

## **Chapter 9**

### **In the Power of the Holy Ghost: Africa and Spirit-Empowered Christianity in the Twenty-First Century (J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu)**

#### **Abbreviations**

CWME	Conference on World Mission and Evangelism
MDCC	The Mussama Disco Christo Church
PCCs	Pentecostal-Charismatic Christians
WCC	World Council of Churches

#### **Introduction**

This chapter deals with Spirit empowerment and the transformation of Christianity in Africa. Talk of Spirit-empowered Christianity in any context immediately brings to attention the many Pentecostal-Charismatic ministries, churches, and movements that have emerged in the history of the faith. The history of Christianity in Africa dates to the early biblical Pentecost period in which people of African descent were not only listed as present at the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, but an Ethiopian eunuch became one of the first beneficiaries of people baptised in the name of the resurrected and ascended Jesus. This highly placed Ethiopian believer presumably became an evangelist of the message of Jesus, the fulfilment of God's Suffering Servant in Isaiah.

One could use the expression, "Spirit-empowered" to refer any stream of Christianity that values, affirms, and consciously promotes the experiential dimension of life in the Spirit, i.e., the power in the name of Jesus and of the Holy Spirit, as part of normal Christian life.<sup>1</sup> The expression "power" in this context does not mean the arbitrary use of force, but divine

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<sup>1</sup> Kwabena J. Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: A Study of Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Leiden: Brill, 2005a): 12.

interventions by which the salvation of souls, confessions of Jesus Christ as Lord, moral transformations, miracles, signs and wonders, and destruction of the powers of evil occur in human life, as part of the ministry of the Spirit of God in the age. The Spirit who was poured out at Pentecost has been working among African Christians ever since.

In the modern era, the early twentieth century saw the rise of many charismatic personalities who founded and led Holy Spirit movements and churches across Christian Africa. Spirit-empowered Christianity is now the representative face of the faith on the continent, and this development has implications for Christianity worldwide. A primary gift of African Christianity to the West and to the world, according to Mark Gornick, is how to function in the power of the Holy Spirit; Spirit-empowered Christianity in Africa is one in which the Holy Spirit brings forth new birth, heals the sick, conquers the past, casts out evil spirits, answers prayers, speaks in dreams, and raises to new life.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Spirit-Empowerment and African Christianity**

At the Edinburgh 1910 World Missions Conference, the expressed fear was that Africa would turn Islamic. However, a century later when the conference reconvened at Edinburgh in 2010, representation was overwhelmingly non-Western, with Africa clearly a leading player in terms of representation. Much has been said about the emergence of Christianity as a non-Western religion, but the fact often left out of this observation is the role of Spirit-empowered movements in the development. At the beginning of the twentieth century, many ordinary Africans experienced their own Pentecost. This occurred through such religious developments as

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<sup>2</sup> Mark R. Gornik, *Word Made Global: Stories of African Christianity in New York City* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2011): 269.

the breakout of the East African Revival that spawned many local churches defining themselves in ecclesiological terms as “churches of the Spirit”. The influence of itinerant prophets like William Wadé Harris of Liberia and Ghana, Garrick Sokari Braide of the Niger Delta, Simon Kimbangu of the Belgian Congo, and Isaiah Shembe of South Africa completely transformed the face of African Christianity.

The late African church historian, Ogbu U. Kalu, refers to the work of these itinerant prophets as sowing the seeds for the rise of the Pentecostal movements in Africa.<sup>3</sup> The spiritual churches – often pejoratively called African independent/initiated/instituted churches – shared critical characteristics with global churches, ministries, and movements designated using the ecclesial category, “Pentecostal.” Many of these placed at the centre of the spirituality an interventionist theology that emphasised prayer, healing, and the prophetic, as hallmarks of the workings of the Spirit. Kalu describes the chief theological contributions of these early African Holy Spirits to the life of the church as follows:

The presence of the Spirit became the evidence, as well as the guarantee that the reign of God was being experienced in its full power [...] It is the presence of the Spirit that explains the possibilities of miracles, healing, and power. These pneumatic resources of the gospel were available in the contemporary life of believers and were not mere creedal assent.<sup>4</sup>

As in the title of this chapter, the enchanted African Pentecostal/charismatic formular “in the power of the Holy Ghost” is commonly used in situations needing divine intervention. At the heart of the ecclesiology of the African Pentecostal imagination is divine empowerment, which occurs by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in human life and in Christian communities. The early independent church movements of Africa emerged precisely because of their

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<sup>3</sup> Ogbu U. Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), Preface pp xiii-x

<sup>4</sup> Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*, 9.

disenchantment with the staid, ordered, and non-interventionist sort of Christianity associated with the Western mission enterprise with its emphasis on evangelisation through education and social developmental programmes. These were received as needed for the lofty purposes they served, but with the vernacular translations of the Scriptures, African also discerned that God was present in the biblical era in the power of the Holy Spirit. They opted for these charismatic dimensions of Christianity, many aspects of which resonated deeply with African religious worldviews and sensibilities.<sup>5</sup>

This chapter explores the explosion of African Pentecostal Christianity and how it is reshaping spirituality beyond the continent today. In the Spirit-empowered ministries and movements we encounter in Africa, soteriology focuses on existential issues and a dynamic pneumatology in which the presence of God manifests within the context of worship. This dual emphasis of Spirit-empowered Christianity in Africa is not misplaced because not only is the growth and dynamism of contemporary global Pentecostalism explained in terms of workings of “the power of the Holy Ghost”, but also it is in that power that Pentecostalism could be said to have spread around and impacted the world. An observation by Harvey Cox some two decades ago on the reasons for the worldwide resurgence of religion, especially Pentecostalism, is disproportionately applicable to the case of Christian Africa: “[Pentecostalism] is about the experience of God, not about abstract religious ideas, and it depicts a God who does not remain aloof but reaches down through the power of the Spirit to touch human hearts in the midst of life’s turmoil.”<sup>6</sup> The growth of Pentecostalism, I argue, fulfils the prophetic appearance of

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<sup>5</sup> See J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *Sighs and Signs of the Spirit: Ghanaian Perspectives on Pentecostalism and Renewal in Africa*, Regnum Studies in Mission (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Reading, PA: Addison-Wesley, 1995): 5.

African peoples at the global Spirit-empowered fellowship constituted following the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (*Shavuot*). It brought together, as we read from Acts 2:5, “devout people from every nation under heaven,”<sup>7</sup> including African Jews, to fellowship together under the influence or intoxication of the Holy Spirit.

The Pentecostal theological emphasis on the experience of the Spirit, Pentecostalism’s lack of formal and neatly defined liturgical structures, and its versatile ecclesiology, mean that wherever Pentecostalism is found, Spirit-empowered communities can bring people together from across denominations and dissolve ethnic and religious identities.

This chapter describes the contribution of African Pentecostalism to world Christianity, based on its history, mission, and theological focus. Africa is a large continent with a significant part of it Islamic, so at all material times, the expression *African Pentecostalism* would be used to refer to the sub-Saharan non-Islamic, predominantly Christian parts of the continent. At the present time, some of the largest Pentecostal churches in the world are in the most populous African country: Nigeria.

### **Pentecostal Spirituality and its Popularity**

Cox observes that the story of the first Pentecost has always served as an inspiration for people discontented with the way religion or the world in general is going.<sup>8</sup> Studies on religion in Africa have consistently concluded that people often accumulate in their personal worlds as many religious resources as can respond to their physical and spiritual needs. The result is that, in various African cultural contexts, people disenchanted with the older denominations crave a Spirit-empowered communion, attracted by an experiential spirituality that responds to their

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<sup>7</sup> All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the Christian Standard Bible (CSB).

<sup>8</sup> Cox, *Fire from Heaven*, 5.

deepest needs. The non-Pentecostals may frame the haemorrhage of their members in terms of “sheep-stealing” against Spirit-empowered churches. However, the truth is that the sheep wander into places where they can find good pasture.

Spirit-empowered Christianity, we have noted, appeals strongly to African religious sensibilities, and that explains why Spirit-empowered churches attract so many disenchanted members out of historic mission denominations. We cannot talk about Spirit-empowered Christianity anywhere in the world without Pentecostalism. Generally, Pentecostals, as Walter J. Hollenweger often argued, are not given to creedal confessions because of the oral nature of their theology; they prefer to sing, dance, and pray their faith extemporaneously, rather than recite it.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, in many places, Pentecostalism first arose as a protest movement against human-made creeds and the coldness of worship associated with traditional churches. Cox observes that, while the beliefs of other religious groups are enshrined in formal theological systems, those of the Pentecostals are embedded in testimonies, ecstatic speech, and bodily movement.<sup>10</sup>

This informal, expressive, and spontaneous form of spirituality resonates with African ways of being religious. African cultures tend to possess a non-literate oral character. Spirituality founded on the “power of the Holy Spirit” has therefore proven popular in African Christianity, engendering emulative action within Western, mission-related, mainline denominations, and leading to what one may describe as the “Pentecostalisation” of African Christianity.

Pentecost, according to Cheryl Bridges Johns, is an “ongoing festival” that continually calls people to participate in the work of the Holy Spirit. She observes that, contrary to traditional Christian views of Pentecost as a static historical event, “the primary mission of

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<sup>9</sup> Walter J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997): pp. 32-34

<sup>10</sup> Cox, *Fire from Heaven*, 15.

Pentecostalism is to renew the meaning of Pentecost for the whole church.”<sup>11</sup> One implication of this is the recognition of an inseparable relationship between Spirit-empowered Christianity and the African primal imagination. *Spirituality* defines “the cluster of values, beliefs, and practices” that determine the distinctive religious lifestyle of a specific religious community.<sup>12</sup>

For indigenous Spirit-empowered Africans in particular, this proves evident first and foremost in worship, usually characterised by what Ghanaian theologian Christian G. Baëta says consists among other things, of rhythmic sways of the body to repetitious music, hand-clapping poignant cries and prayers, dancing, leaping, and motor reactions expressing intense religious emotions<sup>13</sup>

André Droogers also speaks of the “normalisation” of pneumatic phenomena in Pentecostal Christianity.<sup>14</sup> Pentecostal spirituality, encapsulating speaking in tongues; interpretation of tongues; singing in the Spirit; seeing visions and revelations; prophesying; giving words of knowledge; and the desire for signs, wonders, and miracles is not denomination specific. The fluidity and eclectic nature of Spirit-empowered forms of worship is what has led to the rise of renewal movements within the historic mission denominations, what Cephas Omenyo refers to as *Pentecost outside Pentecostalism*.<sup>15</sup> These pneumatic phenomena have recurred

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<sup>11</sup> Cheryl Bridges Johns, “What Can the Mainline Churches Learn from Pentecostals about Pentecost?” in Andre Droogers, Cornelis van der Laan, and Wout van Laar (eds), *Fruitful in the Land: Pluralism, Dialogue and Healing in Migrant Pentecostalism* (Zoetemeer, Netherlands: Boekencentrum, 2006): 93.

<sup>12</sup> Russell P. Spittler, “Corinthian Spirituality: How a Flawed Anthropology Imperils Authentic Christian Experience”, in Edith Blumhofer, Russell P. Spittler, and Grant Wacker (eds), *Pentecostal Currents in American Protestantism* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1999): 19.

<sup>13</sup> Christian G. Baëta, *Prophetism in Ghana: A Study of Some Spiritual Churches* (London: SCM, 1962): 1.

<sup>14</sup> André Droogers, “The Normalization of Religious Experience: Healing, Prophecy, Dreams, and Visions”, in K. Poewe (ed), *Charismatic Christianity as a Global Culture* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1994): 35.

<sup>15</sup> Cephas N. Omenyo, *Pentecost outside Pentecostalism: A Study of the Development of Charismatic Renewal in the Mainline Churches in Ghana* (Utrecht, Netherlands: Boekencentrum, 2002).

throughout Church history<sup>16</sup> since the era of Montanism, the sect-like charismatic movement of the second century that persisted for more than two centuries. This sort of spirituality has emerged in many non-Pentecostal churches. Thus, Spirit-empowerment draws the attention of the Church to the central place of the experience of the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts in Christian life and ministry. The popularity of this spirituality has not only led to the growth of Pentecostalism in Africa but also to the rise of charismatic renewal movements within non-Pentecostal churches.

### **The Spirit Moveth**

Spirit-empowerment in African Christianity has been possible because of the activity of God's Spirit in mission and because of the innovation of Pentecostal churches. Contrary to popular notions that Spirit-empowered movements in Africa seek to be culturally relevant, their primary desire is to be biblical. For the Apostle Paul, the term *spiritual* is synonymous with the Holy Spirit, referring to that which belongs to, or pertains to, the Spirit of God. The Church of the New Testament was charismatic, that is, it functioned in the gifts of grace bestowed by the Holy Spirit. Thus, in passages where Paul refers to believers as being "spiritual", he clearly meant "people of the Spirit".<sup>17</sup> Thus, in the Christian context, Spirit-empowerment is not a denominational idea. In Spirit-empowered movements, churches, and ministries, we encounter the practical outworking of the democratisation of charisma in which God pours out his Spirit on people; this explains why many such groups recognised the calling of women into ministry long before some of the older historic mission denominations.

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<sup>16</sup> See Stanley M. Burgess (ed), *Christian Peoples of the Spirit: A Documentary History of Pentecostal Spirituality from the Early Church to the Present* (New York: NYU Press, 2011).

<sup>17</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *Listening to the Spirit in the Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000) 38-39.



Some churches may refer to themselves as Pentecostal or even Charismatic depending on their historical origins and theological orientations. In essence, however, Pentecostalism is a particular form of Christian expression that may be found within Christian communities in which the experience of the Holy Spirit is considered important, including within non-Pentecostal denominations. The development of renewal groups forming within historic mission denominations stands as a testimony to this pervasive and versatile nature of Pentecostal spirituality. This means Pentecostal-Charismatic spirituality diffuses and spreads quickly, affecting and impacting people of different religious, social, and racial backgrounds. In the last three decades in particular, the distinction that used to exist between Pentecostal and historic mission denominations in several sub-Saharan African countries has been eroding, as the latter continue to imbibe in, and become increasingly open to, the movement of the Spirit within their own liturgical structures.

### **Pentecostal Spirituality and the African Imagination**

Spirit-empowered Christianity, as I have argued, resonates with traditional modes of being religious, especially African orality and senses of the supernatural and power. African cultures have a strong orientation to that which connects with the supernatural realms of existence. There is, in the African understanding, an unseen/spiritual world beyond the seen/physical world from where power, strength, protection, vitality, meaning, and fulfilment emanate for the living. There is also in the African traditional religious imagination a profound emphasis on the transcendent source of true life and existential salvation. Related to this worldview is the conviction that human beings are not alone in the universe but surrounded by a cloud of witnesses that includes the Supreme Being and other spirit beings whose benevolent help they may seek in times of need. This supernaturalist worldview has many facets that fit into

the biblical material, making it easy for African Christians to appreciate resonances between the two worlds.

Additionally, the African traditional religious imagination also includes a deep sense of the human being as finite, weak, limited, and imperfect. Thus, humans stand in need of powers not their own that will not only supply their needs but, more importantly, protect them against the malevolent powers in the world.<sup>18</sup> In this vein, one of the most important traditional symbols of the Akan of Ghana depicts the saying, “*Ewuradze biribi wo sor ma me nsa nka*,” meaning “God, there is something in the skies, let me have it.” This traditional African universe, as explained by the Ghanaian philosopher Kwame Gyekye, is a spiritual one, in which supernatural beings play a significant role in the thoughts and actions of people – in African philosophical thought, therefore, “what is primarily real is spiritual”.<sup>19</sup> This worldview is evident for instance in African warfare prayers, which amount to confrontations between the Spirit-empowered Christian battalions and the unseen forces and presences – principalities and powers in Pauline thought – and their spectacular dramatisation that impresses the psyche. Abimbola Adedokun explains that warfare prayers feature “insurrectional speech, imprecations and declamations” that seek to performatively overthrow the supernatural evil powers that work against human and social flourishing.<sup>20</sup>

This fight against the powers of evil is also evident in the structure of a typical Akan (African) libation prayer, as shown by Kwesi Yankah.<sup>21</sup> Here, the officiant invokes the forces of

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<sup>18</sup> Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995): 94.

<sup>19</sup> Kwame Gyekye, *African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1995): 69.

<sup>20</sup> Abimbola A. Adedokun, *Powerful Devices: Prayer and the Political Praxis of Spiritual Warfare* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2023): 2.

<sup>21</sup> Kwesi Yankah, *Speaking for the Chief: Okyeame and the Politics of Akan Royal Oratory* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995): 174.

beneficence, observing the Akan religious hierarchy where God is the Supreme Being, followed by Mother Earth, the pantheon of lesser gods, and the ancestors. The message segment of libation often highlights the occasion and purpose of the prayer. This is followed by solicitation, in which the speaker solicits support for the spiritual, moral, and material well-being of the lineage or society. The concluding segment of prayer, *mpae*, is often reserved for the pronouncement of curses on the forces of evil. In similar fashion, as Gornick observes among African immigrant Christians – dominated by the Spirit-empowered – the belief in the efficacy of prayer is joined with “regular and intense fasting”, because life is about prayer; “prayer is theology lived, embodied and enacted in daily life”.<sup>22</sup> This is, like the Pentecostal-Charismatic universe, also spiritual. In the Pentecostal worldview, that which is spiritual is also very real and active, and the spiritual encroaches daily upon human affairs. Pentecostal prayers in African contexts commonly request the same things that African traditional libation prayers request from deities and ancestors, that is, beneficence from heaven and curses upon enemies. One may question the Christian legitimacy of that, but in the last few decades, a whole prophetic movement has emerged within Spirit-empowered Christianity in Africa claiming to lead a charge against the powers working against the good in human life and society. The theological worldview underlying Spirit-empowered prayer is that God is active in the world, and that the power of the Holy Spirit can render the forces of darkness and evil working against human flourishing as impotent and ineffective. The Holy Spirit anoints the Church also to deal decisively with principalities and powers that hinder holistic Christian living. In the process, certain denominational barriers and inhibitions are overcome, as even non-Pentecostal churches begin to discover and operate in the power of the Spirit.

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<sup>22</sup> Gornick, *Word Made Global*, 127.

In Africa, as is being experienced globally, Spirit-empowered Christianity is now very much a form of media religion. In Africa, the Pentecostals dominate the media through televangelism, book and magazine publications, websites, and the uses of social media generally. The outbreak of COVID-19, which was problematised in terms of an “evil virus” unleashed on the world by the devil, brought the aggressive prayer life of Spirit-empowered Christians to the fore. Charismatic personalities and churches mobilised prayer across the continent – destroying, cursing, pulling down, and banishing the evil virus from among God’s people so that the Church would be released from lockdown to meet again.

The translatability of Pentecostal spirituality, that is, the ease with which the movement settles comfortably into cultures, has served as one of its major ecumenical strengths. Cox, commenting on the global effects of early twentieth-century North American Pentecostal revivals, refers to how the movement “became Russian in Russia, Chilean in Chile [and] African in Africa. [...] [He notes further that] It was a religion made to travel and it seemed to lose nothing in the translation.”<sup>23</sup> In the last two decades or so, the number of African charismatic churches has burgeoned in western European cities, underscoring the shift in the centre of gravity of Christianity from the northern to the southern continents. That most of the churches in the Diaspora belong to the Pentecostal-Charismatic stream of Christianity or claim a Spirit-empowered heritage is often missed by those commenting on these developments.

The African churches in question are leading the way in demonstrating true ecumenism in the former heartlands of Christianity by bridging racial gaps. These attempts at reversing Christian mission are the focus of the modern Pentecostal Movement as a religion dedicated to preaching Christ in all nations. Indeed, a strong call has gone out to European churches to

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<sup>23</sup> Cox, *Fire from Heaven*, 102.

abandon their attitudes and feelings of hostility towards their new immigrant compatriots and in grateful joy “perceive the work of the Holy Spirit outside the confines of their own organised pastoral activities, and recognise the genesis of new [African] churches and congregations in European soil as the grace of God”.<sup>24</sup> Future generations will be the judge of how well European churches have heeded this challenge from African Pentecostals now living in Europe.

### **Pentecostals and World Christianity**

In world Christianity, Spirit-empowered streams of the faith are often bastardised as aberrations of biblical faith. Early Pentecostal literature speaks of the visible unity of the Church, but this was to occur only on Pentecostal terms because, by putting a strong emphasis on the experience of the Spirit, Spirit-empowered movements draw attention to a dimension of biblical Christianity that is neglected at our peril.<sup>25</sup> There have been mutual suspicions for example between the Spirit-empowered and the advocates of the ecumenical movement all over the world. In Ghana, for example, the historic mission churches operate through the Christian Council of Ghana, while the Pentecostals operate through two bodies: the Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council and the National Association of Charismatic and Christian Churches. Pentecostals have had suspicions of ecumenism for two reasons: first, the older denominations regarded the Spirit-empowered as unqualified for recognition; and second, people in Pentecostal-Charismatic communities entertained serious objections to the various ecumenical councils as

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<sup>24</sup> Claudia Wahrlich-Oblau, “We Shall Be Fruitful in This Land: Pentecostal and Charismatic New Mission Churches in Europe”, in Andre Droogers, Cornelis van der Laan, and Wout van Laar (eds), *Fruitful in this Land: Pluralism, Dialogue and Healing in Migrant Pentecostalism* (Zoetermeer, Netherlands: Boekencentrum, 2006): 46.

<sup>25</sup> Cecil M. Robeck, “Pentecostals and Ecumenism in a Pluralistic World”, in Murray W. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus, and Douglas Petersen (eds), *The Globalization of Pentecostalism: A Religion Made to Travel* (Oxford: Regnum, 1999): 243.

then constituted.<sup>26</sup> The dissociation of classical Pentecostals from bridge-building efforts of Pentecostal ecumenists, such as David du Plessis in the 1960s, serves as a classic example of this suspicion.

The 2005 World Council of Churches (WCC) Conference on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) in Athens highlighted some of these concerns, as it sought to create space for ecumenical dialogue with Pentecostal-Charismatic Christians (PCCs). The Christians at the CWME sent a letter to the organisers protesting aspects of the programme that did not adequately address their concerns. This letter, signed by at least three Africans, started with a word of appreciation to the WCC for allowing PCCs consideration in the programme: “We have sensed the genuine openness in the leadership of the conference to the potential of Pentecostal contributions to the future of global Christianity.” The letter went on to note that: “Pentecostals are often misunderstood, misrepresented, and even unfairly caricatured.”<sup>27</sup>

### **Pentecost and Gentile Inclusion**

Spirit-empowerment, as developments in Africa indicate, is not a denominational agenda. The current spread of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity in Africa is reminiscent of the expansion of Christianity from Jewish into Gentile territory, following the missionary enterprise of the Early Church. God’s exercise in ecumenism did not only arise from the Day of Pentecost but was also demonstrated in many other ways, including the events that took place at the house of Cornelius (Acts 10). One implication of these developments has to do with the fact that Pentecost is about experiencing the Spirit of God; this experience is not the prerogative of any

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<sup>26</sup> Klaude Kendrick, *The Promise Fulfilled: A History of the Modern Pentecostal Movement* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing, 1961): 203-04.

<sup>27</sup> Allan H. Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*. Global Charismatic Christianity (Introduction to Religion) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 335-36.

Christian denomination, ethnic groups, or nationalities. It is noteworthy that, in the house of Cornelius, after being struck by the reality of the ecumenical nature of Pentecost, Peter confesses: “In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality but, in every nation, whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by him” (Acts 10:34-5). Similarly, this truth appears in the words of the Apostle Paul, who went to great lengths to bring this message to the Gentiles: “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law [...] that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (Gal. 3:13-14). Abraham was the father of nations, and therefore, to inherit the blessing of Abraham means to be adopted as outsiders into the family of God. Given that Christian mission has traditionally been viewed as the West bringing the gospel to Africa, it is instructive to note that at present Africa has overtaken the West in the terms of Christian presence. The rise of Spirit-empowered movements is the single most important evidence of the importance of African Christianity in world Christianity. African immigrants are planting churches in Western Europe. In a sense, this is the fulfilment of prophecy of the outsiders now being incorporated into God’s family as beneficiaries of the blessings of Abraham. In the house of the Gentile Centurion, Cornelius, the Pentecost that the disciples of Jesus experienced previously occurred outside Pentecostalism.

The Holy Spirit defied the religious protocols of the time, literally invading Gentile territory, to affirm a global Christian vision of ecumenical proportions. In Acts 11:1-18, the Apostle Peter narrates to his fellow disciples the sequence of events that led him to experience Pentecost with the Gentile Cornelius in Caesarea, and that narrative concludes: “When they heard these things, they became silent; and they glorified God saying, then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life” (Acts 11:18).

This trend has continued, and today some churches are designated Pentecostal because they function in a certain experiential pneumatology. However, the events surrounding Peter's encounter with Cornelius underscores the simple fact that, in God's scheme of things, Pentecost can occur outside Pentecostalism. This is one way to understand the rise of Spirit-empowered movements within Presbyterian, Methodist, Roman Catholic, and Anglican churches in African countries, such as Ghana.

In the early 1920s, the Spirit-empowered experiences of an African Methodist catechist, William Egyanka Appiah, was described as belonging to the occult. He was "firmly ordered [...] to stop all his 'occult practices' completely and at once, as the Methodists were not like that".<sup>28</sup> By this statement, the superintendent minister meant that his catechist was being un-Methodist through his new spirituality. Catechist Appiah felt unable to obey the instructions, and the result was that he and his Faith Society left the Methodist Church of the Gold Coast (Ghana). They decided to meet every Thursday, "to seek the Holy Spirit as the Apostles did".<sup>29</sup> In about 1924, the Fellowship metamorphosed into an independent indigenous "Pentecostal" church, the Mussama Disco Christo Church (MDCC).<sup>30</sup> What the Methodists rejected as "occult practices" at the time were the religious phenomena that give Spirit-empowered ministries their identity, and which in fact are not alien to the Wesleyan Methodist heritage.

This early twentieth-century account from Ghana serves as an example of many that occurred all over the continent at the time. The account recalls the words of Walter Hollenweger that Pentecostal movements usually begin as "ecumenical movements" within existing historic

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<sup>28</sup> Baëta, *Prophetism in Ghana*, 35.

<sup>29</sup> Baëta, *Prophetism in Ghana*, 36.

<sup>30</sup> Baëta, *Prophetism in Ghana*, 31-32.



mission church traditions.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, towards the end of the twentieth century, many young people whose Holy Spirit experiences were considered an aberration to Christian spirituality were thrown out of historic mission denominations. Many started independent charismatic churches, which have grown to become mega-sized churches in urban Africa. They left their previous denominations because their baptism in the Holy Spirit and related experiences were rejected as unbiblical.

A useful example of this situation is the Charismatic Evangelistic Ministry located in Accra. It began as a renewal movement within the Roman Catholic Church on the campus of the University of Ghana. The inability of the hierarchical and liturgically ordered Catholic structure to accommodate the experiential, spiritual, and ecumenical outlook of the new movement led to a break in relations in 1993, culminating in the formation of the Charismatic Evangelistic Ministry. Through such indigenous initiatives in Christian expression, African Christians took their spiritual destinies into their own hands in the formation of independent indigenous churches.

According to Hollenweger, what unites Spirit-empowered churches is not doctrine but religious experience.<sup>32</sup> The phenomenal success of Spirit, particularly in African countries such as Ghana, is largely due to its emphasis on the experience of the Spirit.<sup>33</sup> Pentecostalism has succeeded in Africa because it provides ritual contexts within which people may experience God's presence and power in forceful and demonstrable ways. In Africa, such acts of power for healing, protection of wealth, success and prosperity, and deliverance from activities of witches were traditionally sought from local shrine deities. Spirit-empowered Christianity, with its

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<sup>31</sup> Walter J. Hollenweger, "From Azusa Street to the Toronto Phenomenon", in Jürgen Moltmann and K. Kuschel (eds), *Pentecostal Movements as an Ecumenical Challenge* (London: SCM, 1996): 6.

<sup>32</sup> Hollenweger, "From Azusa Street to the Toronto Phenomenon", 7.

<sup>33</sup> Kwabena J. Asamoah-Gyadu, "Pentecostalism and the Missiological Significance of Religious Experience", *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology* 12(1 and 2), (2002): 30-57.

emphasis on the experience of God's power, now represents, for the same people, Christian alternatives to traditional spiritual resources of supernatural succour.

Spirit-empowerment is now the hallmark of Christianity in Africa. We see its impact in the emergence of mega-sized congregations, the numbers of people subscribing to Pentecostal forms of religious manifestations and impartations in media, the growing public influence of Spirit-empowered leaders, and the sheer transformation of Christianity as a public faith. Our discussion in this chapter is not a novel attempt at pointing to the importance of the nonrational in religion, which is the stock-in-trade of Spirit-empowerment on charismatic Christianity. In his classic work, *The Idea of the Holy*, Rudolf Otto lamented that the marginalisation of the non-rational aspect of religion by orthodoxy had resulted in the idea of the holy being given a one-sidedly intellectualistic approach: "So far from keeping the non-rational element in religion alive in the heart of the religious experience," Otto writes, "orthodox Christianity manifestly failed to recognise its value, and by this failure gave to the idea of God a one-sidedly intellectualistic and rationalistic interpretation."<sup>34</sup> In a sense, Spirit-empowered Christianity serves as a corrective, an inversion, to the logic of the intellectualistic approach to faith.

Russell Spittler states that whatever else can be said about them, the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements have democratised individual religious experience.<sup>35</sup> Donald Miller picks up the same theme of the centrality of religious experience in Spirit-empowered Christianity, in noting that these new paradigm churches, as he terms them, are changing the way Christianity looks and is experienced.<sup>36</sup> Miller further describes the new paradigm churches as

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<sup>34</sup> Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923): 3.

<sup>35</sup> Spittler, "Corinthian Spirituality", 5-6.

<sup>36</sup> Donald E. Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in the New Millennium* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 1997): pp13-16.

groups which have discarded many of the attributes of establishment religion. Appropriating contemporary cultural forms, these churches have created new genres “of worship music; they are restructuring the organisational character of institutional religion; they are democratising access to the sacred by radicalising the Protestant principle of the priesthood of all believers.”<sup>37</sup> In short, they offer people hope and meaning grounded in a transcendent experience of the people.<sup>38</sup>

### **Pentecost in New Tongues**

One way to appreciate the global influence of Pentecostalism is to consider its cardinal theological emphasis of speaking in tongues (glossolalia). Glossolalia is the Spirit-inspired utterance that Pentecostals believe must accompany baptism in the Holy Spirit following conversion. Speaking in tongues plays a very democratising role in worship. The gift of tongues allows people to pray in non-rational meditative language that is not mediated. Certain things remain clear about the experience of glossolalia that have a direct bearing on the democratising nature of Pentecostal spirituality. Tongues is unintelligible speech directed toward God (1 Cor. 14:2, 14-15, 28). The Apostle Paul held in the highest esteem speaking in tongues, as a means of communicating with God. To this end, Paul’s reference to “inarticulate groaning too deep for words” (Rom. 8:26) must be understood as referring primarily to glossolalia.<sup>39</sup>

One clearly senses that we are in profound moments in Pentecostal worship when people sing in tongues. Singing in the Spirit during worship, which invariably means “singing in

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<sup>37</sup> Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism*, 1-2.

<sup>38</sup> Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism*, 3.

<sup>39</sup> Frank D. Macchia, “Sighs Too Deep for Words: Toward a Theology of Glossolalia”, *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 1(1), (1992): 47-73, [Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/096673699200100105>], [Last accessed: 21<sup>st</sup> March 2024].

tongues” can lift both the singer and the listeners to another level of spiritual experience.<sup>40</sup> It is at once a subduing, uplifting, overwhelming, and edifying experience that makes the presence of God palpable when it occurs during worship. The phenomenon changes the atmosphere of worship to the extent that the very presence of the living God becomes real.

Tom Smail describes the phenomenon of singing in the Spirit in the context of worship as a form of collective religious experience that by-passes the rational faculties.<sup>41</sup> Singing in the Spirit reminds us that alongside the praise of the renewed mind comes the praise of the renewed heart that when, evoked by the Spirit, expresses not simply our superficial feelings, but engages the deep primal emotions at the hidden centre of our being in our self-offering to the living God.<sup>42</sup> The experience escapes from a complicated conceptuality and a second dependence on such liturgical resources as prayer books and hymn books and responds in immediacy and freedom to the contact with the living Lord that the Spirit makes possible and, in joyous serenity, rejoices and mediates upon his poured-out grace and his revealed glory.<sup>43</sup>

Smail’s description of speaking in tongues echoes the view of the Apostle Paul: “For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful” (1 Cor. 14:14). The expression “unfruitful” implies that the human intellect in this kind of ecstatic praying lies dormant contributing nothing to the process of articulating thoughts into words. Martin suggests that in enraptured fellowship with God, when the human spirit is in such deep, hidden

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<sup>40</sup> Kwabena J. Asamoah-Gyadu, “Signs of the Spirit: Worship as Experience in African Pentecostalism”, *Journal of African Christian Thought* 8(2), (December 2005b): 17-24.

<sup>41</sup> Tom Smail, “In Spirit and in Truth: Reflections on Charismatic Worship”, in Tom Smail, A. Walker, and N. Wright (eds), *Charismatic Renewal* (London: SPCK, 1995): 109-10.

<sup>42</sup> Smail, “In Spirit and in Truth”, 109-10.

<sup>43</sup> Smail, “In Spirit and in Truth”, 109-10.

communion with the divine Spirit, that words, arising from broken utterances sourced from within our secret selves, are actually formed by spiritual upsurge without mental effort. <sup>.44</sup>

Because glossolalia bypasses the rational faculties and makes possible free access to the living God, it cannot be colonised within any Christian tradition; precisely for this reason, glossolalia can have a strong and profound democratising significance for Spirit-empowered Christians worldwide. The worshipful acts of speaking, praying, and speaking in tongues amount to an inclusive experience in the Spirit which makes the marginalised and despised feel a sense of belonging when it comes Spirit empowerment. Historically, Western mission Christianity became paradigmatic of biblical faith; the reversal of the Tower of Babel experience means that what has happened within African Christianity with the experience of the Spirit cannot be dismissed as an aberration of what happens elsewhere in the world.

### **Pentecost: God's Empowering Presence**

The experience of the Holy Spirit, as Gordon Fee would have it, amounts to encountering God empowering presence.<sup>45</sup> The Holy Spirit is God's empowering presence. The empowering effect of God the Holy Spirit is evident, through glossolalic experiences because, as Paul says, "We do not know how to pray so the Spirit helps us in our weakness" (Rom. 8:26). This is so that, against the backdrop of limited human speech and comprehension, the Spirit-empowered are enabled to speak mysteries to God in prayer. John V. Taylor's *The Go Between God: The Holy Spirit and the Christian Mission* appeared at a time when it was clear that the "death of God" prophets of the 1960s had been proven false. The book drew attention to the Holy Spirit as

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<sup>44</sup> Ralph M. Martin, "Aspects of Worship in I Corinthians 14:1-25", in Cecil M. Robeck (ed), *Charismatic Experiences in Christian History* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1985): 74.

<sup>45</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994).

a neglected factor in Christian mission.<sup>46</sup> Taylor referred to the Holy Spirit as “the chief actor in the historic mission of the Christian church,” noting that “the marching orders” for Christian mission and “the gift of the Holy Spirit come in the same package.”<sup>47</sup>

There is a non-negotiable connection between the reception of power through the presence of the Holy Spirit and the ability to witness. According to the Latin American Pentecostal theologian, Juan Sepúlveda,<sup>48</sup> the constitutive act of the Pentecostal Movement is the offer of a direct and particularly intense encounter with God that makes possible a profound change in the life of the person who experiences it. The reference to the Holy Spirit relates fundamentally to the direct character of the encounter. Through the Holy Spirit, God makes himself directly accessible to the believer who seeks him, thus destroying the necessity of every kind of external priestly mediation.

In the contemporary Western Church, this supernatural dimension in the mission of the Church has been gravely downplayed in Christian ministry, and the results have been an anaemic Christianity and empty chapel buildings. Wherever Christianity is succeeding, such as in Africa, it is doing so because the Holy Spirit, God’s empowering presence, remains active. In emphasising the experience of the Holy Spirit as essential to Christian identity and mission, the various streams of Spirit-empowered movements identify the critical element in the mission of the Church. By the common experience of the Holy Spirit, Africans now come to belong because it is the single most important proof that God’s visitation does not defer to or privilege any single geographical source or people.

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<sup>46</sup> John V. Taylor, *The Go Between God: The Holy Spirit and the Christian Mission* (London: SCM, 1972).

<sup>47</sup> Taylor, *Go Between God*, 34.

<sup>48</sup> Juan Sepúlveda, “Reflections on the Pentecostal Contribution to the Mission of the Church in Latin America”, *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 1(1), (1992): 100, [Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/096673699200100107>], [Last accessed: 21<sup>st</sup> March 2024].

Earlier on in this chapter, I referred to the use of media in the globalisation of Pentecostalism. One of the ways in which Spirit empowerment is mediated is through a shared genre of music. A close relationship exists between music and religious experience. The informal, affective, and expressive nature of Pentecostal meetings, facilitated by music, demonstrates that worship requires more than cognitive assent.<sup>49</sup> Praise and worship of God, Poloma asserts, is believed to be the medium through which the presence of God is made manifest.<sup>50</sup> God does indeed inhabit the praises of his people (Ps. 22:3).

Cox cites music as one of the reasons for the quick diffusion of Pentecostal Christianity globally. Music is not used by Pentecostals merely as an embellishment to worship but as the wavelength on which the message is carried.<sup>51</sup> There is no doubting Cox's claim that music is integral rather than peripheral to Pentecostal worship.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, music is the heartbeat of Pentecostal religiosity and, through this medium, it has most affected non-Pentecostal liturgies. Music plays a critical role in the therapeutic and edifying process of Spirit-empowered worship, observable in African settings. In many of the local Pentecostal-Charismatic choruses, the Holy Spirit, *Sunsum Kronkron*, comes to work among God's people when they gather for worship. In one song, He brings *ayaresa* [healing] *ogyee* [deliverance], and *emuonyam* [glory], to those who wait upon Him.

Another local Pentecostal chorus depicts the Holy Spirit in keeping with biblical images of Him as *ogya* [fire], *mframa* [wind], and *adom nsu* [water of life]. As fire he purifies, as wind he fills, and as living water he restores life to dry deserts and lands, resulting from drought.

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<sup>49</sup> Margaret Poloma, *Mainstream Mystics: The Toronto Blessing and Reviving Pentecostalism* (New York: Altamira, 2003): 41.

<sup>50</sup> Poloma, *Mainstream Mystics*, 41.

<sup>51</sup> Cox, *Fire from Heaven*, 121.

<sup>52</sup> Cox, *Fire from Heaven*, 122.

African Pentecostals worship in expectation that during the singing and prayer, the Holy Spirit will visit, and people can encounter His presence. This mode of religious expression appeals greatly to African religious sensibilities because of its experiential and therapeutic nature.

### **Conclusion**

We cannot talk about Christianity in Africa today without acknowledging its Spirit-empowered streams. In Pentecostalism, says Miller, we are witnessing a second reformation, transforming people who will experience Christianity in this millennium. The Pentecostal reformation challenges the medium through which the message of Christianity is articulated.<sup>53</sup> In Africa, where Pentecostalism has become the representative face of Christianity, Allan H. Anderson also speaks of the situation as an *African Reformation*.<sup>54</sup>

This reformation is thoroughly experiential in character and experientially democratising in orientation because it is not bound by denominational bureaucracy and the restraint of religious tradition. Spirit-empowered Christianity represented by Pentecostalism is not only a faith of the present but also the Christianity of the future. Its greatest strength is its emphasis on Christianity as an *experience* or *encounter* with a living God who revealed himself in Jesus Christ and, at Pentecost, poured himself out on the Church.<sup>55</sup>

Right from its biblical origins in the prophecy of Joel through to the promise of the Spirit after the resurrection of Christ and its fulfilment on the Day of Pentecost, Spirit-empowered Christianity has been thoroughly infectious in its effects. Spirit empowerment offers a form of religion not defined by denominational boundaries. In other words, this spirituality is not

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<sup>53</sup> Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism*, 11.

<sup>54</sup> Allan H. Anderson, *African Reformation: African Initiated Christianity in the 20th Century* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2001).

<sup>55</sup> Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005).



denomination-specific but an experience that people can encounter inside and outside of denominational, ethnic, social, geographical, economic, and political boundaries.

Pentecost, unlike Babel, was a divine action in which God reached out to all flesh by the outpouring of His Spirit. While the Tower of Babel created confusion and dispersion of nations, Pentecost announces the possibility of a new unity among people. This unity, which transcends linguistic and ethnic differences and gives communal value to the individual emotional experience, transforms Spirit-empowered Christianity into the greatest expression of religious communication. Wherever it is found today, Pentecostalism breaks down rigid traditional ecclesiastic structures and joins the secular, modern world, reaching out in all languages to all peoples and nations.<sup>56</sup>

To celebrate Pentecost is not to recall an event locked in time and space but rather to participate in a continuing festival ever more mysterious, frightening, and wonderful than we could ever imagine.<sup>57</sup> Rather than allowing denominational inclinations to divide us, each one of us should remain open to the empowerment of the Spirit, sincerely desiring his gifts, so that when God reaches out to us, we can recognise His presence wherever we meet. For in Christ, as the Apostle Paul tells the Church at Ephesus, we “also are being built together for a dwelling place or God in the Spirit” (Eph. 2:22).

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<sup>56</sup> Waldo Cesar, *From Babel to Pentecost: A Social-Historical-Theological Study of the Growth of Pentecostalism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001): 31-32.

<sup>57</sup> Wout van Laar, “Introduction: It’s Time to Get to Know Each Other”, in Andre Droogers, Cornelis van der Laan, and Wout van Laar (eds), *Fruitful in this Land: Pluralism, Dialogue and Healing in Migrant Pentecostalism* (Zoetermeer, Netherlands: Boekencentrum, 2006): 14.

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### **Abstract**

This paper deals with Spirit-empowerment and the transformation of Christianity in Africa. Spirit-empowered Christianity is now the representative face of Christianity on the continent, and this has global implications. The enchanted African Pentecostal/charismatic formula “in the power of the Holy Ghost” is commonly used in situations needing divine interventions. Not only is the growth and dynamism of contemporary Pentecostalism explained in terms of “the power of the Holy Ghost”, but also it is in that power that Pentecostalism could be said to have spread and impacted the world. This paper explores the explosion of African Pentecostal Christianity and how it is reshaping spirituality beyond the continent today.