

---

# An Anglican Crisis of Comparison: Intersections of Race, Gender, and Religious Authority, with Particular Reference to the Church of Nigeria

Mary-Jane Rubenstein

---

The 1998 Lambeth Conference of the Anglican Communion brought into striking relief the two major issues dividing this particular global church: homosexuality and the ordination of women. Debates over these questions tend to split the church into its “conservative” southern dioceses and more “liberal” northern dioceses. With bishops from Africa and Southeast Asia now outnumbering their British and American counterparts, however, this rift had a surprising consequence at “Lambeth ‘98”: church leaders of the northern hemisphere found themselves having to accept the postcolonial South’s interpretation of the very Scripture, ecclesiastical traditions, and sexual norms the North had imposed on the South in the first place. This article explores the Anglican Church’s internal struggle over women’s ordination and homosexuality as a site of internalized and redeployed colonial tactics—as a complex of racial,

Mary-Jane Rubenstein is a Ph.D. candidate in the philosophy of religion at Columbia University, New York, NY 10025.

I am very grateful to the following for their help with this project: the Reverend Chloe Breyer, Mrs. Phoebe Griswold, the Very Reverend Dr. James A. Kowalski, the Reverend Ifeanyi Obiechefu, Professor Oyèrónké Oyewùmí, and the Reverend Storm Swain. Their views, which have been invaluable to this study, are not necessarily coextensive with those it sets forth.

*Journal of the American Academy of Religion* June 2004, Vol. 72, No. 2, pp. 341–365

DOI: 10.1093/jaarel/lfh033

© 2004 The American Academy of Religion

economic, and historical forces that far exceeds the logic of “reverse colonialism.”

### “WELCOME TO CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL”

ON 19 JULY 1998, 736 Anglican bishops met in Lambeth, England, to discuss church doctrine, policy, and politics, as Anglican bishops have done every ten years since 1867.<sup>1</sup> As far as the conference’s location, procedure, and vestments were concerned, very little had changed since the first Lambeth Conference. With 224 African bishops, 95 Southeast Asian bishops, and 11 women bishops in attendance, however, the Anglican Communion at the turn of the millennium looked practically nothing like it had 131 years earlier.<sup>2</sup> Considering the ever-accelerating mechanisms of global capitalism, this particular multicultural, multinational Christian family had quite a lot to address in twenty-two days, including forced migration, ecology, genocide, euthanasia, children’s rights, water rights, and perhaps most pressingly, world debt and economic justice. By all accounts, however, the issue that received the most attention at Lambeth ‘98 was that of “human sexuality.” Strictly speaking, this term refers to a complex network of sexual practices and lifestyles, including marriage, contraception, divorce, polygamy, premarital sex, “promiscuous” sex, sexual exploitation, cohabitation, and prostitution. In the past few tumultuous years, however, it has come to designate almost exclusively the most controversial subfield gathered under its rubric: homosexuality. In particular, the Anglican Church was concerned with the questions of whether to ordain openly gay priests and whether to bless same-sex unions.<sup>3</sup> And as the conference waged on, it became increasingly clear that the debate over homo-/human sexuality had divided the table—or battlefield—into North and South.

<sup>1</sup> Lambeth is the home of the Archbishop of Canterbury, at once the Bishop for the Diocese of Canterbury, the Primate of All England, and the President of the Anglican Consultative Council. The archbishop who presided over the Lambeth Conference in 1998 was the Most Reverend Dr. George Carey, who has since been replaced by the Most Reverend Dr. Rowan Williams. Archbishop Williams, whose feminist and anti-homophobic stances have troubled conservative dioceses and obsessed the British media for years, was confirmed on 2 December 2002 and installed on 27 February 2003 as the 104th archbishop in St. Augustine’s succession (see Akinola 2002; Integrity USA).

<sup>2</sup> Three years before the first 1867 conference, Samuel J. Crowther, a Yorùbá ex-slave, had been made the first African bishop in the Anglican Church, presiding over what would become the Niger Delta Diocese in Nigeria. Six years earlier, the Bible had been translated into Yorùbá, and Britain had annexed Lagos (presumably to stop the slave trade). Twenty-six years earlier, Obi Ossai had granted religious freedom to Queen Victoria through her missionaries at Aboh. Sixty years earlier, Great Britain had abandoned the slave trade.

<sup>3</sup> These two practices have recently come under even closer scrutiny, following the nominations of two gay men, Canon Dr. Jeffrey John and Canon Eugene Robinson, as bishops-elect of Reading and New Hampshire, respectively. Despite considerable support from church leaders and laity, Canon John was ultimately convinced by those who opposed his nomination to step down as bishop-elect

This clash of the hemispheres culminated not in the signing of a resolution—although one was eventually, and painfully, passed—but in an exorcism.<sup>4</sup> In front of supporting bishops, opposing bishops, various clergy, and a full television crew, the Right Reverend Emmanuel Chukwuma of the Enugu Diocese in southeastern (Igbo) Nigeria attempted to exorcise the Reverend Richard Kircher of Britain, also the general secretary of the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement. The scene was a frightening echo of certain European colonial missionary strategies, except that this time the promiscuous savage was English, his superior was African, and the demons were being cast out on English soil. Yet this is no straightforward “reverse colonialism,” for the terms *African/European*, *gender-confused/Christian*, and *savage/civilized* simply refuse to line up. Jeremy Carrette and Mary Keller have described the scene thus: “A postmodern Western Christianity, informed by gay Christian activism, faced a Nigerian Christianity with a modernist homophobia that was fused with a Nigerian possession tradition” (32). Who, then, was colonized?

In the last two decades, as the Anglican Communion has begun officially to ordain women, and as individual bishops in the United Kingdom, Canada, and America have begun ordaining and blessing the unions of lesbian- and gay-identified people, the dioceses of the southern hemisphere—and the African dioceses in particular—have come to consider themselves the true bearers of the light of the gospel, their task the reconversion of the “fallen” British and North American churches.<sup>5</sup> The most outspoken proponent of this position has been the Most Reverend Peter Jasper Akinola. Archbishop Akinola was the bishop of Abuja, Nigeria, during the 1998 Lambeth Conference and has since been appointed archbishop, primate, and metropolitan of the Church of Nigeria. Speaking as the head of the largest and fastest-growing branch of the Anglican family tree, Akinola has publicly called for the defrocking of women priests, referred to gay and lesbian clergy as “an abomination,” and suggested that all gay and lesbian people should have millstones tied around their

---

(see Diocese of Oxford). Canon Robinson, however, was elected to the episcopate amid threats of schism at the General Convention of the Episcopal Church of America in July–August 2003 (see Davies). The resolution to write a liturgy for same-sex blessing ceremonies was raised and voted down at the same convention (see Thompson).

<sup>4</sup> Bearing all the marks of a divided authorship, the conference’s resolution on “human sexuality” rejects homosexual practices as “incompatible with Scripture,” refuses to legitimize same-sex unions or the ordination of openly gay priests, and commends total abstinence for those who “are not called to marriage” while assuring “homosexual persons” that they, too, are “full members of the body of Jesus Christ” and—perhaps most ironically—condemning “irrational fear of homosexuals” (Lambeth Conference: Resolution 1.10).

<sup>5</sup> My thanks go to Professor Oyèrónké Oyewùmí of the State University of New York, Stony Brook, and the Reverend Ifeanyi Obiechefu of the Diocese of Okigwe North, Nigeria, for their insights.

necks (cf. Hill; Hunt; Wegman).<sup>6</sup> He has declared the Episcopal Church of the United States of America (ECUSA), because of its persistent ordination of women and rampant condoning of unscriptural sexual practices, “the Church of Satan.”

Here, and in many of the arguments on both sides of the divide, we see the question of same-sex relationships connected with another highly divisive issue obscured by the 1998 Lambeth Conference’s obsession with homosexuality: namely, women’s ordination. Before waiting for any communion-wide assent, some bishops in ECUSA began ordaining women as priests in the mid-1970s. England followed in 1984. Fourteen years later at Lambeth, the leaders of the more conservative American dioceses and practically all the dioceses in the southern hemisphere were still unwilling to condone—let alone perform—women’s ordination. As contentious as this issue remains, however, Lambeth did not give it nearly the attention it deserved, precisely because it was so contentious. The flashier, even more volatile “gay issue” was already threatening to divide the church latitudinally, so women’s ordination, when it was finally addressed, was discussed under the close paternal supervision of a resolution entitled not “The Ordination of Women” but “The Unity of the Anglican Communion” (Lambeth Conference: Resolution III.2).<sup>7</sup> This resolution begins by praising the strength-in-unity of the church. It then concludes by addressing women’s ordination—but not with the call to unity one might have expected from the preamble. Rather, it sets forth what might be called an “agreement to disagree,” calling the proponents and opponents of women’s ordination equally “loyal” Anglicans and

---

<sup>6</sup> Some left-wing Anglo-American church leaders have charged that being the head of the largest and fastest-growing branch places Akinola entirely, and unfairly, “above reproach” within the communion (Solheim 1998b). Of the seventy million members of the Anglican Communion, fifteen million of them fall within the three provinces of the Church of Nigeria. The two most recent archbishops have presided with astonishing evangelical fervor, requiring each baptized woman and man (the women usually fare better evangelically) to bring one person into the Anglican fold per year and “planting” new churches at an alarming rate. With the appointment of the first archbishop of Nigeria in 1978, there were sixteen dioceses within the Church of Nigeria. Twenty years later, there were seventy-eight.

<sup>7</sup> After the 1997 meeting with Southeast Asian bishops at Kuala Lumpur, the West African bishops sponsored an amendment to the “Statement on Human Sexuality” that condemns homosexuality as “a sin which could only be adopted by the church if it wanted to commit evangelical suicide” (Lambeth Conference: Resolution V.35). Before the Lambeth Conference convened, Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey made “no secret of the threats made by [these bishops] not only to walk out of the Lambeth Conference but to break up the Communion unless there was a condemnation of homosexual practice. He saw his role as preventing that split and believes he succeeded”; “it was blackmail,” the Reverend Martin Smith of Massachusetts told his congregation after the Lambeth Conference. It is unclear how seriously the archbishop considered a counterwarning issued by Bishop Catherine Roskam, suffragan of New York City, that “condemning homosexuality would be evangelical suicide in my region,” resulting in a “divided church” (Solheim 1998d).

allowing individual bishops to decide whether or not to recognize the authority of women priests and bishops in their respective dioceses. According to the logic of this particular resolution, then, the all-important unity of the Anglican Communion not only permits but depends on a disunity concerning women's religious authority.

Much of the news coverage of Lambeth made sure to confirm the congeniality across sexual difference of the split-minded communion, calling attention, for example, to the "warmth" with which the female bishops were received at Lambeth. As one article reassures its Left-leaning Anglo-American readership, "Even bishops [presumably, male bishops] who do not ordain women went out of their way to welcome the women [presumably, women bishops], often asking them to pose for a photo." As if freezing female bishops on film were not proof enough that the patriarchs were happy to welcome women into their ranks, some of the Church Fathers opted for physical contact. "While she joined the procession into the cathedral for the opening Eucharist," the article goes on, "Bishop Geralyn Wolf of Rhode Island said that a male bishop reached for her hand and said, 'Welcome to Canterbury Cathedral'" (Solheim 1998d).<sup>8</sup>

Some of the women church leaders, however, were unmoved by such gestures. At a ceremony in Philadelphia commemorating twenty-five years of women's ordination in ECUSA, Bishop Barbara Harris of Massachusetts expressed scathing criticism against Lambeth '98, confessing that

despite the development of a critical mass of ordained women, including eleven bishops, at Lambeth we were left wondering what had happened to the dream of a kinder, gentler church. The conference resolution concerning ordination of women and its odious amendment—authored by two women bishops in concert with some conservative male bishops—totally ignored any positive impact the church has experienced through ordination of women to the priesthood and the episcopate over the past 25 years. (Solheim 1999)<sup>9</sup>

Not only was Bishop Harris dissatisfied with the legislation, but unlike Bishop Wolf, she did not feel personally welcomed by conservative bishops. And interestingly enough, she felt least welcome during the deliberations

---

<sup>8</sup> Presumably, this "male bishop" was not the archbishop of Canterbury, so presumably this hospitable utterance could have been reversed, and Bishop Wolf could just as easily have welcomed her hand holder to Canterbury Cathedral.

<sup>9</sup> The amendment states that no bishop who wishes otherwise need recognize the priesthood or episcopate of a woman. At the 2003 General Convention of the Episcopal Church of the United States, a resolution to invest more time (and money) into the conversation about women's ordination was denied by the legislative Committee on Communications, leaving the "odious amendment" in place. See Schjonberg.

over the resolution on human sexuality, which condemns homosexual acts as unscriptural and refuses its blessing on same-sex unions or openly gay priests. As she stood to vote against the resolution, Bishop Harris was “hissed at” by the conservative majority, a majority opposed not only to her views but to her right to be voting in the first place.

As far as Bishop Harris is concerned, Lambeth confirmed that the people whom the “princes of the Church . . . really hold in low esteem” are women. As she has argued, considering that the church has ordained “gay priests and bishops at least since the 13th Century, it is disingenuous at best and downright dishonest at the worst, to pretend that we are faced with some new phenomenon of homosexual clergy.”<sup>10</sup> Bishop Harris suspects that the question of women’s religious authority and the question of human sexuality are inextricably linked, noting that “the advent of open lesbians into the ranks of the ordained has triggered renewed and redoubled efforts to turn the clock back on women’s ordination” (Solheim 1998b).

Of course, it was no accident that the debate over “human sexuality” finally exploded at the first Lambeth Conference that had a “critical mass” of women priests and bishops present. It was no accident that this explosion coincided with a shift in the balance of power from the North to the South.<sup>11</sup> And it was no accident that the two most thorny issues obscured by the communion’s obsession with nonhetero-normative sexual practices were women’s ordination and world debt.

### WHO IS COLONIZED (OR “DIDN’T WE LEARN FROM THE ‘MISSIONARY THING?’”)

In the weeks following Lambeth 1998, church leaders from North America and the British Isles tried to make sense of a conference that had turned them all into comparativists.<sup>12</sup> Addressing their parishes and dioceses, the more “liberal” clergy from the North blamed certain unsatisfactory resolutions on the more “conservative” leaders’ uncritical biblical hermeneutics. Richard Holloway, the bishop of Edinburgh and primate of the Church of Scotland, told a post-Lambeth press conference that the primates of the southern hemisphere “seemed to treat the Bible like an

<sup>10</sup> The reason Bishop Harris has chosen the thirteenth century as the origin of clerical same-sex desire remains unclear to me.

<sup>11</sup> Although the archbishop of Canterbury remains the head of the Anglican Communion, more than half the bishops at Lambeth in 1998 represented the African and Southeast Asian churches, and every bishop’s vote counts equally.

<sup>12</sup> Regarding this section’s heading, my apologies and thanks go to the Very Reverend Dr. James A. Kowalski, dean of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City.

infallible law book that needed no interpretation and allowed no variation in approach” (Solheim 1998b). Bishop Frank Allan of Atlanta concurred, “A new biblical fundamentalism has taken hold in the Anglican Communion, and this concerns me because it is idolatrous. The issue is not the authority of Scripture, but the interpretation of Scripture” (Solheim 1998b). Yet how “new” is this fundamentalist idolatry? Is it not perhaps more uncanny than utterly foreign—less a *creatio ex nihilo* than a return of the repressed in the hands of the oppressed? Indeed, Bishop Harris offered a slightly more nuanced—if no less problematic—account of the situation when she told her (primarily) left-wing diocese of Massachusetts that “the vitriolic, fundamentalist rhetoric of some African, Asian, and other bishops of color, who were in the majority, was in my opinion reflective of the European and North American missionary influence propounded in the Southern Hemisphere” during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. At Lambeth, she explained, the leaders from the “developing” world had redeployed the same “belief in the primacy and inerrancy of Scripture . . . that not only had been handed to their forbears, but had been used to suppress them” (Solheim 1998b). Furthermore, this literalist hermeneutic was undergirded by a “pre-existing cultural bias” against women and nonhetero-normative behavior. Yet *whose cultural bias is it?*

At Lambeth ‘98 much of the Anglo-American Left considered itself “colonized” by the fundamentalist leaders of Africa and Southeast Asia, whose sheer number allowed them to pass binding resolutions against people (namely, “homosexual persons” and women clergy) of whom they had very little understanding or experience. Yet this lack of experience became a rallying cry for the very bishops who professed it, as they charged the anti-homophobic (or “pro-gay”) sector of the church with “abuse” for imposing a Euro-American concern with homosexuality on the southern dioceses, where it was irrelevant. Bishop Benjamin Kwaski of Nigeria spoke for his whole continent when he said that Africans felt “oppressed with this Western problem.” Yet, although he insisted (echoing his archbishop, Peter Akinola) that questions of same-sex relationships “do not apply” to Africa in general or Nigeria in particular, he was no less certain of his ability to adjudicate them.<sup>13</sup> Although he and his colleagues had never met a person who identified as lesbian or gay, they knew “that homosexuality is not the will of God” (Solheim 1998d). Any testimony to the contrary fueled charges of neocolonialism; as the Reverend Martin Smith of Massachusetts reported back to his congregation, “The

<sup>13</sup> The state-centric rhetoric is deliberate here; the episcopal structure of the Anglican Communion is entirely in keeping with national divisions.

few bishops who spoke up for gay and lesbian reality were literally hissed, and denounced in angry whispers as racists and imperialists, for if you supported gays you were opposing the witness of the third world bishops defending purity and scriptural authority” (Solheim 1998d). Meanwhile, as the northern Left defended the use of (northern) reason as a hermeneutical lens, pitting (northern) “experience” against (southern) a priorism and contesting (southern) literalist appeals to Adam and Eve and Leviticus, the northern Right was able to brand itself as the culturally sensitive white guys—“the Only Ones Truly Listening to the Voice of the Third World.”

A year and a half before Lambeth, Anglican leaders from the southern hemisphere had met at Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, to discuss the condoning of “unscriptural” sexual activity within the Church of England and (especially) the Episcopal Church of the United States of America. The Kuala Lumpur document expresses deep concern over “the ordination of practicing homosexuals and blessing of same-sex unions,” asserting that “all sexual promiscuity is a sin . . . this includes homosexual practices between men or women.” The document goes on to encourage homosexual people to turn from their “sexual brokenness” to Christ, who will respond with forgiveness, as he did with the “adulterous woman” in John 8:11, telling her to “go and sin no more.” The African and Southeast Asian bishops conclude their report with a call to “mutual accountability and interdependence” throughout the international communion: “We live in a global village and must be more aware that the way we act in one part of the world can radically affect the mission and witness of the Church in another” (Second Anglican Encounter in the South).

The response to this call to international mutuality came from the leaders of the Episcopal Synod of America, a conservative branch of ECUSA. Eight months after Kuala Lumpur and nine months before Lambeth, sixteen African bishops were flown to Dallas, Texas, to meet with a number of American bishops who had been impressed by the Kuala Lumpur document, particularly with the African churches’ amendments to it.<sup>14</sup> The tangible result of the Dallas meeting was a document declaring, “It is not acceptable for a pro-gay agenda to be smuggled into the church’s program or foisted upon our people—we will not permit it,” and threatening all who believed or practiced otherwise with expulsion from

---

<sup>14</sup> In these amendments the Central and East African bishops demand repentance from bishops who have knowingly ordained lesbian and gay people, calling on all clergy to promote the “healing, correction, and restoration” of “all who suffer or err through homosexual or other kind of sexual brokenness.” The West African bishops add that “some African Christians in Uganda were martyred in the 19th Century for refusing to have homosexual relations with the king because of their faith in the Lord Jesus and their commitment to stand by the word of God.” Both sets of amendments were ultimately rejected at Lambeth (Lambeth Conference: Resolutions V.1, V.38).

the communion (Solheim 1998d). Perhaps more importantly, however, the conservative dioceses in ECUSA forged strong alliances with the leaders of the southern churches as a result of this meeting, forming an international right-wing cohort that would necessarily outnumber the opposition.<sup>15</sup> It is unclear whether or not the Left and left-of-center Anglo-American leaders knew about this alliance before the conference. As Lambeth '98 wore on, however, it became increasingly clear not only that the conservative American bishops had befriended like-minded leaders of the Third World churches but also that they had given them a considerable financial incentive to *remain* "like-minded," particularly on the issues of women's ordination and homosexuality. As the archbishop of Scotland told the British press, "These Americans have lost the battle in their own Episcopal Church so they have hired a proxy army" (Solheim 1998d). It is tragically ironic that this financial exchange "swept out of attention" the concerns of the international debt subsection; according to Bishop Peter Selby of Worcester, the "Western conservatives" prevented a sustained conversation about world debt by "pushing the sexuality issue" (Solheim 1998a).

Just to keep the score straight, at this point, we have nearly got a perfectly triangulated charge of colonialism. The African bishops have accused the Anglo-American Left of saddling the South with its obsession with homosexuality, which is irrelevant to them. Members of this "Left" have charged their right-wing American brothers of saddling the South with *their* obsession with homosexuality by buying votes from African bishops, thereby deferring (not to mention performing) the more pressing crisis of international debt. Finally, other members of the Left have charged the South with deploying a strategy of reverse colonialism, using the outdated tools of an imperialist West. All we need now is the Anglo-American Right's charge against the Anglo-American Left.

This charge has been most systematically delivered by Bishop Jack Iker of Fort Worth, who has called the Lambeth Conference "a wake up call to the Episcopal Church in the USA," chastising the American church for its tendency to impose its narrow will on the rest of the communion. Bishop Iker's main concern after Lambeth was whether or not the American

---

<sup>15</sup> As it turned out, there was no "opposition" at Lambeth because, despite repeated public pleas by Bishop Jack Spong of Newark, the Left-leaning church leaders had not held similar meetings or produced a similar document. The result of this failure to organize was that "liberal" bishops, when they spoke, spoke alone. According to Spong, a notoriously vocal figure on this matter, anti-homophobic church leaders at Lambeth were "reduced to making individual responses when the vicious resolutions were passed, statements that lacked both power and persuasiveness and did not provide an effective place behind which opponents of the majority point of view could rally." Ironically enough, had the "opposition" managed to organize, it probably would have done so under the British Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement, its hypothetical headquarters not in Texas but more or less in the back garden of Lambeth Palace.

Episcopal Church was “humble enough” to listen to voices other than its own. In accordance with the Lambeth resolutions, Iker has urged ECUSA to allow American bishops not to ordain women and to prevent the ordination of homosexual people and the blessing of their unions. He is fairly sure, however, that “the arrogance of the Episcopal Church is so beyond control there’s not going to be any reconsideration.” With the left wing behaving in such an imperialist manner, the Texas bishop has been able to sound the humanist watch cry, proclaiming that Lambeth “has reminded us that we are answerable to one another, that what we say and teach and preach and legislate in this country affects brother and sister Anglicans all over the world.” “It is a communion of mutual accountability,” he crooned, concluding with a conveniently self-effacing warning to his renegade brothers in Christ: “No longer does the United States or England speak for the Anglican Communion but the Church in Africa and Asia does” (Solheim 1998b). With Texas money, that is. *Who is colonized?*

#### INTERLUDE: WHENCE ALL THIS GENDER RIGIDITY? A NIGERIAN CASE STUDY

Before Christianity, so the stories go, people in Igbo- and Yorùbáland lived and worked unencumbered by the oppressive gender norms of western patriarchy.<sup>16</sup> Unlike their European counterparts, women in communities within what would become southern Nigeria were highly organized, fully politically engaged, and frequently economically independent of men.

---

<sup>16</sup> This section is offered as what David Chidester has called a “comparison of comparisons.” It is more an exploration of literature *about* gender, sex, and religious authority in Nigeria than an exploration of gender, sex, and Nigerian religious authority *themselves*. Infinitely grateful to the broadly “postcolonial” work engaged here, but also suspicious of its tendency to congeal into its own ideology, this exploration is supplemented (usually via notes) not only with critical interventions but also with sporadic references to Afro- and Euro-Christian perspectives. By interrupting the postcolonial, post-Christian story with the less academically rigorous, “pre-post” story, I am hoping to highlight the former’s tendency—despite its most acute critical mechanisms—to fall into an ideology itself. Moreover, it is my hope that the latter’s sporadic power to unsettle—even temporarily—the discursive hegemony of the former might reveal a certain neglected critical edge in the everyday work of Christian women in Africa, no matter how elitist, establishmentarian, or patriarchal the institution that frames and commends such work.

The view that Africans previously lived unfettered by the gender norms of western patriarchy, of course, is *not* the view of most African Christians. One of the most colorful descriptions I have found of “Misogynist Primitive Pre-Christian Africa” reads, “The World before Christ was a patriarchal or male dominated world. Similarly the status of Nigerian women was rated very low, from time immemorial. . . . Human sacrifice was part and parcel of everyday life. . . . The people were illiterates. Broken homes and divorces were not strange. Their houses were thatched-roofed. Diseases of all types were rampant [*sic*]. . . . There were numerous superstitious beliefs, hatred, jealousy, oppression, suppression of women and poverty prevailed. . . . The slave trade added petrol to the burning fire [that] the women were passing through already. . . . But thanks be to God, for bringing an end to their sufferings. . . . Christianity was the medicine for their body, soul, and mind” (Arulefula: 160–161).

The social structures said to have secured women's power and autonomy in precolonial West Africa vary from community to community (and scholar to scholar), but the most oft-cited are goddess worship, matrilineality, "dual-sex systems," "gender flexibility" in social roles, and neuter linguistic elements or systems.<sup>17</sup> In each case, women's contemporary social inferiority can be attributed to the contamination or obliteration of these structures under European colonialism, whose primary mechanism of patriarchal control was (and remains) Christianity.

In her study of the Igbo town of Nnobi, Ifi Amadiume (1987) locates the source of precolonial women's authority in two cultural elements: the goddess tradition and the separability of "gender" from (biological) "sex." According to Amadiume, the central deity in Nnobi was the goddess Idemili, who was likewise worshiped by all communities along the river that bears her name. Unlike their mid-western or western counterparts, these "hinterland" societies were not centrally organized under a king or queen. Rather, political and economic affairs were overseen by titled men, *ozo*, and titled women, *ekwe*.<sup>18</sup> The latter were said to be "chosen" by the goddess Idemili. If a woman's crops were thriving, if her farm animals were all surviving, if "whatever [she] touched yielded multiple profits," then a messenger of Idemili would visit her house to determine whether she had become possessed by the goddess. If so, a community-wide ceremony would confirm the woman as an *ekwe* or human servant and representative of the deity.<sup>19</sup>

Although the *ekwe* title was said to be "involuntary," meaning that one could not simply elect to take it, it was certainly not conferred haphazardly. In fact, Idemili seems to have kept close accounting records, for she would choose to possess only the most wealthy women in the community. Here it is important to recognize that this "wealth" came as a result of neither a good birth nor a good marriage but, rather, through tireless work and fiscal savvy. Women were chosen to take the *ekwe* title because they were economically autonomous. And the best way for a woman to secure such economic autonomy was to take a few wives.

Amadiume's analysis of *igba ohu*, or woman-to-woman marriage, is in close (corrective) conversation with Kamene Okonjo's constantly cited analysis of "dual-sex systems." In precolonial mid-western Igbo societies, Okonjo argues, the complete political and economic separation of men

<sup>17</sup> See Olupona; Diop 1987, 1989; Okonjo; Amadiume 1987, 1997; and Oyewùmi 1997, respectively.

<sup>18</sup> While Amadiume maintains (primarily to highlight the violence of Britain's "indirect rule" through imposed "warrant chiefs") that there *were* no "chiefs," male or female, in precolonial Nnobi, she also insists that if *anyone* held "overall political power," it was *aba ekwe*. This name designated the woman who had held the *ekwe* title longest and bestowed on its bearer ultimate "veto rights in public assemblies of all Nnobi" (Amadiume 1987: 133).

<sup>19</sup> An Anglican might call such a person "a priest."

and women ensured that the needs of each sex were equally addressed. Okonjo opposes this system of “parallel functions,” in which sexual difference is respected, to the European “single-sex” patriarchy, in which difference is effaced. In traditional “dual-sex” Igbo societies, “each sex manages its own affairs, and women’s interests are represented at all levels” (Okonjo: 45). Contra Okonjo, Amadiume suggests that hinterland Igbo “gender flexibility” deconstructs any dualistic precolonial sexual organization. By separating “gender” from “sex” in her analysis, Amadiume is able to highlight “occasions or situations in which women can be males and vice versa,” instances of “gender bending” that confer considerable authority on women.<sup>20</sup> First, all Igbo daughters were considered “male” in relation to Igbo wives.<sup>21</sup> Second, a brotherless daughter could become “male” through a process of *nhayikwa*, or “replacement,” in order to inherit her father’s *obi* (ancestral house or compound).<sup>22</sup> Third, an economically driven woman could take one or more wives to manage the house and garden as she, now a “female husband,” focused on political and economic public life.<sup>23</sup> For Amadiume, then, precolonial hinterland Igbo women primarily secured power and respect either as representatives of the deity or as “gender benders.”<sup>24</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Amadiume adheres to a fairly orthodox Beauvoirianism by maintaining the distinction between “gender” and “sex.” Her argument about “occasions or situations in which women can be males and vice versa” is a somewhat tautological vice versa; “males can be women” means that there are people occupying traditionally male social positions who “are” women (her designation for anatomical females), *not* that there are men who can occupy feminine social roles. “Male daughters” and “female husbands” are both anatomically female. It is disappointing that Amadiume never addresses the question of why precolonial Igbo “gender fluidity” is restricted to women; why is it that a woman’s gender can be separated from her “real” sex, but a man’s cannot? Because of the fluidity’s failure to flow both ways, it is unclear whether Amadiume’s revision of Okonjo’s “dual-sex system” truly resists dualistic determinations or whether it ultimately capitulates to a “single-sex” logic, according to which “women can achieve distinction and recognition only by taking on the roles of men in public life and performing them well” (Okonjo: 45).

<sup>21</sup> Unlike wives, daughters could inherit property, and daughters’ organizations (*out umuada*) were far more powerful than wives’ organizations (*out inyemida*; see Okonjo: 52–53). For equivalents of such groups in Yorùbá societies, see Mba: 5–13.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. the story of Nwajiuba, a woman who was called from her marriage back to her dying father’s *obi* to become a male daughter and inherit her father’s line of descent (Amadiume 1987: 31–33).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. the story of Ada Eze, whose Christian son, upon the death of his mother, refused to take her wife (Amadiume 1987: 128–130).

<sup>24</sup> It might be instructive here to note the similarity between these two precolonial routes to women’s authority (goddess representation and gender crossing) and the two questions currently dividing the Anglican Church (women’s ordination and nonheterosexual lifestyles). I realize that to draw such a parallel is to risk capitulating to an all-too-familiar discursive imperialism, especially considering Amadiume’s warning that a “lesbian interpretation” of woman-to-woman marriages “would be totally inapplicable, shocking and offensive to Nnobi women, since the strong bonds and support between them do not imply lesbian sexual practices” (1987: 7). That said, Henry James might be less than pleased with Eve Sedgwick’s reading of his “Beast in the Jungle,” and most nuns would be downright horrified to find themselves on Adrienne Rich’s lesbian continuum. If I persist,

Perhaps even more radical than Amadiume's analysis of Igbo "gender crossing" is Oyèrónké Oyewùmí's assertion of the utter genderlessness of Yorùbá language. According to Oyewùmí, "Yorùbá is a non-gender-specific language: Yorùbá names and pronouns do not make gender distinctions" (2001: 77). This linguistic "gender-freeness" grounds and reflects a society whose primary difference is not—or, at least, *was* not—sexual difference. Before the colonial imposition of western-Christian "bio-logic," "the [sexed] body was not the basis of social roles at all." If any vector of difference can be said to have been the most important, then it was not sex but, in fact, *age*, so that "in no situation in Yorùbá society was a male, by virtue of his body-type, inherently superior to a female" (Oyewùmí 1997: x–xiii).<sup>25</sup> The priority of age-as-social-determinant meant that a person's status was constantly shifting in relation to her or his conversation partner.<sup>26</sup> This ungendered relationality governs linguistic usage as well, inasmuch as "the position from which one speaks determines the mode of address and the choice of pronouns" (Oyewùmí 2001: 85).

Like Amadiume and Okonjo, Oyewùmí partly grounds this precolonial culture's antipatriarchal structure in its religion.<sup>27</sup> The sacred world of traditional Yorùbá religion was divided into three strata. Olódùmarè, the Supreme Being, was entirely genderless and, Oyewùmí conjectures, probably unanthropic before the introduction of Islam and Christianity into Yorùbáland. Below Olódùmarè were the deity's Òrìsà, or messengers to humankind, each of which manifested one of the divine attributes. Some Òrìsà were male, some were female, and some changed sex from community to community. Below the Òrìsà were the (male and female) ancestors. This gender-freeness within the divine sphere reflected and reinforced the genderlessness of the human, so the priesthood was fully open to—and made no distinction between—"ana-females" and "ana-males" (Oyewùmí 1997: 140). In precolonial Yorùbáland, then, there was no "gender," there was no "woman's place," and, Oyewùmí insists, there

---

then, in making this connection (in the safe depths of a footnote), I am not looking to draw precolonial Igbo practices into the register of Anglo-American "homosexuality"; rather, I am looking to assemble both of these under the (very provisional) category of practices-condemned-by-Victorian-Christianity-as-abominable-parodies-of-normative-heterosexual-lifestyles.

<sup>25</sup> It should be noted that whereas Amadiume uses the signifiers *male* and *female* to designate (flexible) gender and *man* and *woman* to designate (inflexible) sex, Oyewùmí uses *man* and *woman* to refer to western, gendered constructs and *male* and *female*, or *ana-male* and *ana-female*, to designate a person's ungendered, transcultural (and still ultimately unquestioned) anatomical sex.

<sup>26</sup> Oh, for an ungendered singular personal pronoun!

<sup>27</sup> See Amadiume 1987: 27–29, 99–105; and Okonjo: 50–53. For a reconstruction of traditional practice among the Efik of Calabar Province in southeastern Nigeria, see Hackett. In this particular society it is the chief priest, *often a woman*, who crowned the *obong*, or king, of Calabar. For a less rosy account of women's roles in traditional Igbo and Yorùbá religions, see Mba: 24–67.

were no “women,” “at least until the British showed up on our doorstep” (2001: 76).

Show up they did, with a legion of missionaries looking to “make disciples of all men” (Matthew 28:19), armed with King James, quinine, and a binary sex/gender system.<sup>28</sup> According to Amadiume, the Christians’ first move in Igboland was to ban all worship of Idemili in the name of God the Father. This moratorium on goddess worship certainly included possession, so women were furthermore prevented from taking the *ekwe* title. Unable to worship the goddess, Igbo women were therefore severed not only from the sacred but from this “guaranteed, honoured, and respected central political position” in their communities (Amadiume 1987: 133). At the same time that Idemili was ousted by the triune male God, the sexual balance of power was destroyed by the colonial creation of male “warrant chiefs,” an imposition that divested women of all political and judicial responsibilities.<sup>29</sup> Perhaps needless to say, the British also forbade the practices of woman-to-woman marriage and the “replacement” ceremony for making sons of daughters, installing the monogamous, heterosexual Christian couple and their gender-stable Christian children as the model of a good African family.<sup>30</sup> According to Amadiume’s analysis, then, Christianity domesticated Igbo women by cutting off their direct access to the divine and by fixing their gender to their sex.

Meanwhile, as Christianity subordinated women in Igboland, it *created* them in Yorùbáland. According to Oyewù mí, “woman” emerged as a category in Yorùbáland *at the same time that it was coded as inferior to “man.”* Precolonial “ana-females,” who, like “ana-males,” had played a constantly shifting variety of powerful and subordinate roles, now (unlike ana-males) suffered an anatomically determined reduction of identity

<sup>28</sup> Anglican missions were established at Bagadry, Abeokuta, Lagos-Ìbàdàn, and Onitsha in 1845, 1846, 1852, and 1857, respectively. The passage from Matthew is cited in the current “vision statement” of the Church of Nigeria, whose primary commitment is to evangelism. The passage is usually rendered, “therefore go and make disciples of all *nations*.”

<sup>29</sup> In mid-western Igbo communities this usually meant that the British would recognize the authority of the *obi* (if they could find him) but not the *omu*. In the best-case scenarios, she was made an intermediary between the *obi* and the women of the town, but she could no longer make policy (see Gailey: 6; Okonjo: 54–56). The same was the case in Yorùbáland—see Oyewù mí’s (1997: 125) story of Lanlatu, a female chief who signed over Ìbàdàn to the British and subsequently became a woman rather than a chief. In the hinterland Igbo communities, where there *was* no “chief” on whom to confer this honor, the British would either select one *ozo* to be his community’s *igwe* or appoint an untitled young man who happened to offer himself as an ally of the white men (see Amadiume 1997: 131; Van Allen 1976: 70; Wipper: 65).

<sup>30</sup> Oyewù mí cites one Anglican missionary’s horrified reaction to the social structure he found in Yorùbáland: “Is it proper to apply the sacred name of a family to a compound occupied by two to six or a dozen men, each perhaps with a plurality of wives?” (1997: 129). Presumably, the good Anglican missionary would have been even more shocked had he known that some of said wives had wives.

that left them “women,” a term fully coextensive with *wives*. Through this “wifization of citizenship,” these newborn women were encouraged to take their husbands’ names, to access the public sphere only through their husbands, and “to be subordinated to men in all situations... regardless of qualifications, merit, or seniority” (Oyewùmí 1997: 135). These new sexual divisions were reinforced both in the western schools (which until the 1870s were all mission schools and required conversion upon matriculation) and in the Christianizing of Yorùbá religion. Unlike Amadiume, who describes Christianity’s relationship to Igbo goddess worship as forceful replacement, Oyewùmí characterizes Christianity’s relationship to Yorùbá religion as something like infection. As Christianity gained more and more converts in Yorùbáland, the traditional religion itself began to change: the sexless, unanthropic Olódùmarè “began to look like ‘our father in heaven,’ the female *òrìsà*, when they were recognized, began to look less powerful than the male *òrìsà* in some nebulous way, and ‘our ancestors’ became ‘our forefathers’” (Oyewùmí 1997: 141). Like its religion, Yorùbá language has also begun to bear the burden of binary sexual division; *ma* (ma’am) and *sa* (sir) have been imported into everyday speech, and words for leadership positions like *president*, *chairperson*, and *director* are all becoming masculinized, the feminine counterpart for each of these terms being *madam*. “I, like millions of other Yorùbá, speak a nonsexist language,” writes Oyewùmí, “but we are increasingly speaking a ‘sexist’ one” (2001: 81, 91).

Women throughout Igbo- and Yorùbáland protested these changes through anticolonial and anti-Christian riots, particularly between 1914 and 1960—that is, between the creation of “Nigeria” and its independence. The longest and best-organized of these revolts was the Ogu Umunwanyi, or “Women’s War,” of 1929 in the Calabar and Owerri provinces.<sup>31</sup> Having been excluded for decades from religious, political, and juridical office under colonial rule, the Igbo women were finally pushed to revolt when they heard (wrongly, according to the powers that were) that a tax was to be imposed on women. Through the local markets, still predominantly run by women, the word spread almost immediately, and soon thousands of women, dressed for war, stormed colonial government buildings throughout most of southeastern Nigeria.<sup>32</sup> They attacked British banks and stores,

<sup>31</sup> For a thorough treatment of the Women’s War, see Van Allen 1972, 1976; and Ifeka-Moller. Other Igbo feminist efforts like the “Dancing Women’s Movement” and “Spirit Movement” have been described in Gailey: 104–105. The “Nathaniel Affair,” or “the last show of strength by the matriarchs,” is documented in Amadiume 1997: 130. For Yorùbá resistance movements, see Mba. For a comparison of the Women’s War with women’s revolts in Cameroun and Kenya, see Wipper.

<sup>32</sup> They were “wearing short loincloths, all carrying sticks wreathed with palm fronds, and all having their faces smeared with charcoal or ashes and their heads bound with young ferns” (Van Allen 1976: 72).

freed prisoners from jails, and set fire to the native courts and their records. They demanded that women not be taxed, that the native courts be abolished, and that the warrant chiefs be removed, declaring that “all white men should go to their own country” (Van Allen 1976: 72). At the very least, they demanded that women be placed on native courts and in the district office, “demands quite in keeping with the power in pre-colonial Africa” (Wipper: 67). Somehow, however, these demands were not understood by the colonial officers and their warrant chiefs, who attributed the women’s dissatisfaction merely to taxation and the decreasing value of palm oil. They were therefore confused when, despite their reassurances that women would not be taxed, the destruction of courts and records accelerated to a feverish pitch through the middle of December, when soldiers opened fire on the rioting women. In the last week of the riots, between fifty and sixty women were killed, having neither killed nor injured any man (although one colonial officer in Ukam “barely escaped being assaulted” [Gailey: 116]).

Three years later, the colonial governor issued reforms in accordance with the suggestions of the governmentally appointed “Aba Commission.” Court cases were now heard by a panel of (male) judges, warrant chiefs were either eliminated or just ignored, and an effort was made, especially in the Igbo hinterland, to determine the “real,” “native” legal system and rulers of the communities (Gailey: 144–153). As for the women, although they were not taxed, their demands went unmet. They were not appointed to the native courts, they were not appointed district officers, and the white men did not go home. In fact, the white men reinforced a 1901 law against “self-help,” which forbade precisely the kind of resistance effort the women had launched during the Women’s War. Having been made aware of Nigerian women’s ability to cause a good deal of trouble, the colonial powers redoubled their efforts to re-create Nigerian “femininity.” And the primary vehicle for this feminine re-creation was the church.

The production of “Europeanized” Nigerian women can be traced back to the return of “Saros” or “Creoles,” English-speaking former slaves, to their native homes in Igbo- and Yorùbáland.<sup>33</sup> Creole women, with their “European-style dress and hair, and in their dutiful service to the church,” became models of African Christian womanhood, whose replicas were produced in church, in the mission schools, and in “various church-linked

---

<sup>33</sup> This homecoming was mainly facilitated by the (Anglican) Christian Mission Society, which would send, for example, a “Yorùbá from Freetown, Christianized and in a way Anglicized *yet not de-Yorùbá-ized* . . . into the interior to promote a style of Christianity which was increasingly their own and something well able to appeal to other Yorùbá” (Hastings: 341).

women's associations" (Amadiume 2000: 38).<sup>34</sup> For our purposes here, the two most significant of these groups are the Anglican Mothers' Union and the Women's Guild. The Mothers' Union is an elite group of women who have been married in the church and who are respected in their communities as exemplary Christian women. New women are inducted into the group every other year by their diocesan bishop, and all members wear blue uniforms. The Women's Guild is a much larger group of Christian women, some of whom are unmarried or divorced, and many of whom are second or third wives and so have not been married in the church. The uniforms of the Women's Guild are green. Both groups study the Bible and pray together, observe feast days, build church buildings, keep the church compound clean and decorated, and place the utmost importance on caring for their husbands and children. Reflecting on these depoliticized groups of subservient Christian women, Amadiume laments, "Whatever happened to the traditional concepts of constitutional woman chiefs and queen mothers?" (2000: 33).

As we have seen, women in precolonial "Nigeria" gained leadership positions through their direct access to the goddess and their economic savvy. Women in *Christian* Nigeria gain leadership positions through their husbands (the bishop's wife is the president of the diocesan Mother's Union, and the pastor's wife is the head of the parish Women's Guild), their economic efforts now redirected toward raising money for the church.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> Amadiume attributes the absence of women from "the top seats of African governments" to Christianity. Whether or not this is the case, church leaders have recently issued pleas to Nigerian women to become more involved in the political process: "There is no gainsaying the fact that bad management has been the bane of development in Nigeria since independence. I therefore call on those women who have the natural endowment and charisma to lead, to aspire for elective posts in the forthcoming Local Government elections" (M. Anikwenwa: 2). This injunction, echoed by the editorial board of the Mothers' Union, seems to be a response to the staggering evangelical success of Nigerian women; it is the hope of the church that women political leaders might Christianize the government as they have their neighbors. It is hoped that these political women, unlike the men, who look to "amass wealth," will "give a selfless and Christlike service that will make Nigerian Society conform to God's ideals" (Mother's Union: 4).

<sup>35</sup> It is perhaps important to allow these women to intervene into Amadiume's analysis and note that this money does not just disappear into church coffers. Rather, it funds a variety of projects including "the introduction of computer studies in the school[s]" and the maintenance of women-run bread factories, weaving centers, soup factories, and (practically omnipresent) women's resource centers, which help women find jobs and teach them the professional skills they need to support themselves and their children as the (Christian) family structure continues to break down under the weight of a collapsed economy. The money raised "for the church" also finances the production of a yearly newsletter, *The Christian Family*, which helps women negotiate the rapidly changing sociopolitical landscape in Nigeria. The most recent of these publications includes educational articles titled "Women and Politics Today," "The Secret of Academic Success," "Crisis Management in the Family," "Mothers Who Kill Themselves Gradually" (on bleaching creams), and "A Strong Case for the Ministry of Women in the Church," as well as articles on abortion and AIDS (Mothers' Union; Nwaizuzu: 90).

Rather than learning the “competitiveness in economic pursuit . . . positive aggression and militancy without bloodshed” encouraged among women in precolonial times, Christian Nigerian women are taught to cultivate “self-sacrifice, meekness, order, and peace,” renouncing their opposites as “maleness” and “headstrongness” (Amadiume 1987: 155, 1997: 131). Indeed, at their most recent annual meeting on Mothering Sunday, Archbishop Peter Akinola addressed his diocese’s chapter of the Mother’s Union, decrying the “mad rush for wealth in Nigeria that has made many mothers to forsake their family obligations.” He told the women to submit to their husbands’ authority, stressing that “God did not make a mistake in apportioning different roles to different people” (2001a).

Apparently, two of the roles that God apportions to certain kinds of people and not to “different” ones are “priest” and “bishop.” Although the Methodist, Baptist, and Pentecostal churches in Nigeria have all begun to ordain women, and although many women have founded “indigenous” African churches, thereby regaining the connection to the sacred that their mothers and grandmothers enjoyed, the Anglican Church in Nigeria has stubbornly refused to ordain women.<sup>36</sup> When I asked the Reverend Ifeanyi Obiechefu why this was the case, he attributed it to a residue of traditional African beliefs. “People who were worshipping idols brought their culture and background into Christianity,” he explained: “They gave women a limit which they could not exceed. Women could be priests, prophetesses, agents for *minor* deities, for *feminine* deities, but not for the main deities. There were many shrines, temples, and places of worship where no women could go in. . . . [W]omen could perform sacrifices only in the

---

<sup>36</sup> For a sustained engagement with these indigenous churches, see Hackett; Peel 1961, 2000. According to the Reverend Obiechefu, Bishop Haruna of Ilorin ordained three women in 1993. When other bishops discovered what Haruna had done, they “kicked against him and refused to recognize those women as priests. Bishop Haruna retired two years later, and still no one knows what to do with the women [whom he ordained].” When I asked Mrs. Griswold, who spent a month praying and working with chapters of the Mothers’ Union and Women’s Guild in Nigeria, whether the women she met seemed to be in favor of women’s ordination, she replied, “Why would they want to be ordained? They’ve got immense power—the bishop’s wife has a huge budget and a ton of administrative responsibility.” This response, of course, would be totally unacceptable to an Amadiume or Mba, but apparently whenever Mrs. Griswold asked about the possibility of women’s ordination, her conversation partner would answer with a vague, “It will come.” There are strong pro-ordination voices among Nigerian Christian women; for example, Dr. O. A. Arulefula has written that “the wind of women [*sic*] ordination is blowing throughout the whole world. The spirit of God is at work, and before we know it, it will be here in Nigeria.” Somewhat disappointingly, she is careful to explain that women should never reach the top of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. A comparativist herself, Arulefula suggests that “like in the Episcopal Church in America, women in the ministry of the Church teach in schools and some serve as counselors. They are usually very dedicated” (172). The only other relevant argument I have found confines “women’s ministry” to teaching, visiting the sick and imprisoned, counseling, singing, praying, and evangelizing, with no mention of ordination to the priesthood or episcopate (Unwrap).

minor temples . . . but in the church, it is different. In the church, everyone is welcome. There is no segregation.” Nevertheless, he continued, although Christianity is slowly correcting precolonial practice, it is working with a fundamentally misogynist culture, and “culture doesn’t die—no matter how you civilize the society.” He added, “We are living in a masculine world. Especially in Africa.” Confused that the Reverend Obiechefu had attributed Anglo-Africa’s misogyny to its residual *Africanness*, I asked why the other European-derived denominations—and, indeed, the “indigenous churches” themselves—have begun to ordain women. Is it because *more* of the precolonial religion still resides in Afro-Anglicanism than in the other denominations? “Yes,” he began, only to correct himself, “no. No, it’s because of Paul’s letter to Timothy. 1 Timothy 2:8–15: it says that women should not have authority in the church.” (So the misogyny comes from traditional African culture, and the misogyny comes from the New Testament.) “Of course,” he interrupted my thought, “a person interprets the Bible in the way that it suits him or her. People who want to ordain women say there were women who ministered to Jesus, like Mary Magdalene.”

## WELCOME TO THE CATHEDRAL OF ST. JOHN THE DIVINE

On 7 July 2002, the Most Reverend Peter J. Akinola, Archbishop, Primate, and Metropolitan of Nigeria, was installed on the International Throne of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City, becoming one of only seven men ever to be so honored. The cathedral, reputed to be one of the most feminist, “gay-friendly,” activist, ecumenical churches in America, was just about the last place its parishioners expected to find the international spokesman for a “misogynist” and “homophobic” Anglicanism enthroned.<sup>37</sup> Not nearly so organized as their Nigerian sisters, the New Yorkers did not quite manage to stage a protest, plan a walkout, or even come up with a symbol to wear in solidarity with “sexual deviants” and women clergy (perhaps medals of Mary Magdalene would have done the trick). So they stood as usual for the procession, ushered in by African dancers and drums and a rush of purples, pinks, and blues. They watched as Archbishop Akinola approached the altar, following close behind the leaders of the Church of Satan. These included Bishop Mark Sisk, Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold, Bishop Suffragan

---

<sup>37</sup> I have lifted these adjectives from conversations with several members of the congregation at the cathedral (Congregation of St. Saviour) who wish to remain anonymous.

Catherine Roskam, and two female priests, one of whom was five and a half months pregnant.

Throughout the late morning and early afternoon on that summer Sunday, Bishops Sisk and Griswold attempted to anticipate and diffuse all left-wing anger by appealing to the radically “different contexts” of the American and Nigerian churches. When one parishioner asked the archbishop after the mass whether he thought God would save lesbians and gay men, he too adopted his fellow bishops’ relativist discourse: “In my country, this question does not arise at all. In my own context, in my own country, the question doesn’t arise at all” (Fox: 11). As they continued to question the archbishop’s views on homosexuality, women’s ordination, and AIDS prevention, the American laypeople and clergy alike were encouraged to think more broadly and to “affirm that our essential unity in Christ transcends our need to agree in every particular” (Fox: 11).<sup>38</sup> Yet one is left wondering, *Whose unity?* Ignoring the “particular” questions of who counts in the Anglican Communion would mean beginning—and, unfortunately, probably ending—with those who count according to everyone’s count—that is, the men in the stratosphere of the episcopal hierarchy. It was in the name of this unity, then, that the three male bishops revealed on that same day their plans to sponsor a “Nigerian Chaplaincy” in ECUSA. This program will pay for Nigerian clergy to come to America “in an effort”—these are Akinola’s words—“to bring people back into the Church of God” (Fox: 11).

And when they come, the Anglo-American Left will no doubt cry colonialism—only to find themselves face to face with the very Oxford Bibles and Victorian gender codes that justified their *ancestors’* transcultural moral impositions a mere century ago. Who, in good faith, can say that she or he is colonized? Who—with an African archconservative sitting on the throne of an almost pagan cathedral in New York, amid the silencing liberal rhetoric of “different contexts,” as promises to deploy evangelical ground troops to the Church of Satan mix with assurances of “universal salvation” from three bishops looking disturbingly like one another’s warrant chiefs—can say anything at all?

---

<sup>38</sup> The Reverend Chloe Breyer, for example, asked whether an African woman whose husband had been “sleeping around” had the right to refuse to have intercourse with him unless he used a condom. The archbishop responded that no woman had the right to refuse intercourse to her husband for any reason and that while he condemns the use of condoms to prevent AIDS (because they promote promiscuity), “the church is beginning to change its position” on condom use for purposes of family planning by married couples.

## REFERENCES

- Akinola, the Most Reverend Peter Jasper  
2001  
2002
- Amadiume, Ifi  
1987  
1997  
2000
- Anikwenwa, Blessing  
2002
- Anikwenwa, the Most Reverend Maxwell  
2002
- Arulefula, O. A.  
1994
- Carrette, Jeremy, and Mary Keller  
1999
- Chidester, David  
1996
- Church of Nigeria  
2002
- “Address to the Mothers’ Union.” Sermon delivered at St. Barnabas’ Church, Abuja, 25 March. Lagos: Church of Nigeria Website. Available at [www.nigeria.anglican.org/News2001a.html](http://www.nigeria.anglican.org/News2001a.html).
- “Response to the Primate, Church of Nigeria, to the Appointment of the Most Reverend Rowan Williams as 104th Archbishop of Canterbury.” Abuja: Church of Nigeria. Available at [www.nigeria.anglican.org/responseabc2002.html](http://www.nigeria.anglican.org/responseabc2002.html).
- Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society*. London: Zed Books.
- Reinventing Africa: Matriarchy, Religion and Culture*. London: Zed Books.
- Daughters of the Goddess, Daughters of Imperialism: African Women, Culture, Power and Democracy*. London: Zed Books.
- President’s Address to the 16th Awka Diocesan Women’s Conference of the Mothers’ Union and Women’s Guild, 20–23 July, 2002*. Onitsha, Nigeria: Service Press.
- “Archbishop’s Message.” *The Christian Family: The Magazine of the Mothers’ Union and Women’s Guild of the Diocese of Awka, Nigeria* 25: 2.
- “Women in the Church.” In *The Anglican Church in Nigeria 1842–1992*, 157–173. Ed. by Akinyele Omayajowo. Lagos: Macmillan Nigeria Publishers Ltd.
- “Religions, Orientation and Critical Theory: Race, Gender and Sexuality at the 1998 Lambeth Conference.” *Theology and Sexuality* 11: 21–43.
- Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.
- “Vision Statement.” Lagos: Church of Nigeria. Available at [www.nigeria.anglican.org/vision.html](http://www.nigeria.anglican.org/vision.html).

- Davies, Matthew  
2003 "Episcopal Bishops Give Consent to Consecration of Canon Gene Robinson." *Worldwide Faith News Archives*. Available at [www.wfn.org/2003/08/msg00085.html](http://www.wfn.org/2003/08/msg00085.html).
- Diocese of Oxford  
2003 "Reading Area." Diocese of Oxford Website. Available at [www.oxford.anglican.org/reading](http://www.oxford.anglican.org/reading).
- Diop, Cheikh Anta  
1987 *Precolonial Black Africa: A Comparative Study of the Political and Social Systems of Europe and Black Africa from Antiquity to the Formation of Modern States*. Westport, CT: Lawrence Hill and Co.
- 1989 *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa: The Domains of Matriarchy and of Patriarchy in Classical Antiquity*. London: Karnak House.
- Fox, Neva Rae  
2002 "Nigerian Primate Seated on International Throne of Cathedral." *Episcopal New Yorker*, July–August: 11.
- Gailey, Harry A.  
1971 *The Road to Aba*. London: University of London Press.
- Hackett, Rosalind I. J.  
1985 "Sacred Paradoxes: Women and Religious Plurality in Nigeria." In *Women, Religion and Social Change*, 247–271. Ed. by Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Ellison Banks Findly. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Hastings, Adrian  
1994 *The Church in Africa, 1450–1950*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Hill, the Reverend  
Dr. Renée  
2002 "From Tolerance to Transformation." Sermon delivered to All Saints Church, Pasadena. Available at [www.allsaints-pas.org/archives/sermons/RH-6-30-02.pdf](http://www.allsaints-pas.org/archives/sermons/RH-6-30-02.pdf).
- Hunt, Patrick A.  
2002 "Not Peace, but a Sword." Sermon delivered to Christ Episcopal Church, Ridgewood, NJ. Available at <http://newark.rutgers.edu/~lcrew/joy225.html>.
- Ifeka-Moller, C.  
1975 "Female Militancy and Colonial Revolt: The Women's War of 1929, Eastern Nigeria." In *Perceiving Women*, 127–158. Ed. by Shirley Ardener. London: Dent.
- Integrity USA  
2002 "Integrity USA Welcomes Archbishop Williams' Appointment." New York: Anglican Communion

- News Service. Available at [www.anglicancommunion.org/acns/articles/30/50/acns3074.html](http://www.anglicancommunion.org/acns/articles/30/50/acns3074.html).
- Lambeth Conference 1998 *Resolutions of the 1998 Lambeth Conference*. Available at [www.lambethconference.org](http://www.lambethconference.org).
- Mba, Nina Emma 1982 *Nigerian Women Mobilized: Women's Political Activities in Southern Nigeria, 1900–1965*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Mothers' Union 2002 "Introduction." *The Christian Family: The Magazine of the Mothers' Union and Women's Guild of Diocese of Awka, Nigeria* 25: 4.
- Nwaizuzu, E. C. 2000 "Women's Work Report." Report presented to the First Session of the Third Synod Holding at Holy Trinity Church, Obollo, 29–31 October 2000. In *Called to Be One that They May Be One as We Are Onei*, 89–92. Synod Report of the Diocese of Okigwe North, Church of Nigeria, Anglican Communion. Aba, Nigeria: S. S. Prints.
- Okonjo, Kamene 1976 "The Dual-Sex Political System in Operation: Igbo Women and Community Politics in Mid-western Nigeria." In *Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change*, 45–58. Ed. by Nancy J. Hafkin and Edna G. Bay. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Olupona, Jacob Obafemi Kehinde 1997 "Women's Rituals, Kingship and Power among the Ondo-Yoruba of Nigeria." In *Queens, Queen Mothers, Priestesses, and Power: Case Studies in African Gender*, 315–336. Ed. by Flora Edouwaye S. Kaplan. New York: New York Academy of Sciences.
- Oyewùmí, Oyèrónké 1997 *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- 2001 "The Translation of Cultures: Engendering Yorùbá Language, Orature, and World-Sense." In *Women, Gender, and Religion: A Reader*, 76–97. Ed. by Elizabeth A. Castelli. New York: Palgrave.
- Peel, J. D. Y. 1961 *Aladura: A Religious Movement among the Yoruba, 1882–1922*. London: Clarendon Press.

- 2000 *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Schjonberg,  
Mary Frances  
2003 "Committee Refuses Further 'Dialogue' on Ordination of Women." Worldwide Faith News Archives. Available at [www.wfn.org/2003/08/msg00015.html](http://www.wfn.org/2003/08/msg00015.html).
- Second Anglican  
Encounter in the South  
1997 "Statement on Human Sexuality." Kuala Lumpur. Available at [www.newark.rutgers.edu/~lcrew.kuala.html](http://www.newark.rutgers.edu/~lcrew.kuala.html).
- Solheim, James  
1998a "Bishops at Lambeth Conference Push Initiative on International Debt." New York: Episcopal News Service. Available at [www.episcopalchurch.org/ens/archives/ndebt.html](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/ens/archives/ndebt.html).
- 1998b "Bishops Interpret Meaning of Lambeth Conference for Their Dioceses." New York: Episcopal News Service. Available at [www.episcopalchurch.org/ens/98-2233.html](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/ens/98-2233.html).
- 1998c "Sexuality Issues Test Bonds of Affection among Bishops at Lambeth Conference." New York: Episcopal News Service. Available at [www.episcopalchurch.org/ens/archives/nsexuality.html](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/ens/archives/nsexuality.html).
- 1999 "After 25 Years, Women Priests Still Raise Difficult Issues for the Church." New York: Episcopal News Service. Available at [www.episcopalchurch.org/ens/99-112.html](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/ens/99-112.html).
- Spong, Bishop Jack S.  
1998 "Christianity Caught in a Timewarp." Newark: Diocese of Newark. Available at [www.dioceseofnewark.org/vox20998.html](http://www.dioceseofnewark.org/vox20998.html).
- Thompson, Richelle  
2003 "Bishops Turn Down Development of Same-Sex Liturgies." Worldwide Faith News Archives. Available at [www.wfn.org/2003/08/msg00103.html](http://www.wfn.org/2003/08/msg00103.html).
- Unwrap, Lady Christy  
2002 "A Strong Case for the Ministry of Women in the Church." *The Christian Family: The Magazine of the Mothers' Union and Women's Guild of the Diocese of Awka, Nigeria* 25: 35–36.
- Van Allen, J.  
1972 "Sitting on a Man: Colonialism and the Lost Political Institutions of Igbo Women." *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 6/2: 165–181.

- 
- 1976 “‘Aba Riots’ or Igbo ‘Women’s War’? Ideology, Stratification, and the Invisibility of Women.” In *Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change*, 59–86. Ed. by Nancy J. Hafkin and Edna G. Bay. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Wegman, the Reverend Jay  
2002 “On the Impending Visit of Archbishop Peter J. Akinola of the Church of Nigeria.” Sermon delivered at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, New York.
- Wipper, Audrey  
1982 “Riot and Rebellion among African Women: Three Examples of Women’s Political Clout.” In *Perspectives on Power*, 50–72. Ed. by Jean F. O’Barr. Durham: Duke University Press.

**Pragmatic Spirituality**  
**The Christian Faith through an Africentric Lens**

Gayraud S. Wilmore · Paper \$20

"A leader in the development of black liberation theology, Wilmore's *Pragmatic Spirituality* is an indispensable interpretation of the meaning of black religion in the second half of the 20th Century. No student of black theology and religion can afford to ignore it."—James H. Cone, author of *Black Theology and Black Power*

**Asian American Religions**  
**The Making and Remaking of Borders and Boundaries**

Edited by Tony Carnes and Fenggang Yang  
*Religion, Race, and Ethnicity Series* · Paper \$22

"An important contribution to the burgeoning field of religion and the new immigrants, especially in our understanding of the diverse religious patterns that exist among Asian American groups."—Helen Rose Ebaugh, coeditor of *Religion and the New Immigrants*

**Noise and Spirit**  
**The Religious and Spiritual Sensibilities of Rap Music**

Edited by Anthony Pinn · Paper \$18

Explores the diverse religious dimensions of rap stemming from Islam (including the Nation of Islam and Five Percent Nation), Rastafarianism, and Humanism, as well as Christianity. The volume examines rap's dialogue with religious traditions, from the ways in which Islamic rap music is used as a method of religious and political instruction to the uses of both the blues and black women's rap for considering the distinction between God and the Devil.

**An Interpretation of the Qur'an**  
**English Translation of the Meanings**  
**A Bilingual Edition**

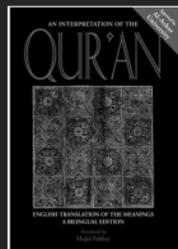
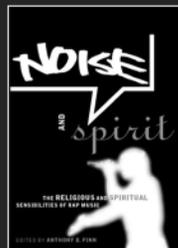
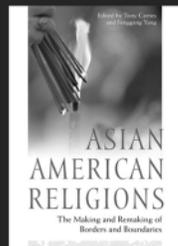
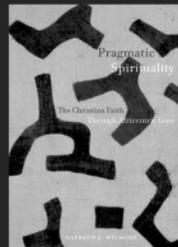
Translated by Majid Fakhry

**NOW AVAILABLE IN PAPERBACK \$19.95**

The clear, rigorous translation, one of the only English translations available by a native Arabic speaker and approved by Al-Azhar University, is laid out here in dual-column format directly opposing the Arabic text to allow the reader to make careful verse by verse comparisons.



**NYU Press**  
[www.nyupress.org](http://www.nyupress.org)



## New Books from Yale

### American Judaism

*A History*

Jonathan D. Sarna

"Destined to stand for many years as the most authoritative—and the most readable—synthesis of 350 of the history of American Judaism."

—Peter Novick



"As the distillation of Jonathan Sarna's lifetime of careful scholarship on Judaism and American Jews, this volume offers compelling reading for general readers as well as university students. . . . This is a landmark book."—Mark A. Noll 44 illus. \$35.00

### The Enlightenment and the Intellectual Foundations of Modern Culture

Louis Dupré

"This immensely readable book will cause readers to rethink the Enlightenment and to see its positive aspects. It will also add crucial historical perspective to current discussions of modernity."—Donald Verene

\$45.00

### The Works of Jonathan Edwards

Vol. 23: *The "Miscellanies," 1153–1360*

Edited by Douglas A. Sweeney

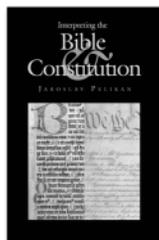
This volume concludes the series of private theological notebooks that Jonathan Edwards kept from his late teens to the end of his life. \$95.00

### Interpreting the Bible and the Constitution

Jaroslav Pelikan

"This book is the work of a seasoned scholar. It draws on a wide literature, both the religious in which Pelikan has worked all his life and the legal, which he uses deftly. The author substantiates his points with force, clarity, and thoroughness."

—Judge John T. Noonan \$30.00



### Constantine and Rome

R. Ross Holloway

"This book takes on a period of immense historical change and explains how Constantine came to accept Christianity, not only as a spiritual force, but as a political institution that reconstituted the empire. It is important for scholars and students alike."—Eve D'Ambra

122 illus. \$35.00

### Converting California

*Indians and Franciscans in the Missions*

James A. Sandos

"Generations of writers have defended or deplored California's fabled Spanish missions. Historian James Sandos takes us beyond the polemics, with fresh and convincing explanations of Indians and missionaries alike."

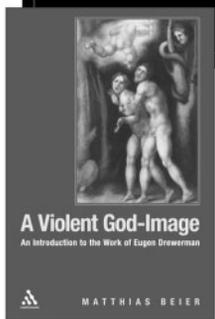
—David J. Weber \$35.00

Yale University Press



yalebooks.com

## NEW FROM CONTINUUM



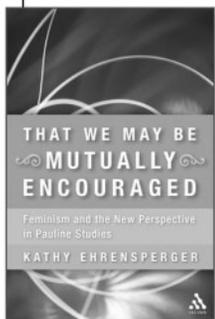
### **A Violent God-Image**

**An Introduction to the Work of Eugen Drewermann**  
*Matthias Beier*

This is the first full-length introduction in English to theologian and psychotherapist Eugen Drewermann, the best-selling European theologian and psychotherapist. At the heart of Drewermann's work is his analysis of a violent image of God that characterizes traditional interpretations of sin and the cross.

388 pp. May 2004

0-8264-1584-9 HC \$39.95 (Cdn. \$51.95)



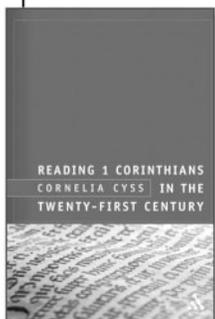
### **That We May Be Mutually Encouraged** **Feminism and the New Perspective in** **Pauline Studies**

*Kathy Ehrensperger*

Ehrensperger brings together feminist commentaries on Paul with the New Perspective approach to Pauline studies. She sets the two schools in dialogue, focusing on issues of identity, diversity, and relationality. She views Paul as a significant dialogue partner in the search for a theology beyond anti-Semitism and misogyny, beyond force and domination.

304 pp. April 2004

0-5670-2640-X PB \$34 (Cdn \$44.50)



### **Reading 1 Corinthians in the 21st Century**

*Cornelia Cyss*

1 Corinthians these days can seem both irrelevant and, in places, overly-familiar. Cyss uses the insights of hermeneutics and other critical methods to offer a new reading of Paul's letter for our day.

240 pp. May 2004

0-5670-2600-0 PB \$34.95 (Cdn \$45.50)

 **continuum**  
NEW YORK • LONDON  
www.continuumbooks.com

In bookstores or call US 1-800-561-7704  
Canada 1-800-565-9523  
Outside North America +44 (0)1202 665432

E-mail orders to [cb@morehousegroup.com](mailto:cb@morehousegroup.com)

PO Box 1321, Harrisburg PA 17105 • [www.continuumbooks.com](http://www.continuumbooks.com)