

## Sociological and Theological Perspectives on Secularization in Africa

*Abel Ngarsouledé (abel.ngarsoulede@gmail.com)*  
*Shalom Evangelical School of Theology (ESTES), Chad*

It is not clear if secularization is a social phenomenon exclusive to the West or a European exception to the general religiosity of the world. Recent developments, in fact, suggest that African societies may also be evolving in this direction. If so, what ethical suggestions can theology offer to African societies? Before pursuing this line of thought, it will be helpful to define the meaning of the term *secularization* in order to clarify our understanding of this important subject.

In Western thought, the term *secularization* has a double meaning, loss and emancipation.<sup>1</sup> Bryan Wilson says that secularization occurs when the clergy loses control of its properties and resources, or when clergy or religious leaders decrease in numbers. He adds that one can also speak of secularism when religion suffers a loss of social status, its belief system is abandoned, or religious practice is neglected.<sup>2</sup> Jürgen Habermas argues that secularization can be understood as a change of mentality due to modernity, which has led to the rejection of metaphysical thought.<sup>3</sup> From the same point of view, Charles Taylor defines secularization as the removal of religion from the public sphere.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jean-Yves Lacoste, ed., *Dictionnaire critique de la théologie* (Paris: Quadrige/PUF, 2002), 1095.

<sup>2</sup> Bryan R. Wilson, “Secularisation,” in *Dictionary of Ethics, Theology and Society*, ed. Paul Barry Clarke and Andrew Linzey, 747–50 (London/New York: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger, *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 43.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 424.

The long debates about religious faith in the West have often shown that many have a greater faith in human reason than in God. These discussions also focus on the heritage of the Church, especially when the transfer of a religious institution's property to the state or general public has occurred. Therefore, it is argued that secularization refers to the process by which a society transitions from a close identification of religion and the state to one of near total separation. The discussions particularly focus on the social function and the future of religion. Sperna Weiland argues that secularization, defined as the abandonment of the triune God, is a fundamental change in the human experience.<sup>5</sup> It removes the fields of religion and metaphysics from human life and thought.

Without intending to contribute to the debate on secularization in the West, we can affirm that Africa has become a secularized continent as well as Europe. Similarities between the two continents and the specific aspects of secularization in Africa are highlighted in this work. The approach to this debate that this paper will take consists of reflecting on the shared reality of secularization in Europe and Africa, emphasizing sociological and theological issues. It will also propose a theological response.

According to our research and analysis, secularization is both a process and an outcome. It concerns all religions: Christianity, Islam, and traditional African religions. We therefore believe that secularization, understood as the gradual decrease of the authority and relevance of religion in human society, is a global phenomenon whose manifestations are as varied as its causes and the contexts in which it is found.

## The reality of Secularization

### *Aspects of Secularization*

In West Africa, current research identifies the main markers of secularization to be the following:

<sup>5</sup> Jan Sperna Weiland, *New Ways in Theology*, trans. by N. D. Smith (Dublin: Gill and McMillan, 1968), 8.

a) *Disenchantment*. This refers to the demystification or unmasking of the traditional sacred cosmos, beliefs, and taboos accepted by people.

b) *The desacralization of power*. Desacralization means the removal of the religious character or sacred understanding of something or somebody. Kwame Bediako thinks that Christianity has played a key role in the emergence of freedom in the modern world through its confrontation with traditional African beliefs.<sup>6</sup> According to Bediako, ancestors are believed to have maintained good relationships and have worked for the well-being of society. Thus, traditional chiefs have performed the crucial function of being intermediaries between the ancestors and society. The authority of the chiefs is presumed to be that of the ancestors.<sup>7</sup> When Christianity undermines their authority, it also undermines the authority of religion.

c) *Emancipation from religion*. Secularization generates rationales that undermine traditional objects of faith, dogmas, and individual ethics. The result is the emancipation of individuals and sectors of society from the influence of religion and the structures that embody its authority.

d) *Secularity*. This is a process by which theological ways of thinking and being give way to mental habits that have no explicit reference to the sacred. Secularity means that religion cannot exert influence over state organizations, functions, and laws.<sup>8</sup> Secularity leads to the emancipation of public spheres: state, economy, ethics and science. It results in the liberalization of people's beliefs in the areas of marriage, reproductive control, social cus-

<sup>6</sup> Kwame Bediako, "Le Christianisme et l'autorité en Afrique," March-April 1992, <http://www.cpjustice.org> (accessed December 5, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Henri Pena-Ruiz, *Histoire de la laïcité: Genèse de l'idéal*, Culture et société (Paris: Découvertes Gallimard, 2005), 18. Henri Pena-Ruiz argues that the combination God and Caesar is a dangerous liaison so that there must have a separation between them. He writes: "In proclaiming the mutual emancipation of religious and political power, laity allows the first to assert freely, but not compel, and the second to devote themselves fully to the interest of all, without public privilege for believers or atheists."

Ngarsouledé: Sociological and Theol. Perspectives on Secularization in Africa toms, and personal sense of identity. It also tends to lead to gender equality and a separation of church and state.

e) *Social change or social transformation*. This occurs in ways that tend to enhance individualism in the sense of personal autonomy. Two things are important to note about this idea: (1) Secularization seems to come hand-in-hand with modernity, which includes an emphasis on rationalism and ethical values based on social conventions; (2) Secularization results in a turn from spiritual to material concerns.<sup>9</sup>

f) *Decline of religion*. This is accompanied by an increase in pluralization, atomization, privatization, indifference, and unbelief. The decline of religion can be understood as a loss of its authority. Essentially, authority is based on power held by a person over another person, a group of people in a given community, or an institution.<sup>10</sup> Authority is power that is acquired by people due to leading a model moral life, acquiring skills as a professional, or providing visible services in a society in which the person is invested.

g) *Altering the content of belief*. Baubérot identifies this form of secularization as existing among Christian intellectuals working in areas of secular society. Such people tend to alternate without recourse to traditional beliefs and to the Christian God. They are inclined to revert to traditional beliefs when the Christian God seems to be slow to respond. Their double life is observed in the tension they maintain between their two belief systems. The result is that in the long run they tend to become more secular.<sup>11</sup>

h) *Re-enchantment*. Research shows that large numbers in the population are returning to religion, but not necessarily to Christianity. The emergence of new religions and new spirituali-

<sup>9</sup> Jean-Pierre Bastian, ed., *La modernité religieuse en perspective comparée: Europe latine et Amérique latine* (Paris: Karthala, 2001), 309.

<sup>10</sup> G. Glez, "Pouvoir temporel du pape," in *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, ed. A. Vacant and E. Mangenot, 12:2670–2772 (Paris: Librairie Lattouzey & Ané, 1933).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Jean Baubérot, "La sécularisation," in *Encyclopédie des religions*, ed. Giuseppe Annoscia, 219–22 (Paris: Encyclopaedia Universalis, 2002).

ties and the multiplication of temporary places of worship in our secularized societies are the result of re-enchantment.

Disenchantment, social change or transformation, desacralization of power, rationalization, pluralization, privatization, atomization, and indifference are common aspects of secularization in Africa and the West. Emancipation from religion is a typical manifestation of secularization in all countries and continents in which research has been conducted. According to Messi Metogo, unbelief is generally identified in Africa within certain social strata – the rich and well educated.<sup>12</sup> Kenya is the only African country that shares with the West a decline of religion. In addition to what is shared by the two continents, the re-enchantment and alternation of beliefs appear to be unique aspects of secularization in sub-Saharan Africa.

The consequence of all the above is seen in the promotion of new values accepted by secular people. Also these characteristic elements of secularization are caused by several abstract and concrete realities that affect people in all social strata.

### *Causes of secularization*

Research identifies several factors of secularization and its victims that exist in both the West and Africa. In this presentation, we will simply list them in order to inform people.

The first cause of secularization is the Christian religion. Some African researchers such as Dopanu, Tshimbulu, and Ngarsouledé as well as certain Westerners note that Christianity is among the ancient causes of secularization in Africa.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Eloi Messi Metogo, *Dieu peut-il mourir en Afrique? Un essai sur l'indifférence religieuse et l'incroyance en Afrique noire* (Paris/Yaoundé: Karthala/Presse de l'UCAC, 1997), 79.

<sup>13</sup> Abiola T. Dopanu, "Secularization, Christianity and the African Religion in Yorubaland," in *AFER* vol. 48, no. 3 (2006): 146–47; Tshimbulu, "Laïcité et religion en Afrique," *Social Compass* vol. 47, no. 3 (2000): 331; and Abel Ngarsouledé, "Enjeux théologiques de la sécularisation en Afrique subsaharienne: Une étude de cas de N'Djamena en République du Tchad" (Thèse de doctorat, Faculté de Théologie Evangélique de Bangui, 2012), 109–10.

The second cause of this social evolution is urbanization, which is noted in the research of Shorter, Onyancha, Dopanu, Messi Metogo, and Ngarsouledé. Cities and slums in Africa added to the rural exodus and widely opened the way to materialism and the transmission of secular ideas through Western media and information technology.<sup>14</sup>

The third cause of secularization in Africa discovered by the researchers is modernity. Modernity makes dramatic changes in the lives of African people. Shorter, Onyancha, Dopanu, Messi Metogo, and Tshimbulu all mention the emancipation of African societies. Dopanu and Tshimbulu, in their study of the Yoruba and other African people influenced by modernity, add the influence of rationalism.<sup>15</sup>

The fourth cause of the evolution of African societies is the spread of Western education that instructs and informs Africans about Western civilization with its ideologies. It also models a new African mentality. Messi Metogo notes that Western education and media have conveyed new forms of knowledge even to the illiterate.<sup>16</sup>

The fifth cause mentioned by the research is the influence of the media and digital technologies.<sup>17</sup> In addition to the observations of Messi Metogo given above, Shorter, Onyancha, and Ngarsouledé note the same cause in their research. Print media, television, video, and telephone are influential forms of commu-

<sup>14</sup> Aylward Shorter and Edwin Onyancha, *Secularism in Africa; A Case Study: Nairobi City* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1997), 57–59; Dopanu, “Secularization, Christianity and the African Religion in Yorubaland,” 146–147; Messi Metogo, *Dieu peut-il mourir en Afrique?* 12–13; and Ngarsouledé, “Enjeux théologiques de la sécularisation en Afrique subsaharienne,” 91.

<sup>15</sup> Shorter and Onyancha, *Secularism in Africa*, 155; Dopanu, “Secularization, Christianity and the African Religion in Yorubaland,” 145; Messi Metogo, *Dieu peut-il mourir en Afrique?* 12.

<sup>16</sup> Messi Metogo, *Dieu peut-il mourir en Afrique?* 12.

<sup>17</sup> Ngarsouledé, “Enjeux théologiques de la sécularisation en Afrique subsaharienne,” 97–102.

nication identified by these authors.<sup>18</sup> On the one hand, the media can be a positive influence in that it promotes education and provides helpful information. On the other hand, it is harmful in that it corrupts morals and promotes a materialistic worldview. It also degrades culture, undermines traditional churches, and fosters hostility toward Christianity.<sup>19</sup>

Shorter, Onyanha, and Messi Metogo also note two additional causes: poverty and the myth of God's withdrawal—the latter idea being prevalent in some African countries. The settlement pattern in African cities, in which poor rural people migrate to large urban areas, often does not result in alleviating poverty since immigrants tend to send money back to relatives in their villages.<sup>20</sup>

### *Those Most Attracted to Secularization*

Secularization in Africa as in the West tends to appeal strongly to intellectuals, government officials, businessmen, social elites, and youth who are exposed to Western culture through education.

We mention in passing those who are most susceptible to secularization in Africa. These are adults who are living in the poor countries of Central and West Africa, such as the entire Yoruba tribe in Nigeria that has come under the influence of secularization.<sup>21</sup> Very often the deplorable social conditions of some African households leads to secularism, to rebellion against God, or to unbelief. According to Tshimbulu, African societies are generally emancipated from the authority of religion.<sup>22</sup> He points to traditional African religions, economics, and politics as spheres of social life in which secularization is clearly prevalent.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Shorter and Onyanha, *Secularism in Africa*, 73; Ngarsouledé, "Enjeux théologiques de la sécularisation en Afrique subsaharienne," 97–102.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 38–39, 61–64.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 32, 57–70.

<sup>21</sup> Shorter and Onyanha, *Secularism in Africa*, 38–39, 61–64.

<sup>22</sup> Tshimbulu, "Laïcité et religion en Afrique," *Social Compass* vol. 47, no. 3 (2000): 336.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

The above reasons for secularization are not, of course, without sociological and theological consequence.

## Sociological and Theological Perspectives on Secularization

### *Sociological Perspective of Secularization*

In the West the damaging effect of secularization is clear in the undermining of the ethical foundations of society, the decline of religion, and the rise of rationalism and a worldview based on science. These things tend to promote the search for personal and collective autonomy that has little or no room for religion. In effect, they result in a misdirected attempt to be independent of God. This is ultimately unsatisfying for many because humanity's thirst for absolute freedom is inconsistent with its need to find fulfillment in transcendent purpose.

Max Weber, approaching the problem from a sociological perspective, studied the relationship between ideas and the socio-economic life of people – that is, the relationship of religion to economics and social stratification. In his opinion, beliefs determine ethics, which have a direct effect on the economy and social life.<sup>24</sup> Danièle Hervieu-Léger affirms this relationship, noting that collective faith in techno-productive values leads human society to a dead end.<sup>25</sup> Modernity with its stepchild secularization has produced a crisis in human society: life without God. Though the desire for human autonomy may lead to freedom, it often comes at the cost of alienation and despair.

In Africa, several authors have reflected on this problem. Shorter and Onyancha observe that on this continent secular values deeply affect all areas of life and society. Curiously, the increasing number of Christians does not prevent the simultaneous

<sup>24</sup> Max Weber, *L'éthique protestante et l'esprit du capitalisme*, Agora 6 (Paris: Plon, 1964), 24.

<sup>25</sup> Danièle Hervieu-Léger, "Religion, modernité et sécularisation," in *Vers un nouveau christianisme?* ed. Danièle Hervieu-Léger and François Champion, Sciences Humaines et Religions (Paris: Cerf, 1986), 216.



development of functional secularism.<sup>26</sup> Messi Metogo affirms this idea in observing that contemporary African societies are characterized by religious indifference and unbelief, though in their depths they have a natural sense of the presence of the supreme God.<sup>27</sup> According to Benno van den Toren, culturally sacred areas and taboos of yesterday in Africa are now desacralized, making accessible areas that previously only the shameless would have explored.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, individual Christians often act without reference to God or are quick to resort to their tribal gods in a crisis. Kwame Bediako noted that Christianity lost much of its social function in the context of African independence.<sup>29</sup>

Both in the West and in Africa emancipation from religion is today's trend. It is apparent that individual lives, sectors of society, and whole communities are now outside the influence of religion and religious authority.

#### *What Is at Stake Theologically?*

In Africa, social, economic, and political difficulties have resulted in a decline of religious feeling in the hearts of people. People now use language that reflects general unbelief. Phrases such as the "silence of God," "impotence of God," "indifference of God," "injustice of God," and "partial love of God" are common. Secularization in this continent covers both the cultural, moral, and social aspects of contemporary society. This includes the field of metaphysics, which confronts human beings with ultimate questions. The effects of secularization are manifest in the rising generation, especially among students, intellectuals, business men, and women. The theological effects include the following:

<sup>26</sup> Shorter and Onyancha, *Secularism in Africa*, 29, 38–39, 157.

<sup>27</sup> Messi Metogo, *Dieu peut-il mourir en Afrique?* 109.

<sup>28</sup> Van den Toren, "Secularisation in Africa: A Challenge for the Churches," 7–9.

<sup>29</sup> Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 186.

a) The recourse to God when all human efforts fail.<sup>30</sup> In this context, one can observe a kind of religious relativism in that dogmatic assertions now have less influence on the lives of Christians.<sup>31</sup> At the plenary assembly of the Pontifical Council for Culture, then Cardinal Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI) said, “Secularization invades every aspect of daily life and generates the development of a mentality in which God is made absent, in part or in whole, in existence and human consciousness.”<sup>32</sup> This secularization is not only an external threat to believers. It has been evident for some that it also exists even inside the Church. “It distorts the interior and deep Christian faith, and, consequently, the lifestyle and daily behavior of believers,” Ratzinger added.<sup>33</sup>

b) The internal tension in the life of intellectuals, social elites, and public officials is another theological effect. The contribution of Karl Grebe and Wilfred Fon further illuminate this point. According to them, people who work in the public sphere are caught uncomfortably between ecclesiastical and traditional practices. Most African Christians have grown up in cultures intimately linked to the religion of their own ethnic group.<sup>34</sup> The rationale behind these practices can be described as rude but compelling. Hence, many African Christians develop a double life. They are fundamentally committed to Christianity but create dynamic equivalents to the Christian faith when they experience difficulties. They quickly return to traditional African religions because of the strong pull of their group identity. As a court without justice is ineffective, says Jean Baubérot, so the authority of religion is lost when its dogmas are questioned by people from outside or

<sup>30</sup> Messi Metogo, *Dieu peut-il mourir en Afrique?* 39.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Joseph Ratzinger (Benoit XVI), “La sécularisation des esprits,” speech given March 8, 2008, <http://www.cerclegustavethibon.hautetfort.com/archive/2008/03/10/la-secularisation-des-esprits.html> (accessed March 24, 2008).

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Karl Grebe et Wilfred Fon, *Religion traditionnelle africaine et relation d'aide* (Abidjan: CPE, 2000), 10–12.

by secularists from within its walls.<sup>35</sup> In consequence, the decline of religious practice, the crisis of vocation, and the erosion of morality are often factors leading to the decline of religious authority.

c) Emancipation from the authority of religion and God. Researchers have found that the human thirst for freedom draws people to free themselves from all forms of authority, especially from that of God whose word restricts their freedom.<sup>36</sup> According to Mark Shaves, religious authority is a social structure that seeks to impose its language to compel individuals to release control over their tangible property and other desires of their hearts. And it is precisely this religious authority against which secularized men and women seek freedom. Hence, in the right circumstances, faith in God can become obsolete.<sup>37</sup>

d) Competitive religious pluralism in Africa. Religious pluralism characterizes secularization in Africa. Steve Bruce observed the same phenomenon in the context of the West where traditional dogmas, long taken for granted, are replaced by the enthusiastic commitment of the people to a string of competitive sects.<sup>38</sup> For him, this new religious effervescence results in the decline of religion. In the face of social innovations and secular ideas, Christianity is unable to defend its intellectual credibility. In consequence, in Africa as in the West, people participate in religious institutions more out of habit than a commitment to doing the will of God.

We conclude that secularization appears at once to be both liberating and enslaving. On the one hand, it educates and awakens human beings to the possibilities to self-emancipation, highlighting their intellectual faculties and practical skills; it shows them, for example, how to master their environment. On the other

<sup>35</sup> Jean Baubérot, *Vers un nouveau pacte laïque?* (Paris: Seuil, 1988), 40.

<sup>36</sup> Ngarsouledé, "Enjeux théologiques de la sécularisation en Afrique subsaharienne," 141.

<sup>37</sup> Hans Blumenberg, cited in: Rosino Gibellini, *Panorama de la théologie au XXe siècle* (Paris: Cerf, 2004), 155.

<sup>38</sup> Steve Bruce, *Religion in Modern World: From Cathedrals to Cults* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 4.

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hand, it inspires in them a godless way of thinking about and behaving in the world. Secularity is a strong new master that relentlessly drives religion from society. The result is that soon religious feelings will have eroded in African societies as much as they have in the West.

In consideration of the above, how are we to behave, and what type of theological response should we bring to this evolution of African societies?

## Theological Response to Secularization

### *Application of the Trinitarian Model*

We have chosen to take a Trinitarian approach to the problem of secularization. The involvement of the triune God in the secular side of humanity has ethical implications to be considered. From the beginning the will of God is that human beings should live in community, in social harmony, and in accordance with his will. Individualism, religious indifference, or the privatization of religion are all deviations from the plan of the Creator. While secular kings have limited control over their people, Christianity's omnipotent and omnipresent God is present in and sovereign over his creation. He shares their lives without approving of their sins. He directs, advises, and defends their interests against the enemy and equips them with substantial provisions. In the same way, African Christians are called to be engaged in their societies without compromising their commitment to God. In effect, they are called to be in the world without being worldly.

Christianity in Africa is called to confront several challenges at the same time. This involves three things:

a) Rethinking the ways in which to communicate the Gospel in Africa in order to effectively confront the problem of secularization in a rapidly changing social context.

b) Working for the social, economic, and cultural transformation of Africa in the context of increasingly secular values.<sup>39</sup>

c) Reestablishing religious authority so that it can be effective in helping to create healthy societies and, in the process, give new meaning and value to politics.

Since the Church in Africa is called to imitate the work of Jesus Christ, it must strive to incarnate gospel truths in a secular environment.

### *Commitment of the Church*

To be more effective in the secular world, the Church should focus on two activities: Bible translation and a reassertion of theological themes relevant in the African context.

*Translation of the Bible.* Thoughtful African Christians agree with Lamin Sanneh about the need to translate the Bible into local languages, for the Bible is crucial in transforming cultures. By translating the Scriptures into local languages, the Church seeks to make the message understandable in the heart-language of readers and listeners in order to achieve a faith response. The ultimate goal of this task is to touch and transform lives in order to bring them into the kingdom of God.

Translating of the Bible into local languages, as a response to secularization, has at least two potential benefits:

a) It promotes the enculturation of the gospel in individual lives and the culture. It has the potential to reach readers at the deepest possible level, to touch the eternity that God has placed in their hearts.<sup>40</sup>

b) It allows Africans to use the word for *God* that already exists in their languages, thus making it clear that God has been with their people long before the first missionaries arrived.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second century and Modern Africa* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992), 15–18.

<sup>40</sup> Lamin Sanneh, *Encountering the West: Christianity and the Global Cultural Process; The African Dimension* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 86.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

We agree with Sanneh that contemporary churches should learn from the experience of the churches in North Africa in the centuries when Islam first appeared on the continent. Those churches completely disappeared when confronted with the challenge of the new religion. Historians often note that a strong contributing factor to the churches' demise was their lack of vernacular Bibles.

*A reassertion of relevant theological themes.* To respond to secularization, contemporary churches should carefully study local cultures and traditions in the context of modernity. By doing so they will be able to better communicate the gospel message in relevant ways to Africans.<sup>42</sup> Just as important is the need of the Church to reassert certain fundamental theological themes in order to confront secularization and remain relevant to the problems of common people. The themes that should be highlighted include the following:

a) *The immanence of God.* The promise of the constant presence of Jesus Christ with his Church appears invalid in the present condition of African people. As the feeling of God's remoteness grows, doubts inevitably arise about his relevance in modern society and life.

b) *The work of the Holy Spirit.* As the role of the Holy Spirit seems less and less relevant in human life, other voices are more readily heeded by Africans. For many, ancestral spirits seem closer and more sensitive to the plight of people than the Holy Spirit. These beliefs may result in people being completely deaf to the voice of God's Spirit.

c) *Scripture.* Given the hardships of everyday reality, people resolutely evade the authority of God in the Scriptures by accepting other authorities. Contemporary society accepts neither the uniqueness nor the literal interpretation of Scripture. Hence, the authority of Scripture fades more in hearts and consciences.

d) *Salvation.* The question of salvation in its immediate and eschatological aspects is questioned by many. This affects the foundation of faith in God and results in people identifying the

<sup>42</sup> Bediako, "Le Christianisme et l'autorité en Afrique."

pursuit of immediate material gain as a better use of time and effort.

e) *The Church as a spiritual institution.* In responding positively to the socio-economic conditions of people in need, the Church may lose its identity as the Body of Christ. When the Church is seen primarily as an institution that provides goods and services, people may follow Jesus only for the “loaves and fishes” rather than a desire to enjoy true fellowship with God.

f) *The social gospel.* Despite the danger of an overemphasis on social concerns, the Church must help to meet the needs of people or risk irrelevance. This is especially true of Africa where much of life is characterized by poverty, the migration of large numbers from rural to urban areas, violence among young people, child soldiers, street children, alcoholism, and the proliferation of incurable diseases through prostitution.

g) *Leadership.* The thirst for power and the prevailing corruption of African leaders indicates that they have not internalized Christian values. An important task of the Church, therefore, is to teach the principle of servant leadership under God. As Bediako writes, “African Christianity may have no greater political [task in] African societies than to assist in this transformation of outlook.”<sup>43</sup>

In conclusion, modernity is a mixed bag. It may mean a rise in secularization that undermines the influence and authority of religion and leads to moral disaster, but it can also mean the prevalence of education, science, technology, and a general expansion of human horizons. The great challenge of the Church in Sub-Saharan Africa today is come to grips with the new ideas and forces unleashed in the modern world in order to harness them to a Christian worldview, one that is at once life- and spirit-affirming. On this depends the fate of the continent.

<sup>43</sup> Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 142.