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The African Christian Diaspora in Europe:

Religious and Cultural Aspects

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I.

Aspects of migration

Next to the intentional expansion of religious movements by mission, *migration* is one of the most significant factors bringing about religious dissemination. This is highlighted by the departure of African individuals and communities beyond the shores of the continent to other geo-political contexts. Africa, with the traumatic experience of the transatlantic slave trade as an unprecedented mode of forced exile, and with the new development of accelerated intercontinental migration in the context of globalization in the second half of the 20th century, has gone through numerous phases of internal and external migration and is a continent continuously on the move. This has effected the arrival and settlement of larger or smaller African migrant groups in Europe – and, in fact, the presence of *religious traditions* quite alien to European established and, in some way, homogeneous religion, if we classify Catholic and Protestant churches in this part of the world as essentially springing from the same roots. Consequently, the phenomenon of '*religion on the move*' has begun to attract the attention of scholars of Religious and Anthropological (Ethnological) Studies who start to acknowledge the significance of migrant religions to their academic field and to the history of religions in general. Yet, the established bodies

of both Catholic and Protestant provenance in Europe (including Anglicanism), or what we call 'western churches', have with the exception of Britain only recently taken notice of the new phenomenon, somehow compelled by the mushrooming of independent groups from continents other than Europe everywhere in their midst. The latter reflects the rapid development of an alternative pentecostal/charismatic Christianity from 1970/80 in the Two-Thirds-world, researched in detail so far more by sociologists and anthropologists rather than theologians, and widely regarded as the parallel development to the renewal in Islam.

In Britain where pioneering research from the early seventies such as my own and that of others¹ has encouraged growing, mainly young, scholarship in the field of black religious studies, the climate has to some degree been more open: Black majority churches are part and parcel of the ecumenical scene. The former British Council of Churches (BCC) developed from 1990 into a 'new instrument' of *Churches Together*, which tries to accommodate Black Pentecostals and African Indigenous churches the same way as Roman Catholics. Yet, still far from having built real 'partnership' (speaking from experience as former director of the CBWCP) the issue of a relevant, interdenominational *partnership* or (theologically speaking) *joint mission* in the multicultural/multiracial milieu of the inner cities is still unsolved, each part rather circling around their respective creedal, cultural or ethical concerns, instead of focusing on the urgent needs of rampant racism, cultural tensions, violence, decay, despair or

¹ Cf. R.I.H. Gerloff, *A Plea for British Black Theologies: The Black Church Movement in Britain in its transatlantic cultural and theological interaction*, Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity 77, 2 volumes (Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 1991); I. MacRobert, *Black Pentecostalism: its origins, functions and theology: with special reference to a Midland borough*, PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 1989.

poverty. On the European continent, this has taken on the shape of a debate about the issue of a 'reverse mission' versus a 'common mission' to secularized society.² The WCC consultation with African and Caribbean Church leaders we organized in Leeds in 1995 therefore stated that "mission must be based on mutual respect", be "dialogical" not colonial, and grounded in "spiritual empowerment...and attention to people, not just strategies". It formulated proposals relating to a common agenda, to proper recognition of the new Christian communities (with an effect on European religious and secular establishments), to the need for radical reform of church structures, and to an acknowledgement of the contribution of the diaspora churches in Europe "as living communities which long for unity in mission and evangelism in today's political world".³

Under the heading *Church, Culture and Identity* it stated:

Black majority churches necessarily know the connection between culture and identity. Culture is intrinsic to humanity, and if culture is not affirmed, they become de-humanized, as colonial history has demonstrated. Culture is related to people's past, present and future, and is carried as baggage of a group, a family or society. This raises at least three issues:

- Culture in this context cannot be understood as static, but very dynamic, as it evolves around the specific needs of a community.
- Language is central to this process, as it expresses values, given or taken away in the course of changing perceptions, e.g. the ever-changing terminology asserting people's cultures.
- Cultural identity of people of African descent is therefore interrelated with specific aspects as the history of oppression, racism, social injustice etc.⁴

² The United Evangelical Mission in Wuppertal, Germany organised a first conference on this topic in May 2000.

³ WCC Consultation with African and African Caribbean Church Leaders, Leeds, England, 30.11–1.12.95, R. Gerloff & H. Van Beek, eds., Geneva: WCC, 1996, 41f.

⁴ Ibid, 39f.

II.

*The Leeds Consultation*⁵

In 1997, in follow-up of existing research in Britain from 1973 and the WCC Consultation held with Black church leaders in Britain 1995, a Consultation took place under the auspices of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at Leeds University on *The Significance of the African Religious Diaspora in Europe*. The reasons behind such an undertaking were varied: increased immigration of people of African descent into Europe and its developing political and monetary union; the growing importance of issues such as human rights, religious freedom, racial equality and social justice; the deficit in partnership models between African independent groups and European religious and secular institutions; and most of all, the lack of knowledge of and research in African religious communities as 'mainstays' for their survival in indifferent or even hostile environments. Among its objectives were: to *network* between African communities and scholars; to stimulate *research* in hitherto under-researched regions; to facilitate *dialogue* between African communities and the historic churches; to equip people from *oral* cultures to tell their own stories; to help European institutions both religious and secular to perceive people's spirituality and faith as *central* to their survival in dignity and affirmation of life; and to contribute to policy-making in terms of mutual support and empowerment across national borders. Hence the conference looked into the *socio-economic* contexts in which African religions arise; the vast *pluriformity* and contextuality of their religious traditions; the patterns of faith and spirituality which make

⁵ See "The Significance of the African Christian Diaspora in Europe: A Report on Four Meetings in 1997/8" in: *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. XXIX/1, Leiden: Brill NV, 1999, 115-120.

people '*belong*' in a climate of exclusion, uprootedness, crisis, deprivation and exposure to racism; and the *tensions* and conflicts among themselves and with their environment.

Regional reports to this conference can be described as *narratives of survival* in different countries. They dealt with the experience of struggles to be fought and the function of a religion which is not practiced for its own sake but for the common good. They reported everyday problems such as racial and religious discrimination, poverty, ill-health, spiritual affliction and the resulting dependency syndrome or lack of motivation to change one's condition - and how, they said to overcome these by the "*power of the Spirit.*" They pointed to the urgency of starting a discourse between secular society and traditional values, especially with a view to the younger generation. Hence debates focused on issues which should become programmatic for further explorations:

- How best to tackle models of *exclusion* on racial, cultural and religious grounds when, due to Western colonial and intellectual history, Africans are still portrayed as 'cultist' or 'primitive'.
- How to affirm African *leadership*, both religious and cultural, in white-dominated societies.
- How, in particular, to raise the profile of *Black women* leaders both inside and outside religious communities.
- How to formulate and convey a *spirituality*, which defies bureaucracy, fosters communication with both the immanent and the transcendent affirms culture and believes in a power greater than human forces.

- How to fight *racism*, not only from a socio-political but spiritual position, and form models of partnership with the indigenous population.
- How to support the *young* who live in the tension between the secular state and traditional values imported from Africa.
- How to *counteract* the de-Africanisation of communities in Europe and at the same time to *adapt* to changes and transformation in the respective societies.
- How to *integrate* anglophone and francophone African groups on one hand and African and Caribbean churches on the other to unite in strength and purpose.⁶

The Leeds Consultation was followed up by three conferences in 1998: one organized by ASPA (African Supporters and Promoters Abroad) in Sweden, on *Cultural Unity in Diversity*, focusing on the cultural-political issues; a Colloquium held by CREDIC, the French organization for Mission Studies, on the impact and missiological issue of a *new sense of mission* (or *reverse mission*) through Christians from other continents;⁷ and a third workshop initiated by the Academy of Mission at Hamburg University on the German situation and the relationship between African churches and the established institutions there. These meetings of two years, and especially Leeds 1997, have served as a kind of inspiration and set in motion a wider process, not only in terms of research and networking between researchers – in fact, two doctoral dissertations have been completed and published in Germany 2003,⁸ and others are underway in Belgium and

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Published in Marc Spindler and Annie Lenoble-Bart (eds), *Chrétiens d'outre-mer en Europe: Un autre visage de l'immigration* (Paris: Editions Karthala, 2000).

⁸ Benjamin Simon, *Afrikanische Kirchen in Deutschland* (Frankfurt a.M.: Otto Lembeck, 2003); Regina Jach, *Migration, Religion und Raum*, Interethnische Beziehungen und Kulturwandel Bd.54, Münster-Hamburg -London: LIT Verlag 2004.

France - but also in terms of the formation of a network between African Christian Communities in Europe themselves.

III.

The Council of Christian Communities of an African Approach in Europe

The latter desire, already strongly voiced at Leeds, was given shape at the second International and Interdisciplinary Conference held at Westminster College Cambridge in 1999 under the title *Open Space: The African Christian Community in Europe and the Quest for Human Community*,⁹ This gathering focused in particular on the pastoral, regional and empowerment aspects among African-derived churches. It initiated a working party of African and Caribbean representatives from five European countries to work on establishing a new organization. This came into being in Switzerland in 2001, called the *Council of Christian Communities of An African Approach in Europe* - a name that signifies that members do not perceive themselves as just preserving race, religion and culture but as becoming a catalyst for healing and bridge-building – or creating that *open space* so needed in a fragmented and polarized Europe. Whereas many churches and councils in different regions compete and struggle to come to terms with their cultural, religious and theological differences, the new council focuses on *inclusion* and not exclusion, i.e. to network between a great diversity of African indigenous (AICs), Evangelical, Pentecostal-Charismatic, Sabbatarian and the older Catholic and Protestant traditions, anglophone and francophone groups, Africans from the continent and those from the Caribbean and America now dispersed across Europe. The headquarters will be in Berlin as the place where Africa was divided among the European nations. Although organisationally and financially struggling, it managed to host most recently the Third

⁹ Material published in *International Review of Mission* LXXXIX No. 354, July 2000, R. Gerloff (editor).

International and Interdisciplinary African Christian Diaspora conference this September near Berlin, in conjunction with Humboldt (Berlin) and Rostock universities and the Mission Academy. Under the topic *The Berlin Congo Conference 1884, the partition of Africa, and Implications for Christian Mission today*, it attracted more than 120 participants from several African and European countries, the Caribbean and America.

From the letter of invitation:¹⁰

By linking the conference with the historical epoch after the Berlin Congo Conference (1884) and the partition of Africa among European nations, the organisers intend to set a *symbolic sign* by serving as an interface between scholars in this field and religious practitioners: academia and grassroots pastors, oral and literary history and theology, European indigenous and African Christianity. The aims of the conference are:

- to examine the historical and socio-political consequences of the partition of Africa for the continent and the African Diaspora, highlighting issues such as migration, racism and sexism;
- to look critically into the political role the Christian mission played in colonising Africa, as well as into the paradigm shift in mission today locally and globally;
- To inquire into the significance of diverse indigenous movements (not least pentecostal) emanating from the Two-thirds-world in their struggle for survival in dignity, as well as their interaction with religious and secular European institutions;
- and in all these aspects explore the practical consequences, not least giving Black women a prominent place in the proceedings.

As such the conference hopes to contribute to a new understanding of faith, to overcoming racial and cultural barriers, and to promoting intercultural and inter-religious dialogue in a

¹⁰ Letter of Invitation to the Third International Interdisciplinary Conference of the African Christian Diaspora in Europe at the Hirschluch Conference Centre near Berlin 11.-15. September 2003.

polarised world. Resource people from Africa, America and the Caribbean are invited to highlight specific issues, as well as engage in a mutual exchange of ideas and experiences.

Ronald Nathan, Caribbean Pentecostal scholar and community development worker, compared in his report on the initial stages of the venture this process with the Pan-African movement at the turn of the 20th century which was a movement for change, freedom and independence. He concluded:

We too are called upon to stand up and speak for change socially, politically, economically, academically and spiritually. The European Community needs us. This goes beyond us being just a source for cheap and disposable labour. Europe needs us in our totality to speak up and stand up for the biblical cause of righteousness and freedom. Shoulder to shoulder we must engage the call to Christian mission that results in holistic liberation for all. Our freedom and liberation is intertwined with those of all the peoples of Europe.¹¹

IV.

*A Reticulate Structure*¹²

I resist here the temptation to give a detailed overview on several European countries. I am knowledgeable on Britain and Berlin, but could point also to developments in wider Germany, Belgium, France, Switzerland, Sweden and the Netherlands. Only to say, as indicated above, that there is a great variety of religious and cultural traditions: in Britain at least twelve different families from Africa and the Caribbean; or, looking on the European continent, a diversity of Adventist, Evangelical, Pentecostal and Charismatic

¹¹ Ronald Nathan in *IRM*, July 2000, 303.

¹² See for the following, Gerloff, "The African Continuum in Variation: The African Christian Diaspora in Britain", *Black Theology in Britain*, issue 4, May 2000, 84–112.

congregations of the Neo-Pentecostal type, but also the oldest oriental Orthodox Churches, Kimbanguists, others who understand themselves as 'ecumenical' or non-denominational, plus 'pockets' of Africans in Catholic, Baptist or Methodist churches. With reference to Berlin, they come mainly from Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and also African America. Many are multi-linguistic, using the vernacular besides the colonial languages English, German and French, and conduct worship in translating to and from Twi, Yoruba, Ibo, Amharic, Oromo or Lingala.¹³ Hence the Berlin scene, with rapid change since the fall of the wall, begins to mirror the overall network or *reticulate structure* of a kind of global Christianity to which I will now turn – a pluriformity of Christian traditions including traditional African religious elements which frequently overlap, mingle and create ever new shapes and expressions – hence for some 'westerners' posing a threat to what I call 'linear' forms of organization, and to the 'clarity' of (academic) theology.

This spectrum of a complex nature points us to a form of *worldwide Christianity* which grows dramatically, whose characteristics lie precisely in its diversity, but which has for obvious reasons been ignored if not condemned and labelled 'cultist' or 'sectarian' by western religious and academic institutions. For a long time it also has been largely neglected in missionary research, and even not sufficiently explored by studies in Pentecostalism, however, has carried itself across the continents and regions by strong cross-cultural, or better transcultural, forces. This phenomenon has caused Kwame Bediako to call Africa herself the '*laboratory of the world*' in terms of the relations

¹³ See R. Gerloff, "Afrikanische Gemeinden als Herausforderung an die Volkskirche", *Weg und Gestalt*, (Berlin: WDL-Verlag, 1998), 203–204.

between a cultural heritage and ideas that have been encountered from worlds elsewhere.

In his own words:

I do not wish to exaggerate the significance of the African dimension in the present global transformation of Christianity. Yet, it seems that the sheer surprise-element in the emergence of that continent as a major base of Christian faith at the close of the twentieth century makes it important that we seek to understand what this might mean both for Africa and for the Christian faith.¹⁴

Bediako points to a pattern of "overlapping circles of Christian life in context, with no absolute centres or peripheries",¹⁵ which I can affirm for the cultural and theological transmission of concepts within the transatlantic cycle, and which the two American sociologists Luther Gerlach and Virginia Hine, in their comparison between Pentecostalism and Black Power,¹⁶ have analysed as the 'polycephalous', 'cellular' or reticulate structure of movements which are carried by signals and life experiences rather than by abstract propositions, hence cannot be suppressed, and are counter to the linear bureaucratic operations of western historic establishments. As much as we find great differences – liturgically, culturally, and doctrinally – between African and African Caribbean Christian communities in Britain, and elsewhere in Europe, there is also much *common ground* little of which little has so far been researched. Points of reference may stand for others:

¹⁴ Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Book, 1995), 252.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 167.

¹⁶ Luther P. Gerlach and Virginia H. Hine, *People, Power, Change: Movements of Social Transformation* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merill, 1970).

- the recovery of African elements in the *American Azusa Street Revival* under the leadership of the black Holiness pastor William J. Seymour in 1906;
- the symbiosis of African and Christian culturalisms in the much earlier *Jamaican Revival* in 1861 (which awaits closer examining);
- the African religious dimension in the *Spiritual Baptist Faith* in Trinidad, Grenada, St Vincent and Guyana;¹⁷
- and the undeniable *impact* of early black and integrated Pentecostalism on both West African churches from the nineteen twenties, and the Black Church movement in Britain fifty years later.

Very little has been examined especially of the phenomena of increased *overlapping* of activities and traditions, and of the *overlays* between African and Western concepts, or what my colleague Kevin Ward has described as a kind of Christianity that "was and is created at the margins, the boundary, the periphery, and in so doing challenges the validity of all boundaries and peripheries."¹⁸

Pentecostalism

Let me at least briefly hint at two major areas of research, first ***Pentecostalism***. Walter Hollenweger has traced the roots of Pentecostalism to both African retentions and Christian propositional history, or to the unprecedented blending of a variety of black and white elements. My thesis is that Pentecostalism had such a global impact, because: - It

¹⁷ Cf. *Patricia Stephens, The Spiritual Baptist Faith: African New World Religious History, Identity and Testimony* (London: Kamak House, 1999).

¹⁸ Kevin Ward, "Mission Studies in Leeds", *BIAMS*, 1996, 2. - See the forthcoming publications of the Berlin conference, and also the book planned by RG for an American readership with Orbis, Maryknoll.

grew from the black scene and the recovery of *African elements* in the midst of white America, in a specific religious and socio-economic setting of that time. It responded to the quest for a *new spirituality* by ‘marrying’ these two cultural traditions, one African (modified and refined under slavery), the other Euro-American; one oral and multifaceted, the other literary and largely one-dimensional. - It thus enabled people anywhere (the Azusa revival reached five countries in three years!) to *indigenise the gospel* in their particular contexts and to express their faith in their own modes of communication.

In my interpretation, Pentecostal missions ‘back to Africa’ therefore only *return the African legacy* inherited from those forcibly exiled from the continent. This is in no way to deny the theological roots of Pentecostalism in North America, especially in primitive Wesleyanism and the Holiness movement, but it is to claim that ‘Christian perfection’ and the force of *Love* in Christian lives became *embodied and practical* in the early integrated revival through African *oral* structures, and through ‘Pentecost’ understood as the *power of communication* in worship, glossolalia and healing. This ‘miracle’ was soon to be violated, stereotyped or even corrupted by groups who withdrew on grounds of colour and status, i.e., clarity of organisation and doctrine, by imitating American middle-of-the-road Protestantism, and rejecting the ingenuity of the Spirit in the unrest of the time. With my own words in my doctoral thesis on black Pentecostal churches in Britain and their roots in the Azusa Street Revival:

Black Pentecostals such as Seymour and Haywood – Haywood being the more aggressive theologian and the better-known writer – represented a black religious

tradition which was extremely radical compared with white Christian standards and which bore in itself a revolutionary potential. Their religious expressions were community-oriented and, in fact, an outright protest against the prevailing social order, including the black middle class which had adapted itself, both doctrinally and liturgically, to white American main-line Protestantism. 'Apostolic' practice both at Azusa and in the Apostolic assemblies ...was not so much only a return to the experiences under oppression, "but to something farther back in history, an authenticity and simplicity of faith that had served them well in slavery and could be relied on to serve them in the growing racial crisis. It was African as its roots."¹⁹

An African Continuum in Variation

Necessarily, in African diaspora research, one must explore the underlying *cultural forces*, and in particular the divergences, different concepts, values and needs of Africans from the continent and Africans in the diaspora, not only in the early revival but also in the ensuing years of dispersion and consolidation. Consequently, the second major area for further exploration relates to what I call the African *Continuum in Variation* in all these overlapping patterns of modern Christian life – a term coined by Mervyn Aleyne in his book on roots of Jamaican culture.²⁰ This is to link the previous emphasis on *competing* strands in the interaction between dominant and subordinate social groups (i.e., the power struggle which manifests itself in both, maintaining the existing social order and creating survival strategies from 'below') to a rich cultural heritage that has long influenced western culture. This cultural continuum in fact has helped not to

¹⁹ Gerloff, *A Plea*...., 101 (quotation from: J. Tinney, "The Significance of Race in the Rise and Development of the Apostolic Pentecostal Movement", Harvard Divinity School Symposium, 1984, 2f).

²⁰ Term coined by Mervyn Aleyne, *Roots of Jamaican Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 1988; cf.: Diane J. Austin-Broos, *Jamaican Genesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

consolidate but to *transcend barriers*. It has facilitated communication and mutual liberation, and evoked 'healing powers', so central to Pentecostal practice and theology. If theological, including Pentecostal, scholarship wants to be partner to the study of religions and social anthropology, it must take culture and related discoveries seriously. With Craig Scandrett-Leatherman in an presentation on "African Roots and Multicultural Mission" practised in the institution of *Ngoma* in the Church of God in Christ:²¹

Afro Pentecostalism is in a good position to minister to many in the Euro-American culture in its 'post-modern' age which seems to have exhausted its absolute dependence on the god of reason, has become fascinated with cultural diversity, and has assimilated numerous forms of African culture, especially musical forms.

The debate about African survivals not destroyed under slavery, which began in the early part of the 20th century, has come down firmly on the positive appreciation of these cultural elements in variation. For America, research in the interaction between the continent of Africa and Black Religions in the 'New World' has been excellently brought to light first by scholars such as William Burghardt DuBois, Zora Neale Hurston and Melville Herskovits;²² further explored by scholars such as George Eaton Simpson and Albert Raboteau;²³ and is now (very important also for research in Pentecostalism) increasingly utilised in the concept of *Afrocentricity* by African American and Caribbean

²¹ Scandrett-Leatherman, 9.

²² William E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Signet Classic, New York: Nal Penguin, 1969 [1905]); Zora Neale Hurston, *The Sanctified Church* (Berkley: Turtle Island, 1983: reprint of early essays from 1926); Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958 [1944]).

²³ George E. Simpson, *Black Religions in the New World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978); A.R. Raboteau, *Slave Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

scholars, including those in Europe. Gayraud S. Wilmore²⁴ and others have used the term 'African Diaspora' as a powerful instrument for this exploration, i.e., the global scattering of Africans outside the continent of Africa as the historical consequence of the transatlantic slave trade, the mutual encounter between black and white communities under these adverse conditions, and subsequent perpetuated racism. From here the term 'diaspora', biblically and theologically speaking, came to describe the consistent patterns of an African Continuum in Variation, such as belief in the spirit world, narrativity of theology, possession or empowerment by the spirit, music, dance and rhythms of life, and the body-mind relationship in healing and belonging – which obviously were not destroyed when language and family bonds were broken up but began to influence the 'host-societies'. My own experience in the *transatlantic cycle*²⁵ between West Africa, the Caribbean, North America and Europe, demonstrates this affinity between African community life and worship anywhere, be it in Nairobi, Thohoyandou, Soweto, Kumasi, Kingston, George Town, New York, Berlin, Hamburg, Amsterdam or London – i.e. located in the region of the former European triangular trade, the ensuing history of slavery and colonialism, the religious and Christian response to these, and the incompatibility between the slave masters' and the slaves' religion, and, nevertheless, their constant and inevitable interaction.

From here young Caribbean Pentecostal scholars in Britain try to free themselves from merely western interpretations of Christianity in response to the struggle for liberation

²⁴ See Gayraud .S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism* (3rd edition revised and enlarged; New York: Orbis Books, 1998).

²⁵ Cf. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993).

and justice. I mention at least two present Black British theological approaches – that of Ronald Nathan’s “Call for a Pan African Theology” among Caribbean youths, and that of Robert Beckford’s *Jesus is Dread*. Nathan argues for ‘liberation churches’ that would address socio-political issues from the failures of the past, celebrate the African heritage in worship, music, art and symbols, and recognise Afrocentricity as opposed to assimilation. Beckford builds on aspects of black culture in order to radicalise Black British Pentecostal churches. Using Stuart Hall’s three “expressive repertoires” that signify its ‘otherness’: namely style, music, and the body as canvas, he struggles to shape a new Christology on the grounds of ‘black talk’.²⁶

V.

Common factors in diverse movements

The notion of an African Continuum in Variation has tremendous implications not only for black churches and Pentecostals but for the renewal of Christianity as a whole. From my insights, Henry Van Dusen’s foresight in the fifties of the development of ‘a third mighty arm of Christian outreach’ after the Eastern and Western missions has come true – a religion, he wrote, that would mould itself into

‘a new, third major type and branch of Christendom’ and be a sign for the ‘Sovereign Unpredictability’ of the Spirit of God.²⁷

²⁶ Nathan, “Caribbean Youth Identity in the United Kingdom: A Call for a Pan-African Theology”, *Black Theology in Britain*, issue 1, 1998, 19–34; Robert Beckford, *Jesus is Dread: Black Theology and Black Culture in Britain* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1998); cf. Valentina Alexander, “Afrocentric and Black Christian Consciousness: Towards an Honest Intersection”, *Black Theology in Britain*, issue 1, 1998, 11–18. Also her doctoral thesis *‘Breaking Every Fetter’* on the liberational elements in Britain’s black Pentecostal and Holiness churches, Centre for Ethnic Relations, University of Warwick, 1997.

²⁷ Henry Van Dusen, “Caribbean Holiday”, *Christian Century*, 18.8.55, 946–948; cf. later Leslie Newbiggin’s claim of a third force in Christianity.

Unlike European-style linear structures, it is cellular, travels along pre-existing social relations, rests on charismatic leadership, communicates in songs and signals, and understands the human person in his or her relationship to community.²⁸ In this way, African Instituted churches, American and Caribbean Pentecostalism, and the American-based Charismatic renewal now ‘criss-cross’ one another across the oceans. AICs are, besides black pentecostals/charismatic churches, to be found in Europe and America (as does the revival of Yoruba religion). British blacks of different traditions have established missions in Africa, the Caribbean and Asia. Asia and Latin America show some of the most fascinating developments of churches turning charismatic. American-style evangelism and prosperity religion with the emphasis on deliverance from evil forces have influenced large churches in West Africa, and have placed “the traditional understanding of the cosmic struggle in the realm of Christian belief”.²⁹ In Britain and the USA, black majority churches are challenged by Rastafari and more lately by the Nation of Islam. And all of them communicate in some way or other, culturally, liturgically and theologically, with western Christianity.

The implications, as I see them, are twofold:

Religions on the move

There is a need to study *religions on the move* in terms of their similarities as well as their distinctions – i.e. common factors in diverse movements as well as differences in

²⁸ Luther-Gerlach’s categories utilised by R. Gerloff, *A Plea...*, 178–180.

²⁹ Kingsley E.Larbi, “The Nature of Continuity and Discontinuity of Ghanaian Pentecostals’ Concept of Salvation in African Cosmology”, paper presented at the 10th International Theological Conference on the Holy Spirit: Theological Issues in the Non-western Pentecostals (unpublished paper, Accra, Ghana: Central University College, n.d.), 25.

contextual approach and practice. These must be viewed from cultural, religious, socio-political as well as theological and liturgical perspectives. Contrary to the mostly static nature of the older denominations, we must heed the change and the move towards *adaptation* which groups and movements undergo when moving from one continent, country, milieu or language into another. Black Pentecostal congregations from Ghana or Jamaica will, in spite of transferred cultural and religious traditions, *never* be the same in the set-up of a German or English town. Inevitably, they have changed by responding to the new environment they encounter. This is true for the migration of whole populations from rural into urban environments, and also for the global phenomenon of migration from South to North, the latter (driven by economic and political factors) only the prolongation of the former (and not least one of the strong factors in the growth and spread of this new kind of Christianity). We must also examine the great ability of indigenous movements – in spite of perhaps borrowed language! – to discard what is detrimental, select what is useful, translate the latter into indigenous contexts, and *shape activities and theologies* accordingly. Klaus Hock of Religious and Theological Studies at Rostock University introduces here the term ‘*transculturation*’,

In order to provide a new approach in the study of a subject that is characterised by an emphatic transitory quality: transculturation refers to dynamic, reciprocal and multi-dimensional processes of exchanges between cultures and religions. Consequently, ‘religion on the move’ is analysed as a non-static, variable phenomenon which is part of a ‘poly-contextual’ world.³⁰

³⁰ Klaus Hock, University of Rostock, abstract for an essay on the African Christian Diaspora in Europe, January 2002.

For Europe's Christian diaspora, Hock claims that both the migrant group's Christianity and recipient society's Christianity have to be regarded as religious and cultural phenomena whose taken-for-granted 'essence' results from processes of transcultural communication. In other words, religious groups and churches influence one another, locally and globally. On the one hand, the former mission churches have shaped, liturgically and theologically, many indigenous movements: After many years' research, when I enter a congregation, I easily sense whether the main influence has been Anglican or Catholic (such as with the Cherubim and Seraphim in West Africa), or American Evangelical (such as with many Pentecostal or Sabbatarian churches in Jamaica and Britain). On the other hand, we observe that black churches increasingly influence established denominations in terms of music, belonging, wholeness, community, grassroots theology, healing and reliance on God's Spirit, because these aspects are biblical; moreover, they are *human*, and hence not just African vehicles for redeeming people. Theologically, this can inspire us to reflect anew on the relationship between *migration and mission*, not as strategies but as carrying *life testimonies*, as told in the story of Abraham and Sarah or the call into discipleship by Jesus.

Common elements

Common elements of 'Africanness' that were not destroyed under colonialism and slavery, functioned (and still function) as vehicles of survival in crisis and marginalisation. They include

- the *role of women* both in initiating and leading movements (hidden or public), who often become marginalised when these become institutionalised;

- the concept of Spirit, or the *Holy Spirit*, as a controlling and organising energy and principle, or as the One Indivisible that unites people, *power-in-participation*, not just in church but in the world;
- the centrality of *music and rhythms* in the liberation of people and growth of assemblies, life-giving power, rhythms of creation, not least recognisable in Gospel music, but also in the overall influence of Black music on the modern popular scene;
- an understanding of the *body-mind relationship* in healing, dreams and visions as intuitive, interpersonal powers;
- the shaping of *community identity*, in which the individual functions as part of the whole organism;
- the potential for *truth and reconciliation* both from African philosophical and spiritual sources – one example being the concept of *ubuntu* in South Africa by which, close to the reality of *koinonia* in the New Testament, a person is never a person without other persons;³¹
- last but not least the search, among black youths in Europe, for a relevant *pan-African theology*, drawn not only from intellectual perceptions (such as pan-African philosophy) but from artistic, cultural and spiritual sources which may give rise to new biblical interpretations.³²

³¹ Cf. Gerloff, “Truth, a New Society and Reconciliation: The TRC in South Africa from a German Perspective” in *Missionalia*, vol. 26/1, April 1998, 50–52.

³² Nathan, 27–28.

VI.

Problems and promises

In the 20th century, the centre of Christianity has shifted from the North to the South, i.e. the majority of Christians now are 'non-white indigenous' (a term coined in WCE) and belong to independent movements. Their dynamic growth in Asia, Africa and Latin America (including the Caribbean) must primarily be attributed to the enormous increase of pentecostal and charismatic churches in the Two-Thirds-world. Western churches as well as academic theology have tended to overlook this phenomenon and its impact on the life, faith and well-being of people, especially the poor and marginalized. Yet this new trans-cultural, trans-social and polycentric face of Christianity now poses a challenge to the former mission churches and to religious studies institutions. Recent scholars in religion not only regard it as the equivalent of the renewal in Islam, but also as a mirror of the global transformation of religion as a whole.³³ They define it as a post-modern message which, through the successful blending of different traditions, equips people to cope with the dilemmas and sufferings of daily life, inspires hope to live for a better future, and - by resisting the status quo - transcends barriers and shapes a cultural and social renewal from below. Therefore, the coherence of this renewal does not lie so much in doctrine and propositions, but in the spiritual and practical experience of the Holy Spirit in apparently unjust and

³³ Cf. Harvey Cox; also Richard Shaull & Waldo César, *Pentecostalism and the Future of the Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000); André Corten/Ruth Marshall-Fratani, eds., *Between Babel and Pentecost* (London: Hurst & Co., 2001); David Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

hopeless situations. The early Pentecostal revival among America's deprived in 1906, multiplied among the poor, women and children on other continents, indeed it blended with less publicised forerunners and similar movements of the Spirit with 'signs and wonders' elsewhere.³⁴

With the arrival of the 21st century, we distinguish between *three waves* of the pentecostal/charismatic movement: the classical Pentecostals; the charismatic renewal within the former mission churches; and autochthon movements - the latter defined by the WCE as 'spirit-led' independent, non-white indigenous, apostolic and post-denominational groups, which include not only the growing number of neo-charismatic churches, in particular in Africa, but also the African Indigenous Churches (AICs) or Spiritual Baptists in the Caribbean,³⁵ all represented in Britain. In 2001, 71 % of pentecostal/charismatic Christians were 'non-white', family-oriented, urban, and many of them among the poorest on earth, especially in the slums and ghettos of mega-cities outside Europe. In the midst of industrial alienation, poverty, violence, migration, health-scares, political corruption, misuse of power and overall powerlessness, they opt for the Kingdom of God on earth, i.e. for a sphere of freedom, participation, self-determination, sharing and fellowship - to improve life's conditions, meet urgent needs and survive in dignity. Almost everywhere pentecostal/charismatic congregations have started from the bottom, be it among the marginalized and voiceless in Africa

³⁴ Examples are the Jamaica Revival 1806-61, and the Mukti Mission in India, 1905-07.

³⁵ WCE, 2nd volume, 19.

and Asia, the lower classes in Latin America, or the early settlers from the Caribbean and Africa in Britain and the growing number of immigrants and refugees from Africa on the European continent.³⁶ Consequently, this has also caused these Christians from the 'underside of human life' to initiate a social upward movement, through mutual support, discipline in work and life-style, the high value placed on education, self-reliance and the overall love of life and God's creation. This can be read from the enormous growth of charismatic movements in Africa where faith, development, and the 'deliverance' from life-destroying *evil spirits* guide daily life. It can be observed in the slow but consistent turn of Latin America to a 'people's Protestantism' of a charismatic type against manipulative and hierarchical structures. This can be certainly observed in Britain where the large Black Pentecostal churches (the Caribbean mostly of the classical kind - Church of God movement and Apostolic 'Oneness' churches; the African either belonging to the AICs or the new charismatic renewal) have developed into training-fields for educated and aspiring young men and women.

On the other hand, there is a dilemma in getting rich. Upward mobility and institutionalisation tend to bring about alienation from humble roots; in some cases, both in Africa and elsewhere, this has led to the isolation of charismatic groups from their origins, jeopardized communication with the poor masses (e.g. in Guatemala), inaugurated a black bourgeoisie (e.g. in

³⁶ In Britain, after the Pentecostals, the Sabbatarians (e.g. Seventh-day Adventists) are the second largest black group; on the European continent, African churches of the new charismatic type prevail.

North America), or brought about a rather uncritical belief in 'miracles' and a confidence in faith as automatically leading to 'prosperity' - meaning a gospel of success, health and wealth. According to this 'Faith gospel', God in Christ has overcome all sin, misery, disease and poverty; and so the faithful have a right to be abundantly blessed and receive well-being through prayer. With Paul Gifford, quoting a Ghanaian charismatic leader:

The traditional and orthodox churches we grew up in held many views which were diametrically opposed to God's word... They preach a doctrine which says in essence – poverty promotes humility... The missionaries erred tragically by not teaching the Africans God's Word and laws regarding sowing and reaping.³⁷

Such a concept does not surprise for two reasons. It links up with Africa's religious worldview which is this-worldly and focuses on material realities. And (while the early AICs emphasised mainly health and healing) the younger generation is desperate to respond to social instability, unemployment, exclusion, want of cash and housing, Aids, violence, and even war.³⁸ Also, according to my findings in Ghana, South Africa and Argentina, there is, against expectations raised in preaching influenced by American evangelists,³⁹ no real danger for the majority of 'getting rich'. Salvation is seen as inclusive, addressing the whole person and community, and received through daily blessings and sustenance for survival. Ogbu Kalu in *Power, Poverty and Prayer*⁴⁰ insists

³⁷ Paul Gifford, *African Christianity* (London: Hurst and Co., 1998), 79 (Duncan Williams, *You are Destined* Christian Action Faith Ministries).

³⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, 336.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 78: Oral Roberts, Kenneth Hagin, T.L. Osborn and others with influence on Benson Idahosa in Nigeria and Paul Yongii Cho in Korea.

⁴⁰ Ogbu U. Kalu, *Power, Poverty and Prayer* (Frankfurt a.M: Peter Lang, 2000).

that the charismatic concept of 'prosperity', rightly understood, belongs to the ethics of power. As the powerful exploit those who are powerless, poverty is immanent to the prevailing system. Therefore, it poses a theological challenge to the West, for neither the former mission churches nor traditional African religion appear to have had the tools to deal with misery. The rapid rise of neo-charismatic churches in Africa after 1970 may, he writes, eventually lead to a political theology and practice where faith goes along with social analysis, and tackles poverty and abuse of power at the very roots. An example is Dr Mensah Otabil's International Central Gospel Church in Accra. His theology, rooted in black assertiveness, teaches not just to wait for miracles, but to take self-control of one's life, develop one's own spiritual and social potential, create new tools of empowerment and new sources of confidence, and 're-focus all the time'. This means not repeating 'the old excuses about suffering as a sign of being like Christ'.⁴¹ In Kalu's words:

It is the claim of Pentecostal faith and the warrant of Pentecostal ministry to insist that the Bible provides the materials out of which an alternately construed world can be properly imagined.

Pentecostalism is, therefore, a child of the demise of modernism, a product of a great shift in interpretative practice which asserts that in the post-Cartesian situation, knowing consists not in settled certitudes but in the actual work of imagination.⁴²

In my own words: A movement which, by the power of the Holy Spirit and in discipleship to Jesus, is non-violent, overcomes ethnic, cultural, social and doctrinal barriers, and encounters God in the *here and now*, has a tremendous potential to bring about peace to this polarised,

⁴¹ Interview with Dr M. Otabil in Dansoman, Accra, 25.4.01; P. Gifford, 79-84. See also E. Kingsley Larbi, *God and the Poor* (Accra: Centre for Pentecostal & Charismatic Studies [CPCS], 2001).

⁴² Kalu, 127, 108.

restless, revengeful and unforgiving world, and to change ourselves and our communities into vessels of God's grace. What is at stake is the recovery of the Gospel of Christ for the redemption of humankind at a time when everything seems 'to fall apart'. This also applies to the pentecostal/charismatic movement itself where and when it betrays the witness of the Spirit.

Based on extensive religious ethnography undertaken by the author among African Christian communities in Europe, the USA and Africa in the last 17 years, this book maps and describes the incipience and consolidation of new brands of African Christianities in diaspora. The book demonstrates how African Christianities are negotiating and assimilating notions of the global while maintaining their local identities. Year: 2013. Language: english.