### MISSION, MIGRATION AND WORLD CHRISTIANITY: AN EVALUATION OF THE MISSION STRATEGY OF THE CHURCH OF PENTECOST IN THE DIASPORA

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Key words: Migration, mission, diaspora, chaplaincy-mission, reverse mission

Introduction

In January this year (2016), I received a kind invitation from the Chairman of the Church of Pentecost to speak at a conference of the Pastors and Leaders of the Pentecost International Worship Centres (PIWC) from Ghana and other parts of the world where the church operates. My topic was, "The Clash of Cultures within the Church of Pentecost in the Western World." This conference was the first of its kind in the history of the church and brought together over one thousand delegates. I was particularly interested in this topic for a number of reasons: first, the subject falls within the field of my own academic research and teaching; and second, I have been personally concerned about how the African church is making a global contribution in cross-cultural mission.

Much has been said in recent times about the numerical growth of the Church in Africa and its sense of mission and contribution to global mission and Christian theology. Church historians and scholars such as Andrew Walls and Philip Jenkins have impressed upon us the anticipated transformative impact of the church from the southern continents, whilst others such as Paul Gifford have offered a rather pessimistic view of the impact, particularly in reference to church planting in the Western world. African scholars such as Kwame Bediako, Ogbu Kalu and Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu have added their voices regarding the nature and significant growth of the African churches both at home and abroad. However, a lot remains to be studied about the self-understanding of these African churches and how they participate in global Christian mission. It is in this light that this article seeks to make a contribution. This paper is in part the result of about ten years of study, looking at the Church of Pentecost and the Lighthouse Chapel International, both of which have branches

around the world. The Church of Pentecost (CoP) will serve as the case study for this present article.

Philip Jenkins, in his book, The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity (2002) brought our attention to the fact that by the year 2050, the center of gravity of Christianity will have shifted firmly to the Southern continents of Asia, Latin America, and Africa. In Africa alone, the number of Christians increased from 10 million in 1910,2 to 350 million in the year 2000.3 According to Jenkins, the most striking feature of the rapid-growing churches in the global South is that they are far more traditional, morally conservative, evangelical and apocalyptic than their northern counterparts.4

These religious values are firmly rooted in the primal imagination of the people, and Christianity serves as a ritual space and framework to deal with their moral, ethical and spiritual concerns. Among many pentecostals, the Bible is not just a repository of religious values or a moral code but is also an interpretive guide to the seen and unseen world. Their faith is characterized by puritanism, belief in prophesy, faith healing, deliverance, exorcism, and dream-visions.5 It is without doubt that Pentecostalism broadly epitomizes these characteristics, and its missionary drive has been noted by Harvey Cox.6 This present paper reflects within this backdrop of global Christian history and is informed by the predictions of Andrew Walls and Philip Jenkins as well as the reflections of Jehu Hanciles.

## Migration and African Churches in the Diaspora

It can be noted that migration and Christian mission have often gone together with church planting, with sometimes the latter becoming the unintended consequence of the former. This was very much the case in early Christian history as persecuted Jewish Christians in Jerusalem fled to neighbouring communities of Samaria and later to Asia Minor outside of Palestine. These persecuted Christians moved not only with their families and limited possessions but also carried their faith and culture with them. Thus Walls reiterates,

It is easy enough to point to historical situations where migration forwarded the spread of the faith. It is clear that the earliest spread of the faith beyond Jewish Palestine owed much to prior Jewish migration across

the Mediterranean world, as well as into Mesopotamia and beyond. The Jewish communities in the diaspora provided the networks by which the message about Jesus spread.7

Philip and others evangelized in the region of Judea and Samaria, and Philip and others evangelized in the Christ (Acts 8). Many centuries later, many people came to faith in Christ (Acts 8). Many centuries later, many people came to rain in Children of the early 17th century, the English Puritans and Pilgrim Fathers of Kings Is who fled to North America during the reigns of Kings James and who hed to North America duling Charles, established colonies in the New World where they could live and practice their faith in the peace and security of the new nation.

However, persecution and migration don't always signal a certain advance of the faith. Andrew Walls rightly observes that migration stands for both disaster and promise, and for this reason, it both favours and hinders Christian mission.8 Walls comes to this conclusion by looking at the history of migration and the spread of Christianity in the first-century Palestine and the movement of the faith across Europe from the fourth century onward. In some cases, migration crushed. overwhelmed, or expelled well-established Christian communities. such as the various Celtic expressions that were repeatedly devastated during successive invasions of Britain. The arrival of Muslim Arabs into Europe also carried significant challenges. Still, the spread of Christianity across the world owes as much to migration, either voluntarily or by persecution, as it does to direct missionary efforts.

In modern times, we observe that the forces of globalization have hastened the spread of ideas and cultures, and have also facilitated the movement of people and material resources. In all of this movement African Christians have admired not only the economy and culture of their colonial masters but have also sought, with pride, to identify with them and their civilization. Africans who travel to Western countries such as England, Germany, Italy, Holland, Belgium and the United States of America return home to be seen as first-class citizens, irrespective of how they went or what they did in those countries.

Why have so many of our brothers and sisters travelled abroad? The forces of migration to the West are actually threefold: 1) The harsh economic conditions in Africa, caused in part by economic mismanagement and murical actually three rolu. mismanagement and myriad military coups, have forced many

individuals and families to seek political asylum in the West. 2) Others went on their own accord, aided by their sacrificial families who pulled resources together to sponsor such trips in the hope of economic gains. 3) A significant number of African students, sponsored by themselves, their governments, or their families, studied abroad and decided to stay after earning their degrees.

These groups by and large constitute the communities of modern African migrants. (Many years earlier, of course, were those who were carried away as slaves over the course of several centuries to work the plantations across the Atlantic). As in the case of the early Christians in Jerusalem who were widely dispersed, these three groups of African migrants also carried their faith, culture, and church with them when they travelled across the continents. Thus Hanciles observes that whilst in the past,

unprecedented European migrations from Christianity's old heartland provided the impetus for the European missionary movement, phenomenal migrations from Christianity's new heartlands in Africa, Latin America and Asia have galvanized a massive non-Western missionary movement.9

It is in this experience that one may analyse the African contribution to global Christian mission.

## A Brief History of Christianity in Ghana

The history of Christianity in Africa, south of the Sahara, might be dated to the latter part of the 15th century, but it was not until the middle of the 19th century that Protestant mission took off following David Livingstone's exploration of the continent, and his so-called "discovery" of the source of the River Nile. His exploration opened the way into Africa not only for merchants but also for missionaries who went to the hinterlands of East, Central, and West Africa to spread

Sub-Saharan African Christianity has a character of its own. The coming of the many and diverse Christian denominations from the West meant that we have not only inherited the nature and character of their mother churches and sending agencies but their divisions and quarrels as well. In Ghana, the Roman Catholic Church was the first missionary group, followed by the Presbyterians (from both Basel and Bremen missions in Switzerland and Germany respectively) and then the Methodist and Anglican churches from England. These constitute the traditional mainline churches, sometimes also referred

These traditional mission churches have played a significant role in Ghana, not only in the planting of churches but also in the provision of schools, hospitals, and numerous social services. Other traditional mission churches include Baptists, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AME Zion), and the Lutheran church.

The early part of the 20th century saw the rise and development of a different expression of Christianity. This time the missionaries and early church planters were African prophets such as William Wade Harris of Liberia, Josiah Olunowo Ositelu of Nigeria, Simon Kimbangu of East Africa and Isaiah Shembe of South Africa. Their African-initiated churches (AICs) did not receive much academic attention until the 1960s, when scholars such as Brengt Sundkler, Christian Baeta, David Barrett, John Taylor and Harold Turner published their maiden research works. 10 Although the nomenclature of the African-initiated churches had remained problematic, it was obvious that their mission had profound impact on the religious landscape in Africa. What is most significant of the AICs is that they were not only protest voices to the established mainline or historic churches but they were leaders in the engagement with the African worldview in the light of scripture and traditional culture.11

Classical Pentecostalism in Ghana arose in the 1930s. Events in America, following the Azusa Street Revival, produced what came to be known as the "classical Pentecostal movement." This was enhanced by a similar revival in Wales, which triggered revivals in several other countries and led to the formation of the Apostolic and Elim Pentecostal churches in Great Britain. It was the Apostolic and Elim churches which largely provided the foundation and selfunderstanding of the Church of Pentecost.

The Charismatic movement burst on the scene in the 1970s, and it produced a stream of new churches in Ghana. Significant among them, though not exhaustive, are the Christian Action Faith Ministry

(now Action Chapel International), The International Central Gospel Church, Victory Bible Church International, the Word Miracle Church (now Perez Chapel International), Lighthouse Chapel International, the House of Faith Church in Kumasi, and the Fountain Gate Chapel in Tamale. By the close of the 1990s, many of the Ghanaian-initiated churches, as well as congregations of some of the mainline churches, were beginning to plant their own mission churches in the diaspora.

#### The Church of Pentecost in Retrospect

The Church of Pentecost (CoP) was founded in 1962 in Ghana by an Irish Missionary, Pastor James McKeown but the history of the Church may be traced back to 1937, when McKeown first arrived in Ghana (then the Gold Coast), as a resident missionary of the Apostolic Church of Bradford, UK. McKeown's mission was at the invitation of the Faith Tabernacle Church, led by Peter Newman Anim. However, the McKeown-Anim partnership did not survive long as a result of theological differences on the subject of faith healing. A further misunderstanding, this time between McKeown and the Apostolic Church headquarters in Bradford, led to McKeown's dismissal from the Apostolic mission. In 1962, McKeown and a group faithful to his cause came together to form the Church of Pentecost. 13

The uniqueness of the CoP is in the missionary approach that James McKeown adopted. This may be best explained in the model of the "three-selfs" as coined by Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson.14 McKeown developed a strong concept of indigenisation, leadership development, and capacity building at the grassroots level with a strong emphasis on prayer, self-discipline, holiness, and evangelism. Members of the church were, from the very beginning, taught to be faithful in sacrificing their time and resources to advance the course of the ministry. The indigenisation principle also meant that the church took the local context seriously and developed forms of worship and liturgy that resonated with the cultural and religious orientations of the people. This included the use of the local language, local musical instruments, and singing, clapping and dancing to local choruses.

Whilst McKeown provided the spiritual impetus and leadership for the church, it was David Mills, the Elim missionary working in partnership with McKeown, who, to a large extent, established the theological foundation for the church's mission and self-understanding as he introduced the first training school to equip the pastors for ministry. By the time James McKeown retired from active service and returned

home to Northern Ireland in 1984, the CoP had been established in a number of African countries, including Cote d'Ivoire, Togo, Benin, Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone, Benin, Nigeria, and Liberia.

The CoP now operates in 90 nations around the world (including Ghana), and, as of December 2015, had more than two and a half million members (2,612, 618) in Ghana alone and nearly a quarter million members (243,534) in all the outside branches.

# The Church of Pentecost Missions in the Diaspora:

Many of the branches of the CoP are in Western nations. Notable among them are the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (USA). The total membership of the church in the UK as of December 2011 was 11,195 and this increased to 14, 203 in 2014, and now stands at 15,555.15

Apart from the UK branches embarking on rigorous evangelism, the steady growth of the numbers of the church in the UK can also be attributed to the mass migration of Ghanaians from the Netherlands and Italy to Britain in the last seven or eight years after the European Union (EU) opened its borders. Many Ghanaian migrants in the Schengen states, who had received permanent residence, saw the move to the UK as an opportunity for their children to receive education in English, which would then ease their integration back to Ghana. However, this migration to the UK produced its own problems. For example, children born, raised, and enculturated in other European countries had to be integrated into new communities in Britain. This struggle brought a lot of tension between parents and children, and in some cases, a number of teenagers turned their backs on the church and their families, preferring to live their own independent lives.

The CoP in the USA recorded a total membership of 18,558, in the year 2011. About a third of this c year 2011. About a third of this figure (4,660) represented children below the age of thirteen, whilst 437 out of the 799 converts were baptised in water and received into church membership.

The total membership of the church in USA increased to 23,540 in 2014 with 5,965 representing children below the age of thirteen. In the same year 727 out of the total of 1,121 converts were baptised and received into membership. These figures suggest that much of the increase of the church membership is biological in the sense that members' children tend to stay in the church, whilst many of the new converts do not become members.

Within Ghana, the internal mission strategy of the CoP focuses on specific communities within a town or city. Community churches are planted and run by a group of Elders and Deaconesses who constitute a Presbytery. The Presiding Elder assumes the role of the local pastor, and a District Pastor serves as a Superintendent Minister over a number of congregations or "local assemblies." A district pastor can have from five to twenty-five local assemblies or congregations across a particular town or city.

This system has largely been replicated in the church's mission abroad but has not always been successful. This is partly because the span of certain church districts, particularly in the USA and Canada, is so vast that district pastors have a difficult time providing meaningful pastoral care to congregations that are so scattered. For example, the distance covered by a district pastor in Ghana between congregations may be no more than 5 kilometres whereas that covered by a district pastor in the USA may be more than 100 kilometres, thus making pastoral responsibilities a very daunting task.

Unlike early Protestant missionaries from Europe and America who came on a cross-cultural mission to reach the indigenous population, the African story is quite different. The focus is not on the indigenous culture but the home culture of the Africans. This may be described as the "chaplaincy approach," where the primary focus of mission is the migrant African Christians who have settled abroad.

These African Christians, who migrated to the West mainly for economic and political reasons, soon became homesick and yearned for a fellowship that would become a source of encouragement and strength to survive in a foreign land. Western churches abound, but many Africans found them quite dull and uninteresting—and they preferred to worship in their mother tongue.

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So they came together to form a house fellowship. Once this grew in number, the people requested for a pastor from the mother church. This is the typical way in which the Church of Pentecost has planted churches across the diaspora.

Within these congregations are the challenges cast among a migrant community. One is the fact that many members are separated from their families, and they cannot afford to visit their home countries to see spouses and children (some of whom they have not seen for many years) or to attend the funerals of close family members. Nancy, a middle-aged woman who lives in New Jersey, is an example. She left her husband and two daughters in Ghana when the youngest daughter was eight years old. Now this daughter is in her third year of university whilst the older daughter is in her final year at medical school. The girls have not seen their mother since she left Ghana some fifteen years ago. In such situations the only available means of communication is phone, skype, or imo. In these cases, for most migrants, it is the church that provides the needed emotional support. as members pray for each other and trust God as they face separation from families and look to Him for favour as they seek to regularise their immigration status and to bring their families to join them.

In cases of bereavement, members of the church sometimes sponsor a trip home or send funds to support the funeral. In a situation where a person is unable to travel home, wake-keeping and funeral services may be held in honour of the deceased, and this provides an opportunity for the migrants to mourn.

This chaplaincy approach to mission is significant for a number of reasons. First, the church becomes the community or home away from home, where members receive the much needed social, economic, and spiritual support. For example, in an interview with one of the ministers of the CoP in the Netherlands, he made it clear that the presence of the CoP in Holland was a major support for many Ghanaians and indeed many other Africans in the country. Many people, particularly women, had travelled to the Netherlands for economic reasons without any academic qualifications or knowledge of the Dutch language. Such people soon found themselves in serious hardship as they could not easily find jobs and had little prospect of further education. As a result, many such women, most of whom were illegal migrants, resorted to prostitution in order to survive.

(Some women were even brought in by cartels for that very purpose). The situation was the same for migrants in France, Italy, Germany and Spain. The African churches, therefore, become the "ummah" where people found supernatural succour and also social and economic support.

In such situations, the primary responsibility of the missionary pastor is providing support to the Christian families and communities who have invited them. Here, mission is inward and members become very protective of their fellowship and do not easily welcome other believers or converts from other nations and cultures into the fellowship. The situation becomes even more complex when a non-traditional member or a person from another nation is recommended for a leadership position in the church. Opposition is usually voiced that "he would not understand how we do things." Because of this, most African churches in the diaspora are defined by the specific nationality of the majority of its members or its leader.

Hanciles contends that African migration from South to the North is determined along the lines of the historical links between excolonies and ex-colonial states. <sup>16</sup> Because of corresponding languages, Hanciles has a valid point, but the large number of Ghanaian and Nigerian immigrants in the Netherlands, Italy, France and Spain reveals that African migrants will travel in many directions, so long as there is the prospect of economic advancement and security.

This chaplaincy approach to mission by the CoP and many Africaninitiated churches means that a lot remains to be accomplished by the vibrant and fast-growing African churches in reaching out to indigenous communities in the diaspora. Cross-cultural mission becomes an unfinished agenda, and in some cases, an undesirable goal, as many African diaspora churches try to protect their own traditions and cultures.

The Church of the first century was also not open to frontier mission and was slow to offer Gentiles a share in the Abrahamic faith. Here, Walls makes a profound statement when he observes that

Church history has always been a battleground for two opposing tendencies; and the reason is that each of the tendencies has its origin in the Gospel itself. On the one

hand it is of the essence of the Gospel that God accepts us as we are, on the ground of Christ's work alone, not on the ground of what we have become or are trying to become. But, if He accepts us "as we are" that implies He does not take us as isolated, self-governing units, because we are not. We are conditioned by a particular time and place, by our family and group and society, by "culture" in fact. In Christ God accepts us together with our group relations; with that cultural conditioning that makes us feel at home in one part of human society and less home in another. But if He takes us with our group relations, then surely it follows that He takes us with our "dis-relations" also; those predispositions. prejudices, suspicious, and hostilities, whether justified or not, which mark the group to which we belong. He does not wait to tidy up our ideas any more than He waits to tidy up our behaviour before He accepts us sinners into His family<sup>17</sup>.

This obviously reveals some of the missionary challenges facing African churches that wish to take their place in global mission. Dickson puts his figure right on the point when he posits that

exclusive thinking starts from the basis of one's own perspective - and ends there. The possibility of matters being viewed also from the bona fide perspective of the other person or group does not readily come to play.18

But the sad reality is that

since the completion of the canon of Scriptures, the church has been guided by a body of traditions, one aspect of which seems to regard exclusive attitudes as

Such exclusivist tendencies contradict the very concept of mission which is the church's reason for existence. 20 Dickson's reflections therefore provide us with a framework within which African migrants churches may evaluate their mission in the diaspora.

#### The Way Forward

We should not underestimate what God is doing through this chaplaincy approach to church planting. The strength and encouragement these churches give to our brothers and sisters in the diaspora is obvious, necessary, and noble. Beyond that, however, is the unintended, quiet ripple these churches are making in the wider world. The New York Times has taken notice and wrote that the vitality of the worship services is impacting other churches and that whites are being drawn in. The article quoted sociologist Tony Carnes who said that the African churches can serve as a "bridge between the races." 21

The Redeemed Christian Church of God, based in Nigeria, is making a concerted effort at reaching Americans with the Gospel. Founder Enoch Adeboye says his initial target is Africans in the U.S but that,

Later on, the people who are natives of this land will sooner or later come to the realization that they need God, and we will be on the ground when that time comes to present God to them.<sup>22</sup>

This type of internal, external—and multi-generational—vision needs to be woven into the core of every African church planted abroad. After all, reaching the community is part and parcel of what it means to be a church. Perhaps the trickle of whites and other native-born Westerners into these churches is God's way of saying that they do have something to offer.

This is where proper training comes in. If the Church of Pentecost, for example, sends a pastor abroad to oversee a church of fellow Africans, he needs to travel there with a broad horizon. Teaching him the principles of cross-cultural communication, ethnographic research, and God's heart for all people will hopefully fix his mind on larger goals than his own nationality. No doubt, such efforts to engage other ethnicities and adjust the worship service might provoke some hostility, but that is the process of mission, and the pastor needs to draw his people into the adventure.

Migrant youth cannot be overlooked in this effort. They are important points of contact to reach indigenous communities as they are sometimes better able to relate to the foreign culture because they were born and raised in it, and they can have considerable influence on their friends. Youth groups that challenge youngsters with their missiological responsibilities should be part of church life.

When we consider recent developments of African migrants now turned missionaries in the diaspora, one could conclude that mission has gone full circle. Although exciting, this "reverse mission" raises a number of missiological issues that need to be addressed. It is clear that although some churches and even individuals travel abroad for the sake of mission and church planting, it is also the case that for many, mission and church planting are simply an unintended consequence. African Christians travel abroad for a better life, but unanticipated difficult conditions in the foreign land compel them to seek for fellowship to address their spiritual and social needs. Because they travel with their faith, they look for a model that replicates what they left back home. Thus, a church springs up, one that we have labeled a "chaplaincy church."

These are now scattered across the Western world and have provided immeasurable support to African brothers and sisters in the diaspora. Their impact has also leaked into the indigenous communities, and they are now gaining the attention of scholars and major media outlets

such as the New York Times.

However, the self-understanding of these churches is often too narrow, with a focus only on a particular ethnic group or nationality-and sometimes only the founding generation. If these churches are going to be a greater reflection of genuine missionary outreach, the pastors and the congregations must embrace a vision that encompasses the indigenous communities as well. A particularly important means of steering the churches in this direction is intentional mission training that challenges the pastors, the congregations, and the youth.

#### Notes

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- <sup>9</sup> Hanciles, Beyond Christendom, 8.
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- 13 For a good study of the history of the Church of Pentecost, see Leonard C. A Giant in Ghana (Chichester, West Sussex: New Wine Ministry, 1989).
- Recent scholarships have challenged the assumption that the three-self as postulated by Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson - selfpropagating; self-supporting and self-governing do not necessarily lead to indigenization. Similarly, a church may have these three qualities without being indigenous. It has however been noted that the three-self formula is most applicable where the church grows rapidly and has very little or no resistance from the population.
- 15 The Church of Pentecost, 2011 Missions Report, Presented to the 13th Session of the Extra-Ordinary Council Meeting 16 – 18 May, 2012, Sowutuom, Accra; The Church of Pentecost International Mission Directorate, Missions Report, January – December, 2014. Presented to the 41st Session of The General Council Meetings, 6-9 May, 2015, Pentecost Convention Centre, Gomoa-Fetteh.
- <sup>16</sup> Beyond Christendom, 6.
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