

Evangelical
Christianity and
Democracy in Africa

Edited by

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OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

2008



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Introduction: Evangelical Christianity and Democracy in Africa

Terence O. Ranger

This volume is the product of an enlightened piece of academic encouragement. It emerges from the International Fellowship of Evangelical Mission Theologians (INFEMIT) project for a three-continent study of evangelical Christianity and democracy. The project covers Asia, Latin America, and Africa, comprising seventeen case studies. I myself am not an evangelical and still less a theologian, but when I was asked to be the research advisor to the six African postdoctoral scholars, I agreed at once because the topic is an increasingly important one. Moreover, it was an excellent idea to offer to African postdoctoral scholars research funding, guaranteed publication, and provision of scarce books and articles. All too often, African academics virtually end their research careers with their doctoral thesis and their publication careers with a revision of their thesis. African academic salaries are low, little research funding is available, and it is difficult to publish scholarly work. It is also rare for African academics in one part of Africa to be in contact with scholars in other parts of the continent. The project's funding of three workshops involving all the African researchers struck me as potentially very valuable.

So the research team was assembled: three women and three men, representing six different African nations. They came from varied religious backgrounds—Anglican, Catholic, humanist, pentecostal, and Presbyterian. They came from varying disciplines. But at the workshops they came together as a team, and discussions at these workshops were among the most intense, demanding, and rewarding of my academic life. These scholars are not propagandists for

evangelical Christianity, though Cyril Imo, writing from northern Nigeria at a time of grave crisis for Christianity, strikes an understandably committed note. In general, however, the commitment all six researchers share is to democracy. They are not inclined to do evangelical Christianity any favors or to pull any punches. Cyril Imo himself is just as critical of an evangelical head of state as he is of a Muslim governor. The strongest impression given by these chapters is one of involvement in national aspirations for democracy.

This personal involvement emerges especially if, like me, one knows something of the researchers' backgrounds. One is aware of Teresa Cruz e Silva in Maputo, unable to research because of the tragedy of the floods or anxiously enduring months of tension after disputed elections. One is aware that Isabel Apawo Phiri's treatment of evangelicalism and gender is shaped partly by her own harsh experiences of Malawian patriarchy (Phiri 1997), and that her treatment of the declaration of the Zambian Christian nation is shaped partly by the excitement in her own Durban evangelical congregation when Zambian evangelicals visited it to show videos of the event. One is very aware that Cyril Imo's research has been carried out at much personal risk, as he visited the hot spots of the continuing northern Nigerian Sharia crisis and narrowly survived the religious riots in Jos in September 2001. Deeply buried within Anthony Balcomb's analysis is his own experience of having to leave a South African Pentecostal ministry because of his political activism (Balcomb 1993). Behind John Karanja's insistence on the evangelical character of Kenya's "historic" churches and on their active participation in the struggle for democracy lies his research on the development of Kenyan Anglicanism as a fully African church and his contemporary position as a radical Anglican democrat. In the first draft of Isabel Mukonyora's chapter, a reader is able to accompany her from 1979 to 2000 as she explores the realities of Zimbabwean Christianity and politics as a journalist, scholar, and citizen. The studies of these scholars thus emerge from a series of typical contemporary African emergencies—car crashes, floods, riots, university closures, and intense political strife. The six authors have continued undauntedly with their research and writing. Knowledge so painfully gained is worth having.

In other words, this is very much an African book, springing out of commitment and involvement, rather than a collection by expatriate scholars, however sympathetic. Readers will find some explicitly African responses to the general literature on evangelicalism, and especially on democracy. Evangelicalism is seen here as mainly an indigenized and African movement rather than as an external and missionary one. As for democracy, too many of the currently available analyses emerge from a Western secular tradition. Some of the scholars in this book have reacted against the secularity of the literature made available to them. If Western scholars want to join in African discussions of democracy, they caution, it will be necessary to make religion central to the analysis. Moreover, they argue that in the long term an African holism, which

inseparably unites the “secular” and the “religious,” always prevails. In the end, old-style evangelical theologies of the separation of the “two kingdoms” stand little chance in Africa. The question for these African scholars is not *whether* evangelical Christianity has been, is, and will be intensely “political,” but *how*.

Some Definitions

This book adopts a generously open definition of “evangelical Christianity.” In his magisterial survey of evangelicals and politics in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, Paul Freston remarks that “the definition of ‘evangelical’ is hotly debated in historical and sociological literature,” and notes that some South African scholars have denied that the category “evangelical” has any utility (Freston 2001, 2).¹ Freston himself refers to the “working definition” outlined by Bebbington (1989), which “consists of four constant characteristics”:

Conversion (emphasis on the need for change of life), activism (emphasis on evangelistic and missionary efforts), biblicism (a special importance attached to the Bible . . .) and crucicentrism (emphasis on the centrality of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross). (Freston 2001, 2)

This book adopts Bebbington’s four defining characteristics, enabling its authors, like Freston, to “cast their net broadly.” Like Freston, they insist on the evangelical tradition of many “mainline” missionary churches. They are even more concerned than he is to regard southern African Apostolic and Zionist movements as evangelical. As John Wolffe recently remarked, “arguments as to whether [the term “evangelical”] can be applied to the African Initiated Churches are ultimately likely to be as much political as intellectual.” Isabel Mukonyora and Teresa Cruz e Silva, who write about Apostolics and Zionists in this book, argue that these movements meet Freston’s four criteria. And in a book about evangelical Christianity and democracy, it has been necessary for us also to take a political position. Without the Apostolics and the Zionists the book would leave out huge numbers of the impoverished and marginalized men and women whose participation—or lack of it—will be the real test of African democracy (Wolffe 2002, 89–93).² In David Martin’s words, “we have in Pentecostalism and all its associated movements the religious mobilization of the culturally despised, above all in the non-western world” (Martin 2002, 167).³ A crucial question for democracy in Africa is whether its practice can extend beyond literate “modern” Christians to those who have previously been “culturally despised,” which especially includes members of African Initiated Churches (AICs), pentecostals, and other evangelicals outside of the historic mainline denominations (Raison-Jourde 1995).⁴

Indeed, this book treats the term “democracy” in much the same way as it treats the term “evangelical.” That is to say, it is concerned with practice rather than with structure or dogma. As David Beetham warned assembled churchmen at a 1993 Leeds conference on “The Christian Churches and Africa’s Democratization,” the successful establishment of democracy in Africa involves more than the overthrow of dictatorship and more than the introduction of multiparty electoral systems. Above all, it means the achievement of *participation* in voting, in discussion, in self-assertion and self-help, in the establishment of a democratic culture both within church and state. The chapters in this book necessarily spend much time on constitutions, elections, and referenda, but they spend even more on the creation of civil society (Beetham 1995).⁵

History and Contemporary History

At the initial workshop in October 1999, it was agreed that the African chapters should be historical in character. This decision seemed to be necessitated by definitions, which emphasized practice and process rather than dogma and structure. It was argued that it was impossible to understand contemporary evangelical Christianity in Africa without understanding how firmly—and correctly—nineteenth-century Protestant missionaries defined themselves as evangelicals (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991).⁶ The churches that have descended from them must be counted among the evangelicals of today. Indeed, anyone who has participated in the revivals and prayer-meetings and consultations and exorcisms of the United Methodist churches in Zimbabwe and Mozambique, which are addressed in the chapters by Mukonyora and Cruz e Silva, will know how very evangelical they are.

It was argued also that it was essential to understand the history of the evangel itself: the dynamics of the translation of the Bible into the African vernaculars, and its assimilation into an oral prophetic culture.⁷ It was important to understand that the first African-initiated Spirit Churches took over and intensified missionary evangelicalism, seeking to Christianize African tradition yet more profoundly than the missionaries and their catechists had been able to do (Ranger 1999).⁸ Such African churches have to be defined as evangelical even if many of them possess an oral rather than a textual biblical tradition (West 1999).⁹ Moreover, they provide a long ancestry for contemporary pentecostal movements that are often thought of as imports from North America.

History was essential, therefore, in order to define evangelicalism and to define democracy. At the initial meeting it was agreed that it was crucially important to problematize *transition*—not only transition within the churches but also political transition. It was agreed that the chapters needed to trace the passage from settler to majority rule in Zimbabwe and South Africa and the

transition from independence to nationalist authoritarianism in Zambia, Kenya, and elsewhere. They needed to narrate “the second democratic revolution” and the establishment of multipartyism, followed in turn by the development of the current authoritarian regimes. They needed to analyze the transition from war to democracy in Mozambique, and from military government to democracy in Nigeria. The role of the churches, it was argued, was very different during the three stages of transition: the anticolonial struggle; the struggle against one-partyism; and today, the struggle against “third-termism.” Once the need had been to challenge dictatorship and to demand democratic forms; now the need is often to move beyond democratic forms to democratic practice. Some churches were better at the first, and others better at the second.

Moreover, it was argued that the chapters should be historical in method and in content. Researchers should make extensive use of archival materials; they should employ open-ended interviews rather than questionnaires; they should not seek to impose large theoretical constructs for comparative purposes but should instead respond to the particularities of their own case study. What were aimed at above all were studies that retained all the complexity of each country, region, or city.

A good deal of all this, of course, has been retained. Readers will discover that every chapter draws on open-ended interviews, and that living evangelical voices are heard throughout the book. Definitions of both “evangelical” and “democratic” are situational rather than standard. Each author has made his or her own decision on which churches, movements, and leaders to include among the representative evangelicals; each has made his or her own decision on what issues are critical to democracy. The authors vary in discipline, representing theologians, church historians, students of comparative religions, and social historians. But there is a strong common identity to the book as a whole. There is a sense that this is a collective effort, a team spirit created by the two intense and intensely stimulating workshops in which the researchers encountered each other. There is, too, a common style, and this remains in a sense historical. Nevertheless, there has been a large change since the initial workshop. The common historical approach now focuses very much on what Isabel Phiri calls “contemporary history.”

The emphasis of these chapters has come to be very heavily focused on the last few years—the last twenty in John Karanja’s Kenyan case; the last fifteen in Isabel Phiri’s Zambian case; the last ten in Tony Balcomb’s South African case; and the last ten in the case studies of Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and northern Nigeria by Isabel Mukonyora, Teresa Cruz e Silva, and Cyril Imo. The latter three studies offer a brief historical background, but their emphasis is on the present and the recent past.

This emphasis has two major advantages. First, it means that the chapters bring us up to date, carrying on from where Gifford’s and Freston’s major

surveys of the African and general field have left off (Freston 2001; Gifford 1998). In these chapters there is a sense of a desire to “go beyond” Gifford; in chronological terms at least, they certainly all do so. But there is more to it than that. The focus of this book is not on the recent past merely because it is necessary to add something. The focus is on the recent past because during the last few years the “public role” of evangelical Christianity has become more and more open and significant. Developments that have taken place since the research project began have compelled the researchers to work as “contemporary historians.” This book is essentially about the new prominence of evangelicals in African politics and about the new importance of the “earthly kingdom” in evangelical theology.

What does all this mean for the purposes of this introduction? It means, in the first place, that I need to offer some general sketch of the historical background. I need to describe the major transitions in the African democratic process and in the relations between African churches and the state.

In the second place, I need to draw on the case studies in this book to explain why evangelical Christianity has recently taken so significant a role in democratic politics. In the process, I shall seek to bring out themes that are raised in some of the case studies but not in others, though they are relevant to all. Such themes include the role of African Initiated Churches, or AICs, which are taken as evangelical case studies by Cruz e Silva and Mukonyora but left unaddressed in the other chapters. There is a need to focus more directly on the effect of war and violence on religious change, a topic that in this book is only centrally dealt with in Cyril Imo’s chapter. More needs to be said about gender and morality.

In the third place, I need to discuss topics that can best be dealt with comparatively rather than in a case study, an obvious example being evangelical transnationalism. And in the fourth place, I shall seek to raise some questions that are not raised in any of the chapters but that seem to me to be important in the contemporary history of democracy and the relationship of evangelical Christianity to it. One of these is the role of African “traditional” religion and the attitude of evangelical Christianity toward it.

Religion and Democracy: Some Transitions

It is conventional and useful to divide (as I have done above) Africa’s democratic history into three “revolutionary” phases. The “first democratic revolution” was the anticolonial struggle that brought independence and “majority rule.” In most of Africa, this effort was completed by the 1960s, though it was of course significantly delayed in three of our case studies: South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique. It is clear that this first revolution was democratic in intention. It is equally clear that it was not democratic in result

(Ranger 2003). From the beginning the new independent states were “commandist,” espousing a theory of “general will” democracy in which the state was held to represent the interests of the population as a whole. In all too many places this authoritarian “modernizing” state gave way to mere autocracy.

The “second democratic revolution” of the late 1980s was the challenge to one-partyism and to military rule, both of which had arisen in many parts of Africa. In many countries this challenge led to the collapse of one-party regimes and the introduction of a competitive electoral system. But if the principle of “majority rule” did not ensure democracy in the 1970s and 1980s, neither did the concept of multipartyism in the 1990s. Movements originally committed to pluralism themselves became in effect one-party regimes; democratically elected presidents (and their clients) had too much to lose from yielding power. In many countries networks of corruption replaced outright military repression, but popular democracy seemed as far away as ever. Hence, what is being attempted at the beginning of the twenty-first century is a “third democratic revolution”: the struggle against presidential third termism; the struggle for incorrupt “transparency”; the struggle not only to develop electoral institutions but also to achieve a democratic culture and practice (Ake 1991; Nherere and D’Engelbronner-Kolf 1993; Nyong’o 1987; Sachikonye 1995).

The churches have played a different role in each of the three stages. During the first anticolonial revolution the churches played an ambiguous part. Most of the white missionary clergy were implicated in one way or another in the colonial order and feared that a successful nationalism would usher in either a revived “paganism” or communism or both. These fears were especially strongly felt by churches of the evangelical tradition (Ranger 1978). AICs, though co-opted into the narrative of anticolonial “resistance history,” were usually aloof from, and sometimes actively at odds with, the secular nationalist movements.¹⁰ The Christian churches played only the most marginal role in histories of African nationalism (Hastings 1995).¹¹

Yet there was, of course, another dimension. Lamin Sanneh has recently emphasized that the spread of evangelical Christianity in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Africa was quite distinct from, and in some ways antithetical, to that of colonialism:

Europe’s ascendancy in no way explains Christianity’s successful spread and expansion in Africa. It was not European surrogates such as kept kings, paramount chiefs, trading clients, and coastal mulatto populations that carried the Gospel into the heart of Africa, but African preachers, evangelists, catechists, schoolteachers, lay readers, nurses, petty traders, women of note, their dependents. . . . The great promise of Christianity lay in the interior, not on the coast with its compromising European cultural climate. In African custom, the ancestors were venerated and male elders revered, whereas in

Christianity, by contrast, the young men were embraced and women enfranchised. So the religion irrupted in Africa as a mass youth movement in significant discontinuity with custom and usage. Similarly, what justified establishing the church in Africa was not late nineteenth-century classic colonialism but rather the drive a century earlier to abolish the slave trade and to create free settlements.

(Sanneh 2001, 113)

Under the compromised surfaces of official colonial Christianity, this gospel of emancipation persisted (Sanneh 2001, 113).

Chapters in this book give some glimpses of the emancipatory and democratic potential of evangelical mission Christianity. Isabel Mukonyora describes the paradoxes of Rhodesian colonialism. It encouraged the growth of a Christianity that taught Africans to be submissive but that also taught “love for one another, justice and self-respect as equals before God, and a belief in the redemptive power of the Holy Spirit” (Ranger 2003). She describes Bishop Abel Muzorewa—heir to this tradition—as “an evangelical democrat.” Teresa Cruz e Silva shows that in Mozambique, evangelical missionary Christianity, even while proclaiming an apolitical theology, inevitably took on more and more the role of an opposition to the colonial state. The Protestant churches “Africanized” their leadership; these African clergy “used the Bible as the foundation for their public statements, demanding independence, justice and freedom” (Cruz e Silva 1996). John Karanja argues that the “mainline Protestant churches” in contemporary Kenya—the main advocates of political democracy—“see themselves as the heirs to an evangelical tradition founded by the early Protestant missionaries” (Githiga 2001; Karanja 1999).

South Africa, as always, is different. In some ways South Africa combined both the first and the second revolutions, that is, the tropical African fight against “colonialism” taking in South Africa the form of a fight against settler authoritarianism. With the striking exception of Beyers Naude, Afrikaner theologians who had developed an anti-imperial theology found it impossibly difficult to develop an anti-authoritarian one. Meanwhile what Peter Walshe has memorably called the “phlegmatic churches”—the mainstream Protestants, as distinct from the charismatics—found it much easier than English-speaking mission churches elsewhere to develop theological critiques of white minority rule (Walshe 1995). As Tony Balcomb writes in his chapter in this book:

The role that Christianity has played in the democratization of South African society has been significant . . . from the earliest rumblings of democracy in the nineteenth century to its final culmination on April 27, 1994. That many of the early movers and shakers for genuine political democracy in South Africa were evangelical . . . is quite clear. (191–192)

None of the scholars in this book are making this surviving emancipatory radicalism the main feature of their analysis of twentieth-century Protestant evangelicalism. Tony Balcomb immediately goes on to add that “obviously this is not the whole story. The role of evangelicals in the democratization of South Africa has been ambivalent.” But at least in South Africa the emancipatory strain was open and visible. Elsewhere in Africa during the first anticolonial revolution it ran much more underground.

If the Protestant churches were not at the forefront of the revolution that ushered in African independence, still less did they emerge as the theoreticians and guarantors of democratic practice in the new African states. Adrian Hastings notes that the churches approached the new African state in much the same way as they had the old colonial one. There was

an anxiety on the part of church leadership to give the state the benefit of almost every possible doubt; a certain touchiness on the part of the state if and when church leaders did say anything verging on the political. In most cases church leaders were aware of a considerable weakness in their own position. If white, they could very easily be branded as interfering neo-colonialists. If black, their education and experience was generally far less than that of the political leadership. Moreover, black archbishops of the 1960s had, for the most part, few African clergy to back them up and no reliably organized cohorts of the laity. (Hastings 1995, 43)

Black clergymen might sometimes appear in leading ceremonial positions in the new states, as the Reverend Canaan Banana did when he assumed the presidency of Zimbabwe. But Banana’s role was not to speak for the church to the state. It was to speak for the state to the church. Liberation theology, he told the Christian Council of Zimbabwe, meant in independent Africa complete support for the sole agency capable of liberation—the state. The churches must unequivocally support state development programmes. And many Christian councils did just that (Maxwell 1995).¹²

Sanneh writes more trenchantly:

The missionary compromise with the colonial state was seen as a betrayal not only of Africans but also of Christianity’s message of liberation, justice and hope. Sadly for African church leaders, however, with little political catechism about how to reposition the churches vis-à-vis the post-colonial state, they engaged in social criticism with not much more than a rhetorical flourish, and their own ambition for power and office weakened their moral authority. They behaved with the same authoritarian intolerance as the political leaders they criticized. Corruption and despotic rule despoiled

countries, divided society, and failed the national cause, but they did succeed in uniting with the exploiters of the people. (Sanneh 2001, 115)

Even when “the Protestant bodies, organized under national Christian councils, stepped into the breach created by the weakness or collapse of the state,” their enterprises were, in Sanneh’s view, merely “a distraction from the real problems of Africa at a time when distractions were the norm of political practice. Contextual theology flourished in this setting . . . equally plausibly, anything and nothing would help.” In Sanneh’s analysis, contextual theology was thus as much discredited in independent Africa as liberation theology. No other political theology, still less a theology of democratic practice, arose to take their place (Sanneh 2001, 115).

All this intolerance, corruption, and authoritarianism were bound sooner or later to give rise to the second democratic revolution. But it did not look as if the churches would play any more of a role in this than they had done in the first. As Paul Gifford remarked, “that the churches played such a role is remarkable. . . . This crucial involvement of the Christian churches in Africa’s political changes came as a surprise” (1995, 2).

Yet, as Paul Gifford’s own edited volume shows more clearly than anything else, the churches *did* play a central part in the second African democratic revolution. That volume—*The Christian Churches and the Democratisation of Africa*—emerged from a conference in Leeds in September 1993. The conference was attended by a cardinal, an archbishop, three bishops, the general secretary of a Presbyterian synod, the president of a Reformed church, two leaders of national Christian Councils, and other African priests and clergy engaged in processes of constitutional change. All had come hot from democratic politics. Some had been chairing national constitutional conventions; some had been leading protest marches; some had been issuing prophetic pastoral letters; yet others had been helping to end civil wars and to lay the foundations for civil democracy. As Gifford wrote in his introduction to the subsequent volume:

In the late 1980s, at the time of the end of the cold war, Africa experienced the beginning of a second liberation, as the peoples of Africa tried to throw off the political systems that had increasingly oppressed and beggared them. The struggle was not the same everywhere, but one of its common features was the significant role played by the churches. (Gifford 1995, 1)

Gifford described the Francophone national conferences, “at which a wide range of groups debated the nation’s future,” and “the way in which Catholic bishops were asked to preside over them.” He described episcopal denunciations of authoritarianism in Kenya, pastoral letters in Malawi, support of an opposition in Zambia: “In Kenya during the 1980s, when all opposition

activity was banned, the leaders of the opposition were effectively churchmen. Examples like these could be taken from many other countries too—like Togo, Malawi and Zambia” (Gifford 1995, 1–5).

Under the surface of quietism or of collaboration with the one-party regimes, the historic churches had been gathering strength, multiplying their adherents, recruiting their clergy, and setting up their structures. They offered the only alternative networks to those of the dominant party. Despite their complicity with the first generation of nationalist leaders, the churchmen still retained enough moral authority to act as arbiters and judges. The “relatively human and moderate autocracy” of the early post-independence regimes had given way to excesses that it needed no theological sophistication to denounce. For their part, the historic churches had largely outlived their connection with colonialism. They were able now to appeal to the subterranean tradition of emancipation. As Gifford wrote, “In general it is the mainline churches that have challenged Africa’s dictators” (Gifford 1995, 5).

But where did that leave evangelical Christianity? In terms of the definitions adopted in the chapters of this book, it left it divided. Some of the “mainline churches” had always seen themselves as evangelical. Gifford says Kenyan Anglican bishops were the most active opponents of the Moi regime; in this book John Karanja describes their opposition as part of evangelical Christianity’s interaction with democracy (Githiga 2001). The Reformed Church of Zambia was represented at the Leeds conference by the Reverend Foston Sakala, the chairman of the Foundation for Democratic Process. Sakala was part of that broad evangelical backing for Chiluba’s challenge to Kaunda, which Isabel Phiri discusses in her chapter. As Teresa Cruz e Silva shows in her chapter, the historic but also evangelical United Methodist Church played an important part in the peace process in Mozambique.

In short, some members of the broad evangelical tradition that is discussed in this book did indeed participate in the second African democratic revolution. But at Leeds things seemed very different so far as other members of that tradition were concerned. “The mainline churches have challenged Africa’s dictators,” writes Gifford. “The newer evangelical and pentecostal churches have provided the[ir] support.” As for members of AICs—the Zionists and Apostolics, whom Isabel Mukonyora and Teresa Cruz e Silva include both among their evangelicals and their democrats—they barely rated a mention at the Leeds conference at all.

In my own summary of the proceedings I noted that many people “got left out” of the Leeds conference and hence, apparently out of African democratic politics:

Virtually all the African Christians present were male clergy of the mainline churches—women, laymen, African independents, Pentecostals, were all conspicuous by their absence. Some of those present

argued that this did not matter. It had been the male leaders of the mainline churches, after all, who had been playing the prophetic role; chairing the constitutional conferences; issuing the pastoral letters and pamphlets. . . . The assembled mainline clergy expressed themselves baffled by that broad spectrum of Christianity represented by the evangelicals, the African Independent Churches and the Pentecostals. As Bishop Diggs of Liberia exclaimed, "We don't know why they won't join us." (Gifford 1995, 24–25)

The assembled leaders of the historic churches had good reasons for their bewilderment at the political division of Christianity. Time after time, they were able to give examples of the newer evangelical and pentecostal churches rallying to the support of state authority; AICs, meanwhile, were seen as apathetically on the sidelines. It was left to young academic researchers to explore the potentialities of pentecostalism (Marshall 1995).

In the 1995 volume that emerged from the Leeds discussions, Paul Gifford and I tried to assess the democratic potential of the charismatic and pentecostal wing of evangelical Christianity. In both cases we were assessing future possibilities rather than current achievements.

Drawing on Latin American rather than African case studies, Gifford remarked:

Although the newer (mainly Pentecostal) churches may today support or at least fail to challenge oppressive political structures, they may in the long run do more for political reform than the mainline churches and [than] any "liberation theology." For in the circumstances of today's Africa, these Pentecostal churches are something new and important: voluntary associations of true brothers and sisters with a new organizational style. This new community provides free social space. Here members find shelter, psychological security, and solidarity. . . . In this new world they can forge a new notion of self, for here they can begin to make personal decisions. In the small area they have marked out for themselves, they can be free agents, responsible beings. They interact as equals. Here they learn patterns of discipline and independence. . . . some even find leadership and responsibility. In this narrow sphere [of the world of personal behavior] an individual can bring control, order, and dignity. Having taken control here, individuals can then combine to exert control in the wider sphere. (Gifford 1995, 6)

Readers of this book will find some African case studies that illustrate these arguments; but these case studies were not available to Gifford in 1993. Nor were they available to me. Indeed, drawing on the African material submitted

to the conference, I contented myself merely with emphasizing the great range of possibilities within the new evangelical and pentecostal tradition:

Some were conservative, not to say reactionary, in their connections with American right-wing fundamentalism; others comforted the poor and powerless by giving them a place in sacred history; yet others had radical implications as they subverted hierarchies of status, gender, and generation.

I emphasized the growing numbers of the new evangelicals and pentecostals: “Already in some African countries their membership was greater than that of the mainline churches. If the latter had been important in the initial challenge to regimes, the former seemed likely to be critical to the sustainability of democracy.” But in what ways they were going to be critical I left for the future to reveal (Gifford 1995, 30–31).

The Third Democratic Revolution and the Crisis of the Historic Churches

More than a decade after 1993 the future revealed quite a lot. The third African Democratic Revolution is essentially about “the sustainability of democracy.” Hence the possibilities discussed by Gifford are being tested on the African ground.¹³ Just as I did in 1993, the chapters in this book certainly emphasize the *variety* of evangelical political theologies and practice—indeed, Tony Balcomb’s, Isabel Mukonyora’s, and John Karanja’s chapters are essentially an examination of the contrasting implications for democratic politics of contrasting evangelical styles. But collectively the chapters go far beyond this. It becomes possible to discern the complex ways in which evangelical Christianity, in all its variations, *is* being critical to democratic sustainability. It is also possible to discern that the historic churches have been in danger of losing their way in an era of democratic practice rather than of prophetic challenge.

In April 2000, after I had attended the first project workshop and received the first research reports, I gave a public lecture at the Jesuit Arrupe College of Philosophy in Harare on “Religion and Democracy in Africa.”¹⁴ In it I offered a version of the history of the previous seven years, which had the advantage of being simple, if somewhat oversimplified. I stressed that the historic churches, so central to the second African democratic revolution, had become less relevant to the third. Hierarchy and authority had given them great advantages in denouncing dictatorial regimes, but they were obstacles to a genuine manifestation of democratic practice. However, the various evangelical churches, largely marginal to the second revolution, had become central to the third:

How different things look now [I said] less than seven years after the Leeds conference. . . . In Malawi, neither the Catholic bishops nor any other heads of the historic churches seem to be sure how to continue to play a prophetic role within a multiparty democracy. In Mozambique, now that both parties have to appeal to mass constituencies, it is not the Catholic and Anglican churches who are important, but the burgeoning evangelicals, Pentecostals and Zionists. The era of the episcopally chaired Constitutional Assembly is over. And most striking of all there is the case of South Africa.

Even at the Leeds conference in 1993 Archbishop Desmond Tutu confessed:

We had a common position, our stand against apartheid. I now realize what I did not previously, that it is a great deal easier to be against. . . . Now that apartheid is being dismantled we are finding that it is not quite so simple to define what we are for. . . . We no longer meet regularly as church leaders because the tyranny is over. . . . We knew what we were against and we opposed that fairly effectively. It is not nearly so easy to say what we are for and we appear to be dithering, not quite knowing where we want to go or how to get there. (Tutu 1995, 96)

By the end of 1999, the crisis of the South African historic churches was being more forcibly expressed. At a conference in Uppsala entitled “Quo Vadis for South African Churches? Justice, Peace, and Reconciliation in Post-Apartheid South Africa,” several of the participants referred to a striking paradox. Under apartheid the historic churches had been the voice of the voiceless. Now they were struggling to be heard. The Reverend Charity Majiza, general secretary of the South African Council of Churches, said that “for decades the liberal churches were at the core of the anti-apartheid movement, but in the 1990s they have become marginalized.” The churches, she said, were “determined to speak out” on poverty, violence, gender, and race. But they had not discovered how to do so effectively.

In my Arrupe lecture I drew upon an early presentation by Tony Balcomb in which he discussed the South African transition more extensively than he does in this book. I summarized his argument:

Everything has changed since 1990. The radical churchmen who were the enemies of apartheid are mostly now part of a new establishment. It is difficult for them to escape some part of the blame for the co-existence of much greater freedom with much greater poverty. The Kairos Document has proved to be too “theologically thin” to provide guidance on how to go on being prophetic in majority rule South Africa. The initiative now lies with the charismatic rather than with the phlegmatic churches. These charismatic churches, which

in the past have been quietist and conservative, now constitute a moral opposition to the new nationalist order. By so doing they make possible the *operation* of democracy.

In my Arrupe lecture I quoted one South African charismatic example, that of Pastor Ray McCauley. During the apartheid years, his Rhema church held that “the government was a Christian government, and that church leaders should not be in politics.” In 1990, however, McCauley publicly confessed that “our silence in these areas was in fact sin.” In January 2000 the Rhema church announced its participation with Roelf Meyer, former leader of the United Democratic Movement, to form Civil Society, “an organization aiming to change the moral tone of South Africa.” McCauley claimed that it would be “a mechanism to encourage civil society [and] to make democracy real in the eyes of the people now” (Belinda Beresford, “Building Up the Body of Christ,” *Mail and Guardian* [Cape Town, South Africa], January 21, 2000).

A similar story, I told my Arrupe audience, could be set out for Malawi. In his splendid account of the confrontation between the Catholic Church and the Malawi state between 1960 and 1994, Matthew Schoffeleers remarks how even the Leeds conference was “a somewhat sobering experience” for the Malawi participants. Bishop Alan Changwera of Zomba was quoted to the effect that

the [Catholic] bishops, after the publication of their pastoral letter, were at a loss as to what to do, as this situation was totally new to them. The church had put out half a million booklets on “What is democracy?” . . . The feeling of the conference was that before it could be determined what the church should do to further democratic sustainability, it needed to be discovered first whether the church was for democracy or merely against tyranny. Were the Malawian bishops themselves qualified to answer the question “What is Democracy”? When they spoke out against an intolerable regime this did not mean that they favored democracy rather than some more benevolent paternalism. (Schoffeleers 1999, 308)

As in South Africa, the questions posed here by Matthew Schoffeleers have turned out to be all too pertinent in Malawi. “With the advent of pluralism,” asks Malawian pastor Felix Chingota, “are the churches now irrelevant?” (Chingota 2001).¹⁵ In a recent “stock-taking” of democracy in Malawi there is an interesting chapter on churches and political life in Malawi’s post-authoritarian era. The author, Peter von Doepp, finds that the contribution of the churches has been “ambiguous.”

On the one hand, the churches have continued to be visible in post-Banda Malawi: As the new political dispensation dawned in Malawi, the churches were quick to indicate that they would continue to play an active role in the politics of the country. The lessons of the

past had been learned. Silence and inaction on matters of public interest was not only bad for the country, but also contrary to the church's understanding of its mission in the world. (von Doepp 1998)

During the 1990s, the historic churches have acted as "watchdogs" by means of their Public Affairs Committee (PAC), which has raised questions concerning structural adjustment, corruption, and factionalism.¹⁶ The PAC has sponsored roundtable conferences on transparency, political tolerance, and reconciliation, and it has run a public education campaign.

Yet von Doepp has serious reservations. The PAC limits itself to government corruption and is silent on "more fundamental matters concerning the accumulation and distribution of wealth in the country." When it comments on poverty, it merely rebukes "the spirit of laziness." In April 1996 the *Nation* newspaper declared the PAC irrelevant:

Small political differences have no impact on people's daily lives, whereas failure to improve their well being is truly a matter of grave concern. . . . These priests, pastors and God-fearing men in that committee have no sense of sympathy for the suffering masses.

Moreover, the churches themselves are seen to mirror Malawi's elite political society. In the same *Nation* article, it is stated that "corruption is perhaps the most widely perceived abuse of clerical authority": an Anglican bishop is accused of embezzling huge sums of donor money; relief maize for the poor is sold off to food processing companies; Sunday collections finance business ventures. Accounts of promiscuity also abound; women are said to be obtained and used as symbols of status and power. Parishioners perceive the clergy as part of the same "neopatrimonial" system they purport to monitor and regulate.

In such a situation charismatic Christians begin to be seen in a different light. Von Doepp describes the emergence of the "born-again" within the Presbyterian Church. They deserve attention, he insists:

Their religious message eschews "politics" and focuses instead on the need for a personal process of conversion that can bring salvation. The "born-again" in many ways spearhead a movement to restore civil integrity. (von Doepp 1998)

He gives an example from a Presbyterian rural congregation "wrought by financial scandal and organizational decay." Within a year the professed pentecostal, the Reverend Dzina, had rebuilt the integrity of the parish. The Women's Guild, previously nonexistent because local men feared sending their wives to the manse, was in full operation. Financial accountability was gradually reinstated. "The political importance of these seeming 'a-political' matters should not be discounted," concludes von Doepp. "The minister in question is helping to build a viable organization where men and women can

learn leadership skills, develop habits of co-operation and appreciate the benefits of civil (as opposed to mercantile) behavior. This is an important component of the democratization process” (von Doepp 1998, 109–125).¹⁷

Drawing on these South African and Malawian examples, and on a more general discussion of the “strengths and weaknesses of hierarchy,” I concluded in my Arrupe lecture that

it seems likely that cardinals, archbishops, bishops, moderators, and the rest have already made their contribution to the (third) African democratic revolution. They took the essential first step and challenged tyranny. The problem now lies with the second, third, and fourth steps. Democracy is a complicated business. The ground has to be cleared for it. Its machinery has to be set up. And most important of all, it has to run. The focus shifts from the leaders to the people.

In the first stage, one needs grand ecclesiastical prophets to challenge tyrants [but] then one needs “professors of morality,” teaching good civic conduct more by example than by exhortation, like the rural Pentecostal Presbyterian minister in Malawi. . . . The values needed are civic as well as personal. . . . Moral leadership by means of high ecclesiastical injunction rarely does anyone any good and certainly rarely any democracy any good. For to make a democracy “run,” the people have not to obey but to *participate*. . . . There has been no democratization of the church itself. The homily, the pastoral letter, instruction remain the norm rather than participation. This lies at the heart of the historic churches’ marginalisation since 1993. [On the other hand], the charismatic tradition seems to be strong on participation.¹⁸

Toward a Richer Analysis of the Role of the Churches in the Third Democratic Revolution

This oversimplified contrast was useful for stimulating a Jesuit audience, and it revealed some basic and important facts. It also represented my response to the early research reports of the scholars represented in this book. But two things have made me realize that it *was* oversimplified. The first is that there have been significant developments recently. The second is that the final chapters of the project researchers are much richer and more complicated than my sketch of the transitions could do justice to.

Recent developments have shown that I was premature in writing off the democratic role of the historic churches. What has come to be called “third-termism”—the attempt by elected presidents to change party and national constitutions so that they can again stand for office—has offered another

opportunity for the prophetic challenge to authoritarian leadership that the historic churches can do best. At the same time there are signs of significantly new thinking. Once again, the case of Malawi is suggestive.

In Malawi, both the Catholics and the Presbyterians have issued pastoral letters warning against any attempt by President Muluzi to stand for a third term. There has been a pamphlet war on the streets of Lilongwe, with some anonymous leaflets urging citizens to show support for the churches, and others demanding that the churches stay out of politics. We are fortunate to have been given an insider account of the Presbyterian pastoral letter by one of those who initiated and drafted it, the Right Reverend Dr. Felix L. Chingota. The letter arose out of a fear that Malawi was in danger of becoming a one-party state again. It is entitled “Some Worrisome Trends Which Undermine the Nurturing of Our Young Democratic Culture.” It seems in many ways a repeat of the famous church denunciations of Dr. Banda.

But in fact the drafters of the Presbyterian pastoral letter were self-consciously making a break with the past. As we have seen, earlier church denunciations of dictatorship had given rise to the PAC, designed to play a mediating role in the multiparty system and hence to end forever the need for prophetic condemnation. The PAC has attacked “partisan clergy” who want to denounce an elected government in a multiparty state. So the Presbyterian pastoral letter defied the PAC. Moreover, it springs out of theological rethinking. Chingota notes that

after the 1972 pastoral letter, which was prophetic, the Malawi churches had to learn a lesson. Their role in the new democratic society is quite different from the one in times of oppression. The words of the Bible in a literal understanding do not apply to emerging problems in constructing a nation and are not a cure for each and every social and political disease. And—unfortunately—the Bible provides a lot of examples of how to act in times of distress, but its advice for calmer political times is rather vague.

Nevertheless, “the spoken word must be made incarnate.” This has to begin, says Chingota, *within* the churches. After 1972 they were not transformed. Now they have to be remodeled on the basis of a theology of the “people of God.” Pastoral letters “must be rooted in a life lived in solidarity with the poor and powerless” (Ross 1996).

Finally, this time around the historic Presbyterian Church—perhaps influenced by the work of born-againists within it—has tried not to exclude the charismatic and pentecostal movements. Its pastoral letter was endorsed by the Charismatic and Pentecostal Association of Malawi (CHAPEL) (Chingota 2001).

One can perhaps see something of the same pattern of rethinking and rededication to the democratic project elsewhere in Africa, with this new

emphasis on participation and interaction with the charismatic and pentecostal evangelicals. John Karanja's chapter in this volume reveals that even the days of episcopal participation in constitutional conferences are not over. Isabel Phiri (who has contributed significantly to Presbyterian theological rethinking in Malawi) describes in this volume how Zambian charismatic Christians have broken ranks to condemn Chiluba's attempt at a third term, but the historic churches have also been outspoken in their condemnation. Cyril Imo's chapter in this volume quotes prophetic statements by Catholic and Anglican bishops, making common cause with evangelicals in northern Nigeria.

In Zimbabwe, after a long period of indecision and inaction, the historic churches as members of the Christian Council recently (and after Isabel Mukonyora completed her chapter) confronted government ministers face to face, denouncing them for lies and violence.¹⁹ Interestingly enough, in their efforts to form a common front, the Zimbabwe Council of Churches sent "fraternal" delegates to "convert" the president of the Zimbabwe Evangelical Alliance, Andrew Watawanushe, whose attempts to Christianize the Zimbabwean state from within are described in Mukonyora's chapter.²⁰ Interestingly enough also, the Association of Evangelicals, representing national evangelical fellowships in forty-six African countries, has chosen Zimbabwe to be the seat of its Ethics, Peace, and Justice Commission. Its executive secretary, Patson Netha, says that the new commission would set out "to complement work covered by the Zimbabwe Council of Churches":

People need to look seriously at issues of morality and ethical codes, for instance in tackling corruption. We believe that if all of us in Africa speak out against injustice we will make an impact. The need to promote justice has always been there, but we have not all been rising to that challenge. We will endeavor to do our best in Zimbabwe to ensure that justice prevails for all faiths and for those who do not belong to any faith. (Zimbabwe *Independent*, "Ethics, Peace, and Justice Body to Set Up Base in Zimbabwe," July 27, 2001)

Most striking of all, perhaps, as a sign of a new collaborative thinking—and even theology—is the joint statement issued by more than forty churches in Zimbabwe's eastern Manicaland Province. Firmly biblical, unflinchingly critical of violence and corruption, the statement is endorsed by historic churches, charismatic/pentecostal churches, and African Initiated Churches.²¹

It is in this new context, rather than in the context of structural opposition to the historic churches, that one must now see the increasing importance of evangelical Christianity in democratic politics. But if the political visibility of charismatic evangelical Christianity is not due solely to the withdrawal of the historic churches, what then are some of the factors of contemporary Africa that help to explain it? David Martin writes:

The broad background is the weakness of the African state, vast indebtedness, and a corrupt clientelism, which means that churches become the main mediating institutions, and Christian appeals count as major arbiters of political legitimacy. Churches become alternative communities wielding power through non-governmental organizations, and Pentecostals may sometimes act as alternative oppositions, picking up the sentiments of the excluded. (Martin 2002, 133–134)

But African states are not merely experienced as weak. They are increasingly experienced by their citizens as violent, bankrupt, and immoral. Each of these characteristics does something to explain the development of an evangelical democratic culture.

The Crisis of Violence

Most chapters in this volume say relatively little about violence. Yet violence is almost always present for most of them: the guerrilla wars in Mozambique and Zimbabwe; the post-independence war with Renamo in Mozambique; the post-independent repression in Matabeleland in the 1980s; anti-apartheid urban political violence in South Africa, followed by criminal urban violence today; military coups and religious faction fights in Nigeria; and state-backed ethnic violence in Kenya. Often violence functions as a catalyst for religious change and for theological rethinking.

Sometimes violence compels churchmen to take sides and to justify doing so. An example comes from Ngwabi Bhebe's study of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe's guerrilla war. Historically, evangelical Lutherans had adopted Two Kingdom theology. During the war, however, black Lutheran clergy in the rural areas chose to support the guerrillas and to express theological reasons for doing so. Bhebe writes:

Clearly in so far as the Evangelical Lutheran Church followers and their Church leaders were concerned, their relationship with and responses to the plight of the peasants and vis-à-vis the liberation struggle were not cast in the mould of the two kingdoms. . . . Soderstrom's suggested scenario of a Christian being a citizen of two worlds—the secular and the spiritual—may have applied in some churches elsewhere in Zimbabwe, but certainly not in the Evangelical Lutheran Church. The Church through its followers and leaders was simply part of the one kingdom, the impoverished and suffering rural kingdom. (Bhebe 1999, 152)

Bhebe describes how guerrillas accused Lutheran pastors of preaching a white man's God of pacifism and quietism. He also describes how the clergy drew on black theology and on ideas of the just war and sacrificial love to counter such

accusations. The guerrillas were often astonished, and the Lutheran church changed. The last missionary bishop of the church, Sigfrid Strandvik, tried to persuade his pastors to stop their political activities. Elias Masiane of Shashe, who was later arrested, tortured, and imprisoned by the Smith regime, reacted “almost emotionally”:

My people are suffering economic disadvantages at the hands of Rhodesian whites. Do you want me to stop my involvement in politics and leave my people to continue to suffer? Then I quoted Romans 12, which says that the church must suffer with those who suffer and must rejoice with those who rejoice. I also said that if I was going to be arrested and suffer with my people, I did not mind. (Bhebe 1999, 162)

Such deep involvement with the guerrillas meant, of course, that the Lutheran pastors gave full-hearted support to the majority rule regime after 1980. But the western Lutheran dioceses suffered from brutal repressions in the 1980s, and their clergy once again suffered with those who suffered. Such continuous theological rethinking in this historic evangelical church has meant that it can now once again, in the third democratic revolution, respond to the need to take part in democratic politics. It is no accident that the Christian Council of Zimbabwe has begun to confront the Zimbabwean state under the presidency of Bishop Ambrose Moyo of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Violence can compel people to create their own institutions so that they can express their own agency and sustain the morale and sense of identity of their kin and clients. This happened during the Renamo/Frelimo war in Mozambique. Mozambican refugees in the camps created innumerable little Apostolic and Zionist churches, so that the camps were honeycombed with “democratic” cells. This was the politics of the personal. But it was to these charismatic cells that Christian Care’s voter education was addressed, as refugees returned from the camps to take part in Mozambique’s first election. This provides some background to Teresa Cruz e Silva’s account of Zionist “democracy” in contemporary peri-urban Maputo.²²

Sometimes violence demands that those involved in it, whether as participants or as victims, find some way of applying a moral code that will help them determine how they can legitimately conduct themselves. The spread of the Zionist churches in Mozambique from the 1950s did not affect only refugees in Malawi or Zimbabwe or in Mozambique’s peri-urban areas. Many participants in the war in the rural areas also became Zionists and drew upon their new faith for moral guidance and justification.

Sometimes violence compels churches to unite. This requires the development of both an ecumenical and an activist theology. It is the situation described by Cyril Imo in his chapter in this book, in which he quotes Catholic and Anglican bishops in northern Nigeria as joining to articulate a general

“evangelical” position (Sanneh 2001, 44).²³ Such bishops have approved of taking up arms in “self-defense”; and Christians in Kano, “including evangelicals” have used guns to repel attacks on their area, killing many Muslims. Imo tells us that while retaining “their views of the secularity of the state,” evangelicals have reinterpreted the scriptural text “Give unto Caesar what is his and to God what is his”:

The new interpretation saw “Caesar” not as the “world,” “worldliness,” or even the “devil.” . . . But many evangelicals now began to see “Caesar” in a new light, as an entity with a capacity for good, thus concluding that a “believer” should identify with politics and political leadership and at the same time remain faithful to God. . . . Many Christians in these areas have become even more politically conscious. . . . Few evangelicals believe that engaging in politics is “satanic.” (60)

Not only in northern Nigeria but also in many other parts of Africa people fear a revival of violence, whether religious, criminal, or political. Ensuring peace by any means, including politics, seems work unequivocally approved by God.²⁴ Ruth Marshall, writing about Pentecostalism in southern Nigeria, speaks of “the omni-present reality of state violence,” whether expressed in police shootings or the razing of slums. She adds:

It is little wonder that popular discourse centers on themes of decline, disintegration, and unleashing of forces over which they have no control. Violence is the idiom which best expresses the often arbitrary and unreasonable quality of quotidian struggles. . . . That stories of conversion focus on the contrast between the hopefulness, sinfulness and destructiveness of one’s own past and the security, hope and empowerment that new life in Christ brings is typical of the born-again experience wherever it is found, yet it takes on added poignancy and significance in the above context. This new hope and empowerment is not simply a case of false consciousness, and what is being created is not some unreal world of atavistic escapism, but rather an expressive act of individual and collective reconstruction. (1993, 223)

The Crisis of Poverty

There is a crisis of poverty, as well as a crisis of violence, in contemporary Africa. Charismatic evangelicals are centrally concerned with poverty. It is often asserted that the new evangelical and Pentecostal movements in Africa lay excessive emphasis on “the Gospel of Prosperity.” There have been many pictures presented of grossly rich leaders flamboyantly displaying their wealth,

and happy to benefit from patrimonial corruption. Their followers, meanwhile, live in a fantasy world, expecting prosperity to come almost magically. The chapters in this book present a wider and more sympathetic view. As both Isabel Mukonyora and Teresa Cruz e Silva emphasize, Zionist and Apostolic churches are certainly concerned with prosperity, but for most of their adherents “prosperity” means survival or, if possible, a little more. Nor is there anything magical about their expectations. The churches stress self-reliance and hard work. As David Maxwell has emphasized, pentecostalism encourages its followers to engage in what he calls “penny capitalism”—small-scale, local entrepreneurship (Maxwell 1998).

This emphasis can be described as “democratic” in so far as it encourages individual agency and participation, but it need not necessarily result in formal political activity (Maxwell 2000). Nevertheless, as it becomes more and more apparent that it is the African regimes that are largely responsible for frustrating hopes for advancement and even for threatening survival, it is possible to detect increasing pentecostal criticism of the state.

As long ago as 1997, the Reverend Njeru Wambugu, acting general secretary of the Organisation of African Instituted Churches (OAIC), argued that “the power of political and social change in Africa lies in the church and not in politicians.” During colonialism, he argued, it had been the AICs that “protested against oppression.” But in independent Africa things have all too often been different: “I don’t know whether to place the AICs in the category of ‘tamed’ churches. But the paradox in Africa is that today most vocal opponents of dictatorship and other ills are members of the mainline churches.” Yet the AICs ought to be in the vanguard of protest. In independent Africa “the vision of uplifting themselves socially, morally, and economically has been doomed.” Yet still the AICs have left politics to the prosperous and influential ex-mission churches:

Like thousands of others in Africa, members of [these churches] suffer in silence. They remain among disadvantaged groups of Christians the world over. . . . The OAIC general secretary does not spare the leaders of Independent churches. He alleges that they are today propping up dictators in power or watching injustice in its stampede. . . . Rev. Wambugu challenges the AICs to come out of their silence. He wonders [about] the essence of the independent churches’ fight against the oppressive colonial governments if they cannot champion a similar struggle against prevailing unjust governments. . . . “I am challenging them to tell me what they consider to be evil. I am demanding to know whether poverty, lawlessness, dictatorship, misrule, oppression, suppression, detention, corruption and violence are not evil.”

The AICs must enter politics (Wambugu 1997).

Several years after Wambugu's challenge, there are indeed signs that charismatic churches are not merely demonizing poverty but also politicizing it. Maxwell has depicted the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God in Africa (ZAOGA) as democratic at the level of the local congregation and autocratic at the level of Bishop Guti's leadership. Until recently, Guti was happy to try to seek advantage through closeness to the Zimbabwean state. He agreed to serve on Robert Mugabe's 1999 Constitutional Commission; Mugabe's wife, Grace, is a member of ZAOGA. Yet now the "democratic" township congregations are applying effective pressure on the leadership. ZAOGA's strength lies in the townships, and it cannot remain indifferent when inflation and unemployment destroy any chance of modest prosperity and threaten family survival. The leadership cannot be seen as being identified with a state that is sending in its army to beat up township voters. In the June 2000 election the townships voted overwhelmingly for the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC); and in March 2002 they voted overwhelmingly for the opposition presidential candidate. Now the church leadership is beginning to change its tune. In July 2001 the second most influential man in the church called publicly for ZAOGA members to support the opposition MDC.²⁵

The Crisis of Morality

Today in Africa there is a perceived crisis of morality, though even within the evangelical churches there are divisions about the nature of that crisis. None of the churches, whether evangelical or not, disputes the immorality of theft, fraud, adultery, rape, and murder. Some churches, though, view the whole "liberal" agenda as immoral. They consider it unacceptable to legalize abortion or homosexuality. I recently read an article by an extreme white evangelical in Cape Town who maintained that the South African constitution breaks every one of the Ten Commandments. But the liberalism of the South African constitution is exceptional. In many African countries, it has been possible for regimes to divide evangelicals by appealing for support for their repressive sexual policies. The issue at stake, therefore, is whether immorality is seen as something repressed by the state or as something that characterizes the state. Increasingly, it seems, the latter view is triumphing.

The chapters that follow reveal a range of ideas about how to moralize the state. Some represent a continuance of the old missionary separation of the private and the public sphere, and the old missionary assumption that a change in private morality will gradually transform society. At the other extreme is the Zambian case—so well discussed by Isabel Phiri in this book—where a real attempt has been made by evangelicals to achieve a "Christian state." Phiri shows all the ambiguities and dangers of this attempt, but she also shows that the vision of the Christian state has become the criterion by which

Zambian leaders and parties are judged. Between these two extremes are many other evangelical attempts to moralize the individual, the society, and the state.

The West African literature, inadequately represented in this book, has placed particular emphasis on evangelical and Pentecostal representations of morality and immorality. Ruth Marshall has analyzed the Nigerian Pentecostal churches. David Martin has offered a useful summary of her work:

The background for the growth of the poorer churches is not merely economic decline and the increasingly abrasive struggle for survival, but the use of power and influence at every level for personal pillage, so that subordinate groups are burdened with a sense of forces out of control. . . . People find in these churches an equality and sense of worth outside the categories of worldly success or the hierarchies of age and wealth, and also a rudimentary social security. . . . Ethical discipline ensures that appetite for mammon is under control and “goods” keep circulating in not too hurtful a manner. Those living triumphantly “in the power of Jesus” have to abide by the rules or face ruin. . . . The reorganization of a chaotic moral field enables Pentecostals to participate in popular discontent with government. Most born-again Christians do not bribe officials or even tolerate such behavior, and they also articulate an indirect critique of state-sponsored violence and the operations of the fraternities. They wrestle against principalities and powers, and that means spiritual and satanic wickedness in high places. . . . There are signs that this spiritual contest with corruption and with the violence and lack of accountability of the powerful may grow into a more institutional participation in politics. (Martin 2002, 139–141)²⁶

Marshall herself has cautioned that pentecostal participation in politics may very well not be democratic in its underlying ideology. We have seen that while the historic churches challenged dictatorships, their authoritarian structures limited their capacity to contribute to democratic practice. The pentecostal challenge to regime immorality is more profound, but the divine authority on which it is based may make even less allowance for democratic dissent. Marshall writes that “the Pentecostal discourse involves a critique which deligitimates the authoritarian use of power.” But she goes on to quote the then president of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), Pastor Adeboye, comparing his organisation to God’s army:

Everybody must take orders from the commander-in-chief. No arguments, no debates. I told you last time you came, I said, God is not a democrat. . . . I want PFN to become an invading army. I don’t want it to become a social club. I want to see a PFN by the grace of God

that when the devil hears “P” he will begin to shake. That cannot happen if we go about it democratically. Because when God has spoken and we say this is the way we shall go, someone will say, let us vote. I can tell you, whenever you go to vote, the majority will vote for the devil. (1995, 257)

However, even where new evangelical ideology is authoritarian, the church and the domestic life of new evangelical churches may be democratic in their effects. Particularly important in evangelical discussions of morality are questions of gender. The “headship” of men is proclaimed, but the selfish promiscuity of men, especially of powerful men, is criticized. Many southern African evangelical churches have women’s organizations that teach married women sexual techniques and emphasize their sexual rights. Marshall shows that Nigerian born-again doctrine transforms the practice of marriage, family, and sexuality in ways that are “highly attractive to young urban women.” Manifestly, no democracy can succeed unless women participate as much as men do as voters and as citizens. Greater domestic and sexual equality will contribute to such participation. In this book, gender is discussed in the chapters by Mukonyora, Cruz e Silva, and Phiri, in the first two mainly with reference to Apostolic and Zionist churches. We need to explore further what is happening to ideas and practices concerning gender in other evangelical churches, as well as study, as Isabel Phiri does, the entry of evangelical women into electoral politics.²⁷

At least what we can say is that in many places in Africa, and not only in relation to gender, the personal has become the political, and the moral has become the democratic. Evangelical Christians have taken the lead in making this so.

Evangelical Transnationalism

These, then, are some of the features of contemporary Africa that have propelled charismatic evangelicals into democratic politics. They are clear in the chapters of this book. What cannot come out clearly in a series of case studies is the transnational character of evangelicalism that ensures an exchange of ideas and institutional forms that strengthens its democratic contribution in Africa. By this I do not mean the much-discussed impact of North American evangelical missionaries and of the links between African and American churches. I mean transnationalism within Africa and across African boundaries (Maxwell 2001).

The case studies in this book are focused especially in southern Africa. To have chapters on South Africa, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Zambia overrepresents one region of Africa and one set of types of evangelicalism. Obviously

West Africa—and especially Francophone West Africa—is inadequately represented, and this introduction has made matters worse by deliberately drawing on supplementary literature for the countries included in this book, and particularly on very recent material from my own research area, Zimbabwe.

But there are advantages as well as disadvantages to this concentration. The main advantage is that the book deals with four geographically contiguous nation-states, across whose borders ideas and people have flowed for at least one hundred fifty years. Protestant missionaries moved across these borders in the nineteenth century—from South Africa into the Rhodesias, and from Southern Rhodesia into Mozambique. African labor migrants moved across these borders in the opposite direction in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries and brought back new religious ideas. Charismatic and evangelical forms of Christianity and their missionaries are still moving across those borders today. Isabel Mukonyora's Masowe Apostles are members of a great pan-African church with congregations over the whole of southern and central Africa; Teresa Cruz e Silva's Zionists sprang originally from Zimbabwe and South Africa. David Maxwell's ZAOGA is an outstanding example of what he calls "Transnational Pentecostalism." Zionism—or Apostolic Pentecostalism—is significantly different in each place it establishes itself. The pattern of Zionist churches in Maputo, for instance, is unlike the pattern in South African or Zimbabwean cities. The role Zionism plays in each place depends upon the needs of the people. Yet there is a perceived commonality from which all its congregations draw strength. Not only states are allied in Southern Africa, but also those churches whose emphasis on the private sphere is profoundly affecting democratic politics.

Conclusion

I have said many positive things about the actual and potential contribution of both types of evangelical Christianity—the historic and the charismatic—to contemporary Africa. The time has come perhaps to make one very important modification that is not directly discussed in any of the case studies in this book. Cyril Imo's chapter raises directly the problem of democratic politics where there are two conflicting faith claims. He deals, of course, with Islam and Christianity. But no one in this book, and few others writing on evangelical Christianity, has dealt with another conflicting faith claim: between Islam and every form of Christianity on the one hand and African "traditional" religion on the other. And the central question that arises here is this: Are traditionalists to be thought of as capable of democracy?

Leaders of AICs, like Wambugu, protest that African states have ignored or repressed them. African states, dominated by bureaucrats who were educated in mission schools, still represent the values of missionary modernity

(Wambugu 1997). Adherents of African traditional religions, though, have much more to complain about. Kenyan scholar Makau Mutua quotes Ali Mazrui to the effect that “no African country has officially allocated a national holiday in honor of the gods of indigenous religions. The Semitic religions (Christianity and Islam) are nationally honored in much of Africa; the indigenous religious festivals are at best ethnic rather than national occasions” (Mazrui 1991). But Mutua argues that discrimination against traditional religion goes much further than this:

The modern African state, right from its inception, has relentlessly engaged in a campaign of the marginalization, at best, or eradication, at worst, of African religion. . . . The destruction and delegitimation of African religion have been actively effected at the urging, or with the collusion and for the benefit of, either or both Islam and Christianity. . . . [T]he conscious, willful and planned displacement of African religion goes beyond any legitimate bounds of religious advocacy and violates the human rights of Africans: . . . it is in fact a repudiation . . . of the humanity of African culture. (Mutua 1999, 170)

It is by definition profoundly undemocratic (Mutua 1999).

Mutua, an academic lawyer, shows that the constitutions of independent African states—Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Zambia, the Congo, etc.—guarantee “liberal generic protection of religious freedoms.” But these are defined in such a way that they refer exclusively to Islam and Christianity. At the same time the constitutions continue to espouse exceptions to that protection first introduced by colonialists on the grounds of “public morality” and “public health,” which are plainly aimed at traditional religion. Mutua writes of “constitutional silence and the absolute refusal to acknowledge the existence of African religions” and gives examples of action taken against them since independence. He criticizes both Zambia and North African states for privileging “Semitic religions” by declaring themselves either Christian or Islamic and thereby depriving adherents of African religions of their national identity (Mutua 1999, 177–179).²⁸

Mutua makes only passing reference to evangelical Christianity. But we must confront the fact that evangelicals of all kinds “demonize” African religion and seek to expel it both from the private and the public sphere. Let me take the example of Zimbabwe for one last time. Isabel Mukonyora shows that the Masowe Vapostori are profoundly democratic in the equality they establish in the wilderness between people of all ranks and especially between men and women. But this equality depends on the rejection and virtual exorcism of ancestral spirits. The Vapostori are more effectively hostile to African religion than any of the historic churches, whether evangelical or Catholic.²⁹ David Maxwell has argued for the democratic agency shown in the township

congregations of the ZAOGA. But ZAOGA appeals to students by promising to “save” them from ancestral religion. The ancestors, who were poor, cannot help bring prosperity.

Other Zimbabwean evangelicals are as much concerned to expel traditional religion from public life. It is widely believed that Robert Mugabe derives his power from the blessing of the spirit mediums that represent great rain spirits or dead kings. In evangelical parlance these are “demons.” The Reverend Tim Neill, an evangelical Anglican who figures largely in Isabel Mukonyora’s paper, has set up a network of “Deborah” women’s prayer-groups. These regularly pray for Zimbabwe to become democratic; they also regularly pray for it to be liberated from “demonic” spirits. The great heroes and heroines of Zimbabwe’s first anticolonial resistance in 1896 were the senior spirit mediums, Kagubi and Nehanda. Their statues stand in parliament, and the Deborah women pray for their removal. In early June, during a televised debate on religion and the state, a black woman evangelical dismissed pleas for respect to be shown to Nehanda as a national heroine by telling her interviewer: “At this very moment Mbuya Nehanda is burning in hell. And unless you change your ways you will burn in hell, too.”

Not surprisingly, such attitudes have given rise to controversy. During the discussions on a new Zimbabwean constitution in 1999, the Evangelical Alliance pressed for Zimbabwe to be declared a Christian nation. By contrast, in virtually every rural area the visiting constitutional commissioners were told that African religion must be respected. Rural respondents demanded democratic liberalism at the level of the state: they endorsed private moral and social conservatism with equal vigor.³⁰

Members of the University of Zimbabwe’s Religious Studies Department have taken up this issue. Dr. Paul Gundani is the founder and president of a multifaith movement. In May 2001 he told a public audience that evangelical prejudice against African religious adherents would make democracy impossible in Zimbabwe. In late June 2001 a two-day *festschrift* workshop was organized for me where various aspects of my work were examined by Zimbabwean scholars from different disciplines. Ezra Chitando from the Religious Studies Department made a “critical review of T. Ranger’s portrayal of Christianity as an aspect of African identity.” He concluded:

Ranger and the translatability school may want to readily identify Christianity with African identity, but many Africans are hesitant to do so. As it associates itself with modernity, sophistication and globalization Christianity has been experienced as domineering. In its extreme evangelical expression, where progressive Africans are “delivered from the spirit of poverty” (Maxwell 1998), Christianity has in fact meant denying one’s very own Africanness. (Chitando 2001)³¹

One of the works circulated to the scholars involved in this book was a November 1999 conference paper by Robert Woodberry in which he attempted correlations between Protestantism, Catholicism, and Islam on the one hand, and democracy on the other. Woodberry found “a strong positive association between the percentage of Protestantism in a society and the level of democratization”; there was “a negative relationship between Islam and democracy”; “the relationship between Catholicism and democracy is more complex.” But Woodberry found that societies with indigenous religions “are the least likely to be democratic” (Woodberry 1999). This seems to me to raise a dreadful spectre. Is democracy in Africa just a Christian project, designed to legitimate the power of Christians—and especially Protestants—who alone understand it? Or, can there develop an African understanding of democracy that effectively draws on the communal values expressed in African traditional religion as well as on the moral and spiritual transformations wrought by evangelicals?

NOTES

1. On the South African debate, Freston cites Hale (1993) and Walker (1994).

2. Wolffe (2002, 89–93) has a discussion of South African evangelicalism. The politics to which he refers is rather different from our own focus on democracy. In his view, people call African Initiated Churches “evangelical” if they want to insist on their universal Christian character; and refuse to apply that name if they wish to insist on a uniquely African inspiration. He concludes that it is not sensible to impose rigid definitions—“there are no firm limits to religious movements.”

3. In this global survey, Martin has a section on Africa in which he discusses Apostolic and Zionist churches (2002, 132–152).

4. Françoise Raison-Jourde, in a chapter on political change in Madagascar, asks whether it should be “normal that democracy should always be the business only of Christians, who nowadays represent no more than half the population?” This is a question that might well be asked of Mozambique also. In countries like South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Zambia—where Christians of various kinds constitute the great majority of citizens—it would have to be rephrased as I have done.

5. David Beetham, “Problems of Democratic Consolidation,” in Gifford (1995).

6. For recent profound analyses of the theology and practice of nineteenth-century evangelical Protestantism, see Comaroff and Comaroff (1991); Peel (2000). In a fascinating discussion of evangelical missionaries, van Rooden (1996) emphasizes the modernity of Protestant missionaries and their innovation of a distinction between private and public spheres, which transformed Christianity in Europe and installed itself in Africa. Previously the norm in Europe had been established state churches. By “locating Christianity within a private sphere, expecting it to effect societal change indirectly, the missionary effort was both an indication and a cause of a fundamental discursive shift between religion and politics in the West” (van Rooden 1996, 84). A wide-ranging discussion can be found in Hutchinson and Kalu (1998).

7. For two important recent studies see West and Dube (2000) and Kurewa (2000). See also Wimbush (2000).

8. For South Africa, see Anderson (2000). Also, Sanneh argues that the vernacular Bible “had explosive consequences” within mission Christianity; that it was “the pulse” of revival movements; and that in the 1930s “translatability was a consistent force in transferring authority from the culture of the European missionary translator to that of mother-tongue speakers in Africa, with missionaries sooner or later becoming victims of vernacularisation” (1994, 44).

9. Gerald West writes that “the Bible plays an important role in the lives of many [Africans], particularly the poor and marginalized. The Bible is a symbol of the presence of the God of life with them and a resource in their struggle for survival, liberation, and life. This is true for a whole range of readers, including largely illiterate ‘readers’ in the townships and informal shack settlements . . . who listen to, retell and remake the Bible.” West argues that if scholars tell African Initiated Church members that they are theologians, no discussion is possible. If they say they are seeking to understand the Bible, they can immediately take part in oral exegesis. See also Philpott (1993). There are discussions of the oral Bible in Africa by N. Ndungu, Z. Nthamburi, and D. Waruta in Kinoti and Waliggo (1997).

10. For a discussion of the changing understanding of the “political” significance of African Initiated Churches, see Ranger (1986).

11. “Missionary clergy were even less temperamentally interested in politics than clergy at home in Europe and America,” writes Hastings. “The gospel most sought to preach was in intention unambiguously other-worldly. . . . Missionaries were prone to think extremely well of colonialism, though not so often of colonialists.” Yet most missionaries accepted that democracy was coming to Africa and should be prepared for. “From the 1920s to the 1950s, the principal secular contribution of the churches to black Africa was . . . this training for democracy of a tiny elite” (Hastings 1995, 42).

12. For Banana’s most recent reflections, see his book (1996).

13. Five years after the Leeds conference volume, Gifford himself has analyzed these questions further in his book *African Christianity: Its Public Role* (1998); and Paul Freston responds to Gifford in his *Evangelicals and Politics in Asia, Africa and Latin America* (2001). As is evident in the notes, the chapters in this book have been written with Gifford and Freston very much in mind.

14. The lecture was given on April 3, 2000. It was published in the 2001 issue of Arrupe’s magazine, *Chiedza*.

15. Chingota cites an open letter to the Presbyterian General Synod in April 2001 by a Mr. Likambale objecting to its criticisms of the United Democratic Front government. “The current government under the UDF has committed no human rights abuses: there have been no political killings. Furthermore, now there are several political parties the Church should leave any political criticism to opposition parties. The Church should not act as another opposition party. Rather it should now concentrate on spiritual matters.”

16. In September 1996, the Catholic Episcopal Conference of Malawi issued a pastoral letter condemning corruption.

17. There is lively literature on “born-again” preachers operating outside the Malawian historic churches (van Dijk 1992, Werbner 1998). Van Dijk argues that these young preachers and their “small fellowships and ministries” were more profoundly subversive of Banda’s regime and its “democratic” successors than any other

religious movement. They showed contempt for political gerontocracy, for political appeals to “tradition,” and for the pursuit of power, patronage, and profit. “If someone from within the Born-Again groups was appointed, even involuntarily, to one of the many political organisations (for men, women, youth, or whatever), that person was perceived forthwith as an outcast: someone who, for access to power, defiled the treasure of being born again” (van Dijk 1992, 174–175).

18. I drew here on the material that is presented in this book by Isabel Mukonyora and Teresa Cruz e Silva.

19. The South African Council of Churches has also found its voice in support of its Zimbabwean colleagues. Its secretary-general, Molefe Tsele, attended the Victoria Falls meeting of the Zimbabwe Council, and subsequently issued a statement: “We support the ZCC for its stance against misrule and we have no apologies for that. We don’t expect these people (government) to voluntarily see logic but at one point they will be forced to. I have no doubt that ultimately the will of the people of Zimbabwe will prevail. You may delay it, but it is inevitable. One day Zimbabweans will have their legitimate representatives.”

20. “What the ZCC is trying to achieve,” one Anglican bishop is quoted as saying, “is nice brotherly love. We don’t want voices that divide us. We are God’s messengers and we should not allow ourselves to be used by these politicians. God will punish us heavily.”

21. “Life in Abundance,” Pastoral Statement of the Churches in Manicaland, March 2001. The forty churches, which had been meeting together since May 2000, included not only the Catholic, Anglican, and Lutheran churches but also the African Catholic Church, the Apostolic Church of Pentecost, the Elim Pentecostal Church, the Pentecostal Assemblies of God, the United Apostolic Faith Church, and the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God (ZAOGA). The scope of the statement did not, however, extend to all the evangelicals discussed in this book. The Vapostori churches, discussed by Mukonyora in her chapter, were not participants.

22. I owe this information to Shirley de Wolf, who represented Christian Care in the Mozambican refugee camps.

23. Revivalist and charismatic evangelical churches had played their own role in the Christian/Muslim polarization. Lamin Sanneh, discussing the Christian use of the vernacular in the presentation of the Scriptures and the Muslim repudiation of it, sees radical Islam and radical Christianity confronting each other in Nigeria: “According to a popular teaching of the Christ Apostolic Church—considered an elite among the charismatic churches—prayer is likened to gunpowder; and the Holy Spirit, that terror of the invisible enemy, is regarded as the gun, with the Bible as the ramrod. This is perhaps the closest that Christian revival came to the sphere of the sword of the Muslim reformers. . . . The Muslim ‘sword of truth’ identified them as the unerring target” (Sanneh 2001, 44).

24. When the Christian Council of Zimbabwe demanded a promise of nonviolence from Zimbabwe’s minister of justice in December 2001, the minister of justice replied that he could not give such a pledge because violence was inseparable from revolution. For the doctrine of the “third revolution” in Zimbabwe, see Ranger (2002). Both mainline churches and evangelical/pentecostals have been divided in their

response to the official “revolution,” some condemning its destructive violence, and others praising its redistributive justice.

25. Personal communication from David Maxwell.

26. He is drawing especially on Marshall (1991), and he also cites Meyer (1999).

27. The leading Zambian woman scholar, Dr. Mutumba Mainga Bull, has written a lengthy analysis of the gender dimensions of the 2001 elections in Zambia, which took place after Isabel Phiri had completed her chapter (M. M. Bull, “Gender Dimensions of Multiparty Politics: Elections 2001 in Zambia,” Workshop on the Political Process in Zambia, January 2002). Dr. Bull notes that the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia joined with the Zambia Episcopal Conference and the Christian Council of Zambia to work with the Women’s NGO umbrella body so as to give women “space to air their view on whether President Chiluba should run for a third term.” The Evangelical Fellowship also participated in a Conflict Management Committee to monitor voter registration and training. In the elections two women stood as presidential candidates. One hundred eighty-two women candidates stood for twelve different parties, some standing on an overtly evangelical program; sixteen were successful for six different parties. In March 2001 the National Women’s Lobby Group brought together women members from eight parties and issued a joint Zambia Women’s Manifesto. In mid-September 2001 a Women in Politics National Conference was held, which included delegates from the Zambian churches. Women candidates in the election were endorsed by the Women’s Movement if they were “humble and [did] not give false promises.” Women candidates were urged “to transform the male mainstream and make it conducive to both men and women of all categories and status.”

28. An-Na’im’s collection contains other chapters relevant to this book. Farid Esack, Lamin Sanneh, Benjamin Soares, and Chabha Bouslimani write on Muslim proselytization; Rosalind Hackett writes on radical Christian revivalism in Nigeria and Ghana.

29. This does not seem to be so much the case for Maputo Zionism. I was fascinated when visiting Teresa Cruz e Silva to go to the beach early on a Sunday morning. It was a positive theatre of possession and healing—Zionist healers and baptizers using the sea alongside exorcisers of Ndaú spirits and invokers of the female spirits of the sea.

30. Matthew Schoffeleers, whose accounts of the Malawian Catholic church and democratic politics I have quoted above, has also insisted that “Catholics were not the only ones calling for reform. . . . [In] the early months of 1995 African Traditional Religion made its own contribution in the form of the massive Mchape pilgrimage.” Schoffeleers insists on “the need to study local perceptions of Demokalasi” (1999).

31. At the workshop Paul Gundani made an oral presentation entitled “Saint Kagubi and Saint Nehanda.” He pointed out that the spirit medium Kagubi had been baptized a Catholic the night before he was hanged in 1897, and given the name of the good thief, Dismas. Had Zimbabwean Christianity been like the early church, Gundani suggested, it would have seized the opportunity to connect itself to the once-dominant old tradition by sanctifying Kagubi and even Nehanda. But Zimbabwean Christianity had always been too evangelical—and modernizing—to contemplate any such thing.