



Two-Part Documentary Film Series Just Released!

STORIES FROM GHANA
(77:00)

STORIES FROM ZIMBABWE
(73:30)

"The most penetrating and informative material I have ever seen on African Christianity, bringing out its vitality & variety without ever sensationalizing or exoticising."

Terence Ranger

Professor of African History, Oxford

"Striking, powerful and clarifying. . . These films pack more information & present it more tellingly than would vast areas of print."

Andrew Walls

Founder, *Journal of Religion in Africa* &
Centre for the Study of World Christianity
University of Edinburgh

"Very inspiring... and terribly informative!"

Samuel Kobia, Kenyan former General Secretary, World Council of Churches

"Magnificent and often really moving . . . I know of no comparable material that raises so many of the critical issues in contemporary African Christianity."

Philip Jenkins, Senior Fellow, Institute for Studies of Religion, Baylor University

"Essential teaching tools in African studies . . ."

Olufemi Vaughan, Professor of Africana Studies & History, Bowdoin College

ABOUT

Christianity's explosive growth in Africa was totally unexpected at the dawn of independence from colonial rule. It is part of a startling reversal in world history. Christianity is no longer the religion of the West. Over two-thirds of the world's Christians now live in the global South—with Africa growing the fastest—and all signs point to this trend continuing.

With guidance from leading scholars in the field we have been documenting the vitality and changing

nature of Christianity in Africa. We explored, among other things, the ways in which it is has become increasingly popular by becoming increasingly *African*—that is, by becoming rooted more authentically in local cultures, as Christianity has wherever it has effectively expanded. In Ghana and Zimbabwe, where we did our principal filming, we saw that this means emphasizing healing, for instance, or dancing as spiritual discipline, or addressing the multiplicity of spirits that are part and parcel of the world most Africans know.

We filmed stories that bring viewers into this world through the personal dramas of ordinary people wrestling with unmistakable, and at times gripping, human problems: for example, a young Pentecostal woman struggling to overcome bitterness toward her mother, or a teenager wracked by poverty, depression and guilt, who has been persuaded by a traditional healer that hateful relatives have placed a curse on her life. Her Methodist pastor brings in the church's "prayer group" to pray against any spiritual powers that she, and they, suspect might be at work.

Such stories are illuminated by leading thinkers on the subject, like Archbishop Peter Sarpong of the Catholic Church in Ghana, a pioneer in introducing African cultures into Christian worship, and Kwame Bediako, one of Africa's leading theologians, or Eben Nhwatiwa, a Zimbabwean theologian and bishop in the United Methodist church, and Trevor Manhanga, the Pentecostal head of Zimbabwe's Council of Churches. (The *Educational Extras* in these films' *Complete Educational Edition* carry biographical sketches and additional reflections from some of these commentators.) Filming some of our characters on routine "missions" to North America points to the impact African Christianity is having in the West, at a time when African congregations are taking over old churches in Holland, Norway and Sweden, for example, and the ten largest churches in Britain are African.

With major funding from Pew Charitable Trusts and the John Templeton Foundation, we filmed over 350 hours for this project, primarily in Ghana and Zimbabwe. In both countries we followed stories in all three kinds of churches typically found in sub-Saharan Africa today: mission-founded churches, old-style independent or "spiritual" churches, and new Pentecostal or charismatic ones. From this footage we edited roughcut portraits of each church community we filmed (also included in our *Educational Extras*). We then returned some years later to Ghana and, then, in 2011, to Zimbabwe, to see what has happened to the churches and characters originally filmed.

To read and see more, visit jamesault.com/documentaries/africa-project/

Distribution Details

The *African Christianity Rising* films are being distributed in two editions with Public Performance Rights for use in universities, theological schools and churches: an *Institutional Edition*, a 2-DVD set including both films, and a *Complete Educational Edition*, including, in addition, 20 Educational Extras running over three hours on two DVDs.

For Public Performance Rights editions, special screenings & speaking engagements, additional uses of project footage, continuing releases of project materials in video & text, and interactive discussions of the film materials and their educational uses, visit or contact us at:

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PRODUCER/DIRECTOR JAMES AULT

James Ault is an award-winning documentary filmmaker, author and scholar educated at Harvard and Brandeis (Ph.D. in Sociology). He began his career as a student of African politics and cultures, living and working in Zambia. His first film, *Born Again: Life in a Fundamentalist Baptist Church*, an intimate portrait of a Jerry-Falwell inspired church in Worcester, Massachusetts, in the 1980s, won a Blue Ribbon at the American Film Festival and was broadcast nationally on PBS, on Channel 4 in the UK, in Europe and around the world. His book about that project, *Spirit and Flesh* (Knopf 2004) was named one of the 5 best nonfiction books of the year, and called “easily the best account of the inner workings of a fundamentalist community that has ever been written” by Nicholas Wolterstorff (Yale Divinity School).

He is currently writing a book on this African Christianity film project tentatively titled *In the Feet of African Christians: Exploring Christianity’s Explosive Growth in Africa*. Its e-book edition will have links to project video embedded in its text, including dramatic stories not appearing in the films themselves, as well as additional materials on characters and communities viewers meet in them.

TESTIMONIES FROM LEADING EDUCATORS

“These two films . . . offer a remarkable degree of insight into the way the Christian faith is developing in Africa, perhaps its most critical contemporary theatre. They show the range of religious activity, tradition and innovation; but they also indicate determining conditions and prevailing directions. The representative African commentators are of the highest quality.

I have watched these films with audiences of specialist scholars, of students at various levels and of general public. In every case the effect has been striking, powerful and clarifying. These films pack more information and present it more tellingly than would vast areas of print. Their potential for good is immense.”

Andrew F. Walls, Founding Director, Centre for the Study of World Christianity, University of Edinburgh, & of the *Journal of Religion in Africa*

“Magnificent and often really moving. . . I know of no comparable material that raises so many of the critical issues in contemporary African Christianity . . . By far the most useful aspect is that all these ideas and beliefs - which Americans might find strange or off-putting - are presented by likable and intelligent interview subjects: the ideas are, in short, given human faces. I have vastly enjoyed using these films in undergraduate classes, where they evoke intense interest and stir excellent discussions. But I find it hard to think of any audience, whether professional, academic or political, that could not benefit from these superlative examples of documentary filmmaking.”

Philip Jenkins, Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of Humanities, Pennsylvania State University, & Senior Fellow, Institute for Studies of Religion, Baylor University

“Teaching how Africa's world religions intersect with indigenous belief systems pose daunting pedagogical challenges, especially in the West. Ault’s impressive documentaries effectively challenge the sensationalism notoriously persistent even among intelligent lay learners. They deftly engage the creative agency among the masses of African religious adherents in national

and transnational contexts and are essential teaching tools in African studies.”

Olufemi Vaughan, Geoffrey Canada Professor of Africana Studies & History
Director, Africana Studies Program, Bowdoin College

"It was as if the disjointed pieces of a jigsaw puzzle suddenly coalesced into a coherent picture. The video helped us to understand Africa and its people as we never had before."

Nancy Behr, a pastor who had lived in Africa about using these materials
with her local congregation in Attleboro, Massachusetts.

“These documentaries have enormous potential to educate the student world and the general public about the dramatic growth and spiritual power of Christianity in the Global South.”

Richard Elphick, Professor of History, Wesleyan University

“A striking portrait revealing a Christianity poised to renew the vitality of a faith once received from Europe and America.” _

Albert Raboteau, Professor of Religion, Princeton University