

EDITORIAL

Pentecost Researchers' Forum: Emerging Scholars in African Pentecostal Discourse

Volume 5, Issue 2 of the Pentecost Journal of Theology and Mission (PJTM) marks a notable scholarly contribution stemming from the inaugural Pentecost Researchers' Forum (PRF) organised by Pentecost University in 2023. This forum serves as an annual convening for researchers whose interests align with Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity, particularly within the African context and the African diaspora. I have previously argued that both Pentecostalism and African religions exhibit a shared affinity for oral traditions and have historically shied away from formal academic discourse.¹ In her analysis of Pentecostalism, Teresa Chai, a Malaysian scholar specialising in intercultural studies at the Asia Pacific Theological Seminary in the Philippines, highlights a significant concern regarding the relationship between academic knowledge and spiritual experience within Pentecostal communities. She observes a notable sense of fear and apprehension among adherents regarding the potential implications.² Marius Nel observes that early Pentecostals in South Africa favoured being Spirit-filled over pursuing academic knowledge, believing that such pursuits could hinder their ability to remain attuned to the workings of the Holy Spirit.³ Thus, Pentecostals generally raise questions about the compatibility of rigorous theological education with the spontaneous and experiential nature of their spirituality.

Despite these fears, recent trends indicate a notable increase in scholarly engagement among Pentecostal-Charismatic leaders across Africa, mirroring the developments in global Pentecostalism. A significant number of these leaders are now pursuing formal theological education at various esteemed institutions worldwide, signifying a shift towards integrating academic rigour with spirituality. The primary objective of the PRF is to cultivate an academic platform that fosters knowledge exchange among such scholars, enabling them to share their findings with peers who have similar interests. The forum is dedicated to exploring methodologies for effectively integrating scholarly research into the practical ministry of the church. This is achieved by recognising the inherent compatibility between academic inquiry and Pentecostal spirituality. Such integration is not only beneficial but also considered an essential

¹ Christian Tsekpoe, "Shifting Centres of Christian Vitality: Challenges and Opportunities for African Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity" *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*. 32/2 (2023), 250-66.

² Teresa Chai, "Pentecostal Theological Education and Ministerial Formation," in Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, et al. Eds., *Pentecostal Mission and Global Christianity*. Oxford: Regnum, 2014, 356.

³ Marius Nel, "Rather Spirit-filled than learned! Pentecostalism's tradition of anti-intellectualism and Pentecostal theological scholarship" *Verbum et Ecclesia* 37/1 (2016), 2.

aspect of the University A+ agenda at Pentecost University.⁴ Furthermore, the PRF aims to achieve multiple objectives, including promoting collaborative research efforts, enhancing the visibility of Pentecostal scholarship, and fostering dialogue among diverse theological perspectives. By addressing these goals, the forum aspires to contribute to the broader discourse surrounding African Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity and its implications for contemporary ministry.

At the 2023 PRF, ten emerging scholars were given the opportunity to present their PhD research conducted across a diverse array of prestigious universities worldwide. The selection of presenters was carefully curated, focusing on scholars whose doctoral degrees were awarded within the previous two years at the time of presentation. This dynamic group of emerging scholars reflects the vibrancy of contemporary academic discourse in their respective fields. From these presentations, seven scholarly articles have successfully passed rigorous peer review and have now been published in this special volume. Each article underscores the need for African Pentecostals to engage proactively with a variety of pressing contemporary issues.

The first significant contribution to this issue is the article titled “Beyond Eco-Pneumatology: An Examination of Scripture with ‘Green Eyes’ Towards the Development of An African Pentecostal Ecotheology” by Emmanuel Awudi. This work originated from his PhD research, which he successfully completed in 2023 at the Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission, and Culture in Akropong-Akuapem, Ghana. Through his extensive research, Awudi has established himself as a prominent scholar in the field of African Pentecostal ecotheology. In this article, he critically examines the factors contributing to the insufficient development of ecotheology within African Pentecostal circles. He posits that the prevalent apathy towards ecological initiatives among Pentecostals is intrinsically linked to an anthropocentric hermeneutic of Scripture. To address this shortcoming, he proposes strategic methodologies aimed at reorienting eco-care from a marginal aspect of theological engagement to an essential component of missional practice. He advocates for the integration of ecological principles into the discourse of practical theology, thereby fostering a more robust and responsible theological framework that prioritizes ecological stewardship. This work is an important contribution to knowledge that deserves attention among African Pentecostals and beyond.

Another important study in this volume was conducted by Dieudonne Komla Nuekpe regarding the presence of folk Muslims in Ghana and its missiological implications for Pentecostalism. This noteworthy work originated from his PhD thesis, completed in 2021 at Torch Trinity Graduate University in Seoul, South Korea, and was

⁴ Under the University A+ agenda, Pentecost University recognises the place of the Holy Spirit in guiding diligent efforts to nurture ethical, resourceful, entrepreneurial, and value-driven graduates in a research-led, innovative and problem-solving environment.

subsequently published by Langham under the title *Lived Islam in Africa and Its Missiological Implications for Pentecostals*.⁵ In this article, he highlights the nuanced presence of Islam in Ghana, drawing attention to specific areas of misunderstanding and ignorance that exist among Pentecostal adherents and Muslims. By integrating perspectives from various fields—including intercultural studies, Islamic studies, Pentecostal missiology, church history, cultural anthropology, and biblical theology—he proposes a framework through which Pentecostals can effectively and respectfully witness Christ to Ghanaian Muslims. This study has discovered the nexus of shared heritage that provides strategies for Pentecostals in Ghana to share their faith with folk Muslims in a peaceful atmosphere. It is a resource book for scholars and Christians concerned with Christian-Muslim relations in Ghana and beyond.

Samuel Kodzo Gakpetor authored the next article, which is based on his PhD research submitted to the Department of Practical Theology at the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa. In this scholarly inquiry, he explores the effectiveness of disciple-making processes within Ghanaian ecclesiastical contexts and their contribution to cultivating a healthy work ethic among Christians. He contends that a significant challenge faced by many Christians in Ghana is the persistent dichotomy between the sacred and secular spheres, which is further exacerbated by a notable absence of deliberate and systematic discipleship practices. He also identifies the detrimental impact of certain cultural characteristics endemic to the Ghanaian context that may hinder holistic spiritual development. In addressing these critical concerns, he advocates for the formulation of a comprehensive and integrative disciple-making strategy, one which seamlessly interweaves various dimensions of life, as a vital necessity for effectively tackling the challenges presented by the contemporary ecclesial landscape in Ghana. This is an important study, owing to the central place discipleship plays in Christianity. A Pentecostal approach to discipleship in Africa is a welcome contribution, and Samuel Gakpetor must be commended for his excellent work.

The next article was written by Philip Osei-Korsah under the title “Sexual Misconduct Suspension: The Impact of Guilt on Members of the Church of Pentecost, Ghana.” This scholarly work is derived from his PhD thesis, which was submitted to the Department of Community Care Counseling at Liberty University in Lynchburg, USA, in 2023. The study examines the psychosocial conditions affecting CoP members who have faced suspension from fellowship as a disciplinary response to instances of sexual misconduct. It contends that the primary repercussions of such church discipline on the suspended individuals manifest as profound feelings of shame, guilt, sadness, and anger, which consequently drive these individuals to withdraw from

⁵ Dieudonne Komla Nuekpe, *Lived Islam in Africa and Its Missiological Implications for Pentecostals*. Carlisle: Langham Publishing, 2023.

ecclesiastical activities. The research advocates for the pressing necessity for structured social support systems to aid in the reintegration of individuals suspended for sexual misconduct back into the church community. This subject of church discipline is very controversial among Pentecostal-Charismatics. Philip-Korsah's work has scratched exactly where it itches.

Job Wiredu is the author of "Rural Pastors, Family Welfare, and Pastoral Care Equity Challenges: A Case Study of Three Classical Pentecostal Churches in Ghana." This work is the culmination of his PhD research, which he presented to the Department of Religious Studies at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Kumasi, Ghana. The article explores the diverse challenges encountered by pastors and their families serving in rural areas, focusing specifically on three prominent classical Pentecostal denominations in Ghana: The Church of Pentecost, The Apostolic Church of Ghana, and Christ Apostolic Church International. The research explores the dynamics surrounding the reluctance of some pastors to accept postings to rural areas, in contrast to the compulsion faced by others to comply with such assignments. The findings indicate that a significant factor influencing these decisions stems from the comparative welfare disparities between urban and rural pastoral assignments, resulting in a noticeable trend: urban-based pastors are perceived to receive better welfare benefits compared to their rural counterparts. The study proposes the need for the involvement of the churches in the provision of basic social amenities and the categorisation of welfare policies to ensure equity in the welfare benefits of ministers in rural communities as a possible mitigation of the gaps between rural pastors and urban pastors. This study addresses an important issue that requires the attention of church leaders in both rural and urban settings.

The article titled "The Holy Spirit in Moral Character Formation: Perceptions within Ghanaian Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity" is authored by Patrick Tetteh Kudadjie. This work, derived from his PhD thesis submitted to the Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission, and Culture in Akropong-Akuapem, Ghana, in 2023, critically engages with themes relevant to contemporary Pentecostal pneumatology. Kudadjie examines the impact of Pentecostal pneumatology on the formation of moral character. Through empirical research involving congregants from the CoP and the International Central Gospel Church (ICGC) in Ghana, he argues that while a substantial portion of participants acknowledges the role of the Holy Spirit in cultivating charismatic gifts, there is a notable lack of awareness regarding the Holy Spirit's contribution to moral character development. Consequently, the study advocates for Ghanaian Pentecostal leaders to promote a more balanced emphasis on the dual roles of the Holy Spirit: not only as a facilitator of charismatic gifts but also as a vital agent in the moral and ethical formation of adherents. This approach aims to enhance the theological understanding and practical application of pneumatology

in the context of Ghanaian Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity. This work is a must-read for both theologians and ecclesial practitioners.

The concluding article, titled “Pentecostal Spirituality and the Theology of Prayer: Continuities and Discontinuities of African Indigenous Spirituality,” is authored by Joseph T. I. Buerthey. This piece is based on his PhD thesis submitted to the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch University in South Africa. In this article, Buerthey argues that there are both continuities and discontinuities between traditional African indigenous prayer practices and the emerging Pentecostal and neo-Prophetic practices observed in Ghana. He concludes that while the evolving landscape of African Pentecostal prayer is intricately linked to themes inherent in the African religious system, it also shows divergences in specific aspects of worship. This exploration provides valuable insights into the dynamics of spiritual expression within contemporary African Christianity. This research represents a significant contribution to knowledge in the field of African Pentecostal theology.

This special volume of the *Pentecost Journal of Theology and Mission* represents a significant advancement in African Pentecostal-Charismatic scholarship. The diverse range of topics explored by these emerging scholars not only highlights the vibrancy inherent in Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity but also effectively addresses pressing contemporary issues that resonate with the current challenges facing the church. Each scholarly article enriches our understanding of how African Pentecostalism interacts with societal and theological concerns, including meaningful engagement with folk Islam, fostering ecological stewardship, and navigating the complexities of moral character development and ecclesiastical discipline. The insights extracted from these studies reflect a robust commitment to amalgamating rigorous scholarly inquiry with pragmatic applications and spiritual edification, thereby enhancing the overarching route of the Pentecostal community. As these nascent scholars refine their theoretical frameworks and foster dialogue, they are strategically positioned to exert a significant influence on both local and global discourses pertaining to the future of Pentecostalism in Africa. The PRF not only reveals Pentecost University’s dedication to cultivating a vibrant academic milieu but also establishes itself as an essential conduit for thought leadership within the Pentecostal community. This inaugural volume unveils the boundless prospects that await as scholars undertake the pressing task of grappling with the complexities of faith and communal identity, ensuring that Pentecostal Christianity maintains its relevance and responsiveness within the sociocultural contexts it inhabits.

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