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# Christianity

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## Conflicts

In the past decade, an estimated 2 million children have been killed in armed conflict. Three times as many have been permanently disabled or seriously injured. These deaths resulted from the numerous wars waged on the African continent over the past decade. For instance, during the ethnic conflicts in Rwanda in 1994, 300,000 children were said to be killed, while Sierra Leone has seen serious and grotesque human rights violations since 1991, when its civil war erupted.

Both sides have also used a large number of child soldiers. For example, the United Nations estimates some 250,000 children under the age of 18 serve in national and guerrilla armies in places like Liberia and Sierra Leone, making African children no longer simply passive victims of warfare. The flood of lightweight, powerful weapons to poorer nations, combined with the vulnerability of young children, has propelled more and more kids onto the front lines.

## Health

This period has seen the eradication of most childhood diseases like measles and polio, but they have been replaced by human immunodeficiency virus and acquired immune deficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS). More than 14 million children have lost one or both parents to HIV/AIDS, and around 390,000 children in sub-Saharan Africa became infected with HIV just in 2008.

The majority of these children have been infected with HIV during pregnancy, childbirth, or breastfeeding, resulting from their mothers' infections. Worldwide, it is estimated that more than 15 million children under 18 have been orphaned by AIDS, about 11.6 million of them in sub-Saharan Africa. In countries like Zambia and Botswana, which are badly affected by the epidemic, 20 percent of all children are orphans—most of whom have been orphaned by AIDS.

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**See Also:** AIDS and AIDS Programs; Educational Reform; Family Life and Structure; Genocide; Health; Popular Culture; Poverty; Rites of Passage; School Day (Mission Schools).

## Further Readings

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## Christianity

According to tradition and to the early church historian Eusebius, Christianity was preached in Ethiopia by the apostle Matthew before it reached Europe; Mark the evangelist is said to have established the church in Alexandria in 43 C.E. What is clear is that some of the most important early Christian theologians were from northern Africa: Augustine, from present-day Algeria, and Clement and Origen, from present-day Egypt. The monastic movement in the early church drew its inspiration from these writers. By the 4th century, Christianity was well established in what are today Ethiopia and Eritrea, and was centered in a city called Aksum. From the 6th to 14th centuries, it flourished in what is now Sudan. Coptic Christianity, as it is now known, flourished as the majority faith in this northeastern section of Africa until the end of the 14th century, and is still vibrant in the area. Though considerably diminished by the Arabic conquest of northern Africa, Christianity nonetheless continued in Tunisia, Libya, and Algeria.

## Missionaries and Colonizers

Christianity had to wait until the 15th century, though, before it reached sub-Saharan Africa. Christians were reported in Guinea Bissau in 1445 and in Mauritania in 1448. Portuguese colonizers brought Christianity to the Congo in 1483, to Angola in 1492, and to Mozambique in 1506. Christianity began in Kenya in 1498 and in Nigeria and Benin in 1515. A significant step was taken in 1518, when the first indigenous bishop from sub-Saharan black Africa was consecrated by the pope. During the 16th century, the Roman Catholic religious order of the

Society of Jesus (Jesuits) set up missions throughout Africa. In 1633, the first Protestant missionary, a Lutheran, arrived in Ethiopia, the first Anglican missionary arrived in what is now Ghana in 1752, and the main efforts of various Protestant denominations increased markedly in the 18th century. Perhaps the most famous missionary from this period is David Livingstone, who was as much an explorer as a missionary. For six years, he was not in communication with England, prompting H. M. Stanley's famous expedition to retrieve him.

The most famous African Christian from this period, on the other hand, was Samuel Ajayi Crowther. Born in what is now Nigeria, Crowther was removed by the British from a Portuguese slave ship and landed in Sierra Leone, a basically Christian colony. There, he became an Anglican and attended the first university available in tropical Africa, after which he was ordained a priest in England. He oversaw the translation of the Bible into the Yoruba language, and set up a Niger mission that engaged with Muslims in that area. He is best known as an advocate of the indigenization of African Christianity, which increasingly went against the trend. The next century showed him to have been prophetic on this topic.

### Indigenization

Evangelization continued apace into the 20th century and, increasingly, was carried on by indigenous African Christians. At the beginning of the 20th century, there were around 9,000 Christians in Africa, but at the beginning of the 21st century, there are about 380 million. Some estimate that by the middle of the 21st century, that number will have doubled. These numbers alone would suggest that indigenization is afoot, since it would be incredible for such large numbers to embrace something seen as counter to their own culture.

However, the facts also confirm that the various African cultures are shaping the Christianity that is taking such firm root across the continent, especially in sub-Saharan Africa: there are now 11,500 denominations of Christianity in Africa, ranging from the ancient versions of Ethiopia and Egypt among the Copts to the traditional Roman Catholic, Anglican, and other Protestant parishes; to more explicitly charismatic and evangelical congregations; and to the many African Independent Churches that set them-

selves apart from the groups that originated from European missionary activity.

Among these are the Zionist Independent Churches, called "Spirit" churches because of their belief in the Holy Spirit's intervention to heal spiritually and physically. They show parallels with traditional African religion in their use of drums, dancing, and spirit possession. Their leaders are called prophets. These are a syncretic blend, therefore, of Christianity and tribal religion. Typically, they claim Saturday as their Sabbath, and therefore celebrate on that day rather than on Sunday. Another similar set of syncretic Christian churches are misnamed Ethiopian Independent Churches, since they are generally located in southern and west Africa.

They are enamored, however, of any evidence of reference to Africa in the Bible, and this most frequently would be to Ethiopia. These churches were formed in protest to the racist tradition in missionary-founded Christian churches that maintained whites in leadership positions; Ethiopian Independent Churches insist on black leadership, while remaining close in doctrine to the European-based Christian churches. One of the first instigators for this movement was Crowther, who established the African Anglican Pastorate in Nigeria. Another was Vincent Mojola Agbebi, who formed the Native Baptist Church.

### Women in the Church

Women frequently take leadership positions in these churches, and there is an emphasis on charismatic, immediate communication with the divine. The older forms of Christianity (e.g., Roman Catholicism, Anglicanism, the Baptists, Presbyterians) generally have made accommodation with local customs and religious practices. Rituals involving covenant making and oath taking, the breaking of curses, the casting out of demons, and other such practices, as well as vivid incorporation of dancing and music into otherwise somewhat staid services have become routine, even if they have sometimes been called into question in Rome and the other metropolitan administrative centers historically associated with Christianity.

The mainline Christian denominations are now well established and thriving in Africa, with Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu being perhaps the most famous African Christian in the late 20th cen-

ture, and a major international voice influential in the overturning of the apartheid system in South Africa. Roman Catholicism has grown by 20 times since 1980, and includes among its most influential members the Nigerian cardinal Francis Arinze, who has sought interfaith dialogue, and Ghanaian Peter Turkson. Tension between local customs and Church practices exist, of course, most recently demonstrated in the creation of the Catholic Apostolic National Church in Uganda by a group of married priests. In fact, vocations to the priesthood are strongest in the African continent, and it is now sending out missionaries around the world.

Congo (Zaire) is now about 95 percent Christian, Angola 94 percent, Uganda 89 percent, South Africa 83 percent, Rwanda 83 percent, Zambia 82 percent, Kenya 79 percent, Zimbabwe 68 percent, Ethiopia 58 percent, Ghana 55 percent, Cameroon 54 percent, Tanzania 50 percent, and Nigeria 46 percent. Yet one cannot avoid the accompanying statistic, that the Rwandan genocide that led to well over 800,000 murders was a Christian-on-Christian event.

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**See Also:** Cults; Islam; Rastafarianism; Religions, Minority; Religions, Traditional; Witchcraft and Sorcery.

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## Colonialism and Mandates

Daily life in contemporary African countries must be understood as determined by their status as members of an interlocking network of postcolonies, striving to imagine themselves as related through Pan-Africanism but struggling first to realize themselves as fully functioning nations.

Even though Ethiopia and Liberia are generally spoken of as the only countries in Africa that were not colonized, this actually suggests the level of subjugation the rest of the continent did experience. After all, if Italy failed in its attempt to take over Ethiopia in the 1880s, Mussolini succeeded in doing so in 1936; Liberia was, in fact, a colony for several decades, created in 1822 by the American Society for Colonization of Free People of Color of the United States as a destination for freed American slaves.

The drive toward colonization that characterized Europe in the 19th century had reached its zenith in 1885 at the Berlin Conference, called by Otto von Bismarck to settle Belgium's claims on the Congo River basin. Subsequently nicknamed the "scramble for Africa," this conference was attended by representatives from the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Spain, the United States, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Russia, Sweden-Norway, and Turkey (the Ottoman Empire), who divided up the continent as if it were a birthday cake.

Britain had been well established in South Africa for some time before this conference, as well as in Lagos, the Gold Coast protectorate, the Gambia, and Sierra Leone; Cecil Rhodes had tried to build a railroad that would extend British control from Cairo to Cape Town. France had focused on Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, and part of Dahomey, and gained much of the rest of western Africa.

It had also settled in Algeria, but most of northern Africa (Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya) was controlled by the Ottoman Turks. Portugal had been in Angola since 1482 and in Mozambique since 1498. Germany had Burundi, Rwanda, and Tanganyika in the east and what is now Namibia and Cameroon in the west. Spain took Equatorial Guinea.

These understandings among the European powers had often worked in more than the obvious ways against the inhabitants of Africa, for example, through economic exploitation and the trampling of human