

# THE CHANGING FACE OF MISSIONS: PENTECOSTAL DIASPORA PERSPECTIVES FROM SOUTH AFRICA

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## Introduction

Traditionally Christian mission has been associated with the Western missionary traversing formidable geographical and cultural barriers in the 19th and early 20th centuries to evangelise, as it were “the heathen”. No matter how well intentioned this mission was, it was mixed up with a baggage of European imperialism, slave trade and commercial interest, which to some extent discredited an otherwise noble venture.<sup>1</sup> In an extreme response, some scholars are suggesting that the word ‘mission’ should be dropped from Christian vocabulary, because ‘mission’ carries a lot of negative connotations such as collaborating colonialism, and taking an aggressive stance against other faiths, which prevent constructive dialogue.<sup>2</sup> These criticisms notwithstanding, the legacy of the 19th century European missionaries needs to be appreciated, as the global expansion of the Christian faith today can only be ascribed to the foundational work of these missionaries, who transcribed our local languages, translated the Bible, brought the benefits of Western education, which today enables us to participate in the global community, and the blessing of orthodox medicine, among others.

However the world has changed, and so has the Christian mission enterprise. Currently although Christianity appears to be in decline in Europe and North America, the Faith is experiencing an upsurge in Africa, Latin America, and Asia, a development that has relocated the centre of gravity of Christian mission to the southern hemisphere. According to Operation World 2010, 63% of Christians in the world now live in these regions. Spearheading this expansion are Pentecostals, and it is suggested that the revival being experienced by some of the historic mission churches in Africa is due to the influence of Pentecostalism in the neighbourhood.<sup>3</sup>

The contemporary global situation which is characterised by an unprecedented mass movement of people across national frontiers, has made a telling impact on trends in Christian mission. Like Rachel, who migrated with Jacob, "on an accompanying spouse visa" and stole her father's household gods (Gen 31:19), today's migrants also do well to carry their brand of Christianity along. How they practise and attempt to propagate or relate to other Christian bodies in the host communities has received considerable attention from scholars.<sup>4</sup>

Although the popular destinations for economic migrants are Western Europe and North America, there are more displaced diaspora people in Africa than any other continent.<sup>5</sup> And one nation with a significant gravitational pull on migration is South Africa, with its complex social structure of racial categorisation and grotesque income distribution pattern. Although intra-African missions, whether diaspora initiated in nature, or undertaken through intentional missionary effort, is making a significant impact on the continent, it has received very little attention among mission scholars. Killingray's work is however exceptional for recognising the significant contribution of indigenous Africans to the spread of Christianity on the continent.<sup>6</sup> This article reflects on the paradigm shift in mission, and attempts to explain the current remarkable global impact of Pentecostal missions. Furthermore it investigates the symbiotic link between globalisation and diaspora Christian missions within the South African Pentecostals context.

### **Paradigm Shift in Missions**

The paradigm shift in Christian mission is termed "post-Western Christianity" by Sanneh, who thinks the worldwide revitalisation of Christianity currently taking place is without the support of Western institutional structures.<sup>7</sup> Bosch ascribes this shift to causal factors such as, the loss of Western dominance in Christian mission, the stiff challenge facing unjust and exploitative structures that besmear Christian mission, the redundancy of the Western concept of progress and development, and the awareness of our limited resources and greater interdependence.<sup>8</sup>

Among the diverse concepts emerging in response to the paradigm shift in mission, is the relevant doctrine of inculturation, which recognises that “a plurality of cultures presupposes a plurality of theologies and therefore, for the Third-World churches, a farewell to a Eurocentric approach.”<sup>9</sup> By implication, Christian thought should be reviewed and applied in a new way in each human culture.<sup>10</sup> These developments may not necessarily render the Western missionary enterprise redundant, rather they challenge us to promote synergy and cross fertilisation of theological concepts and mission strategies between the West and the developing world, and across denominations, for a dynamic, globally relevant, and a multifaceted mission paradigm. Ecumenism, and collaboration in terms of sharing resources and ministry opportunities, and joint missionary training ventures could help realise a global balance in contemporary Christian mission endeavours. Obviously a multiple model which could adequately confront the current crisis in mission include voluntary and involuntary migration,<sup>11</sup> which constitute the focus of this paper.

### **Globalisation and Current Trends in Christian Mission**

Globalisation can be described as the enhanced interaction between people groups due to the literal and figurative elimination of geographical distance through travelling, and the impact of information and technology respectively. Global migration is estimated at 859 million people, comprising 12.5% of the world’s population who are in diaspora around the world.<sup>12</sup> Migration is ascribable to factors such as instability, famine, and economic deprivation, among others, which establish a trend of movement towards more stable and prosperous countries. Most global migration occurs outside the Western world, taking the form of South-South migration; and Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest number of migrants of any continent, with an estimated number of 35 million.<sup>13</sup> South Africa, in spite of its Apartheid past, is one of the most steady and progressive economies in Africa<sup>14</sup>, and has therefore become a leading migrant destination on the continent. The 2011 census revealed that there were 2 199 871 people living in South Africa who were born outside the country. They constituted 4.2% of the population - which then stood at 51, 770 560; and 71% of those born outside of South Africa were African.<sup>15</sup>

Such mass migration of people directly alters the religious constituencies of their host nations, as the migrants may come with a totally new religion or introduce a new form of an existing one.<sup>16</sup>

It is estimated that out of the 859 million people in diaspora, Christians constitute 407 million, which comprises a significant 18% of Christians worldwide. The data further reveals that Christian diaspora constitute 47.4% of all religious people in diaspora.<sup>17</sup>

Asamoah-Gyadu, reflecting on the underprivileged situation of the African economic migrant, posits that vulnerability is an important factor in Christian mission, which could see "God empowering the weak to fulfil his purposes among the strong."<sup>18</sup> Analysing the impact of migration on the American Christian community, Zscheile appreciates the challenge of a global community as one of "difference and otherness", as cultures, religions, tribes and nationalities exist in close proximity due to technology and migration.<sup>19</sup> He identifies a singular opportunity in globalisation, which is to form reciprocal relationships, and establish mutually respected Christian communities with migrants and those that can be reached by technology, with all the vulnerability that entails.<sup>20</sup> Prill examines the relationship of the established churches in the West to migrant Christians, and supports the formation of multi-cultural rather than mono-cultural churches, as the authentic biblical model.<sup>21</sup> Writing from the perspective of the missions director of the Church of Pentecost (CoP), a Ghanaian Pentecostal denomination that is deeply involved in diaspora mission, Opoku identifies some of the values migrants derive from diaspora churches, as the chance to worship in familiar ways, promoting their sense of identity, a ready response to their social needs, and insulation against some of the social vices bedevilling Western societies.<sup>22</sup> The author however admits that the Church has not made the desired impact on evangelising the Western world through its diasporic community.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, The Church of Pentecost is active, not only in Western diaspora mission, but also in intra-Africa mission, which extends to South Africa, where the CoP has planted diaspora congregations.

### **Diaspora Mission in SA**

To develop a creative and relevant response to the changing trends in Christian mission, any contemporary mission enterprise needs to engage with the Christian history of the target community to appreciate the outcome of the cross-fertilisation of Christian ideas and local norms over the years. The first Christian contact with SA dates as far back as 1652, with the arrival of the Dutch, and later the French Huguenots in 1668. With time the Dutch Reformed Church (known as NGK in Dutch) became the dominant church, but with little concern for the evangelisation of the indigenous Africans. The role of the church in racial discrimination is revealed in this statement "in the very early days at the Cape colony, discrimination practised between white and black, slave and free person, was ostensibly based more on religion than race."<sup>24</sup> It was not until 1857 that the NGK initiated efforts to evangelise the coloureds,<sup>25</sup> who constitute a class of mixed races, ranking next to Europeans on the South African colour scale. When in the 19th century, evangelism among the indigenous blacks was gaining grounds, racial tension developed in the NGK, and the synod decided that white and black congregations should worship separately.<sup>26</sup> And this segregation has characterised Christian communities in SA to date. Ps Damons's sad reflection on the situation, stated in February 2016 is poignantly true, "The church is the last bastion of apartheid in SA."<sup>27</sup>

One of the most influential Pentecostal churches in SA is the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM), which emerged out of the ministry of John G. Lakeland in 1908. Initially the Church was able to accommodate the Black South Africans, Afrikaner Whites and the Coloureds. By 1919 Afrikaner intolerance led to a split where many of the Blacks left the AFM to form the Zionist churches.<sup>28</sup> One of the leaders of the dissenting black groups, Engenas Lekganyane founded the Zion Christian Church (ZCC), which is the largest denomination in SA registering between 2 million to 6 million in more than over 4000 parishes.<sup>29</sup> Through its sustained evangelistic activities the AFM was able to attract large constituents of Black, Coloured, and Indian people with each cultural group worshipping apart; a situation best captured in Clark's words, "The AFM followed the nationalist emphasis on apartness and by the end of the 1950s consisted of four separate

churches: a White (mother) church, and the three daughter churches – a Black, a Coloured and an Indian.”<sup>30</sup> The Church has mission outposts in neighbouring countries in southern Africa, and the influx of migrants from some of these nations has created diaspora AFM congregations, which compound the already complex social relations within the denomination.

Similar to the AFM experience, the Assemblies of God in SA, since the 1970s, has also become segregated along racial lines. By implication, any mission engagement in SA today would have to reckon with the composite social structure, and respond sensitively to racial, nationalistic and economic stratification. However it is also necessary to mention that a significant number of multiracial congregations are emerging in some of the new churches in SA.<sup>31</sup>

Goodhew has undertaken extensive research work on the growth and decline in South African churches from 1960 to 1991, which revealed that the mainline Protestant churches and the Roman Catholic experienced significant decline in membership, whilst other Christians, comprising Pentecostals and African Initiated Churches (AICs) registered significant growth.<sup>32</sup> From 1980 to 1991 white Roman Catholics decreased from 388,000 to 315,000 -6%, white Anglicans also dropped from 426,000 to 292,000, -6%. The “Other” Christians category however registered a rise of 608,000 to 727,000, increasing by 14%. Among the Coloured people all mainline denominations lost members in significant numbers, but “Others” rose to 714,000 from 461,000.<sup>33</sup> And a similar trend emerges in the Indian community. The black population also registered a decline in the mainline churches, for instance the proportion of African Wesleyan Methodists dropped by 3% between 1980 and 1991, but in contrast, “Other” Christian Churches grew by 6%.<sup>34</sup> Obviously Pentecostal type churches are in vogue in SA, which corroborate the global trends mentioned above.

Appreciating contextualisation as the approach used by a local church to integrate the Gospel into its own culture,<sup>35</sup> Pentecostal pneumatology appears to bond well with traditional South African worldview of spiritual consciousness, that acknowledges the presence of malevolent spirits who use muthi (Zulu, traditional medicine

or charms), dispensed by a sangoma (Zulu, traditional healer who can also cast spells), as a medium to hurt people. Consequently a Pentecostal spiritual warfare concept, which offers protection and victory against diabolic spiritual forces, holds a strong appeal. In addition, the prophetic and healing theologies of the Pentecostal Movement, which responds to the felt needs of a rather economically disadvantaged people, readily dovetails into the traditional context. Furthermore the large black population, who have been disinherited and traumatised by Apartheid can only find hope in the premillennial doctrine of Pentecostalism, which promises a radically new world order, void of racial and economic discrimination, where the oppressed and oppressor would stand as co-equals before God. Cox avers that this kind of hope which rises above any particular context would prevail even though other human hopes have failed to materialise.<sup>36</sup> This position notwithstanding, the complex racial composition of the South Africa Society will demand a multifaceted theological and mission approach to engage all the races, tribes, classes, and nationalities.

Through the efforts of some of their lay members, African Pentecostal diaspora communities in SA have registered their presence by establishing branches of their home churches, characterised by a strong national identity, be they Zimbabweans, Nigerians or Ghanaians etc. and I will examine the impact of the Church of Pentecost (CoP), Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM), Shona Congregations, and Light House Chapel International (LCI), Mega Church.

The CoP, a church of Ghanaian origins, was planted in SA in 1990, through the initiative of a lay leader, Deacon Evans Akuffo, who migrated to SA as an accountant. The Church has since grown to register a total membership 5137 in 2015, with a nationality breakdown of 2550 Ghanaians, 2053 indigenous black coloured South Africans, and 334 comprising other African nationals. The CoP, SA has 53 congregations spread out in all the provinces, except Northern Cape. It has 15 ministers, comprising 11 Ghanaians, 3 black South Africans, and one Zambian. These figures reveal that the CoP, SA has attracted a significant number of indigenous South Africans, comprising almost 40% of its entire membership. One interesting dynamic of diaspora mission is how it compels indigenous ministers, who join the church, to become cross-cultural missionaries in their

own backyard. Such is the case of Rev Cameron Sikrweqe, who as a Xhosa has become a missionary to Ghanaians and other nationalities in the CoP, SA. He admits that being a missionary to a diaspora community stretches him to go beyond what is familiar, in order to engage well with his congregation. In his view the church can only reach the other races, namely Whites and Indians by developing an approach that is relevant to their cultural nuances. Rev David Zuze, also a minister of the CoP has a situation that further reveals the complexities of contemporary migration. He happens to be a Zambian working in a Ghanaian diaspora Church in SA. He joined the Church through the influence of his South African mother-in-law, and he finds the multicultural exposure offered by the Church very exciting. He however recognises the language barrier and tensions engendered by cultural peculiarities as the main challenges that confront a missional diaspora church.

The case of Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) Kempton Park Shona<sup>37</sup> Assembly, predominantly Zimbabwean, is a fascinating case of reverse mission. The AFM as indicated above is of South African origin, which reached out to Zimbabwe to establish indigenous AFM congregations. Some of these congregations' members have migrated to SA and have formed diaspora congregations that speak Shona, their mother tongue. Rev Tenda Munemo, the senior Pastor<sup>38</sup> has revealed that the Church began as a fellowship of two Shona families in October 2007. The headquarters church of this mission has 10,000 members, with 9,500 of them being Zimbabweans, 500 being indigenous black South Africans, and 100 being people of other nationalities. The AFM Shona Mission in SA currently has 10 pastors who are all Zimbabweans. Some of the congregations are Shona mono-cultural, with a few others being multicultural, and they preach mostly in Shona, and in English occasionally. The Church does not receive financial support from the home Church in Zimbabwe, rather it supports foreign missions in Zimbabwe and beyond. Rev Munemo is excited about the positive impact their ministry makes by rescuing migrants from reckless living, and also for the capacity of the Church to acquire property in SA. He however identifies xenophobic attacks, and the difficulty encountered by the many Zimbabweans to regularise their migration status as the main challenges facing the Church.



A third diaspora church that appears to be making inroads into the black South African community is the Lighthouse Chapel International (LIC) Mega Church, founded by Bishop Dag Heward Mills, headquartered in Ghana. The Senior Pastor and General Overseer of the Church in SA is Dr E. Kluffio a Ghanaian, and the headquarters address is 258 Kotze Street, Sunny Side Pretoria. Similar to the trend in many diaspora churches, LIC, SA was planted in February 1997 by a Ghanaian lay leader who came to SA on a student visa. By April 2016 the church could count over 4,000 members in 82 congregations located in all the 9 provinces of SA. The congregations are mainly multicultural comprising, in total, 10% Ghanaians and 90% South Africans, and they mostly use English, and the relevant local language in certain locations. The LIC has 16 full time ministers, 8 of whom are Ghanaians, with the rest being indigenous black South Africans. Furthermore LIC has 82 indigenous lay ministers, and 28 such of other nationalities. According to Dr Kluffio, the approach they use to maintain unity in a multicultural church is to focus on Christ, and avoid using examples from their home origin. The LIC is a member of the International Federation of Christian Churches, and it does not receive financial support from the home mission. To Dr Kluffio, the most fulfilling aspect of diaspora mission is the accomplishment of raising indigenous pastors who minister to their own people.

### **Conclusion**

Obviously globalisation has resulted in the emergence of diaspora churches, which is a significant feature of the shift in contemporary Christian mission paradigm. We need to celebrate the approach of some Pentecostal churches, who build capacity by empowering their laity to take the bold initiative and plant their home churches in diaspora communities. South Africa, a popular migrant destination, has attracted many African nationalities and these have diversified and enriched the Christian narrative of the nation. The pneumatic emphasis and premillennial promise of Pentecostals appear to integrate well with the indigenous worldview, responding appreciatively to the harrowing socio-political and socio-economic experience of SA. As a result, whilst the mainline mission Churches seem to be declining, the Pentecostal and Zionist Churches are rather expanding.

Mission engagement in such a context would therefore demand a dynamic theological and spiritual capacity that is adaptable and sensitive to the complexities of a multiracial society such as South Africa.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> For instance see Andrew F. Walls, “An anthropology of hope: Africa, slavery, and civilization in nineteenth-century mission thinking” *International bulletin of missionary research*, October 2015 vol. 39 no. 4, 225-230.
- <sup>2</sup> See Hope S. Antone’s paper presented at the Asia Mission Conference held in Tainan, Taiwan on “Beyond Edinburgh 1910 – Asian reactions on mission” on September 29 to October 3, 2008. [http://cca.org.hk/home/ctc/ctc08-03/08\\_hope62.pdf](http://cca.org.hk/home/ctc/ctc08-03/08_hope62.pdf) (accessed on March 21, 2016)
- <sup>3</sup> Wonsuk Ma et al (ed.), “Introduction: Pentecostals and world mission” *Pentecostal mission and global Christianity, Regnum Edinburgh centenary series volume 20*. (Oxford: Regnum, 2014), 1.
- <sup>4</sup> Some literature on diaspora missions include Opoku Onyinah’s “Pentecostalism and the African diaspora”: An examination of the missions activities of the Church of Pentecost”, *PNUEMA: The journal of the society for Pentecostal studies*, Vol. 26, No. 2, Fall 2004; J. K. Asamoah-Gyadu, “Migration, diaspora mission and religious others in world Christianity: An African perspective” *International bulletin of missionary research*, 39, No. 4 (2015); 189–192. Todd M. Tomllison, “Migration, religious diasporas, and religious diversity: A global survey”, *Mission studies*, 29 (2012) 3-22; Thorsten Prill, “Migration, mission and the multi-ethnic Church”, *Evangelical review of Theology*, (2009) 33:4, 332 – 346.
- <sup>5</sup> David Clayton (ed.), “Christianity in a global age”, in *Laussane occasional paper no. 30*, 2014.
- <sup>6</sup> David Killingray, “Passing on the Gospel: Indigenous mission in Africa” *Transformation*, Vol. 28. No.2 (April 2011), 93-102.
- <sup>7</sup> Lamin Sanneh, *Whose religion is Christianity? The Gospel beyond the West?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991).
- <sup>8</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming mission: Paradigm shifts in theology*

- of mission*. (New York: Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY, 1991, 2011), 193.
- <sup>9</sup> Bosch, *Transforming mission*, 463.
- <sup>10</sup> Memorandum from a consultation on mission (Produced by a consultation held in Rome, May 1982, and organized by the secretariat for promoting Christian unity), *International review of mission* Vol. 71), 458-477.
- <sup>11</sup> Marty Shaw, Jr. "The future of kingdom work in a globalizing world" in David Clayton (ed.) *Globalization and the Gospel: Rethinking mission in the contemporary world* (Pattaya, Thailand: Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 2004)
- <sup>12</sup> Todd M. Johnson, "Migration, religious diasporas and religious diversity: A global survey". *Mission studies*, 29 (2012), 3-22.
- <sup>13</sup> David Clayton (ed.), "Christianity in a global age", in Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 30, 2014.
- <sup>14</sup> The gross domestic product per capita in South Africa was equivalent to 48% of the world's average in 2014. GDP per capita in South Africa averaged 5080.22 USD from 1960 until 2014, reaching an all-time high of 6090.27 USD in 2013 and a record low of 3543.52 USD in 1960.
- <sup>15</sup> <http://mg.co.za/article/2015-05-06-do-5-million-immigrants-live-in-sa>
- <sup>16</sup> T. M. Johnson & G. A. Bellofatto, "Migration, religious diaspora, and religious diversity: a global survey", *Missions studies* 29 (2012), 3-22.
- <sup>17</sup> Johnson and Bellofatto, 8.
- <sup>18</sup> Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, Migration, diaspora, mission, and religious others in world Christianity: An African Perspective," *International bulletin of missionary research* 39, no.4 (2015), 189-92. <http://www.internationalbulletin.org/2015-04/2015-04-189asamoah-gyadu.html>
- <sup>19</sup> Dwight Zscheile, "Forming and restoring community in a nomadic world: A next generation perspective on the future of the discipline of missiology", *Missiology: An international review* 42(1) (2013), 26-38.
- <sup>20</sup> Zscheile, 30.

- 21 Thorsten Prill, "Migration, mission and the multi-ethnic Church", *Evangelical review of Theology* (2009) 33:4, 334-346.
- 22 "Pentecostalism and the African Diaspora: An examination of the missions activities of the Church of Pentecost", *Pneuma: The journal of the society for Pentecostal studies*, Vol. 26, No. 2, (Fall 2004), 216-241. The author is currently Chairman of The Church of Pentecost, a Ghanaian Church that has mission outposts in over 90 nations. Some of these mission outposts comprise Ghanaians in the diaspora, whilst others have significant numbers of indigenous people in their fold.
- 23 Onyinah, 239.
- 24 John W. De Gruchy. *The Church struggle in South Africa*, twenty-fifth anniversary edition (Kindle Locations 330-331). Kindle Edition
- 25 John W. De Gruchy. *The Church struggle in South Africa*.
- 26 John W. De Gruchy. *The Church struggle in South Africa*.
- 27 Rev Hermy Damons, formerly a senior minister in Rhema Bible Church was interacting with a group of The Church of Pentecost ministerial students at Kempton Park on March 6, 2016.
- 28 Matthew Clark, "Mission effort in the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa", *Transformation* vol. 26, No. 3 (July 2009), 174-185.
- 29 Clark, 176; "Lekganyane, founder of the Zion Christian Church", [prominentpeople.co.za/lekanyane.aspx](http://prominentpeople.co.za/lekanyane.aspx).
- 30 Clark, 177.
- 31 Goodhew, "Growth and decline in South Africa's Churches" *Journal of religion in Africa*, Vol. 30, Fasc. 3(August 200),361.
- 32 David Goodhew, 244-369.
- 33 Goodhew, 357.
- 34 Goodhew, 356.
- 35 Louis J. Luzbetak. *The Churches and cultures: New perspectives in missiological anthropology*. (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 69.
- 36 Harvey Cox, *Fire From Heaven*, (London: Cassel, 1996), 82.
- 37 President Robert Mugabe is a Shona
- 38 April 1, 2016 at Kempton Park, Johannesburg.