The Flow of African Spirituality into World Christianity. A Case for Pneumatology and Migration

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Abstract

Much of the spirituality peculiar to African Christians bears traces of the influence of African Traditional Religions (ATR). Prayer traditions like incantations, melodious choruses and appeal to spirits, typical of ATR, have infiltrated the religious life of African Christians both at home and in Diaspora, amongst Christians in the mainline churches as well as in the African Independent Churches. Though the flow of African spiritual heritage into Christianity happened in the early history of Christianity, it accelerated in the lives of slaves in diaspora in the West Indies, the Americas and Europe. Today, the process continues amongst African migrants fleeing the unbearable political and economic strangulations in Africa; they migrate with their culture and spirituality and impact on Christianity worldwide. It is the intent of this paper therefore to explore how the African mystic sentiment, frenzied excitement and spirit-laden spirituality, which combine the sacred and the secular in practical life, influenced Christian worship and thought down the ages and, in recent times, contributed to the emergence of the Pentecostal and charismatic spirituality.

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Introduction

Africans are not just by nature religious (Mbiti 1969:1); their "heritage is intensely religious" (Gyekye 1996:3). Apparently, these observations by African experts hold true in all cases, irrespective of sex, class and cultural differences. The impact of religion in the African life seems to defy the influence of modernity and Western culture, and is as pervasive today as it has always been in the past, inspiring and influencing every aspect of life – actions and thoughts. The intensity of religious practices in the life of Africans hardly yielded to changes in time and location: people are as religious today as their forefathers in antiquity, and practice their faith as much in diaspora as they do in the African continent. In the Americas, in the Caribbean and in Europe the story is the same. Africans take their religious dispositions wherever they go. People born with African ancestry begin immediately to tap into the African mentality and spirituality.

The Main Features of Traditional African Thought and Spirituality

African thought and spirituality are replete with abiding values and peculiarities that have survived years of translocations and migrations and to date continue to influence people of African origin all over the world. We can identify at least four prominent values and practices which characterize the African life-style and mentality: commitment to a holistic view of reality; sense of the sacred; communitarian life-style; and spontaneity. These features can be found among Africans of all ages and places.

Firstly, we need to observe that for the traditional African person, reality is essentially unified and interconnected; processes and developments are perceived holistically, integrating the visible and invisible, the spiritual and the corporeal, the sacred and the profane, divinity and humanity into a single paradoxical worldview. In the African worldview, the world of spirits breaks into the world of humans, and God indwells both worlds. Here God's transcendence and immanence, the human body and soul, matter and spirit are conceived not so much in their polarity as in their interconnectedness. Indeed, "The

world of the African is characterized by its unity and coherence." (Westermann 1949:83). Unlike in Western philosophy, dualism cannot be sustained in African thought. Here lies the root of the holistic deployment of body and spirit, emotion and rationality, music and movement typical of the African spirituality.

Secondly, Africans have a broad sense of the sacred. Space, nature and environment are believed to be endowed with a certain degree of sacredness. This is rooted in the African ontology, which attributes a "life force" to everything and thus claims that spiritual beings or deities inhabit the objects of nature and permeate the universe, playing the roles of intermediaries between God and humans. "Thus, because of the presence of spiritual beings, objects of nature take on religious significance and command human respect." (Gyekye 1996:7).

All things, animate and inanimate, including space are imbued with this divine presence that makes them acquire sacred status (Egbulem 2003:19–20), and evoke respect and worship at designated places and through recognized channels through the agency of spirits and ancestors.

Thus, in the spirituality of the African Traditional Religions (ATR), the boundary between the sacred and the mundane is indistinct (Carter 1976:23). The sphere of the spirits and the domain of the ancestors are all located in this world (Mbiti 1969:75) The Christian understanding of heaven as God's abode beyond this world, where he receives and rewards the good people, is not part of this worldview. Hence, the eschatology of the traditional African spirituality is this-worldly and somewhat materialistic.

Thirdly, in the African worldview, the human being is not just an individual but essentially a community, a composite of body and soul. In his communitarian worldview, the African feels a strong bond existing between him or her and the community. Accordingly, one exists, not just because one thinks (Descartes), but because one belongs to a relational network. "Man is therefore relationship, connectedness, communion, community." (Okere 2005:4).

This worldview has two major implications: abhorrence for suicide, which is rarely an option for the average Africa even in moments of absurdity of life. The African does not claim to be the sole owner of his life. His or her life is primarily a corporate investment, belonging to God and the community. Communitarian worldview equally leads to a high sense of belongingness to a family, a belongingness that defines the identity of the African person. One belongs, not just to his nuclear family, but to the extended family, which goes on expanding till it embraces the entire clan and incorporates the ancestors. Ancestors, as the "living dead" (Mbiti 1969:83), are believed to be the invisible part of their families, which they continue to influence by acting as intermediaries between God and the families for which they provided ritual leadership during their physical existence.

Finally, the average African is spontaneous in movement and in the use of words. He articulates his joy and sorrows setting his entire being in motion, with dance and songs. When he is excited he expresses his emotions with gesticulations, laughter and shouts of joy. When he is angry he easily breaks into dance and songs to vent his anger (Carter 1976:29). Nowhere does this show itself as in worship and prayer, where joy leads to praises and sadness to lamentations, all directed to God. Most solemn moments in the African Traditional worship are articulated in the context of a rhythmical-monotonous song, sound and dance that set the participants in frenzy and ecstasy, climaxing in self-transcendence. Frenzied musical movements drive the African to bliss and self-transcendence. Ritual movements, dances and songs are part and parcel of the African prayer tradition.

The black African is indeed in love with oral expressions. This might explain why there was much delay in the development of written forms of expression. "The word in African thought encompasses the entire system of communication. This is what is generally referred to as oral tradition in African life, and it includes communication in music, song, dance, poetry, proverbs, storytelling, art and ritual" (Egbulem 2003:19).

In the African worldview, to live is to communicate; and the height of all communications is prayer. Prayer is not just a matter of words, but a total articulation of one's state of mind and life in celebrations, lamentations, praises, supplications, vindications, and so on. To the African, prayer is essentially an existential articulation of one's life situation to God, which could be spontaneously verbalized, dramatized or even permanently expressed in names and inscriptions.

Most Africans give God-bearing names to their children. Generally, African names describe the circumstance of birth, tell life stories, profess faith in God, celebrate victory over undeclared enemies, express optimism for the future, utter lamentations or praises, declare vindications, and so on. In all such cases, what is central is the art of bringing God into the picture of one's life – this is a normal African phenomenon. Giving names is mostly an ongoing prayer. Likewise, it is common to see inscriptions on vehicles, buses and lorries, all making prayerful declarations. The African uses every avenue to express himself and to communicate to God; he deploys his entire body in prayer and worship.

African Input in Christian Antiquity

The encounter between Africa and Christianity occurred earlier than generally thought; it has its roots in the Old Testament, in the earliest encounter between

Africa and the Jewish nation. Some black Africans "appeared in the pages of the Scriptures, both in the Old Testament and the New, and most particularly in the many references to Ethiopia in the Psalms and the Prophets" (Davis 1990:1). Prominent among them was the queen of Sheba, an Ethiopian noted for her black skinned beauty, quest for wisdom and exemplary faith. Later in the New Testament, our Lord Jesus Christ bore witness to her exemplary faith, declaring that on the day of reckoning, she would stand in judgment against faithless generations (Lk 11:31; Origen 1957:98). The prophet Isaiah equally speaks about the black pharaohs and warriors (Isa 18:1–2) who came from the land of Kush, usually known as Nubia. The black-skinned people of Nubia lived in the south of Egypt as a colony, but around 8 BCE they became a dominant power and ruled Egypt for a while. In the process, they appropriated Egyptian civilization and architecture for themselves, but also impacted on the Egyptian culture and evolved their own writing (Davis 1990:2). Through such cultural integration, black African thought made its début in the Mediterranean area.

The first African to emerge in the pages of the New Testament is the so called "Ethiopian Eunuch", though known to be of Nubian origin (Davis 1990:4) "Ethiopian" is the generic name in Greek for a black African. The story of this rich African Eunuch (Acts 8:26–40) is indeed unique, because he emerges as one of the earliest non-Jewish believers in the Jewish religion (a proselyte) who immediately turned to Christ even before the conversion of Saint Paul and the Roman centurion Cornelius. One could say that this man was a typical African: he was reading the scriptural text *aloud* and at the sight of water, *spontaneously* requested baptism. Most importantly, he returned to Africa with his new faith and initiated what must have been the first Christian mission outside Israel.

There were other instances of early encounter between Africa and Christianity. The first was even with Christ himself in the tradition of the flight of the Holy Family (Mt 2:13–23) and another was the conscription of Simon of Cyrene, a North African, into carrying the cross of Jesus Christ (Lk 23:26). There was yet the presence of the Egyptians and Libyans at the public inauguration of the church on the Pentecost day in Jerusalem (Acts 2:1–13). Remarkably, in the New Testament record, there is always an African involvement when it matters most for Christianity: at the infancy, Africa shielded Jesus Christ against his enemies; at the very beginning of missions, an African eunuch was involved in taking Christianity out of the Jewish nation; and at the passion of Christ, an African helped him to carry the cross of salvation. However, it was Mark the evangelist, the first bishop of Alexandria BCE 62, who made Christianity take roots in North Africa, especially in Alexandria and Cyrenaica (Oborji 1998:48–49).

The church in North Africa flourished and produced great African martyrs, theologians and founders of monasticism, but lasted only till the seventh century and disappeared almost completely in the eighth century leaving only pockets of Coptic and Orthodox Churches behind in Egypt and its environs. It remains a puzzle why such a booming Christian presence in North Africa, with well over six hundred Catholic bishoprics by the year 430 CE, vanished almost completely after the Arab-Islamic onslaught. Two major reasons have often been proffered why the church could not resist that incursion: first, the region was already destabilized by internal conflicts provoked by doctrinal controversies (Nthamburi 1981:215–220); second, Christianity in North Africa lacked contextualization and proper inculturation (Oborji 1998:50) – it was a Latin church, conceived for the upper class, but hardly for the native population. Neither the Bible nor the liturgy was translated into the native Berber language (Bauer 1994:29).

The story was however different with the Coptic Church in Egypt and the Orthodox Church in Nubia and Ethiopia, noted for their proximity to the African spiritual sensibilities. Though the churches in Nubia and Ethiopia were theologically oriented towards the Egyptian monophysitism, they partnered politically and liturgically the Eastern Christianity of the Byzantine Empire. Ethiopia had not just the luck of receiving Christianity very early, some two centuries before the kingdom of Nubia, but also the unique privilege of becoming a Christian nation with its own tradition and culture (Ghebremedhin 1990:3). This great civilization of indigenous black people developed its own writing and alphabets in the second century and was the first black nation to have its own coinage.

> By the fifth century it had its own liturgy, derived from the Coptic liturgy of Alexandria. This liturgy had its own unique characteristics in terms of liturgical texts, sacred rites like the dance, music (including the use of the drum that was unique in Ethiopia) and artwork and architecture . . . Ethiopia has made its own unique contribution to the Christian heritage with its own translation of the Scriptures, its own version of several patristic texts, and its own rich tradition of monasticism and asceticism. (Davis 1990:8)

Due to its rootedness, it was able to resist the Islamic intimidation. In the Ethiopian Church, we are reminded that Africa forms part of the rich heritage of Christianity, and here we see an African Church that has its roots in the early Church, even preceding the emergence of Christianity in Northern Europe (Davis 1990:8).

It is important to note that Christianity thrived at this earliest period only to the extent it was rooted in the indigenous culture. The Latin Church vanished easily because it lacked adequate inculturation, vibrant liturgy and home-grown spirituality. The Nubian and Ethiopian sacred rites, dances, music with drumming, artwork and architecture, monasticism and asceticism are just but a few examples of the chunk of African spirituality that flowed into Christianity.

African-Christian Encounter in Sub-Saharan Africa in the Era of Missions

After the collapse of Christianity in North Africa, missionary activity was initiated in the fifteenth century in Sub-Saharan Africa, especially along the Atlantic coast. It began with the arrival of the Portuguese navigators, who brought priests with them to evangelize along the West African coasts stretching from Guinea, Sierra Leone, Benin down to central Congo, Angola, the southwest of Mozambique, the islands of Madagascar and Mauritius. Mission posts were established and converts were made in all these places, but the missionary enterprise did not survive for long. It was able to hold out for a while, largely because of the warm African response to a new religious reality as exemplified by King Alfonso of Congo whose personal piety and commitment to Christianity was outstanding. In general, the missions failed partly because of the commercial interests of the countries empowered by the Pope to evangelize (Bauer 1994:48), and partly because the missionary activity was too superficial – not just because they concentrated on the coastal regions and avoided the African inland, but also because the established churches were mainly European in structure, worship and life-style (Oborji 1998:51).

The second phase of the missionary activity in Sub-Saharan Africa took place between 1792 and 1960, and reached its peak in the nineteenth century. Many events – the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, colonialism, Protestant missionary activity in Africa and the independence of many African countries for instance – played together to give the Christian missionary activity a boost in the period in question. Unlike in the fifteenth century missionary activity, the missionaries came this time not just to save souls, but to build up churches (Oborji 1998:54). Hence, notwithstanding the numerous medical, political and cultural challenges, they were able to plant the seed of the gospel that eventually gave rise to the growth of indigenous churches.

As time progressed, however, missionaries of different denominations were ready, at varied degrees, to learn African languages, translate catechisms, liturgy

and the Bible into local languages. Though there were avowed attempts on the part of the missionaries, at the early stages of the African studies, to research into the African cultures and values, they could not gain a deep insight into the African Traditional Religions, which had been the main reservoir of African tradition and culture. They viewed the cultures from their own perspectives and thus could not strip the Christian message of its European accretions.

This ambiguity on the part of the missionaries towards the recognition of the importance of the African element had a double effect in the evangelization of the people: some Christians lost patience and left the missionary churches to establish their own independent churches (we shall come back to this later); many others remained within the churches, but felt alienated, and thus tended to pay lip service to the demands of Christian faith and worship (Isichei 1995:279). They might be officially active in the Church, but they would invariably indulge in a clandestine patronage of the traditional shrines, medicine men and healers, who apparently satisfy their traditional African spirituality better. In this case, the option is inauthentic faith and a crude combination of Christian and pagan practices.

Since the middle of the twentieth century, however, the Catholic Church in particular has been trying to promote inculturation to stem the tide of irresponsible syncretism and half-Christian half-pagan mentality among some of its members (Vatican II, Lumen Gentium 13, Ad Gentes 22, Gaudium et Spes 58). But due to heavy dependency on central authority and commitment to Latin and European liturgy, the project of inculturation in the Catholic Church has not yet struck the core of African spirituality and thought. Inculturation remains mostly technical, affecting barely liturgical lives, lacking practical application in other vital areas of African thought. Through the reform initiated by the Second Vatican Council, the use of native languages, dance, gongs, drums and hand clapping in liturgy were allowed (Vat II, *Sacrosanctum concilium* 1975: Articles 119 and 120), yet a total integration of the African spirituality and thought are yet to be achieved.

African Independent Churches and the Adoption of Traditional African Spirituality

In the larger part of the twentieth century, various indigenous groups of Christians emerged, who opted out of the mainline churches to begin their own African churches. These churches were founded in protest, either against political marginalization or against alienating spirituality in the mission churches. The various shades of African Indigenous/Initiated/Independent

Churches (AICS) purported to guarantee not just self-governance and self-reliance amongst Africans, but also more success in confronting such typical African spiritual problems as spirit possession, witchcraft and sorcery. In many cases, the mainline churches or mission churches proved inept to handle such problems, and tended to explain them away, rather than treat them to the satisfaction of the supplicants (Baur 1994:350).

The first drive towards the formation of independent churches was anti-colonial in character: in South Africa, it was a protest against the color bar within the Church, in Nigeria against missionary domination and in Kenya against cultural alienation (Baur 1994:350–351). In South Africa the emergence of native churches was nurtured by some white missionaries. The American Pentecostal John G. Lake (1908–1912), for instance, established the "Apostolic Faith Mission" for the Whites, and "Zion Christian Church" for black South Africans (Nnamani 2007:236). This black church was later called African Zionism and turned out to be the first of all the Independent African churches.

However, the African churches that emerged between 1910 and 1960 mainly protested against theological and devotional inflexibility in the mission churches (Anderson 2004:103–122); they were mainly prophetic-charismatic movements founded by self-styled prophets or prophetesses who claimed to be gifted with healing powers (Baur 1994:349–359). One such church called *Aladura* (people of prayer) emerged among the Yoruba of Nigeria (1920) in response to the inability of the mission churches to confront the great epidemic of 1918 in Nigeria. With their prayers, garnished with lots of African religious sensibilities and massive appeal to the Holy Spirit, they were able to curtail the scourge of the epidemic to the admiration of many. This feat won for them many followers from amongst fellow Africans, who, from their religious background, were accustomed to seeing religion use spirituality to effect healing.[1] What the average African needed from religion was relief from sickness and protection from evil. When a religion failed to satisfy these specifically African needs, it usually had to reckon with desertion or insincerity.

About the same time, similar indigenous churches began to emerge elsewhere in Africa: Kimbanguism in the Congo (1921), Maria Legio Church in Western Kenya, Eden Revival Church in Ghana, and Alice Lenshina's Lumpa church in Zambia (1955). All these churches have certain things in common: charismatic and self-styled prophets or prophetesses as founders; claims of direct inspiration from God or the Holy Spirit; crude incorporation of the

1 For more information on Aladura churches, see Harold W. Turner, *An African Independent Church. The Life and Faith of the Church of the Lord* (*Aladura*). Oxford: University Press, 1967, 2 vols.

spirituality of the African Traditional Religion, especially in the fight against witchcraft and demonic possession (Nnamani 2007:236–238; Baur 1994:250–259). Although most of these African Initiated Churches had no earlier contact with Pentecostals in the West, they all gave the Holy Spirit a prominent position in their spirituality. This general appeal to the Holy Spirit could be seen as part of that "charismatic wind", which according to Ogbu Kalu, "blew through the African continent in the post-independence period" (Kalu 2008:xi). This spirit wave galvanized the African religious powers to define, not just the African identity, but fundamentally the African response to Western-oriented Christianity.

While it is obvious on the one hand that anti-colonialism and Protestantism influenced the emergence of the African Independent Churches, it is true on the other hand, that "all the prophetic-charismatic churches have their deepest roots neither in colonialism nor in Protestantism but in their *religious African heritage*" (Baur 1994:354; italics original). There is indeed a massive and, often times, uncritical adoption of the African religious heritage in all the 'Spirit'/'prayer' (Aladura)/'healing' (Zionist) churches. By implication positive and negative African values found their way into the spirituality of the African indigenous churches, and by extension into Pentecostalism.

The Impact of African Spirituality on African and Classical Pentecostalism

Classical Pentecostalism originated directly or indirectly from North America in the very beginning of the twentieth century and spread almost immediately to other continents including Africa. It began in South Africa for instance in 1908, about the same time when African Initiated Churches with Pentecostal inclination started emerging in the other parts of the continent. There is indeed no proof that the American Pentecostalism had any direct influence on most of the African Initiated Churches (AICS) and Charismatic movements. They were not just contemporaneous; they all emphasize personal encounter with God through the power of the Spirit, healing, deliverance and this worldly salvation (Anderson 2004:105).

The AICS and classical Pentecostalism have been experiencing phenomenal growth. Classical Pentecostalism has not just witnessed unparalleled growth, it has also penetrated the mainline Catholic and Protestant churches in the form of Charismatic renewal movements seeking to renew and revive these historic churches from within, which they had often declared triumphantly to be dead.

Pentecostalism has been spreading like a wild fire in Africa to the surprise of many people. Scholars have been in want of reasons for this rapid growth. Sociologists and historians are however quick to attribute this swift expansion to social tension associated with industrialization and urbanization. It is their contention that oppressive political and social culture produce societal dispossessions, estrangement and insecurity, which push victims to go in search of organic structures that protest against the status quo (Moore 1986:142). Even if this theory of deprivation stands as the immediate cause, it can certainly not be tendered as the remote cause. The explanation must thus be sought beyond the issue of social class down to their roots.

Theology and doctrine must be seen as main causes too, because as Grant Wacker rightly argues, Pentecostals were able to cope with economic uncertainties, social ostracism, and racism because of their *primitive faith*, which gave them certitude about the reality of the supernatural and definitive triumph over the vicissitudes of life (Wacker 1984:355–356). This primitive faith must as well have its roots somewhere else, from a source where faith does not appear as something extraneous, but integral to life.

The African heritage emerges as the root of such a spirituality that emits faith and vibrancy. The impact of African spirituality is unmistakable in the early revivals that occasioned the birth of classical Pentecostalism. As I have said elsewhere, just as a lot of African genius went into the making of the so called "Negro Spirituals" and "Blues", and into the making of the American music world in general, much of it flowed into the veins of the Pentecostal ethos. Through the person of William Seymour, the African American, who together with other African-American brethren reinvented Pentecostalism in Azusa Street, African or tropical temperament was imbued into the early revivals (Nnamani 2007:242).

Many scholars have made direct and indirect references to the African root of Pentecostalism. Peter Hocken speaks in this line as he argues that black spirituality is characterized by orality and physicality; musical, experiential and heartfelt' worship; dramatic, poetic, narrative and vocal prayers; inspirational preaching that allows occasional 'interruption' from the congregation as would hardly ever happen amongst their white peers (Hocken 1966:38). Harold Carter makes the same point as he contends that "spontaneity, vivid imagery, beautiful metaphors, and synonyms" abound in the black prayer tradition, where prayer is more of an event than words, shrouded in a "mysterious attitude of reverence" (Carter 1976:21). Much more directly, Walter Hollenweger makes a case for the black root of Pentecostalism: He identifies the following as aspects of African spiritual heritage that has flown into Pentecostalism: orality of liturgy;

narrative theology and witness; maximum participation in liturgy; inclusion of dreams and visions in worship; and an understanding of the body/mind relationship (Hollenweger 1997:18). With yet a deeper insight, Iain MacRobert maintains that the African concepts of "community, spiritual power, spirit possession . . . equality, black personhood" form the bedrock of the dynamism that characterizes most of the Pentecostal life and liturgy (MacRobert 1988:36). And as an insider, Cyprian Davis, an African/American lists "four major characteristics of African-American spirituality: contemplative in terms of prayer, holistic in terms of asceticism, joyful in terms of spiritual atmosphere, and community-based in terms of spiritual values" (Davis 2003:22).

These predominantly African cultural features were very evident, not only in the leadership of William Seymour, but also in the revival worship of the early Pentecostals. Historically, Charles Parham takes the credit for "midwifing" Pentecostalism out of the Holiness Movements; but to all intents and purposes, William Seymour was the one who reinvented Pentecostalism and gave it the character it bears today, as a movement which draws from the legacy of Holiness Movements and African American (black) spirituality. Though Parham and Seymour could still be seen as co-founders, except for the intervention of the latter, Parham would have suffocated Pentecostalism with his "narrow ideology" (Hollenweger 1997:23). At the time Parham discountenanced the vibrancy and boisterous nature of Pentecostal worship, insisting that "any strained exertion of the body, mind or voice is not the work of the Holy Spirit" (Cox 1995:61). This made these co-founders part company later.

Pentecostalism continued to thrive however as a protest movement with a double legacy: rising from the Holiness tradition of Americanized English Puritanism (Synan 1971), it rose in protest against spiritual laxity; and drawing from the African heritage of a communal and holistic vision of reality, it evolved a nondiscriminatory spirituality that combines the sacred and the secular in practical life as against the prevalent culture of racial segregation and dualistic piety that tended to separate the "physical" from the "spiritual". Accordingly, Pentecostalism began right from the outset to entrench multiethnicity and active participation of everybody in the congregation. Where there was no black influence, Pentecostalism developed slightly differently. In the West, for instance, the reason for the emergence of Pentecostalism may have had much to do with theological disagreements; but in Africa, it is primarily a reaction to cultural imposition, often perpetrated through alien styles of worship and leadership, which tend to suffocate the African temperament and spirit (Nnamani 2007:243–244).

With their predefined liturgies and theologies, rigid rules and rationalistic Western form of Christianity, the mainline missionary churches found it

more difficult to unlock the African/tropical temperament, spontaneity and enthusiasm. Tired of such alienating spirituality, many African Christians are eager to worship in accordance with their African temperament and mentality (Dickson 1984:114). Pentecostalism, by virtue of its legacy of African spirituality affords adherents such opportunities, especially as it emphasizes the immediate personal experience of God's power by the Spirit, the general priesthood of the faithful with due recognition of charismatic leadership, as well as intuitive and emotional worship. Such Pentecostal ritual behaviors synchronize with the African worldview, and could equally explain why many Africans welcome Pentecostal culture; although unconscious, it is as if they are welcoming what is their own.

This does not mean that everything about the contemporary Pentecostal spirituality is worthwhile. We must observe that classical Pentecostalism, just like its forerunner the African Initiated Churches, has unwittingly adopted many harmful aspects of African traditions. Thus, African Initiated and Pentecostal churches are guilty of undue processes of inculturation and uncritical adoption of African practices inimical to the message of Christ (Nnamani 2007:243–245). Some Pentecostal churches tend to indulge in irresponsible syncretism – mixing up elements of African Traditional Religion with the Christian and biblical culture in a manner that brings in pagan elements from the back door, what they refuse entry through the main gate. The devil mania of the Pentecostals, which makes them suspect the devil and evil spirits in every unusual situation; by so doing, they enthrone him indirectly and offer him reverse and fear-propelled adoration. Through crude adoption of African values African Pentecostals readily exaggerate demonology, mistake spirits for the Holy Spirit and focus too much on this worldly eschatology. It is proper therefore for Pentecostalism to appropriate worthwhile African values in terms of temperament and spontaneity, but it is retrogressive to perpetrate negative African practices like superstitious and magical piety. If proper inculturation is to be attained, there must be an ongoing critical appraisal of the African elements that have found their way into Pentecostal churches.

African Spirituality in Diaspora: The Migration of Spirit and Ideas

As people migrate, they go with their culture, faith and religion; and the migration of people leads naturally to the migration of ideas, spirit and resources. Ideas migrate most in terms of religion and culture. The story is the same whether it is as a result of forced or voluntary migration, slavery or refugee dislocations, marriage mobility or rural-urban migration. Migration has been

a wide and far-reaching phenomenon in the history of Africa and of the world. So diaspora is not a new phenomenon. There is even the view that all peoples in our time are members of diasporas since all human beings are descendants of East Africa (Johnson 1998:43).

Paul Johnson identifies "streams of African Diasporas" that began 100,000 years ago (Ibid). The second stream followed in 3000 BCE with the mass movement of Bantu-speaking peoples within the African continent and to the Indian Ocean; the third was a trading diaspora around the fifth century BCE, when traders, merchants, slaves and soldiers emigrated to Europe, the Middle East and Asia; the fourth stream is the massive forced migration caused by the Atlantic trade in slaves that saw many Africans shipped to Europe the Americas; then the fifth stream stretches from the end of the trans-Atlantic slave trade to the present-day movement of the global South to the global North due to political persecution and economic impoverishment.

When people talk about African diaspora today, they refer invariably to the two last streams – the Atlantic slave trade movements and the more recent mobility of global South to the global North. Unlike other migrations, these last two are characterized by issues of racial oppression and resistance, up-rootedness and survival strategy. Naturally, wherever displacement is an issue, religion features prominently. Consequently, in the modern African diasporas occasioned by the trans-Atlantic migrations and the recent relocations from the global South to the global North, religion, and indeed, African spirituality have been playing a vital role.

Surprisingly, immigration experts did not perceive the role of religion in the life of migrants until the 1990s. Recent scholarship has however revealed that religion plays a vital role in the life of immigrants as they react to alienation and confusion due to up-rootedness. Religion becomes a tool for survival. This is amply demonstrated in the life of the Israelites. They migrated with their religion into Egypt and came back more enriched through the Exodus experience; again, they survived in the Babylonian captivity with the power of their religion and by virtue of their exile experiences, they returned home with deeper religious reflections about creation and cultic worship. Some scholars conclude therefore that "immigration itself is often a theologizing experience" (Ludwig & Asamoah-Gyadu 2011:5).

This theologizing experience is common amongst immigrants, who, like the Huguenots and Salzburgians, were forced to leave their country because of persecution (Lehman 2005); it is even much more obvious amongst enslaved people taken away from their African homeland to distant destinations such as Europe, Americas and the Caribbean islands. All the slaves

had unique religious experiences, which made them fashion a spirituality based on their African heritage, but influenced by the religions found in the New World. (Raboteau 2004). This religious experience was inspiring even for the slaves who lived only for a while in Europe and America and had to be sent back to a new home in Freetown and Monrovia in Africa. Blending such short-lived experience with innate African spirituality, the new converts became, not just convinced Christians but also effective pioneer missionaries in Africa as was evidenced in the ministry of Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther (Isichei 1995:171).

The situation is slightly different with the slaves who landed and settled in South America and the Caribbean islands. They were not subjected to strict religious control and could thus retain much of the elements of African traditional religions, which they brought with them from their home nations. Given their circumstances and being exposed to other religions they evolved syncretistic Afro-Brazilian, Afro-Cuban and Haitian voodoo religions, which in essence are neither Christian nor purely African Traditional Religion, but a varied blend of both. However, when one observes the song, dance, oratory, sacrifice, divination and spirit possessions displayed by these religions, one sees the affinity with African Traditional Religion. As one observes these religions their origin immediately becomes obvious. The Cuban and Haitian religions, for instance, that emphasize communal piety and worship acknowledge their West African origins (Nigeria and Republic of Benin); but those others that emphasize the spirits of the dead readily identify with West-Central Africa, in particular with the Democratic Republic of Congo (Matory 2008:355). Though these non-Christian religions do not concern us in this essay, we cannot but notice that they form part of the African heritage in diaspora.

Our main concern here is the theologizing experience of those slaves who were deported to North America. Under the burden of their bondage, they took solace and refugee in religion: initially in the religion of their African homeland, but later in Christianity, which gave them the opportunity to liken their experiences with those of the Israelites in the Exodus from Egypt or Babylonian exile. Gospel songs such as "Go down, Moses" "Sweet Chariot", and "At the river of Babylon" are vivid reminders of this theologizing experience (Ludwig & Asamoah-Gyadu 2011:5).

Initially, when African slaves arrived in North America, they were not under any form of pressure to become Christians, except for a few exceptions. They could pray and practice their religions, though discreetly, in order not to attract the displeasure of the slave masters. The African prayer tradition survived the harsh period of slavery. According to Harold Carter, an African American,

"the habit and impact of prayer" is an outstanding part of the African heritage, which preceded the Christianization of the African people in America. Strikingly, Carter traces the black keenness on prayer to the African notion of God and to a world view that does not entertain a rigid distinction between the sacred and the secular. The slaves practiced prayer as a natural communication that belongs to life: through prayer they "sought both openly and secretly to find meaning and personhood in life" (Carter 1976:23).

For the African, prayer is a daily routine: the day begins and ends with prayer and all daily activities are accompanied with prayer. Hence the slaves maintained this habit of prayer, whether it was allowed or disallowed. Initially, some slave masters forbade prayer; so, slaves had to conduct secret prayer meetings in plantations, using every possible trick to conceal the unapproved worship (Carter 1976:29). But towards the end of the eighteenth century, slaves were pressurized to embrace Christianity; they thus felt free to express their religious sentiments, praying directly to God in non-conventional ways, talking to him spontaneously, dancing and shouting without any form of theological moderation. Ironically, the slaves were spiritually free despite their physical bondage: they were free from Church traditions and theological dogmas, and they were free to nurture their "individual initiative in finding God" (Carter 1976:27, 31). The spirituality that thus emerged was devoid of the usual cultic control and retained much of the ancestral religions. This spirituality was bequeathed to the African Americans, who, like their forefathers, learned to encounter God everywhere at home, at work, in the church, as the one who reveals himself in dreams, visions, songs, and prayers.

The prayer life of black slaves and their descendants in the Americas illustrate a theologizing experience, which undoubtedly led to the blending of the African heritage with the Jewish and Christian story. Appropriating for their need the biblical story, the slaves saw themselves as being in Egypt (Carter 1976:127) and thus began to see their spirituality as "Scripture-based" (Davis 2003:23). Though the individual and collective prayer tradition of the black people in the Americas has its roots in the African heritage, it evolved with due acquaintance with the Bible. As evangelical preaching began to produce "visible manifestations of the Spirit" in their prayer meetings, the slaves perceived a real affinity between their African heritage and "white man's" religion. Through a unique theologizing experience, therefore, the African Americans were able to blend evangelical doctrine with African ritual behavior in the period stretching from the Great Awakening of the 1740s to the Cane Ridge revival of 1883 (Hocken 1966:20).

Without any exaggeration, it can be affirmed that the typical African ritual behavior – distinct in language, style, imagery, and spirit – survived slavery

and became a tradition, not just "in the Black Protestant, free churches, where spontaneous congregational participation is a normal part of worship" (Carter 1976:20), but also in the African-American Catholic worship, where "the use of dance, the clapping of hands, the swaying of the body . . . are now common practice" (Davis 2003:22). Just as the African heritage survived in the mainline Churches – Catholic and Protestant alike – it got revived in black Pentecostalism, where spirit possession and ecstatic behavior, typical of the traditional African religion, has become a spectacular *modus operandi*. To this effect, W.E.B Dubois observed as far back as 1969 that the emergent American churches "owe much of their condition to the silent but potent influence of their millions of Negro converts" (Dubois 1969:213).

African Spirituality among New Immigrant Congregations in the West

The African-American black churches have long formed part of the religious landscape of America, and may no longer conjure the image of immigrant communities in diaspora. But the new immigrants coming from Africa and the Caribbean Islands bring in some air of freshness to Christian life in the secularized West, in a manner that makes them conspicuous. The missionary zeal and social character of these congregations make them unique and prominent.

Until recently, missionaries from the West traveled to Africa and Asia to evangelize the people, but today the reverse seems to be the case both among the Pentecostals and the mainline churches, hitherto known as the mission churches. There is a new wave of migration from the global South to the global North, which has to some extent assumed a missionary character. The African Christian presence hoists the flag of a lively Christianity; it is said for instance that "about half of all churchgoers in London are black" (Ludwig & Asamoah-Gyadu 2011:7). Most of the immigrants are Christians who have no link with the mainline churches in Europe and America, either because the Western churches cannot fulfill their religious yearnings since they are mostly and scantly populated by old people, or because they come from independent or classical Pentecostal congregations in Africa seeking their own independent existence in the West. Among the mainline churches, especially among the Catholics, clerics and consecrated persons from the global South are increasingly moving to Europe and America to supply the dearth of priests and able-bodied religious in the Western Catholic churches. Similarly, Pentecostals, both from the African Initiated Churches and from the African Pentecostals, are sending their missionaries into the West to take care of their immigrant

members; in most cases they extend their missionary outreach to the other lukewarm Christians. As one witnesses "the influx of Christian leaders from the global south into the north", one is left with no doubt that what Ogbu Kalu called "reverse flow of missions" has begun (Kalu 2008:271).

This reversal of the traditional missionary roles among the various congregations, especially among the African Initiated Churches, who build communities across the length and breadth of Europe, from London to Moscow, Hamburg to Sicily, is increasing the flow of African values into global Christianity. The African integration of religion into the entire life and the communitarian expression of spirituality come to focus in these congregations. These immigrants usually have tales of shattered hopes and broken dreams, hardship and measures of success; hence, they readily avail themselves of the services of these congregations to offer prayers and celebrations. They seek affiliation with them in order "to reinforce ethnic identity, solidarity, and to develop survival skills" (Kalu 2008:284). On their part, these congregations, especially the Pentecostal and Charismatic groups, identify whole-heartedly with these immigrant Christians consisting mostly of asylum seekers, refugees and occupational migrants. Apart from offering them a sense of belonging, these churches and prayer camps teach their members how to cope with life in their new homeland by helping them, (i) to pray for visas and survival, (ii) to seek for work permits and employments, (iii) to rent monies and mortgages, (iv) to acquire health insurance and settle other bills, and finally to save money and goods to transfer home (Kalu 2008:282).

Undoubtedly, African Christianity is on display through the active and mission-oriented African Charismatic and Pentecostal movements flourishing in the West. More than the white population, the non-white ethnic immigrant population practices Christianity in a manner that stresses intimate and joyous relationship with God, beliefs in the spirit world, in healing prophecy and in God's direct intervention to ensure the material wellbeing of people. These peculiar African religious behaviors could be seen as the "African indigenous religious and cultural responses to the message of Christian gospel" (Kalu 2008:291). The missionary impact of this phenomenon is unmistakable and has been beautifully articulated by Roswith Gerloff in the following words:

> African missions do not distinguish between spiritual and the material. They base evangelism on spiritual empowerment, as well as on social care for people. Different from the European style of linear structures, African missions travel along pre-existing social relations such as family, friendship, village or island community, and trade and work comradeship. They

> rest on Charismatic leadership, communicate in songs and signals, and understand the human person in his or her relationship to community. Therefore, faith becomes the light, reliable and comforting baggage in the process of migration and crisis. It testifies to a God who wanders with people through the wilderness. It believes in mutual respect and sharing. It turns the personal commitment of witnesses into a vehicle for being the gospel to be proclaimed (2000:354; *cf* Kalu 2008:290).

Conclusion

In the foregoing, we have been able to identify some of the features of African spirituality that have gained entry into world Christianity. These would include the commitment to a holistic view of reality, which integrates the sacred and the secular; a strong sense of the sacred, which considers every space and time appropriate for worship; a communitarian conception of life, which blends the religious and the social; and spontaneity in words and movements, which accounts for flexibility in worship. These four features of African thought and spirituality supply the points on which the Africanity or Africanness of a people can be determined;[2] they are the abiding values that accompany people of African descent wherever they live. In recent times, Pentecostalism has done a lot to facilitate this inflow, not just because of its revival of the pneumatic dimension of Christianity, which resonates in the African appreciation of the spirit world, but also because of its being in the forefront of the reverse flow of missionary activity from the global South to the global North. Through this move, Africa may get the chance to contribute once more towards the shaping of the doctrine, polity, liturgy and ethics of Christianity as eminent Africans did long ago in North Africa.

This may indeed lead to the fulfillment of the following prophecy of Wilmont Blyden in 1818:

> Africa may yet prove to be the spiritual conservatory of the world. Just as in the past times, Egypt proved the stronghold of Christianity after Jerusalem fell, and just as the noblest and greatest of the Fathers of the

2 The further scrutiny on the notion of 'Africanity', which Stephan Palmié demands of Africanists and African Americans, can be carried on along this line. Cf. Stephan Palmié (ed), *Africas of the Americas. Beyond the Search for Origins in the Study of Afro-Atlantic Religions*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2008.

> Christian Church came out of Egypt, so it may be, when the civilized nations, in consequence of their wonderful material development, have had their spiritual perceptions darkened and their spiritual susceptibilities blunted through the agency of a capturing and absorbing materialism, it may be, that they may have resort to Africa to recover some of the simple elements of faith; for the promise of that land is that she shall stretch forth her hands unto God (Blyden 1818:143).

However, this would only be possible, if an attempt is made to rid African Pentecostalism of crude syncretism and of some of the negative African values that have gotten mixed up with the positive ones.

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