as *das Opium des Volkes* for governmental control of society.[74] In such an understanding, any deity will do. However, the claims Christ makes in terms of being the only qualified Provider of eternal and spiritual rebirth—and not merely ethical rehabilitation—controvert this idea.[75] Therefore, Taylor warns, "In identifying the

---

[70] Kraemer explains, "The moving plight of man is that the fundamental fact of his existence is his being created unto the divine order of Ultimate Truth and Reality. Therefore the quest for Eternal Truth and Life is his prime life-necessity and by the nature of the case his prime obligation. Yet he cannot produce it by his own efforts. . . . God, not he himself, has laid eternity in his heart, he can never be the creator and producer in the realm of ultimate Truth and Reality, but only the humble receiver," *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*, 11–12. In other words, human opinion cannot generate or remove eternal realities.

[71] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 306–309.

[72] Indeed, John Hick writes, "When one meets some of one's neighbours of these other faiths, and gets to know individuals and families, and is invited to their weddings and festivals and community events, one discovers that, while there are all manner of fascinating cultural differences, Muslims and Jews and Hindus and Sikhs and Buddhists in general do not seem to be less honest and truthful, or less loving and compassionate in family and community, or less good citizens, or less religiously committed, than are one's Christian neighbours in general. The ordinary people of these other faiths do not generally seem to be better human beings, morally and spiritually, than Christians, but neither do they seem to be worse human beings. . . . These other traditions are, to about the same extent as Christianity, contexts of a salvific human transformation from natural self-centredness to a new orientation centred in the divine or the transcendent," "The Theological Challenge of Religious Pluralism," in *Christianity and Other Religions: Selected Readings*, eds. John Hick and Brian Hebblethwaite (London, UK: Oneworld Publications, 2001), 192. Kindle. The unique provision of spiritual rebirth Christ purchases on the cross is notably absent.

[73] Hans Küng insists, "I became increasingly aware that discussion with the other world religions is actually essential to survival, necessary for the sake of peace in the world. Are not the most fanatical and cruel political struggles coloured, inspired, and legitimized by religion? How much would the affected peoples have been spared, if the religions had been quicker to recognize their responsibility for peace, love of neighbour, and nonviolence, for reconciliation and forgiveness, if they, instead of helping to foment conflicts, had resolved them? Thus any ecumenical theology today has to acknowledge its share of responsibility for world peace. There can be no peace without peace between the world religions," "Is There One True Religion? An Essay in Establishing Ecumenical Criteria," in *Christianity and Other Religions: Selected Readings*, eds. John Hick and Brian Hebblethwaite (London, UK: Oneworld Publications, 2001), 146–147. Kindle.

[74] Karl Marx, "Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," https://tinyurl.com/fexbm8df (accessed 20 July 2021).

[75] Karl Barth writes, "Jesus Christ does not fill out and improve all the different attempts of man to think of God and to represent him according to his own standard. But as the self- offering and self-manifestation of God he replaces and completely outbids those attempts, putting them in the shadows to which they belong. Similarly, in so far as God reconciles the world to himself in him, he replaces all the different attempts of man to reconcile God to the world, all our human efforts at justification and sanctification, at conversion and salvation. The revelation of God in Jesus Christ maintains that our justification and sanctification, our conversion and salvation, have been brought about and achieved once

Christian life with a life lived in conformity with the norms of our civilization, we lose sight of the further, greater transformation which Christian faith holds out, the raising of human life to the divine (*theiosis*)."[76]

The Fracture Between Sacred and Secular

Of course, from this foundation of human flourishing flow the issues of everyday life—the choices and challenges that impact an individual's path. As enumerated above, where many missionaries operated on immanent and disenchanted assumptions; the animist societies were functioning on transcendent and spiritual understandings of their worlds. However, what exacerbated problems between the two—and ultimately created fertile ground for syncretism—was the distinction between the *sacred* and the *secular*.[77] In essence, many missionaries did not provide the tools for new converts to address their daily concerns in a manner that exalted Christ.[78]

To explain this predicament, attention must return to the Eusebian concept of two ways of life—one for the clergy and another for the congregation. Eusebius describes the lives of the servants of God: "Like some celestial beings they gaze upon human life, performing the duty of a priesthood to Almighty God for the whole race . . . with right principles of true holiness, and of a soul purified in disposition, and above all with virtuous deeds and words; with such they propitiate the Divinity."[79] On the other hand, he declares that "a kind of secondary grade of piety is attributed to" the life of the common believer.[80] Relegated to second-class status, the affairs of everyday life appeared beneath the deliberations of those who served the Almighty.[81] Therefore throughout the following centuries, the thoughts of the priests and philosophers were raised to the mysteries of God and answered lofty existential matters—the area of study that would come to be known as "high religion."[82]

The Church's emphasis left the common problems of daily life—or the issues of "low religion"—to the machinations of humanity, which were solved with advancements

---

and for all in Jesus Christ. And our faith in Jesus Christ consists in our recognizing and admitting and affirming and accepting the fact that everything has actually been done for us once and for all in Jesus Christ. He is the assistance that comes to us. He alone is the Word of God that is spoken to us," "The Revelation of God as the Abolition of Religion," in *Christianity and Other Religions: Selected Readings*, eds. John Hick and Brian Hebblethwaite (London, UK: Oneworld Publications, 2001), 16–17. Kindle.

[76] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 737.

[77] Van Rheenen explains, "While the people are asking low religion questions, the missionary is preaching on the level of high religion," *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts*, 61.

[78] Hiebert notes, "It should be apparent why many missionaries trained in the West had no answers to the problems of the middle level—they often did not even see it," "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle," 411.

[79] Eusebius, *The Proof of the Gospel,* 48–49.

[80] Eusebius, *The Proof of the Gospel,* 50.

[81] Gonzalez confirms, "Several schools of classical philosophy held that the body was the prison or the sepulcher of the soul, which could not be truly free as long as it did not overcome the limitations of the body. Stoic doctrine, very widespread at the time, held the passions are the great enemy of true wisdom, and that the wise devote themselves to the perfecting of their souls and the subjugation of their passions," *The Story of Christianity, Volume 1,* 137.

[82] Hiebert clarifies, "Religion as a system of explanation deals with the ultimate questions of the origin, purpose and destiny of an individual, a society, and the universe," "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle," 412. Though it is true that after the Reformation devotional reading of Scripture became more personal, it was also very humanistic and did not adequately address the spiritual intersection between God and humanity such as would have been useful to animists. The theology of the academy remained esoteric.

in medicine, technology, science, and the like.[83] As such, Mbiti reports, "Christianity from western Europe and north America has come to Africa, not simply carrying the Gospel of the New Testament, but as a complex phenomenon made up of western culture, politics, science, technology, medicine, schools and new methods of conquering nature."[84] Secular solutions, however, were insufficient for answering the questions animists posed to missionaries because of the "existence-in-relation" within which they view themselves.[85] Steyne explains, "The animist looks for reasons beyond the obvious and found only in the spiritual realm. Catastrophes, natural disasters, disease, untimely death and other exigencies of life are all evaluated spiritually, with a view to establish or restore harmony and balance to life's context."[86]

In this regard, however, Christianity was presented to many animists as a religion that could not address their most basic apprehensions.[87] First, there was apparently no instruction on how to deal with the spirits and divinities which the Africans encountered on a daily basis.[88] Second, if there were answers, they were so theological and esoteric that they lacked practical application to the animist's context.[89] Without remedies to their fundamental challenges, many Africans who converted to Christianity were forced to seek solutions in the only place they knew to look—within the animistic practices they had been instructed to leave behind.[90] Such

---

[83] Van Rheenen writes, "The answers to the problems of low religion have become secularized," *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts*, 63. Van Rheenen likewise notes the effect of this on Western believers. "Many Christians are practicing Deists. They diligently study the Bible without expecting God to act in the same way he did in Scripture. They pray for the sick, yet expect God to work only through doctors' hands," "Syncretism and Contextualization: The Church on a Journey Defining Itself," in *Contextualization and Syncretism: Navigating Cultural Currents* (Pasedena, CA: William Carey Library, 2006), 38. Kindle.

[84] Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy,* 217. Mbiti continues, "Whether consciously or unconsciously, Europe began to transform Africa and if possible to make it resemble itself in many aspects. . . . Mini Englands and mini Germanies, mini Frances in mini Italies, were being planted everywhere on our continent."

[85] Swailem Sidhom explains, "Existence-in-relation sums up the pattern of the African way of life. And this encompasses within it a great deal, practically the whole universe. The African maintains a vital relationship with nature, God, the deities, ancestors, the tribe, the clan, the extended family, and himself. Into each avenue he enters with his whole being, without essentially distinguishing the existence of any boundaries dividing one from another," "The Theological Estimate of Man," in *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs,* eds. Kwesi Dickson and Paul Ellingworth (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1969), 102. Additionally, Kalu notes that in Africa, "All realms of life are sacralized; there is no distinction between the sacred and the profane," *African Pentecostalism*, 176.

[86] Steyne, *Gods of Power,* 38.

[87] Kraft writes, "It was as if we had imitated the Galatians, to whom Paul says, 'How can you be so foolish! You began by God's Spirit; do you now want to finish by your own power?' (Gal. 3:3). What it amounted to is that we were really practicing a form of Christianity so strongly influenced by our Western Enlightenment worldview that we knew little else to do but to turn to naturalistic, human technique-centered methods for solving problems. . . . In many ways our Evangelicalism was more like deism than like biblical Christianity," *Christianity with Power,* 38–39.

[88] "What about spirit possession or curses or witchcraft or black magic? What is the Christian answer to these? Often the missionary evangelist or doctor has no answer. These do not really exist, they say. But to people for whom these are very real experiences in their lives, there must be another answer. Therefore, many of them returned to the magician for cures," Hiebert, "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle," 409.

[89] Harvie M. Conn warns, "Seeing theology as an essentializing science and the creeds as the product of that kind of theological reflection inhibits us as well from facing up to our own missiological task," *Eternal Word and Changing Worlds: Theology, Anthropology, and Mission in Trialogue* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 223.

[90] Hiebert, Tienou, and Shaw, *Understanding Folk Religion*, 19. "Missionaries often tried to stamp out animistic 'superstitions,' but they did not go away. Because they were not consciously dealt with, they went underground. . . . The people continued to practice their old ways, but did so in secret to avoid the

is the perfect breeding ground for *syncretism*—"the mixing of different beliefs and practices in ways that distort the truth and power of the gospel."[91]

The Chasm Between Supernatural and Political

Even so, most Western missionaries had no context for understanding how to deal with the struggles animists were facing. Indeed, since the concept of civility began to take hold throughout Europe, it "included the development of rational moral self-control; and also, crucially, taste, manners, refinement; in short, sound education and polite manners."[92] There was a correct and dignified manner for handling every contingency and a sensible, scientific explanation for each seeming phenomenon.[93] Problems could be solved through the *political* process—through presenting sound, logical arguments by which the opposition could be swayed.[94] However, spiritual warfare was outside the sphere of what naturalistic human reason was prepared to handle because of the demystification of the Christian faith. [95] As such, Hiebert confesses, "As a Westerner, I was used to presenting Christ on the basis of rational arguments, not by evidences of his power in the lives of people who were sick, possessed and destitute. In particular, the confrontation with spirits that appeared so natural a part of Christ's ministry belonged in my mind to a separate world of the miraculous—far from ordinary everyday experiences."[96]

Nonetheless, animists were not only interested in engaging in demonstrations of

---

condemnation of the missionaries. They added Christianity as a new layer of beliefs on top of the old. The result was two-tier Christianity. In the long run, this uneasy coexistence of public Christianity and private 'paganism' led to syncretism. Moreover, today these underground beliefs are resurfacing around the world and creating havoc in young churches as well as in the West."

[91] Hiebert, Tienou, and Shaw, *Understanding Folk Religion*, 13. Concerning syncretism, Eric Sauer writes, "A change of behavior and even institutions without a change of values and worldview is not truly conversion. It is syncretism," "Rediscovering Biblical Theology," in *Scripture and Strategy: The Use of the Bible in Postmodern Church and Mission,* ed. David Hesselgrave (Pasadena, CA:William Carey Library, 1994), 725. Kindle.

[92] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 110.

[93] Van Rheenen notes, "Animists do not object to these naturalistic explanations; they merely assume that there is some spiritual power behind the secular explanation," *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts*, 173.

[94] Taylor explains the political order is "an answer to a problem: how to maintain peace and civility among diverse and potentially rival agents," *A Secular Age*, 127–128.

In a sense, as Constantine's rule brought peace and order to the Christian world, so proper government was thought of by many as the answer to all areas of strife. However, this concept of consensus through rational argument overflows into every area of society. As H. T. Holcomb asserted, "If men cannot agree what can be better than to submit their differences to the settlement of a disinterested and impartial third party? *If men cannot agree*. This qualification begs the entire question. Reasonable men can agree and unreasonable men must become reasonable or be replaced, in industrial affairs, by those who are," "Some Recent Phases of the Labor Problem," in *Proceedings of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Fifty-Third Meeting,* ed. L. O. Howard (Washington, DC: Press of Gibson Bros., 1904), 572.

[95] Mbiti remarks, "As scientific knowledge increases the people's understanding of these forces and objects of the universe, they will gradually give up the idea of nature spirits. But religion came long before science, and it will be a long time before rural communities are convinced by the spread of scientific ideas that there are no spirits behind the powers and forces of nature. Science looks on these phenomena as governed by natural laws; but religion may continue to think of them as ruled by spirits," *Introduction to African Religion*, 67.

[96] Hiebert, "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle," 407.

supernatural power because of their concern for *personal* power but were actively seeking paths to dominance in the spiritual realm.[97] Indeed, Mbiti, Nida, and Burnett illustrate the manner by which animists seek influence through words, rituals and ceremonies, sacred places, religious objects, offerings and sacrifices, and the use of specialists such as diviners and witch doctors.[98] Steyne presents the reason, "Life's essential quest is to secure power and use it. Not to have power or access to it produces great anxiety in the face of spirit caprice and the rigors of life. A life without power is not worth living. The drive to acquire power is a very strong and basic one. Power offers man control of his uncertain world."[99]

This dynamic of spiritual influence is one of the reasons many animists since the time of Christ have accepted the Gospel—they were searching for victory over the demons who caused them evil. Van Rheenen explains, "Animistic peoples live with an all-pervasive fear of ancestors, spirits, magic, and witchcraft. However, the Christian message provides an ideology in which 'perfect love drives out fear' (1 John 4:18). Christ has triumphed over the principalities and powers which undergird animist systems and has put them to shame."[100]

Indeed, the Bible is replete with such demonstrations of God's supremacy over every contrary spirit. One noteworthy power encounter occurred through the plagues that preceded Israel's exodus from Egypt, which exhibited God's authority and superiority over the various Egyptian deities.[101] In the final plague, the death of the firstborn, Yahweh

---

[97] Steyne reports, "To get the spirit world to serve man's objectives, man needs life force—power. The search for it occupies a great deal of his time, for without it he is helpless. Power is needed to make rain, give good crops, secure employment, heal diseases, guaranteed fertility, or past school exams. Protection is needed from disease, evil spells cast by malevolent persons, catastrophes of all sorts, failure, sorcery and witchcraft. These can only be dealt with effectively if one has power," *Gods of Power,* 38.

[98] Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion,* 19–30 and *African Religions and Philosophy,* 58–74. Also, Nida and Smalley, *Introducing Animism,* 31–49, and David Burnett, *Unearthly Powers: A Christian Perspective on Primal and Folk Religions* (Eastbourne, UK: MARK, 1988), 69–199. Nida clarifies, "One basic assumption that is applied in all animistic practices is the controllability of the spirit power. If only one knows the right formulae, the spirit world can be made to do one's bidding, whether for good or for evil. The animist is not concerned about seeking the will of his god, but in compelling, entreating, or coercing his god to do his will," 54.

[99] Steyne, *Gods of Power,* 60. He goes on to say, "The search for an acquisition of power supersedes any commitment to ethics or morality. Whatever is empowering is right."

[100] Van Rheenen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts*, 30. The success of Pentecostalism may be attributed to the fact that it engages this dimension of faith. Kalu, explains, "Jesus' ministry was very much a cosmic battle in which He rescued humanity from evil powers. Therefore African Pentecostals have equated principalities, powers, and demons with the various categories of spirits in the worldview and as enemies of man and God. Pentecostals reinforce the causality pattern in primal worldview before providing a solution beyond the purviews of indigenous cosmology," *African Pentecostalism*, 182.

However, it should also be noted that many Evangelicals demonstrated a pneumatically powerful Christian witness. Gary B. McGee writes, "A. B. Simpson, the former Presbyterian minister who founded the Christian and Missionary Alliance (CMA), and A. J. Gordon, chairman of the executive committee of the American Baptist Missionary Union, put theory into action by encouraging the faithful to trust God for miracles, especially physical healings," "The Radical Strategy in Modern Mission: The Linkage of Paranormal Phenomena with Evangelism," in *The Holy Spirit and Mission Dynamics,* ed. C. Douglas McConnell (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1997), 76–77.

[101] Adeyemo, *Africa Bible Commentary,* 96. "God has no rival. His ultimate aim was to bring Pharaoh and the Egyptians, as well as the Israelites, to recognize that he is the only true God, who is able to defeat all the Egyptian divinities." It is noteworthy here that political or diplomatic options did not sway Pharaoh. What was required was victory over him in the spiritual realm.

explains His intention, "I will go through the land of Egypt on that night, and fatally strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the human firstborn to animals; and *against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments—I am the* Lord. The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live; and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will come upon you" (Ex 12:13–13, emphasis added).

This tenth plague was especially significant because the Israelites were instructed to slaughter a year-old male lamb, also called a *ram*, and spread its blood on the doorposts of their homes.[102] This put the Israelites in a precarious situation because the ram was especially significant to the Egyptian cult. First, it represented Pharaoh, who was believed to be divine, and the supreme mediator between the deities and the people.[103] Second, there were other divinities such as Amun (also called Ammon), the king of all Egyptian deities, and Khnum, the creator of humanity—who were both represented symbolically with the characteristics of rams.[104] Therefore, there was danger in doing what Yahweh asked, and Moses was aware of it. Previously, when Pharaoh had instructed him to make Israel's sacrifices "within the land"—where all the Egyptians could watch them—Moses responded, "It is not right to do so, for we will sacrifice to the Lord our God what is an abomination to the Egyptians. If we sacrifice what is an abomination to the Egyptians before their eyes, will they not then stone us?" (Ex 8:25–26).[105] Moses understood that to paint their doorposts with

---

[102] Ex 12.

[103] C. J. Labuschagne writes, "It should not be overlooked that the Pharaoh was a god and that he was Yahweh's adversary in this capacity. It was not only because he was the ruler in Egypt that he is represented as Yahweh's adversary in the dramatic contest to free Israel, but also because he was known as a god, having control not only over the Egyptians, but also over Yahweh's people whom he oppressed and enslaved," *The Incomparability of Yahweh in the Old Testament* (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1966), 75.

Likewise, C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch comment, "The slaying of the first-born was a judgment upon the gods, not only because the impotence and the worthlessness of the fancied gods were displayed in the consternation produced by this stroke, but still more directly in the fact, then in slang of the king's son and many of the first-born animals, the gods of Egypt, which were worshipped both in their kings and also in certain sacred animals, such as the bull Apis and the goat Nendes, were actually smitten themselves" *Commentary on the Old Testament: The Pentateuch,* Vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1996), 332.

[104] Cornelius Tacitus relates, "To ensure his future hold over the people, Moses introduced a new cult . . . They killed a ram, apparently as an insult to Ammon, and also sacrificed a bull, because the Egyptians worship the bull Apis," *The Histories, Vol. II, Letter 5,* ed. W. Hamilton Fyfe (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1912), 205. As to their roles, George Hart details that Amun was, "Primeval deity and supreme god of the Egyptian pantheon," *The Routledge Dictionary of Egyptian Gods and Goddesses* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2005) 13. As to Khnum, Hart writes that he is, "Ram-god, creator of life on the potter's wheel," 85. Emily Teeter confirms, "Myths recount that the virile ram god Khnum created humankind on his potter's wheel," *Religion and Ritual in Ancient Egypt* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 12.

[105] Jan Assmann and Zev Farber confirm, "Moses recognizes that the Israelites are going to sacrifice an animal that is sacred to the Egyptians, and that this would be an abomination for the Egyptians (תועבת מצרים). Ostensibly, this is because the ram was the sacred animal of two Egyptian gods, Amun and Khnum," "Sacrificing a Lamb in Egypt: When a Temple of Yahu Stood Near a Temple of Khnum," https://tinyurl.com/3pdnz88u (accessed 23 July 2021). Additionally, Assmann and Farber cite Herodotus' admonition, "I say, all sacrifice goats and abstain from sheep . . . the Egyptians make the image of Zeus (=Amun) into the face of a ram… the Thebans then do not sacrifice rams but hold them sacred for this reason."

the blood of Egyptian deities was akin to an act of war.

Therefore, with the tenth and final plague, the Israelites had to decide—in an overtly observable manner—whether they truly believed God was able to overcome all the deities of the Egyptians. Tippett clarifies the value of such a step, "The symbolic rejection of the old way not only involves a religious encounter, but thereafter it serves as a continual reminder of the act of rejection that alone can save the convert from syncretism or polytheism."[106]

This biblical account communicates to the animist that the Lord is indeed the one true God who is able to overcome all African divinities. Likewise, the blood on the doorposts serves to remind animist converts that to choose the Christian God is to renounce all others. In this manner, what is written in Scripture answers the animists' most profound questions, allay their fears, and teach them how to live. Therefore, Van Rheenen admonishes, "The church must let the Bible determine her understanding of the nature of spiritual beings and their work in the world."[107]

Filling the Gap

A consideration of Francis Schaeffer's words is meaningful at this point: "Every generation of Christians has this problem of learning how to speak meaningfully to its own age."[108] Such a thought hints at the underlying balance between a desire to uphold biblical truths, but also to address current issues in a meaningful manner. Men such as Eusebius, Thomas of Aquino, and other well-meaning believers spoke into the mysteries of God and attempted to explain His glories to their eras, but their human words have influenced Christianity in ways they could not have foreseen. Kwame Bediako astutely diagnoses the issue: "It is not often recognized in Christian circles that theological affirmations about Christ are meaningful ultimately not in terms of what Christians say, but in terms of what persons of other faiths understand those affirmations to apply for them."[109]

What Bediako addresses here is the difficult reality of the Great Commission and of the task of communication—Christians are called to make disciples of people they may not understand. This may occur even between people in the same nation, region, and language. As Taylor suggests, "An atheist in the Bible belt has trouble being understood, as often (in a rather different way) do believing Christians in certain reaches of the

---

[106] Allen R. Tippett, "The Evangelization of Animists," in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1975), 849. Tippett also comments, "The notion of making a definite act of commitment to the Lord is a biblical concept in both the Old and New Testaments, and was normally accompanied by some kind of ocular demonstration of the commitment. . . . In the animist world today the public demonstration, or *rite of separation*, varies with the cultural climate—fetish-burning, burial of ancestral skulls, casting the secret paraphernalia into the sea or river, eating the forbidden totem fish or animal, according to the pattern of their animism. . . . This is symbolism, but more than symbolism. Psychologically men are strengthened to keep their covenant by having made a public confession and having done it as a *company of converts*," 848–849.

[107] Van Rheenen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts*, 99.

[108] Schaeffer, *Escape from Reason,* 8.

[109] Kwame Bediako, "The Unique Christ in the Plurality of Religions," in *The Unique Christ in Our Pluralist World,* ed. Bruce J. Nicholls (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1994), 47.

academy."[110] In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this lack of comprehension resulted in confessors of Christianity imposing their cultures on animist societies, insisting on disenchanting them and making them conform to paradigms that were intermixed with secular-adjacent views of Western rationalist religion.

Consequently, nascent and maturing Christians in animist contexts might have felt misunderstood and undervalued—not only on the levels of language and symbol, but also on the deeply entrenched and daily-faced spiritual plane. Indeed, when their pleas for instruction were left unanswered, many felt they had no choice but to go back to the diviners and the provisions of their animistic folk religion for their enchanted problems. Thus, because many missionaries, pastors, and theologians failed to address the spiritual, enchanted aspect of life in animist communities, they left a gap in understanding that led to syncretism.[111] Yet, ministers of the Gospel are called to higher standards.[112]

Therefore, Kraft warns, "Willful reluctance to open oneself up to what God wants to reveal in the spiritual realm can carry with it serious consequences. We may be victims of a worldview conditioning that makes such openness difficult, but we should carefully avoid allowing ourselves willfully to choose blindness."[113] Missionaries with this Western, disenchanted bent may believe the moral standards they set, the church polity they establish, and hymnbooks they carry as a valid offering of the civilized order.[114] However, because these requirements are centered on human attainment, function, and production, rather than spiritual issues (i.e., the singular work of God or fruit of the Spirit), this is often received as a humanist commentary on personhood and expression, rather than what is spiritually useful.[115] What African believers require is to know the God who is more

---

[110] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 556.

[111] Hiebert, Tienou, and Shaw, *Understanding Folk Religion*, 40. "Too often missionaries and church leaders provide answers to the questions of formal religion, but fail to understand that folk religions seek to answer other questions. Consequently, when people are converted, they simply add formal religious beliefs to their existing folk religious beliefs, one set public and the other more private. The result is split-level Christianity. To deal with this uneasy coexistence of two belief systems, it is important that Christian leaders provide answers to the everyday questions of people's lives, questions embedded in folk religions which are rooted in the people's understandings of truth."

[112] 2 Tim 4:1–5.
[113] Kraft," *Christianity with Power,* 71.

[114] Bright writes, "It is true, too, that the preaching of Christian ethics has through the years had an impact upon secular society and has made it a better place in which to live. Indeed, one hates to think what society would be without the leavening influence of Christian morality. But to present the Christian gospel as merely a program of social righteousness is fundamentally to mistake the Christ of the Gospels and to tread a path of frustration and disillusionment. For a non-Christian world will not put into practice the ethics of Christ and cannot, for all our chiding, be made to do so. In a non-Christian world the teachings of Jesus are simply not "practical," as that world is quick to declare. To realize the ethics of the Kingdom it is first necessary that men submit to the rule of that Kingdom," *The Kingdom of God*, 222.

[115] Hiebert is clear: "So long as the missionary comes with a two tiered worldview, with God confined to the supernatural and the natural world operating for all practical purposes according to autonomous scientific laws, Christianity will continue to be a secularizing force in the world. Only as God has brought back into the middle of our scientific understanding of nature will we stem the tide of Western secularism," "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle," 413.

powerful than the demons with which they daily wrestle.[116]

Subsequently, after observing the issues that secular-adjacent, Western Christianity brought to Africa, Byang Kato identified the solution and taught, "The Bible is the final judge of every culture. The heart that has undergone change through conversion has assumed a new philosophy of life. This new philosophy of life, based on the Bible, is the basis for examining mythical values, or the formal level of a culture. Any practice that does not agree with what the Bible teaches must be dropped."[117] The reason for Kato's confidence in Scripture is because it transcends culture and points to "the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead" (Acts 10:42).[118] Mbiti asserts, "The uniqueness of Christianity is in Jesus Christ. He is the stumbling block of all ideologies and religious systems . . . His own Person is greater than can be contained in a religion or ideology. He is 'the Man for others' and yet beyond them. It is He, therefore, and only He, Who deserves to be the goal and standard for individuals and mankind."[119]

Undoubtedly, Christ is the objective and model for all who proclaim the *euangellion*. If the hypostatic union was not only utilized but necessary for the work of humanity's salvation, then the imperative from the command to "preach the gospel" (Mark 16:15) is to lead others to His holy nexus joining God and humanity.[120] Christ is the only One who in every way can fill the gap between the things of God and the things of humankind—through His work on the cross, His indwelling Spirit, and as He speaks through His Word.[121] Kato confirms, "What we

---

[116] Green writes, "Instead of being a community demonstrating the Lord's power, we have become one which talks incessantly. We need to remember that `the kingdom of God is not talk, but power'. Where churches have regained dependence on God's Spirit, where they have believed that God is active among his people today, where they have prayerfully asked him to give them not only qualities of character but spiritual power, then those same gifts which we see in the New Testament have appeared today" *Evangelism in the Early Church*, 210–212.

[117] Byang Kato, *African Cultural Revolution and the Christian Faith* (Jos, Nigeria: Challenge Publication, 1976), 31.
[118] Kato, *African Cultural Revolution and the Christian Faith*, 48–49.

[119] Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, 277.

[120] Byang Kato notes, "The New Testament has given us the pattern for cultural adaptation. The incarnation itself is a form of contextualization. The Son of God condescended to pitch his tent among us to make it possible for us to be redeemed," "The Gospel, Cultural Context, and Religious Syncretism," in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1975), 1217.
Concerning the *hypostatic union,* Wayne Grudem explains: "The union of Christ's human and divine nature's in one person is sometimes called the *hypostatic union*. This phrase simply means the union of Christ's human and divine nature in one being." *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 558. Citing the Chalcedonian Definition of A.D. 451, Grudem reports, "It taught that Christ definitely has to natures, a human nature and the divine nature. It taught that his divine nature is exactly the same as of the Father ('consubstantial with the Father according to the Godhead'). And it maintains that the human nature is exactly like our human nature, yet without sin ('consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like onto us, without sin'). Moreover, it affirmed that in the person of Christ the human nature retains its distinctive characteristics and the divine nature retains its distinctive characteristics ('the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved'). Finally, it affirmed that, whether we can understand it or not, these two natures are united together in the one person of Christ," 557–558.

[121] Green explains, "There have been theological movements since the Enlightenment which have reduced Jesus to a witty rabbi, a superstar, a wandering charismatic. They lack persuasive power. They do

need in today's Africa is not a return to the old traditional religions, or even a borrowing of some of the pagan practices to add to Christianity. Our greatest need is to live up to the claims we make as Christians in Africa, and promote the Christian message for Africa in all areas of life and everywhere possible as true ambassadors of Christ."[122]

In the end, "To the African, immortality is the highest good for the achievement of which his whole life is structured."[123] This is the gift Christ offers that He singularly has the power to bestow. Therefore, the assignment for the believer serving God is not only to communicate a lofty, philosophical message of the Godhead's attributes—the ontological plane of "high religion"—though that may certainly be a worthy aspect of his or her mission. Likewise, the task is not merely a human exercise—the focus on daily concerns which are the habitation of "low religion"—though there is necessarily an abundance of that as well as believers seek to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8). Rather it is a divine union of the two, tailored to the charge of reaching the person, the group, the nation, and the world in the power of His Spirit and the wisdom of His Word.[124] And it requires leading others to the transformation the Lord has envisioned for them. In as such, the mission must be guided by the loving and wise hand of God, who knows what is in all people's hearts.[125] As Idowu affirms, "It is because of the very weakness of our perception that God in His infinite love and mercy caused the Word to become flesh and pitch His tent among us. Even then, God in Jesus is known only to as many as will receive Him—those who spiritually discerned and accept that in Him is God."[126]

---

not bring people to that newness of life which the apostles experienced and which is so evident today in the Two Thirds World," *Evangelism in the Early Church,* 86–88. It is in returning to the understanding of Christ as Emmanuel, the Messiah, our Redeemer, and our "great high priest who has passed through the heavens" (Heb 4:14), that we will have a correct understanding of who He is.

[122] Byang H. Kato, *Biblical Christianity in Africa,* Theological Perspectives in Africa, No. 2 (Achimota, Ghana: African Christian Press, 1985), 37.

[123] Sidhom, "The Theological Estimate of Man," 104.

[124] Van Rheenen confirms, "Issues of high religion and low religion do not have to be segmented but can be brought together. Sovereign God was shown as actively working in this world. He must be proclaimed as the God who acts," *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts*, 65

[125] John 2:24–25 (NLT) reports, "Jesus . . . knew all about people. No one needed to tell him about human nature, for he knew what was in each person's heart."

[126] Idowu, "God," 22.

Bibliography

Adeyemo, Tokunboh. *Africa Bible Commentary.* Nairobi, Kenya: WordAlive Publishers, 2006. Kindle.

Assmann, Jan and Zev Farber. "Sacrificing a Lamb in Egypt: When a Temple of Yahu Stood Near a Temple of Khnum." https://tinyurl.com/3pdnz88u. Accessed 23 July 2021.

Barth, Karl. "The Revelation of God as the Abolition of Religion." In *Christianity and Other Religions: Selected Readings*. Eds. John Hick and Brian Hebblethwaite, 10–26. London, UK: Oneworld Publications, 2001. Kindle.

Bediako, Kwame. "The Unique Christ in the Plurality of Religions." In *The Unique Christ in Our Pluralist World.* Ed. Bruce J. Nicholls, 47–56. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1994.

Bercot, David W. *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs.* Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2000.

Brandner, Tobias. *Pilgrims and Popes: A Concise History of Pre-Reformation Christianity in the West.* Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009. https://tinyurl.com/m7ezkpwc. Accessed 18 July 2021. Ebsco.

Brent, Allen. *A Political History of Early Christianity*. New York: NY: T&T Clark International, 2009.

Bright, John. *The Kingdom of God: The Biblical Concept and Its Meaning for the Church.* Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1953.

Burnett, David. *Unearthly Powers: A Christian Perspective on Primal and Folk Religions.* Eastbourne, UK: MARC, 1988.

Chamberlin, E. R. *The Bad Popes.* Sapere Books, 2020. Kindle.

Conn, Harvie M. *Eternal Word and Changing Worlds: Theology, Anthropology, and Mission in Trialogue.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984.

Dalberg, Lord Acton, John Emerich Edward. *Acton-Creighton Correspondence: Letter 1.* Cannes, April 5, 1887. https://tinyurl.com/t97yzjdc. Accessed 18 July 2021.

Duffy, Eamon. *Saints and Sinners: A History of the Popes*, Fourth Edition. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014. https://tinyurl.com/ndrhvyw. Accessed 16 July 2021.

Engel, James F. and William. A. Dyrness. *Changing the Mind of Missions: Where Have We Gone Wrong?* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000.

Eusebius, of Caesarea and William John Ferrar. *The Proof of the Gospel: Being the Demonstratio Evangelica of Eusebius of Cæsarea,* Vol. 1. New York, NY: The Macmillen Company, 1920.

Ezeanya, Stephen N. "God, Spirits, and the Spirit World." In *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs.* Eds. Kwesi Dickson and Paul Ellingworth. 30–46. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1969.

Gonzalez, Justo L. *The Story of Christianity, Volume 1: The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation.* San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins Publishers, 1984.

_____. *The Story of Christianity, Volume 2: The Reformation to the Present Day.* San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins Publishers, 1985.

Green, Michael. *Evangelism in the Early Church.* Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004. Kindle.

Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994.

Hart, George. *The Routledge Dictionary of Egyptian Gods and Goddesses.* New York, NY: Routledge, 2005.

Hastings, Adrian. *The Church in Africa: 1450-1950.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1994.

Hick, John. "The Theological Challenge of Religious Pluralism." In *Christianity and Other Religions: Selected Readings.* Eds. John Hick and Brian Hebblethwaite, 191–209. London, UK: Oneworld Publications, 2001. Kindle.

Hiebert, Paul G. "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle." In *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement, 4th Edition.* Eds. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C Hawthorne, 407–414. Pasadena, CA; William Carey Library, 2009.

Hiebert, Paul G., Tite Tienou, and R. Daniel Shaw. *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices.* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999.

Hill, Jonathan. *The History of Christianity: The Early Church to the Reformation.* Oxford, UK: Lion Hudson Limited, 2020. https://tinyurl.com/98uuu6u8. Accessed 14 July 2021. Ebsco.

Holcomb, H. T. "Some Recent Phases of the Labor Problem." In *Proceedings of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Fifty-Third Meeting.* Ed. L. O. Howard, 551–577. Washington, DC: Press of Gibson Bros., 1904.

Idowu, E. Bolaji. "God." In *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs.* Eds. Kwesi Dickson and Paul Ellingworth, 17–29. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1969.

Kalu, Ogbu. *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2008.

Kato, Byang H. *African Cultural Revolution and the Christian Faith.* Jos, Nigeria: Challenge Publication, 1976.

_____. *Biblical Christianity in Africa.* Theological Perspectives in Africa, No. 2. Achimota, Ghana: African Christian Press, 1985.

_____."The Gospel, Cultural Context, and Religious Syncretism." *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*. Ed. J. D. Douglas, 1216–28. Minneapolis, MN: World Wide Publications, 1975.

Keil, C.F., and F. Delitzsch. *Commentary on the Old Testament: The Pentateuch,* Vol. 1. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1996.

Klausner, Joseph. *From Jesus to Paul.* Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1943.

Kraft, Charles H. *Christianity with Power: Your Worldview and Your Experience of the Supernatural.* Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1989.

Kraemer, Hendrick. *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World.* London, UK: Edinburgh House Press, 1947.

Küng, Hans. "Is There One True Religion? An Essay in Establishing Ecumenical Criteria." In *Christianity and Other Religions: Selected Readings*. Eds. John Hick and Brian Hebblethwaite, 146–178. London, UK: Oneworld Publications, 2001. Kindle.

Labuschagne, C. J. *The Incomparability of Yahweh in the Old Testament.* Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1966.

Macdonald, M. H. "Deism." In *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Ed. Walter A. Elwell, 304–305. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984.

Marx, Karl. "Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right." https://tinyurl.com/fexbm8df. Accessed 20 July 2021.

Mbiti, John S. *African Religions and Philosophy.* New York, NY: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., Publishers, 1969.

_____. *Introduction to African Religion.* New York, NY: Praeger Publishers, Inc., 1975.

_____. *Prayers of African Religion.* London, UK: SPCK, 1975.

Muchiri, Mary Nyambura. *Papers on Language and Culture: an African Perspective.* Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2009. Google Play.

Neff, David. "Make Disciples, Not Just Converts." *Christianity Today.* 25 October 1999, Vol. 43, No. 12. https://tinyurl.com/y8urvndn. Accessed 23 November 2018.

Newbigin, Lesslie. *Honest Religion for Secular Man.* Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1966.

Nida, Eugene A. and William A. Smalley. *Introducing Animism.* New York, NY: Friendship Press, 1959.

Njoku, Chukwudi A. "The Missionary Factor in African Christianity, 1884–1914." In *African Christianity: An African Story.* Ed. Ogbu U. Kalu, 191–223. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc., 2007.

Ntamushobora, Faustin. *From Trials to Triumphs: The Voice of Habakkuk to the Suffering African.* Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2009.

Para-Mallam, Gideon. "Theological Trends in Africa: Implications for Missions and Evangelism." *Lausanne Reports,* March 2008. https://tinyurl.com/yaq5vgs7. Accessed 23 November 2018.

Riccards Michael P. *Faith and Leadership: The Papacy and the Roman Catholic Church.* Plymouth, United Kingdom: Lexington Books, 2012. https://tinyurl.com/mjp355pp. Accessed 16 July 2021. Ebsco.

Sadler, George W. "Rising Expectations." In *The Commission,* Volume XX, Number 4, eds. Eugene L. Hill and Ione Gray, 2–3, 32. Richmond, VA: Department of Missionary Education and Promotion of the Foreign Mission Board, April 1957.

Sauer, Eric. "Rediscovering Biblical Theology." In *Scripture and Strategy: The Use of the Bible in Postmodern Church and Mission.* Ed. David Hesselgrave, 522–745. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1994. Kindle.

Schaeffer, Francis. *Escape from Reason: A Penetrating Analysis of Trends in Modern Thought.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006. https://tinyurl.com/ykp2refa. Accessed 11 July 2021. Ebsco.

Schaff, Philip. *The History of the Christian Church: Nicene and Post-Nicene Christianity,* Vol. 3. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996.

_____. *The History of the Christian Church: Mediaeval Christianity,* Vol. 4. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996.

Scherman, Nosson. *The Stone Edition: The Chumash.* The ArtScroll Series. Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 2009.

Sidhom, Swailem. "The Theological Estimate of Man." In *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs.* Eds. Kwesi Dickson and Paul Ellingworth, 83–115. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1969.

Steyne, Philip M. *Gods of Power: A Study of the Beliefs and Practices of Animists.* Columbia, SC: Impact International Foundation, 2005.

Tacitus, Cornelius. *The Histories, Vol. II, Letter 5.* Ed. W. Hamilton Fyfe. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1912.

Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007. Kindle.

Teeter, Emily. *Religion and Ritual in Ancient Egypt.* Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Thomas of Aquino. *The Summa Theologica: Complete Edition.* New York, NY: Catholic Way Publishing, 2014. https://tinyurl.com/2ku7kxvt. Accessed 19 July 2021. GooglePlay.

Tippett, Allen R. "The Evangelization of Animists." In *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, Ed. J. D. Douglas, 844–855. Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1975.

Tylor, Edward B. *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom,* Vol. 2. London, UK: John Murray, 1871.

Van Rheenen, Gailyn. *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts.* Pasedena, CA: William Carey Library, 1991.

_____. "Syncretism and Contextualization: The Church on a Journey Defining Itself." In *Contextualization and Syncretism: Navigating Cultural Currents.* Pasedena, CA: William Carey Library, 2006. Kindle.

Waindi, Ella Mbogo. "Kenya." Email, August 28, 2018.

_____. "Question about positive discipleship efforts in Kenya." Email, August 26, 2019.

Wamagatta, Evanson N. "Changes of Government Policies Towards Mission Education in Colonial Kenya and Their Effects on the Missions: The Case of the Gospel Missionary Society." *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 38, 3–26. 2008.