African Pentecostalism in Diaspora

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Abstract

This article is an attempt to survey the field of African immigrant Christianity so as to put the specifically Pentecostal factor in proper perspective. It points to where scholars have been, are and should be going, and who are the chief conversation partners. It examines the various discourses, arguing that reverse flow is broader than a description of Africans doing mission in the northern globe; it is better grasped from a global missiological perspective. African immigrant Christianity is beyond the religious performances of suffering communities in Europe; the discourses on modernity and globalization are useful but harbour internal contradictions; and the profiles of mega-churches are not adequate representations. We are confronted with complex matters about religious experiences and expressions catalyzed by the complex patterns of African migration and the changing character of the destinations. The question to be raised is: what is the Pentecostal dimension?

Keywords: African Pentecostalism, Diaspora, immigrant Christianity.

Like Joseph’s Multi-coloured Coat: An Overview

The literature on African immigrant religions has burgeoned in recent years reflecting a number of concerns. Some deal with the intensified pace and complex patterns of African migration catalyzed by African conditions: collapsed economies, legitimacy crises and softening of states. There are now three important moments in migration patterns: the departure, the migration route and the destination, each with a rich history and structure etched in human biographies. For instance, the nature of the departure may influence the route, the route will influence the time span of that moment, and both will shape the patterns of adjustment at the destination. Some depart voluntarily in search of education and economic resources; others are forced out by wars and untoward
circumstances. Some departures never end at the desired destinations and may terminate *en route*. In the Lingalalanguage, those who make it to the destination jubilate that they have eaten the crocodile, reflecting the bitter irony that the reverse could have happened in the crocodile infested waters. Each moment may last through years and each moment generates the nature of religious resource for coping.

African migration patterns have also been determined by external forces including changes in European immigration laws, changes in patterns created by western economic, cultural and technological trends – usually dubbed as globalization – and by increased exchanges within the continent and among the communities in the southern globe. For instance, two contradictory forces have shaped European immigration laws: the drop in birth rate and labour needs favour open immigration, while high unemployment and economic changes elicit hostility and closed doors. African migration is not always towards the northern globe but has broadened within the continent and into other parts of the global south, especially Asia, driven by the rapid expansion of Asian trade and commercial opportunities. In most cases, the presence of migrants has stimulated debates within the destinations because of the type of business which immigrants bring and because some destinations are not used to such a large presence of strangers. The size threatens the allocation and sharing of resources, and may threaten self-understanding of the cultural and racial identities of host communities. Comparatively, African migration is not the largest, but it has been recent and has grown at a fast rate. Britain attracted many African immigrants because of colonial roots. The large presence of Moroccans and North Africans in the Netherlands has no colonial explanation. In the United States, African immigrants have a very high educational level.¹ But in all cases, racism has always determined the attitude towards Africans. Ideologies have been spawned either with the myth of the curse of Ham or other spurious “scientific” data. In recent times, public discourse has politicized immigration and criminalized immigrants who are caught in the middle of the re-negotiation of the concepts of melting pot, assimilation, diversity and multiculturalism.

One dimension of the stranger’s presence that could be very visible and threatening is religion, either for being different, more enthusiastic or simply noisy. For instance, a Muslim community in western Canada

once debated the architecture of the mosque because the typical architecture jars prominently with the dominant Christian Eurocentric architecture. The community feared that high public visibility may attract hostile responses or create social and economic boundaries. It was argued that the better part of valour may borrow a leaf from Jews in Europe whose temples/synagogues are camouflaged. In many contexts, African religious groups encounter difficulties in securing worship places. Many western countries are increasingly conscious of and concerned about the impact of immigrant religions on their religious landscapes. For instance, a number of articles in a Roman Catholic journal deliberated the impact on the American Catholic landscape and concluded that:

Like Joseph’s ‘Amazing Technicolor Dream coat,’ the American Catholic church is now displaying a dazzling variety of cultural, ethnic, and racial backgrounds...There has been a huge influx of immigrants, despite the economic slowdown, which tends to discourage immigration, and more stringent restrictions in the wake of September 11, 2001. Currently, more than 34 million immigrants live in the United States, 10 million of them illegally, and a majority of them are Catholic. Immigrants make up 12 percent of the US household population... This is vastly significant for the future of the church’s ministry, within a couple of decades these ‘minorities’ will constitute the majority in the church. What is distinctive about the new arrivals is that they come mostly from non-European countries, especially from Africa, Asia, and Latin America, and bring with them languages, customs, and cultures vastly different from those of their host country. More importantly, unlike their predecessors, these immigrants intend to preserve their native traditions. While working hard to move into the economic and political mainstream, culturally and religiously refuse to be assimilated into white Anglo-Saxon cultures... The new immigrants bring with them a different brand of Catholicism and a different experience of being church.²

In western and northern Europe the impact of immigrant religion is exacerbated by the collision between intense immigrant religiosity and the decline of religion in the secularized destination lands. Immigrant religion enlarges and reshapes the religious space; thus, one does not have to travel far to encounter various religions of the world. Since many immigrants are from the global south where Christianity has grown exponentially, “Christianities” of various hues have been exported into

the global north and into Muslim and Buddhist countries of the global south.

In recent times, the debate on religion in America and Europe has become linked with state security. There is the fear that most violence in the contemporary world is related to religion. In Africa, the Middle East and Eastern Europe, religion has become linked with violence. Societies that are in transition suffer pangs of violence in the trauma of adjustment. It is as if the whole of humanity has been drawn into the vortex of violence; even the rich regions of the world are witnessing an escalating violent conflict between sect and its detractors; between religious cultures and other civilizations. The dark smokes in New York and Washington on the 11 September 2001 signalled the violent face of religion and escalated the fear of immigrants as bearers of weapons of mass destruction.3 Thus, scholars have followed the flag of state concern to study and provide the data and analyses for state policies on immigrants.

As the pundit claims, religion is like the royal high road that leads into the heart of a civilization. Immigrant religions may be ironically shoring up what secularist discourse may wish dead but which the core of the civilization still regards as a cherished ideal. Grace Davie spells this out by arguing that in the northern globe, religion has survived as a dimension of cultural heritage that is cherished and vicariously cultivated. By vicarious, says Davie, “I mean the notion of religion performed by an active minority but on behalf of a much larger number, who (implicitly at least) not only understand, but, quite clearly, approve of what the minority is doing.”4 She argues that there are effectively two religious economies in Europe: an incipient market in which voluntary membership is the norm. It is a minority’s market. The second is governed by the idea of religion as a public utility in which membership remains ascribed rather than chosen. The tendency is to opt out. The turn from obligation to con-


Consumption dovetails with liberal ideology to promote experimentations with forms of spirituality beyond formal boundaries. Quite often, civil religious forms are invented to sustain fading and contested myths.

A key area missed by Davie is the phenomenon of apocalyptic and counter-cultural religious groups in the north who are studied under the rubric of new religious movements because the word cult is now taboo. Some are fragile groups – cultural opponents who are forced to violence because of internal weakness or the opposition of the society; others are assaulted by government law and order instruments, and resort to self defence; still others are revolutionary utopian groups who initiate violence to overthrow legitimate government. There are secular apocalyptic groups (such as environmentalists and feminists) and religious apocalyptic movements, some harbouring catastrophic or pessimistic views of human beings and society while others are more progressive in linking human endeavours to the future of the world. All share a cosmic perception of life sustained by the religious factor. Two points here: the decline of religion in the West, the growth of religion in the southern globe and the increased pace of immigration are all connected and should be analysed together. Within that perspective, attention must include the search for alternative forms of spirituality in the northern globe because the quests ensure that religion survives the scorching heat of secularism, science and technology. Attention to alternative spiritualities puts the power of immigrant religions in perspective.

African immigrant religion should not be profiled as flowing in one direction, from the south to the north. It flows in multi-directions. Many African immigrants are in the continent. The literature requires greater analysis precisely because like hunters in the dank forest, scholars have followed different paths and pursued different types of animals. Some have tried to use “Diaspora” as the organizing scheme; but the word has its own history originally associated with the Jews but now fraught with imprecision. As Gerrie ter Haar observed, the word is used in three ways: to refer to the process of becoming scattered, to the actual community that has been scattered, or to the place of scattering. She should have added a crucial fourth dimension, namely, the tradition (cultural and


religious) that follows the immigrants and in the case of Israel explained
the reason for the migration of both the Abrahamic redemptive and
exilic dispersal. The fourth dimension becomes the essential connec-
tion between migration and the spreading of religion. William Safran
observed that,

> The label has been stretched to cover almost any ethnic or religious
> minority that is dispersed physically from its original homeland, regard-
> less of the conditions leading to the dispersion, and regardless of whether,
> and to what extent, physical, cultural, or emotional links exist between the
> community and the home country.7

The limitation of the word to the double relationship and dual loyalty
of the migrant does not help precisely because there are four types of
migrants: those residing en route; those residing in the new destination
as exiles who sing native choruses in foreign lands; those who believe
that they have crossed Jordan, cut off ancient ties, and burnt the wooden
frames of the xylophone; and the circulatory migrants who return to the
homeland after an exilic period.

For Africans there is another problem: does the African Diaspora
include our ebony brethren, the African Americans, the West Indians
or the Afro-Colombians in the Palenque? It is not often realized that
first, the concept of Africa Diaspora was used specifically to theorize
the impact of the slave trade or Black Atlantic; second that the histo-
rigraph on the black church among African Americans, especially
after the demise of the Negro church in the 1960s, includes a problem
as to whether to include African churches.8 Alistair Kee laconically con-

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New Directions in Theory and Research (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 15; M. Splindler,
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8. David D. Daniels, “African Immigrant Churches in the United States and the
Study of Black Church History,” In Olupona and Gemignani (eds), African Immigrant
Religions, pp. 47–60. For the debate about the purview of African Diaspora, see Isidore
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C. Johnson, Diaspora Conversions: Black Carib Religion and the Recovery of Africa
Abroad or the African Diaspora.” In Terence O. Ranger (ed.), Emerging Themes of
cluded that: “Many of these studies are simply describing immigrants, or migrants, but the use of the term ‘diasporic’ signals to the reader that here is a piece of profound social analysis by a writer who has an acute sense of academic fashion.” Beyond the challenges of the concept is the purview of the literature.

Some studies have embraced the wide gamut of African immigrant religions risking the tangled debate on cultural retention and the redolent incense of African religions in the new world. They encounter enormous challenges in researching into African indigenous religions practiced outside Africa by immigrants. They face an old village riddle: does the potency of a medicine survive the crossing of a stream, let alone a large body of water? J.K. Olupona illustrates the broad perspective in his research project on the scope, range, varieties, multi-faceted nature, inter-relationship of African immigrant religious experiences and expressions, the resources available to them, and the construction of cultural meaning, identity and social integration through religion. Equally difficult is the lack of literature on African connections with theosophic religions such Rosicrucianism, Freemasonry, Eckankar, Grail Message, Aetherius Society and such-like. There is little doubt that Africans participate in these global religions and pilgrimage to Grail Message’s Graceland in Austria. How do we access the data or name the African participation? Studies on immigrant religions must perforce include African Muslim presence in the northern and southern globes, and African presence in Israel and elsewhere. In Israel, Galia Sabar identifies quadruple marginalization: black, undocumented, Christian or Falasi and socially peripheral. Arab Christians discriminate against African Christians. The reality in the Holy Land jars prominently against the dreams of the Holy Land. In a reprise, Arabs and African American Muslims discriminate and marginalize West African Muslims in America, according to Linda Beck.


12. Linda Beck, “West African Muslims in America: When are Muslims not
Among the studies narrowed specifically on Christianity, some focus on the different strands of the African Instituted Churches (AICs) that paved the way in African immigrant Christianity because many African immigrants usually joined the denominations that are present in their home countries. In the United States, the ritualistic liturgy of the AICs that combine many indigenous elements attracted Afrocentric African Americans who preferred what they regarded as authentic African Christianity. Ordinarily, African Americans hardly attend African churches but some Africans attend black churches in search of ebony kinship, lively liturgy and in solidarity with African American pastors who engage Africa as black Josephs who have returned to rescue the brothers who sold them into slavery. The literature on AICs is uneven: more attention has been paid to the Aladura type AICs from West Africa and less attention has focused on the Roho from eastern Africa and the Zionists from southern Africa. Aurelien Makoko Gampiot provides a good vignette on the spread of Kimbanguism in Europe among students from December 1970 inspired by Charles Kisolokele, the eldest son of Simon Kimbangu who was receiving medical treatment in Switzerland.13 A number of AICs operate under the radar. Then, the irony about the Orthodox churches in Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia who claim to be the first African independent churches. Some studies on them are emerging. Fouad Ibrahim uses the Coptic Diaspora in Germany to illustrate that immigrant attitudes towards both their religion and their new home changed through time. Egyptian immigrants are rediscovering their identity through Coptic spirituality and practices in the face of a hostile social environment. Early efforts by Egyptian immigrants to assimilate failed.14 Worku Nida’s study of Orthodox churches from Ethiopia uses an ethnographic discourse on the teaching of the kidase, a traditional chant to illustrate how religion serves in the construction, maintenance and transmission of identity. In Los Angeles, the community sacrifices the purity of tradition and transforms the culture


by teaching the chant to girls because of the more compelling purpose of ensuring that the second generation youth learn the cultural ways of the homeland.\textsuperscript{15} Thus, the complexity in studying African immigrant religions is connected with the changing patterns, size and experiences of a wide range of immigrant population, and the mediating interest of scholars.

On the character of African immigrant Christianity, scholarship has focused on certain factors:

1. the import of the immigrant condition;
2. the mode of foundation;
3. the geography of religion – showing varied experiences in different parts of the world;
4. ethnicity and cultural forces such as language;
5. negotiating between confessional conservatism and adaptive transformations in the adjustment to new contexts;
6. structural dynamics (organization, power and authority, conflicts, relationship with homeland);
7. ecumenicity – relationship with destination community, with other Christians and religions in response to state policies, and rivalry and competition.

**Immigrant Christianity in Immigrant Conditions: Formation, Ethnicity and Identity**

Gerrie ter Haar’s excellent study emphasizes the import of the immigrant condition for understanding immigrant Christianity. Religion is a coping mechanism in the face of a hostile environment. She deploys van Gennep’s concept of the rites of passage: immigrants separate from the homeland, but are not aggregated into the mainstream of the new home, so they are in the liminal, transition stage. Liminality is a hazardous form of existence characterized by confusion, vulnerability, hardship and marginality. She then applies Victor Turner’s ritual theory to show how the specific rituals of an immigrant church responds to the liminal condition.\textsuperscript{16}

However, this reflection adds that it depends on why and how the immigrant left home and how the immigrant arrived at the destination.


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These determine the pattern of adjustment. Those with professional skill or with the capacity to retrain do not inhabit the slums like Biljmer in Amsterdam. The focus on the immigrant condition is useful when the scholar is attentive to the spirituality that the immigrants bring and the ways in which the exigencies of the destination intensify the primary religiosiy.

To illustrate from the Horn of Africa: the conflicts in that region produced refugees who have been officially admitted into various countries in the northern globe. Their path of entry informs the immigrant condition and adjustment strategies. For instance, the Sudanese refugees who gathered from many refugee camps to the Chicago area first formed the Lost Boys and Girls of Sudan (CALBOS) in 2002 for creating an ethnically united front and mutual aid organization. From there, they networked with others to incorporate the Ayual Community Development Association in Philadelphia aimed at providing relief in Southern Sudan. In 2006, they sent massive support to the homeland. They could do this because they are patronized by the state at federal and state levels and by philanthropists of various hues. It was a short step to organizing Christian worship. Sudanese in Wheaton and Chicago use their worship services to maintain cultural identity and to weave into a secular association that seeks to protect their people and to mobilize assistance to their homeland. Often immigrant associations perform as stateless powers, and immigrant church collaborates as in church and state relationships. But the Christianity of the Chicago Sudanese re-enacts the Christianity of the refugee camps – a theme that requires investigation. One of their leaders converted from Islam when he trekked to a refugee camp in Kenya. Many of the Christian groups from the Horn of Africa tend to replicate the denominations from their homelands. Their churches serve as means of maintaining cultural identity and raising children in the indigenous language and culture. For instance, in Minnesota, many Ethiopians are still Lutherans who have their services in Amharic while the Eritreans use Tigrinya.


Fewer studies are focused on Africans in the mainline churches. Yet many mainline churches in Africa are growing congregations in the global north. Initially, immigrants joined familiar denominations in the destination homelands. Kevin Ward’s analysis of Ugandan Christian communities in Britain is interesting because the Ugandan immigrant communities reflect the deeply contested nature of ethnic divisions in the homeland. Many join Anglican and Catholic churches because of the deep political loyalties carved by these churches in the history of Uganda. A few Ugandan priests serve both churches in Britain. For example, John Sentamu is the Archbishop of York. Later, charismatic groups emerged. Within the biwempe or the Pentecostal camp, the Baganda predominate in seven Baganda congregations in London, and one uses the Luganda vernacular. Religious affiliation is used to reinforce ethnic identity, solidarity, and to develop survival skills.

Language is an index of how a community performs adjustment but many churches gradually attract a wider audience and shift into European languages.

The foundation of mainline churches intensified in the 1990s. There are several modes of formation: some start as fellowships in somebody’s basement and may never grow beyond that level; some mature from the basement into a registered church headed by a lay pastor or a tent-making pastor; a congregation may request an official inauguration by a mainline church in Africa; or a mainline church in the north may mobilize an African group into a church. For instance, a number of Nigerian Catholic parishes exist in the United States. Some have Nigerian priests or white priests who served as missionaries in Nigeria. Occasionally, an African church may send a missionary to form a branch. These are deliberately founded by the leaders in the home base as extensions/overseas branches. An affluent congregation in Africa may sponsor an overseas branch as a mission project. But this trend may be related to the specific condition of the religious space. For instance, in Canada, South Korean and Taiwan immigrants started the trend by forming immigrant churches within mainline churches, thereby creating a receptive terrain. Reginald Bibby’s book, Restless God: The Renaissance of Religion in Canada, makes an argument for a North American exceptionality to the decline of religion in Western industrial nations. Reasons vary for the

expansion of African mainline churches: either the Africans feel marginalized in white churches, or the home churches mobilize members who could contribute to the church’s projects at home or seek the prestige of sporting international branches. For the most part, African immigrant churches are started by immigrants. Moses Biney examined the case of a Ghanaian Presbyterian church in New York that started as a prayer fellowship in 1983 and was inaugurated three years later. In another case, a Presbyterian pastor completed his education, stayed back and founded a congregation before inviting the church in the home country to bless it as a branch. In Montreal and Toronto, the Ghanaian Presbyterian churches were aided by the Presbyterian Church in Canada that paid for the resident pastors. The problem was to decide whether these were congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Canada or a congregation of the Presbyterian Church in the home country. Many African churches are opting for the latter. It is now a common sight to witness the ceremonies of dedication by senior church officials from various African countries.

To conclude this section, certain forces determine the formation and functioning of African immigrants: laicization of mainline churches in the homeland, rapid growth and scrambled ministerial formation, migration and the immigrant condition. Thus, these forces pull these churches in different directions: common socio-economic and political problems compel united responses by immigrants. However, the condition of marginality induces ethnic cohesion. The recruitment strategy that follows the warm lines of family, friends and members of one’s ethnic group or former members of one’s church in the home country creates the tendency towards the formation of ethnic/vernacular churches. A missiological ideal to evangelize the whole world motivates some congregations to reach for multiracial and multiethnic status. In Nuremberg, Germany, I was intrigued by the liturgy in the Church of Pentecost. They read the Bible in three languages, German, Twi and English because there are few members from other African nations and many of the Africans are married to German wives. Most African immigrant churches start from lay immigrants. The laicization of African Christianity that followed decolonization has come full circle. Some of the founders may later acquire theological training or request for a trained pastor to oversee the operation. Many combine pastoral work with their secular professions as tent-makers. Indeed, the Christ Embassy (Port Harcourt, Nigeria) insists

that all pastors in the international sector must earn their wages through secular employment. This reduces friction over financial matters, cuts operational costs and enables the congregations to expand their facilities faster. Lay power encourages rapid expansion. A few establish international and regional offices that oversee the international operations and post pastors to congregations. Centralization intensifies virulent church politics, nepotism, abuse and conflict. Thus, conflicts arise between the “overseas branches” and the home churches because of power, authority and control or because immigrant churches tend to be more charismatic and adaptive.

The Pentecostal Dimension in African Immigrant Christianity

An overview of the African immigrant religious landscape is useful for a proper perspective on specifically Pentecostal immigrant churches. They share many of the same characteristics. Most studies on African immigrant churches focus on charismatic Pentecostal churches because they are regarded as the largest and influence the spirituality of mainline churches. For instance, in the Lilly Foundation endowed study of African American churches, it was shown that in 2000 there were 40 African congregations in Chicago: 21 Pentecostals; nine AICs; and six mainline denominations. On the national origins of the congregations: 16 Nigerian, nine Ghanaian, one Senegalese, one Ethiopian and one Eritrean. In the last decade the numbers have increased, although many are not documented and many more remain in the basements of homes as weekend prayer fellowships. The reasons for the larger Pentecostal presence are that they are easier to form without the burden of formality, official permission and trained leadership. The evangelical impulse in Pentecostalism ensures that leaders are very motivated and encourage immigrant members to form churches. Such members have been socialized in evangelism and leadership roles. Intrinsically, immigrant Pentecostals have a higher tendency to form a church because the migration process from the preparation, search for visa, travel, arrival and adjustment are choreographed by the prayerful support of the home church and pastor.23 Many pilgrimage to prayer camps before setting out into the unknown. The evangelical, entrepreneurial socialization is so strong that some switch churches so as

to regain leadership roles. It also causes schisms as some split to form new churches where they can lead.

Pentecostal studies have tended to be dominated by certain discourses: modernity and globalization, reverse flow and religion as a survival kit. Some examine the connection between migration, modernity and globalization. Others profile the immigrant churches as engaged in the process of reverse flow. But critics question whether the churches are engaged in mission to the world or just to themselves. For instance, a recent survey of one hundred Nigerian churches in South Africa shows that only ten percent of the members are South Africans and another ten percent of the members are from other African nations. Other studies profile mega-churches such as the Church of Pentecost from Ghana, the Redeemed Christian Church of God from Nigeria and successful European churches such as Kingsway International, London, and Embassy of the Blessed Kingdom of God in Ukraine. Thus, there is an imbalance in the regional coverage biased narrowly towards West Africa, and a tendency to essentialize and narrow the focus on the character and import of religious practices for immigrant communities. Ghanaian immigrant communities have had more than their fair share of scrutiny while little attention is paid to Zambia, Zimbabwe and Democratic Republic of Congo that have powerful pastors with international visibility. This raises the question whether the immigrant churches are studied as ethnic churches in foreign sites, a veritable image of oil on water, or as a part of the new religious landscape of European Christianity, a landscape consisting of local worship communities that promote civic engagement, build social capital, provide social services and define the broader religious landscape. Little attention is paid to their belief, doctrine, theology, polity and ethics. It is not often realized that African Pentecostalism is a movement with many types and all these varieties are reproduced in the Diaspora: evangelical, prosperity, healing and deliverance, miracle and wonders, teaching and doctrinal emphasis, witchcraft eradication, support-ministries, social service/NGO type, house fellowships and parachurch groups.

Dominant Discourses:
Globalization, Migration and Reverse Flow

Most studies focus on the last three decades and lack attention to the long view about African religious presence in the north partially because the explosion of charismatic and Pentecostal movements attracted attention to the phenomenon of Christianity and African migrant labour in the northern globe. This presence intensified from the 1980s characterized by the emergence of a new generation of leaders that was more educated and enjoyed increased contacts with worldwide Pentecostalism through outreach, leadership training programs and the media. Naturally, scholarship has focused on contemporary African Pentecostalism, which could be studied with discourses such as modernity, externality and globalization. Globalization and immigration are linked as forces that generate the immigrant population precisely because the dark side of economic globalization created the economic and social justice problems that drive people into the migration route. The wealth of the northern globe created by the new economic order obeys the law of osmosis by attracting migration from the predated and collapsed economies burdened by foreign debt. Globalization determines the conditions that create emigration, the direction of migration and the conditions of immigration. The challenges of adjustment to various types of modernities shape the concerns and contents of immigrant theology and the forms of religious expression by immigrant communities. Global technology provides the instrument of evangelization. A study of cost-intensive media use by Pentecostal churches illustrates this. This is why scholars rush to the upscale Christianity of mega-churches for the data profiling globalized Christianities.

But this raises two issues: the first is the ambiguous attitude to modernity among immigrant Africans and the second is that modernity and globalization discourses reinforce the instrumentalist discourse in the study of immigrant Pentecostalism. It intrigues Europeans that a majority of Africans are drawn to enthusiastic religion instead of adapting to secular western ways. Africans engage in modern environments and operate the tools of modernity and yet harbour anti-modernist religious impulses, beliefs, symbols and practices. Immigrants still hold to the spiritual worldviews of the primal cultures and find the charismatic churches as attentive to their deeply-felt needs. Many itinerant evangelists travel round the globe to perform deliverance rites for African immigrants. Such powerful prayers are supposed to open the gates of “hard” nations for the benefit of the immigrants. As an immigrant prayer puts it: “We did not come here for work because there is much work at home. We came for money and
resources to improve our lot. So we pray for the doors and gates to open.” Powerful healers and prayer warriors attract large numbers of votaries. The liturgy feels like home and buttresses the spiritual dimension. Deliverance vigils solve witchcraft and sorcery problems. A full day of worship reconnects an individual to the spirit of the human community that exists in the homeland. Members do not complain that the church service might be too hot or last too long. Rather, the sense of community, hospitality and the recovery of the pneumatic resources of the gospel energize the engagement of modernity.

Many scholars deploy the instrumentalist discourse by emphasizing the functions of the religious groups to a population in transition. It is argued that these religious communities cater to the African psyche that is deeply religious; that these churches provide a home away from home, buttress identity, empower immigrants, provide coping mechanism, social network, security, employment, legal and financial aids, many social services and counselling on how to engage the new society with success. Churches in the United Kingdom are more likely to become involved in social services in their neighbourhoods than those in Europe where there is a “system” that is supposed to work on its own efficiency. The capacity to provide these services serves as the attraction, recruitment and encapsulation strategy. People are attracted to big organizations because of their capacity to shield the individual against the hostile winds in a strange land.

However, the scholarship on a few mega-churches as indicative of the character of contemporary reverse flow runs the risk of missing the depth and nuance of the situation. Many immigrant charismatic churches struggle with few numbers of an inconsistent membership made of people who work shifts at their low paid jobs. Stories abound among frustrated pastors whose members sometimes deny the congregation the use of the electronic keyboard because they had to go to work! Many lack the resources to survive and the mortality rate is high because of membership instability, scarcity of funds, restrictions on worship places, public regulations, fragility and schisms, and hostile attitudes by hosts. Clergy malpractice aided the discomfort of many – greed, financial scandals, sexual scandals and fakery. Some fakes posed as pastors to engage in drug dealing.

State laws are important in Africa and elsewhere. For instance, when Soviet Russia dissolved, it was common to report a harvest of souls and many Pentecostals rushed in. But in 1997, under the pressure from the Orthodox Church, the Russian Law of Religion mounted restrictions against foreign missionaries and proselytization. The current debate about citizenship in both Britain and the European Union will be significant for immigrant African Pentecostals. In Sweden for instance, the African
churches are joined by other immigrants because of restrictive state policies which are not publicly articulated in an environment that pretends to create open spaces understood as conducive, free environments where different social and religious groups can operate without hindrance. The geography of religion is crucial because as one moves into northern and eastern Europe, state restrictions against African immigrant Christianity increase. Simon Coleman examines the hostility of the socio-political terrain in Sweden to Pentecostalism irrespective of colour, for instance, the negative attitude towards the Word of Life ministry led by Ulf Ekman.26

Ironically, state policies have engendered ecumenism, a scarce commodity amidst rabid competition. The relationship between African migrants and West Indian churches that became an identifiable feature in the United Kingdom from the 1950s has not been fully examined. Between 1997 and 1999, six conferences were held on the burgeoning African churches in Europe, estimated at three million in 1999. In all the gatherings, participants deliberated on the high level of marginality and racism suffered by African and Caribbean congregations in European Union member countries. State policies have forced African and Caribbean Christians together. It led to a meeting of African Christian leaders from five European countries at Notre Dame de Justice, Rhode Saint Genese, Belgium, on 5th December 1999 where they formed the protective umbrella, Council of African Christian Communities in Europe, a pressure group and strategic partnership of vulnerable immigrant churches. It needs to be added that even within Africa restrictions exist, as in South Africa where immigrants are resented. In Cameroon, the state regulations are rigid because many of the Pentecostal churches are Nigerian.27 Thus, a danger lurks within the thick descriptions of the successful few because they hide larger questions about the impact on receiving contexts or host perceptions. The thick reconstruction of their success may avoid the fact that the hosts consider them as exotic and may be hostile.

Attention must also be paid to efforts by churches in the destination to understand and co-operate with immigrant churches. Ursula Harfst has reported on the “Program for Cooperation between German and Foreign Language Churches” started by the United Evangelical Mission especially in the Rhein-Ruhr-Region, where 190 of the 431 immigrant churches

27. Robert Mbe Akoko, Ask and you shall be given: Pentecostalism and the Economic Crisis in Cameroon (Leiden: African Studies Centre, University of Leiden, 2007).
are African. Similarly, Alle G. Hoekema reports that though immigrant churches suffer a quadruple jeopardy in the Netherlands – accommodation, language, racism, visa and economic hardship – a network with the acronym SKIN (Samen Kerke in Nederland) endeavours to mobilize the immigrant churches for greater interface with the host society, including theological training for the leaders.  

The concept of reverse flow should be re-examined. As a process of reverse flow, have these churches succeeded in attracting a wider band of the population outside their ethnic and national bases? For instance, the Redeemed Christian Church of God is as predominantly Yoruba as the Church of Pentecost is Twi. In Toronto, Canada, the Church of Pentecost has two branches: the larger one is Twi while the smaller branch has some non-Ghanaians. All the other branches in Ottawa, Montreal, Hamilton and Victoria are predominantly Ghanaian. Samuel Adelaja’s Embassy of the Blessed Kingdom of God in Kiev is not an African immigrant church. But his zeal to evangelize Eastern Europe springs from the interior of African Pentecostalism. The history of reverse flow shows that it started within the mainline churches in Africa as a part of the larger question of indigenization and the capacity of African Christians to fulfil their own share of the gospel’s mandate. The debate soon flowed into the call for moratorium, and the first efforts by the Lutheran World Federation to send African missionaries to Germany. The experiment showed that if there could be a reverse flow, Africans must develop the theology, the missionary logistics, funding and show the guts to endure hardship. The question is whether these prerequisites have been fulfilled.  

Many Pentecostal churches exhibit a high sense of cross-cultural mission arguing that even if the natives do not patronize the church, the Word of God is being proclaimed on the land and spoken into the atmosphere in obedience to the mandate on global mission. A number of Pentecostal churches are strongly motivated with heavenly visions that say that God has a purpose for the continent in the end-times and has given Africans the mandate to evangelize Europe where secularism has drained the spiritual vitality, and to go into some parts of Africa and the southern globe where dryness and resistance pervade. The Intercessors for Africa are very strong on the prophecies on the continent. It features in the

28. See articles in Adogame, Gerloff and Hock (eds), Christianity in Africa.
29. See his own account, Sunday Adelaja, Church Shift (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2008).
writings of many African Pentecostal pastors. Hanciles draws a distinction between forming a church as self-preservation and as self expansion by using the deliberate expansion of the Church of Pentecost into Australia, one of the most secularized nations of the world, as an example. The church sent a pastor to reconnoitre the terrain in 1998, but soon Revd Kwesi Ansah established two congregations in Sydney and Melbourne; this mission grew seven churches in the next two years.\textsuperscript{31} Like of old, the evangelists have followed the commercial routes. In Asia, some Africans who graduated from the Haggai Institute stayed back in Malaysia encouraged by entrepreneurial Chinese merchants to establish churches in predominantly Muslim states. Some churches have created international missionary structures in the polity and like the old missionary enterprise guide the operation from the home base. Others, like the faith missions of old jump into the affray without logistic support. Meanwhile, structured ministerial formation has collapsed – which was never strong in the nineteenth century. The burgeoning size, lack of control, the din of many voices and styles create the atmosphere of confusion. But it has always been so whenever the missionary impulse was strong.

Reverse flow is choreographed by the activities of itinerant evangelists. A large number of ministers from Africa visit the northern globe as itinerant evangelists. Some visiting pastors minister to African churches and house fellowships, a feature of immigrant Christianity that has burgeoned. Many Africans belong to house prayer fellowships held on Saturdays without competing with allegiance to churches. Some meet in private homes, and others are hosted in church buildings. For instance, in Edinburgh, the African-Caribbean Christian Fellowship is hosted on Saturday evenings by an Elim Pentecostal church. Many African visiting evangelists share pulpits in African American churches; still others hold special programs in white churches or networks of churches. They would, in return, give their pulpits to the foreigners who hosted them. Pulpit sharing has enabled a wide variety of ministries to do cross-cultural mission and has enabled African American ministries to engage in the evangelization of the motherland. Some African pastors have regular itineraries garnished with prescribed seasonal schedules as if these are preaching outposts for the home church. Others visit occasionally whenever a ministration can be organized. One means of tracing this phenomenon is to peruse the announcements and glossy photographs in the American magazine \textit{Charisma}.

Evidence abounds in Miller and Yamamori’s *Global Pentecostalism* that Pentecostals are now bearing the brunt of holistic mission, providing social services and giving hope to the hopeless. Miller and Yamamori dubbed these as “progressive Pentecostals” as opposed to the “soft” Pentecostalism of the prosperity gospel preachers. Miller, a sociologist, collaborated with Yamamori, the director of Bread for the Hungry International, an NGO, in documenting the activities of Pentecostals in twenty countries. The goal was to study an emergent dimension of Pentecostalism, the growing worldwide importance of “Progressive Pentecostals” who have active social ministries and are inspired by Christ and the Holy Spirit to engage in holistic mission. The arguments are that Pentecostalism is a broad movement; not all engage in ecstatic, other-worldly prosperity-focused spirituality; not all are lower class, marginalized people and that social involvement is built on a certain way of reading the Bible. Pentecostalism has changed character in every decade and currently social activism has grown from the upward mobility of the membership of the movement or influenced by evangelicals and international networks. The study is attentive to Pentecostals outside the Western world and the argument here is that the shift in the global south informs their worldwide ministry. In all parts of the world Pentecostals have become sensitive to creating an alternative social reality. This study counters many stereotypes arguing that beyond the lively liturgy, prosperity gospel and mass mediation, Pentecostals respond to indigenous worldviews, urban and rural cultures, especially life at the grassroots confronted by the harsh realities of daily living. The study focuses on indigenous, fast-growing ministries, located in the developing world, and having active social programs that address the needs of the larger communities beyond their members. These hold the cutting edge and initiate the most innovative social programs worldwide. The purview of Pentecostal social ministry includes humanitarian, personal crisis, community development and social transformation interventions. The book canvasses eight dimensions: mercy ministries, emergency services, education, counselling, medical support, economic development, arts (music, dance and art work) and advocacy for policy change. The level of engagement depends on the size of the congregation, the resource base and the capacity to partner with others especially the NGOs. Few engaged in direct political action

but created alternative institutions that grow a new crop of civic, business and educational leaders. Wisdom Tettey’s study of All Nations Full Gospel Church, Toronto, illustrates the same phenomenon with the examples of All Nations International Development Agency (NIDA) and Neighborhood Outreach and Help (NOAH) program.\(^{33}\)

The immigrant churches in England make the extra effort to be seen as social service centres. The moral system among the born-again Christians helps the new migrant to be frugal, hardworking, focused, internalize the Western value system, and to eschew wasteful lifestyles. As moral havens, immigrant churches have economic, ethical and social implications. Pastors stand between the immigrant and the police and, therefore, these churches help the immigrant to be law-abiding. In some cities, security officers recognize its potential and deliberately forge relationships with churches. The psychological refitting of the individual personality within the western context is a major aspect of the tasks of an immigrant church. This explains why some churches package their infrastructures to resemble corporate structures and deliberately refer to themselves as “connections” because they connect people to God, to other people and to coping resources. As Rijk van Dijk says of the Dutch context:

At the level of externally oriented relations, Pentecostal leaders both in Ghana and in the Netherlands tend to act as brokers. They link information and interaction flows between different cultural contexts, and they fulfil an intermediary role between their networks and the larger society. They alleviate and accommodate some of the adverse effects of strangerhood.\(^{34}\)

Immigrants perceive these churches as cultural refuge where they can transmit their indigenous cultures and values to their children and thereby deal with the trauma of rearing children in the Western culture whose values clash prominently with the indigenous values of the immigrants. Cultural clashes have the strongest impact on the structure of the family: work, money, sex, child rearing and authority patterns become contested grounds. Thus, pastors are compelled to intervene in marital problems by posing as “family heads.” Immigrant communities are particularly fractious under the weight of new values, the stress of the new political

economy, and the burden of their own old, village values. Marriages flounder and bitter divorces ensue because Western anti-patriarchal norms about sexuality jar prominently against the African patriarchal systems. This has increased with the feminization of Diaspora.35

GATE: Some Conclusions

We end at the GATE, the acronym of an association in the Netherlands, Gifts of Africa To Europe. This association mobilizes African immigrant churches that represent the contemporary gift of Africa to various parts of the world. The volume and variety of cross-cultural mission among African Pentecostals have become increasingly extensive. In Pentecostal rhetoric, many pastors reclaim the mandate to a holistic range of mission that includes the re-evangelization of the Jerusalem homeland, the aggressive expansion into the Judea represented by other African countries, into the Samaria of the global south and cross-cultural evangelization of the northern globe. This intensive concentric pattern of expansion is a sign of maturity with a tinge of nationalism as well as obedience to the gospel mandate. Reverse flow is a postcolonial critique. The cry goes beyond the black manifest destiny to evangelize Africa to the ultimate mandate to rescue the global north where Christianity is declining, re-evangelize Africa and engage other transnational contexts in the global south. For some churches, engaging the outside world enhances prestige and makes the church an international organization like the “Anglican Communion” or the universal Catholic Church. The quest for an international character and for external linkages could be interpreted as signs of modernity and globalization. But these are moot points precisely because the immigrants are already immersed in modernity and are ambiguously crying for pre-modern forms of worship. Some churches fund large projects in the homeland through funds raised from outside. There is a connection between money and power in religious local/global links. Some of the pastors support themselves through the goodwill of African immigrants who benefited from their ministrations, and so they could boast, like Paul, that they labour for Christ without salary from their churches! Pentecostal remittances through tithes and offerings function under the divine mandate to succour those who feed one with the Word of God. The Pentecostal immigrant feels a weight of obligation to support the

brethren who are on the evangelical war front at home. Some surmise that God brought them out of Africa for this purpose.

What are the implications for global mission in the twenty-first century? At one level, the old missionary era has ended and a new phase started. New faces have emerged and the prophecy about a blessed reflex has been fulfilled. The true meaning of reverse flow is the recognition that the Great Command is a mandate to all believers individually and corporately. Each is called, each is sent. As Andrew Walls put it,

Christian faith is now more diffused than at any previous time in its history; not only in the sense that it is more geographically, ethnically and culturally widespread than ever before, but in the sense that it is diffused within more communities. The territorial ‘from-to’ idea that underlay the older missionary movement has to give way to a concept much more like that of Christians within the Roman Empire in the second and third centuries; parallel presences in different circles and at different levels, each seeking to penetrate within and beyond its circle.36

At a second level, argues Roswith Gerloff, this development of a trans-cultural, transnational and polycentric pattern of Christianity poses a challenge to the traditional, often ethnocentric and monocultural ways of doing theology, of being church and of doing mission.37 The implication is that the paradigm shift has impact on both the global south and north. The north needs the humility to reassess its role and methods, to probe the true forms of partnership as shown by Pentecostals who share pulpits and reshape missionary presence into learning encounters like non-governmental organizations engaged in rural development. The gospel is never planted but given and received in dialogue. The continuous spread of a religion that relies on the Holy Spirit must perforce transform the Christianity of new immigrant destinations. But the global south must avoid hubris because the old problems of mission still require answers. The surge of youthful short-term mission from the global north is a healthy sign because it reinforces a similar form of mission from the south through mutual engagement. Short-term mission is reshaping the character of contemporary mission by privileging social activism and social capital.

In October 2006, I taught a course on missiology to 20 Korean pastors in Seoul. One of the pastors observed that doing cross-cultural mission invigorates his congregation and causes growth. But when I probed these active

missionary-sending pastors more about their problems, a catalogue rolled out resonating with the problems in the nineteenth century enterprises: rivalry and competition, problems related to funding, care of personnel, over-emphasis on quantity, numbers and size, imitation of models crafted by Western agencies, administrative and logistic problems, poor conflict resolution facilities and inability to create innovative strategies. Someone drew attention to the need to recover the Kingdom of God vision and model – which sounded like Roland Allen's cry in 1912! This encounter was significant because the African practice of reverse flow has to be attentive to the pitfalls in the old missionary movement from the global north. Finally, even if the Africans focus on the growing immigrant population, they are still engaged in mission in lands where they have never been before and some of whom sent missionaries to Africa. A key component of mission is the recovery of territory and lands for God. This is the character of reverse flow – reverse flow is not cross-cultural mission directed to the northern globe but the capacity to participate in mission showing that we are all one body and that the monopoly of evangelization was not restricted to one group of people. Pentecostalism has an inbuilt zeal for evangelism and mission, and this explains its rapid spread worldwide.

References

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