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**Dr. Claudette Carr**

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The Journal of Contemporary Christian Studies (JCCS) is peer-reviewed, which provides a forum for exploration of various themes within Contemporary Christianity. We invite submissions of original research in the field of Contemporary Christian studies on various themes in: Theology, Mission, Apologetics, Pentecostalism/Charismatic Studies, New religious movements, and communities in Africa and the Diaspora

Submissions are invited across disciplines and cultures. In addition to commissioned articles and reflections, we welcome unsolicited articles, reviews and contributions from scholars, students, pastors and leaders nationally and internationally. We welcome comments from readers and believe that our contribution to the theological academic world will enrich students and practitioners in their academic and contemporary practical ministries. The Journal welcomes interdisciplinary debate and dialogue.

The judgement and opinions expressed in JCCS are those of the authors alone and do not reflect the view of the Editors and the Editorial Board, or the policies of the Christ the Redeemer College, London.

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# List of Contributors

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**William K. Kay** (PhD, University of Reading; PhD, University of Nottingham; DD, University of Nottingham) retired after holding academic posts in a variety of British universities in several fields. He was a senior lecturer in Religious and Theology Education at King's College, London, and later Professor of Theology at Glyndwr University and Professor of Pentecostal Studies at Chester University. He has carried out international empirical research on educational and Pentecostal topics and published over 100 peer reviewed articles, several books, chapters for books and edited collections. He edited the *Journal of the European Pentecostal Association* for about 10 years and wrote *George Jeffreys: Pentecostal Apostle and Revivalist* (2017) and *Pentecostalism: A Very Short*

*Introduction* (2011). He received an award for an outstanding contribution to Pentecostalism from Churches Together in England in 2016 and a Lifetime Achievement award from the Society of Pentecostal Studies in 2019.

**Emmanuel Nkenjika Osegbob** recently completed his master's degree in theology, Leadership and Ministry at Christ the Redeemer College, London, with the official award scheduled for September 2025. His dissertation, part of the requirements for the award, investigated the political attitudes of Black immigrant Pentecostals in Norwich, UK, and the surrounding areas. His work uses a mixed methods strategy founded on cultural awareness and rigorous ethics, thereby giving prominence to the voices of the underrepresented in civic and theological conversations. Emmanuel's academic interests span Pentecostalism, diaspora identity, and urban political dynamics.

Before venturing into theology, Emmanuel practised dentistry for many years — a foundation that informs his meticulous attention to detail and human-centred inquiry. He currently pastors Oasis Chapel, Great Yarmouth, a parish of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, where he merges spiritual leadership with a dedication to enhancing the visibility of unheard voices in academic and public arenas.

**Babatunde Adedibu** holds a PhD in Missiology from North West University, South Africa, and is a Professor of Church History and Missiology, Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy, Redeemer's University, Ede, Osun State, Nigeria. Adedibu has published widely on African Christianity in Africa and the Diaspora, particularly the Pentecostal strand, as well as on the interconnectedness between theology, religious creativity and innovation, development, mission, migration, globalisation, media, and civil society. He is a Professor Extraordinary with the Department of Religion and Theology at the University of the Western Cape, South Africa.

**Claudette Carr** (SFHEA) is Doctor of Philosophy in Education and holds a degree in Social Science & a master's in Applied Anthropology. She is also a qualified youth worker, and a youth work specialist with over two decades of experience leading and teaching undergraduate and postgraduate courses as

a Senior and Principal Lecturer in community and international community development. Working in youth ministry, and social policy at Brunel University, Birkbeck College, Lucerne University of Applied Sciences (Switzerland) and the University of Westminster, she developed the first Master's programme of its kind in Faith-Based Community Development in the UK. In her capacity as a consultant and trainer she has developed short courses in community leadership, and community-based research for community leaders and residents in partnership with several London Boroughs. Currently, she is a Principal Theology Lecturer and the Director of Research at Christ the Redeemer College.

**R. David Muir** is a political scientist and theologian. He holds a PhD in Black Theology & Pentecostalism from King's College, London University. David is the former Head of Whitelands College (University of Roehampton) and Senior Lecturer in Public Theology & Community Engagement. At Roehampton University, he was director of the Centre for Pentecostalism & Community Engagement. David was head of research and regional development at the Commonwealth Institute (CI) and Home Office adviser on policing, diversity, and community relations. In 2000, he was appointed by the Home Secretary to the new Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA) where he was deputy chairman and chair of the MPA's first public inquiry (The Virdi Inquiry). David was director of the Humanities Programme at London Metropolitan University (LMU) and special adviser to the Vice Chancellor. He has worked in several UK universities and has published widely on theology and politics. David was executive director for Public Theology and Public Policy at the Evangelical Alliance and is an Associate Supervisor for postgraduate students at Wescott House, Cambridge University.

# Editorial Note

*Claudette Carr*

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The articles gathered in this volume offer insights into the constitution of world Christianity, and how Pentecostalism is situated within it. In so doing, they address a gap in the historiography of Western theological discourse. Historically, the literature of Christianity has focused on Western formations, essentially positioned as the dominant narrative, and commonly known as Christendom. Increasingly, the stronghold of Western cultural hegemony in its telling of the stories of the “other”, has tended to be framed within what Daniel Akhazemea refers to in his article as the “staid denominationalism of historic mission Christianity”, and what Robert Beckford refers to as “Colonial Christianity.”

This provides something of a backdrop and context for the timely contributions of our authors, who pick up on some of the themes covered in the previous volume of this journal, which was focused on the impact of globalisation on Pentecostalism. In the present iteration of the discourse, contributors begin the necessary work of mapping and bearing public witness to the complexity of Pentecostalism, as seen through the lenses of scholars, researchers, and participants in the global south.

These contributions are representative of what the late theologian, Lamin Sanneh, described as a “fundamental historical shift” in the story of Christianity, and of “the character and fortunes of the religion and of the social modes appropriate to it”. In this reversal of the telling of the Christian story, the periphery has shifted to the centre and in this sense, perhaps one might suggest that the proverbial postcolonial chickens have come home to roost. Contemporaneous with this shift is the emergence of new epistemological paradigms to explain the meaning of new religious movements, formations, and identities, and how these are constituted and

reconstituted.

On a macro level these articles can be contextualised within the growing recognition of the global nature of African Christianity. In *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind*, published in 2007, the late scholar and theologian, Thomas C. Oden, cites David Barrett's projection that continuing growth would result in there being 633 million Christians in Africa by 2025. That is to say, most of the world's Christians are located in the global south. Paradoxically, as Oden and several of the contributors to this journal observe in relation to a lacuna in studies of how Pentecostalism is constituted: "Christians of the Global South have had far less opportunities to appreciate or even learn of their history than have Western Christians." Oden continues, "This is especially so for Africans. The remedy is better historical inquiry, not slipshod history or the ideologically charged tweaking of historical evidence".

The compilation of articles in this volume seek to stand in that gap by representing scholarly inquiry into the Pentecostalism of the "Black Atlantic" (a term coined in 1993 by the British sociologist, Paul Gilroy, to describe the shared history of the African diaspora experience). Each of the authors conduct their own particular inquiries from micro and macro perspectives on Pentecostalism. In his article, "Pentecostal Churches Then and Now", William E. Kay provides an overarching narrative mapping the unique developments of the birth and growth of Pentecostalism in the United Kingdom. It is not a linear history, but snapshots of some of the foundational moments and key figures playing a role in the changes wrought on the movement by the upheaval of the world wars of the first half of the twentieth century, and the revivals and social changes of the second half.

Kay's analysis is divided into three acts, with the first from 1907-1950 and the establishment of the Pentecostal Church in Britain. The second act, from 1950-2000 covers the planting of African-Caribbean and West-African churches and the emergence of the Charismatic

movement. The third act addresses the period from 2000 until today, and in documenting the too often taken for granted historical exclusion of the Pentecostal movement from the wider theological discourse and public witness of Christianity, is very much a history of the present.

Kay concludes by summarising some of the key developments behind the shift of the diverse forms of Pentecostal churches from the periphery to the centre that can be found in a globalised and digitalised Britain. At the heart of these dynamic developments in Pentecostalism in the UK, Kay asserts, are core beliefs about the presence of the Holy Spirit. It would seem that the dynamism and uniqueness of the Pentecostal movement gives credence to this, as we read in the Joel 2:28 prophecy and its manifestation in Acts 2:17-18, and in Zachariah 4:8, “Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,” Says the LORD of hosts.”

This segues rather fittingly into the previously-mentioned contribution of Daniel Akhazemea, who explores “The Distinctives of African Pentecostal Approaches to Education and Training”. In a micro-case study of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Akhazemea presents a cogent overview of the history of pedagogical practices in Pentecostal spaces. He begins by acknowledging the difficulty in reaching a uniform definition of Pentecostalism, and delineating three important nodal points in the history of the movement, which he describes as: Classical Pentecostalism and Neo-Pentecostalism, itself interchangeable with Charismatic movements.

Akhazemea explores the unique characteristics of African Pentecostal approaches to education and training, shedding light on how various distinctive features shape these educational experiences. He also highlights some common themes within the broader movement, such as how local cultural influences have been integrated with African Pentecostal pedagogical practices, and, in the Nigerian context, the paradox of “continuity and rupture” in which Pentecostalism is simultaneously “inside and outside” of African traditional religions. The

tensions between the former and the latter highlight the need for further contextualisation of the ways in which these forms of Christian practice are reconstituted within different cultures of Pentecostal practice, even as syncretism is contested. The study emphasises the holistic nature of Pentecostal education, which seeks to develop individuals intellectually, spiritually, socially, and emotionally. Significantly, the study points toward the uniqueness of RCCG's global network of schools, universities, and training institutes as a demonstration of how Pentecostal movements combine ministerial preparation with wider academic and vocational education, cultivating graduates who are both spiritually grounded and professionally competent.

So much of what we have reviewed not only speaks to the need for a solid historiographical framework that addresses the gap in Pentecostal studies identified by Thomas Oden, but also what Akhazemea identifies as the need for "Pentecostal Charismatic churches to develop their own theological paradigms that challenge and transform Pentecostal and Charismatic spirituality".

Certainly, the contributions of Emmanuel Osegbob, Onesimus A. Ngundu, and Babatunde Adedibu, point towards the need for a new paradigm of ontological anthropology that might serve as a theoretical framework that can engage with multiple narratives emerging from within and without the global south and Black Atlantic Christian experience.

Osegbob's empirical research examines perceptions of Black immigrant Pentecostals in Norwich and its environs, and their involvement in local community politics. Drawing on a mixed-methods approach that integrates quantitative and qualitative data, the convergence of findings through a triangulated analysis highlights both consistency and divergence across data strands that enhance the validity of the study's conclusions. The study reveals that while political action is increasingly seen as a spiritual responsibility, structural and racial exclusions shape both participation and skepticism, while dual affiliations produce nuanced and sometimes

ambivalent political attitudes.

Osegboh offers a welcome study into the involvement of Black immigrant Pentecostals in the arena of public theology/ political theology, and the concomitant socio-political concerns of faith-based community development and engaged citizenship within small urban settings in the United Kingdom.

Currently theological programmes in the academy increasingly focus on “decolonizing the curriculum” through an intentional policy practice aimed at decentering dominant western narratives across a range of disciplines to ensure inclusion.

Onesimus A. Ngundu’s study speaks to this historical shift and particular cultural moment. Ngundu explores the difficulties that arise from the importation of western marriage laws and practices into the countries of sub-Saharan Africa. Marriages in these countries are traditionally conducted and formalised by the *lobolo* system. The study identifies various issues that emerge from this, before providing a solution in the form of an African Christian marriage practice that combines both traditions.

The potential for an ontological anthropological approach is found in Babatunde Adedibu’s study, which presents a unique view of how African Indigenous ontologies shape narratives of African Pentecostalism. As an example of the contextualization of global Pentecostalism, Adedibu presents a nuanced rendering of the ontological belief that underpins African Pentecostalism. The study highlights “spiritual warfare songs” as a medium for hope, and an example of the way African ontological ideas continue to permeate African Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity and Spirit-inspired artistic expressions.

The multidisciplinary gathering of scholarship reflected in this journal, demonstrates the need, not only for a new paradigm of thinking, given the ascendancy of African Christian theology discussed here, but also for a new global collaboration between scholars in the global south and the

African diaspora. By combining their skills and expertise, they are able to amplify and bridge a historical gap that has resulted in the omission of many voices and stories.

# Distinctives of African Pentecostal Approaches to Education and Training: The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) Experience

*Daniel Akhazemea*

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## **Abstract**

This paper explores the distinctive features of African Pentecostal approaches to education and training, with a particular focus on the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) as a case study. It highlights how African Pentecostalism, shaped by both biblical convictions and cultural contexts, integrates spirituality, practical skills, and community values into educational practice. The study emphasizes the holistic nature of Pentecostal education, which seeks to form individuals intellectually, spiritually, socially, and emotionally. Distinctives such as integration of faith and learning, emphasis on spiritual formation, contextual relevance, and practical orientation are examined as core elements of African Pentecostal pedagogy. The RCCG's global network of schools, universities, and training institutes demonstrates how Pentecostal movements combine ministerial preparation with wider academic and vocational education, producing graduates who are both spiritually grounded and professionally competent. While challenges such as balancing academic rigor with spiritual vitality and addressing rising costs of education remain, RCCG's model illustrates the potential of African Pentecostal education to contribute to societal transformation and global Christian scholarship.

**Keywords:** African Pentecostalism, Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), theological education, spiritual formation, holistic learning

## Introduction

Biblical commentators have found it difficult to adopt a uniform definition for Pentecostalism (Daniel, 2021). This difficulty arises principally from variation in the understandings, theologies and practices of the different movements adopting the term in their self-descriptions. A common theme, however, is the emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit, baptism of the Holy Spirit, His gifts, and direct experience of the presence of God in the everyday lives of believers. One classical work (Hollenweger, 1997: 269–71), describes the basis of early Pentecostalism as “the presence of the living God, the reality of the Holy Spirit, which people looked forward to receiving in conversion, sanctification, the baptism of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit”.

The various movements’ understanding of Pentecostalism and their doctrines are such that I here engage with the term Pentecostalism very broadly, to include what is often described as classical Pentecostalism, neo-Pentecostalism or charismatic movements. Classical Pentecostals identify tongues as evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit and necessary for the manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit (cf. particularly 1 Cor 12:4-7). Neo-Pentecostals and charismatic movements, while acknowledging speaking in tongues as an important gift of the Spirit (particularly in aiding prayer), and citing Acts 1:8, embrace instead the miraculous workings of the Holy Spirit in a believer’s life as such evidence. They hold that speaking in tongues is not necessarily evidence of baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Asamoah-Gyadu (2005) provides a definition of Pentecostalism that captures this understanding well:

Pentecostalism refers to Christian groups which emphasise salvation in Christ as a transformative experience wrought by the Holy Spirit and in which pneumatic phenomena including “speaking in tongues”, prophecies, visions, healing and miracles in general, perceived as standing in historic continuity with the experiences of the early church as found especially in the Acts

of the Apostles, are sought, accepted, valued, and consciously encouraged among members as signifying the presence of God and experiences of his Spirit.

It is widely acknowledged that Pentecostalism is a rapidly growing global Christian movement, characterized by emphasis on the active work of the Holy Spirit, charismatic experiences, and a fervent belief in the transformative power of faith. It has distinctive theological and practical perspectives on various aspects of life, including education. I here explore the unique characteristics of African Pentecostal approaches to education and training, with the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) as a case study, thus shedding light on how these distinctive features shape the educational experiences of Pentecostal individuals and communities. While it is important to note that there are significant variations within the Pentecostal movement, there are some common themes and characteristics in African Pentecostal approaches to education and training.

African Pentecostalism is a term that has been used by scholars to describe Pentecostal practices in Africa that also reflect some local cultural influences. Some have even posited that primitive African religion is incorporated into the liturgies and practices of various Pentecostal churches in Africa (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005). In his philosophical study of Nigerian Pentecostalism, Wariboko (2014: 5, 26) describes the ability of Nigerian Pentecostals to be simultaneously “inside and outside” of African traditional religions, meaning that some churches display “both continuity and rupture in the same Nigerian religious landscape”.

African Pentecostalism appears to develop in forms that do not conform to clear strands of the Pentecostal and charismatic movements. Rarely do you find movements that are classically Pentecostal in Africa today. Syncretism is prevalent in many groups of African Pentecostalism, where African traditional understanding of spiritual realities is noticeable in the liturgies and practices. Allan Anderson (2016: 3–11) observes that

“Pentecostalism, through its experience of the Spirit, often unconsciously taps into deep-seated religious and cultural beliefs. It draws from these sources in continuity with them while also simultaneously confronting them in discontinuity, using a biblical rationale for its beliefs and practices”. He stresses that it could be argued that most churches in Africa, whether connected with western Christianity or not, have developed an African character which has many parallels to independent Spirit churches, as they all emphasise the working of the Holy Spirit in confronting an African spirit-filled world.

This resonates with Cox’s (1996: 71) suggestion that for the growth of any religion, Pentecostalism or otherwise, two underlying factors are necessary: such a religion must “be able to include and transform at least certain elements of pre-existing religions which still retain a strong grip on the cultural subconscious”, and “also equip people to live in rapidly changing societies”. This explains why Pentecostalism often takes the form of the culture within which it is practiced, whether western, Asian, African, and so on. Within the African context there are variations influenced by local contexts. Writers have identified the Afro-American influence of the Azuza Street revival that is often referenced as the beginning of the Pentecostal movement (Kay, 2004).

Asamoah-Gyadu (2005) suggests that some old African initiated churches have metamorphosed into traditional Pentecostal churches. These changes have been occasioned by such factors as the continuous metamorphosis into modern versions of themselves in order to ensure their own survival, including dropping the use of paraphernalia and rituals considered too close to traditional religions. He emphasises that “[I]n Ghana today, as elsewhere around the African continent, multitudinous independent indigenous Pentecostal and autochthonous Charismatic movements that developed in response to the staid denominationalism of historic mission Christianity have come to represent local manifestations of a global phenomenon”.

## **Pentecostal Education**

While there were times when education was not seen as key to ministerial effectiveness by Pentecostals in Africa, today education is highly valued by these movements. African Pentecostals believe that education is essential for personal growth, spiritual development, and service to others. They also believe that education can be used to promote the Kingdom of God and to transform society. Asonzeh (2007) stresses that the RCCG has a strong commitment to education and has established schools and universities around the world.

Kay (2004: 229–39) charts the historical development of Pentecostal education around the world. He explains that Pentecostal education initially concerned itself with offering training to ministers and leaders of churches. It subsequently expanded its educational offering to include day schools, universities, and other forms of training. He draws attention to the birth of Pentecostalism often being credited to events at Bethel Bible College, Topeka, Kansas.

It is discernible from Pentecostal education today that a broad mix of institutions and programmes are on offer. African Pentecostal Bible schools that were established by western Pentecostal parent churches, say the Assemblies of God or Foursquare, generally follow the parent church's philosophy and approach to education and training. The parent church's curriculum is adopted and applied. However, most indigenous African Pentecostals develop training approaches that are a mixture of ideas and systems borrowed from these established western Pentecostal training institutions combined with those of local African cultural contexts. The mode of delivery and curriculum follows the African Pentecostal style.

In Africa, Pentecostal and charismatic colleges can usually trace their origins either to missionary work from the West or to innovative indigenous schemes (Kay, 2004). Pentecostal education began within the arena of ministerial training. Since congregations require ministers and ministers require training, training has been thought to require specific

institutions. This has led to growth in the number of Pentecostal training institutions. These may involve several small congregations collaborating to establish a Bible school, or, where facilities are available, converting a part of the church into a day training centre during the week. This is a pattern that appears common in Nigeria.

There is a growing argument that the time has come for African Pentecostal/charismatic churches to develop their own theological paradigms to challenge and transform Pentecostal and charismatic spirituality throughout the world. This is because “European models of theological education often do not take enough notice of the specific, local, religious, social, and cultural contexts that dominate Pentecostal/Charismatic people throughout the rest of the world” (Anderson, 2004).

A shift in Pentecostal education occurred in the late twentieth century with mainstream Pentecostal denominations such as the Assemblies of God, among others, expanding their undergraduate and postgraduate curricula into the humanities. This development has led to increased Pentecostal scholarship and the demystification of Pentecostal training. Several denominations have since established training schools which are not restricted to ministry training, although considerable emphasis is given to applied theology and the practical application of the Bible in ministry.

### **Pentecostal Perspectives on Education and Training**

Pentecostal perspectives on education are shaped by a number of core beliefs, among which are the following:

- The Bible as the inspired word of God is taken as the ultimate authority for all matters of faith and practice. This means that education should be based on biblical principles.
- Education is essential for personal growth, spiritual development, and service to others. It is believed that education can help people reach their full potential and hence serve God and others more effectively.

- Education can be used to promote the Kingdom of God and transform society. This means that education can be used to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ and to make the world a better place.

### **Pentecostal Approaches to Education and Training**

Pentecostalism is currently described as the fastest growing strand of Christianity. Such tremendous growth has been, in part, ignited at Bible schools that train ministers to support the missional orientation of the Pentecostal movement. As a vibrant and rapidly growing Christian movement, Pentecostalism has developed theological and practical perspectives on various aspects of life, including education.

Alvarez (2000: 281–93) identifies six visible educational commitments that support this approach. He believes that Pentecostal education:

1. Stirs up passion for God.
2. Aims for a radical dependency on the Holy Spirit, both inwardly and outwardly.
3. Is rooted in a sound biblical worldview and lifestyle consistent with the teachings of the Scriptures.
4. Aims to blend efficacious service and academics, producing men and women of integrity in all areas of responsibility and service.
5. Is dynamic, critical and creative in response to contemporary issues that affect the world and the environment.
6. Is “missiologically involved” as per Grant McClung’s (1990) suggestion that Pentecostalism is by its very nature missiological.

The above-enumerated commitments suggest that Pentecostal education may offer a balance between the cognitive, competency, and affective domains of education for Christian service. Lewis (1998: 1–3) identifies how Pentecostal education reflects these domains:

1. Cognitive outcomes are produced through formal methods in a school context.

2. Skill outcomes are produced through non-formal methods in the workplace context.
3. Affective outcomes are produced through informal methods in a community context.

Lewis suggests that “the best theological training models combine all three domains, use all three methodologies intentionally and provide all three contexts together”.

### **Nature and Character of Pentecostal Education**

Generally, Pentecostal education is more practical and ministry-oriented than the education of other evangelicals, whose training is more cognitively-oriented. Its philosophy often aims at preparing students mentally, emotionally, spiritually and practically. The process often involves mentors, whose primary task is equipping students by enabling and mobilizing them in a wholesome manner. As Pentecostal education seeks to affect the whole person, there is an intentional flexibility and dynamism that encourages the adoption of new ideas, new strategies, or new ministry commitments to stimulate understanding. An important feature of Pentecostal education is that experiencing the features of New Testament ministry is not only something hoped for, but is also expected, just as it was by the disciples in the biblical narratives.

Early in the history of Pentecostal education, Bible school training was limited to instruction on how to understand and use the Bible in ministry, homiletics, operation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and a form of systematic theology called “Pentecostal scholasticism” (Jacobsen , 1999). Pentecostal scholasticism was said to be associated with a narrow Bible-based curriculum and with simple pedagogy. Pentecostal education gradually found itself accepted within the mainstream as it allied itself with the theological education of evangelical orthodoxy. The cost of this alliance threatened Pentecostalism’s experiential dynamism, however. It

has been argued that a more radical approach is needed to ensure that the training of Pentecostal ministers contributes to the vitality of churches. This radicalism is supported by Anderson (2001), who has called for more contextual theology within Pentecostal education

Pentecostals largely believe that the Bible as a text is a sufficient resource for the Holy Spirit to use to grow a church. Unlike the mainstream churches that require their clergy to undertake an average of three years' theological study before ordination to ministry, Pentecostal training tends to be shorter, say one or two years before ordination. Sometimes ordination may be conducted based on evidence of the manifestation of the gift of the Spirit. The Bible and the Holy Spirit's anointing are the prerequisites for such ordination.

Wayne Kraiss (1998: 59-72) has proposed the following four features should characterise Pentecostal education:

1. Training centres must be a place of compassion and love.
2. Educational centres must be places of Christ-like forgiveness. Kraiss suggests that the goal of Pentecostal education is to model something the students may never see in the world.
3. Training centres must be committed to building people and be staffed by educators with the eyes of discernment needed to call forth the best from within a person.
4. Educational locations must be places where the educators are peacemakers.

Furthermore, Bowers (2010: 232–59) suggests a model of Pentecostal education organized around formational practices of spiritual retreat and conferencing, table fellowship, communal prayer and worship, sharing testimony, making and keeping covenant, discerning missional context, personal assessment and development planning, collaborative learning, mentoring, and resourcing, shared theological praxis, and congregational and missional collaboration.

## **African Pentecostal Approaches to Education and Training**

Anderson (2004) argues that African Pentecostals often have a form of Christian spirituality influenced by the popular religions of the regions in which they live. This often leads to sharp differences with the rather cerebral Christianity of western missionaries and their theological colleges. This understanding means that the “context of theological education is not the Bible college, the seminary or the university, but the community in which God’s people are found.”

Pentecostal perspectives on education often emphasise distinctive elements that reflect people’s theological and cultural beliefs. While it is important to note that there can be significant variation within the Pentecostal movement, some common themes and characteristics are discernible. The African Pentecostal approach to education and training exhibits several distinctives that reflect certain emphases and perspectives of African communities. Among these are the following:

### ***1. A Holistic Approach to Education***

African Pentecostal approaches to education often prioritise holistic development of the spiritual, intellectual, physical, and emotional dimensions. This is in contrast to many western approaches to education, which tend to focus more on the cognitive dimension. African Pentecostal approaches to education appear to not only emphasise intellectual growth but also emotional, social, and spiritual development. The goal is to produce well-rounded individuals who are spiritually active, and practically and intellectually prepared to face real issues in life and ministry. This is evident in a curriculum that provides a wide range of subjects to prepare students for leadership within the church, society and industry.

### ***2. Integration of Faith and Learning***

African Pentecostal approaches to education seek to integrate faith and learning. This means that students are encouraged to see their

education and training in the light of their Christian faith, and to use their knowledge and skills to serve God and others. It also means that academic subjects are taught in the context of religious beliefs and values. African Pentecostals view education as a means of spiritual growth and often seek to instil Christian principles and values into every aspect of learning. The emphasis in Pentecostal and charismatic leadership has usually been on the spirituality of the leader, rather than on their intellectual abilities or even ministerial skills. It is interesting that McKinney (2000: 253–79) advocates for the spirituality of Pentecostal training institutions. He stresses that the faculty members of such institutions should be sensitive to the Holy Spirit and offer students a model of humble and disciplined lives. Wanak (2000: 3–24) argues for a holistic approach of “intentional interaction between theory and practice” so that there is no division between the superstructure of Christian doctrine and the infrastructure of Christian practice.

### ***3. Emphasis on Community***

African Pentecostal education often fosters a strong sense of community and fellowship among students and faculty. This sense of belonging and mutual support is seen as an important aspect of spiritual growth and development. As a result, students are seen as members of a larger community, and their education and training is considered a way to prepare them to contribute to the betterment of that community. This leads to the development of a sense of community and fellowship among students, teachers, and families. Such a sense of belonging is seen as essential for spiritual growth and support.

### ***4. Emphasis on Transformation***

African Pentecostal education and training aims to bring about personal and societal transformation through spiritual growth, character development, and a focus on moral values. It encourages the prospect of community

transformation as an extension of the kingdom of God. The Holy Spirit is central in the African Pentecostal approach to teaching and learning. “He is the one who makes and equips teachers; he is an active participant in our development, and the one who enables us to change in a changing world” (Johns, 1999: 42–47). Johns draws attention to a very significant aspect of the Holy Spirit’s involvement in Pentecostal education when she comments that Pentecostal experience is the “epistemological key” that “radically alters traditional forms of theological education”, and declares this a major distinctive of Pentecostal/Charismatic education.

### *5. Relevance to the African Context*

African Pentecostal approaches to education and training are designed to be relevant to the African context. This means contextualising the unique challenges and opportunities facing Africa, as well as the African cultural worldview. It is often argued that European models of theological education do not take sufficient notice of the specific, local, religious, social, and cultural contexts that dominate Pentecostal/charismatic people throughout the rest of the world (Anderson, 2004), and that the cultural setting should help to inform each programme of tuition. As observed by Bediako (2000, 5–11), the “hard-line and historically imported categories” from the West are “now found to be not always helpful, as they do not describe adequately the actual experience of the majority of African Christians”. As a result, Pentecostal education ought to vary from culture to culture and should adapt itself to local needs and situations (Kay, 2004). The education and training of the RCCG training systems embrace the contextual input of their various locations.

### *6. Practical Orientation*

Rather than focusing solely on theoretical knowledge, African Pentecostal education emphasizes practical training and equipping individuals with tangible skills for real-world application. Such skills are important for

Pentecostal missiological engagement. African Pentecostal hermeneutics emphasises experience as the grid through which to interpret the Bible. This makes African Pentecostal theological education more holistic and functional.

Elliston (1988: 203–15) recommends a “non-formal” education that is “functionally oriented, democratic, and [where] the entry requirements are set by the community being served”. It is clear from the biblical model that in-service leadership training through apprenticeship was Jesus and the apostle Paul’s favoured model of ministerial training. Jesus empowered those who had been through a three-year intensive process of training on the job, and appointed them to be apostles through whom the gospel was to be disseminated throughout the world. Education without experiential practical engagement, imported from the western model, is not very effective within the African Pentecostal context. It is noteworthy that through Experiential Prior Learning (EPL), recognition or accreditation is now being given by some universities for ministry experiences. The spirituality that these experiences bring is making Pentecostal/charismatic spirituality more effective and acceptable in such settings.

### ***7. Ecstatic African-Centric Worship and Prayer***

Charismatic worship is often integrated into the educational experiences of students through regular chapel services, prayer meetings, and spiritual retreats, where students actively participate in charismatic expressions of their faith including African types of praying. The RCCG Bible College in Nigeria, for example, has what it calls the “Weekend of Emphasis” where students experience Pentecostal worship and prayer. The results of such retreats contribute considerably to ministerial preparation.

### ***8. Emphasis on Spiritual Formation***

African Pentecostal education places a significant emphasis on spiritual development. Students are encouraged to cultivate a deep relationship with

God and also develop their spiritual gifts. This aligns with Wanak's (2000, 32–34) observation about Asian Pentecostal education, also evident in the African Pentecostal approach, that “the task of the theological educator is to bridge the ancient text and the contemporary context, ancient pedagogy and the modern approaches to academic, spiritual and ministerial formation”. This includes encouragement of student-faculty contact, encouragement of cooperation among students, active learning, prompt feedback, emphasis on time on task, high expectations, and respect for diverse talents and ways of learning.

### *9. Flexibility and Adaptability*

African Pentecostal approaches to education can be flexible and adaptive, responding to the changing needs of the church and society. This adaptability can lead to a wide range of educational models and means of transmission.

### **The RCCG Context**

The Redeemed Christian Church of God was established in 1952. Its doctrine and practices place it under the umbrella of Neo-Pentecostalism. Early in the development of the church, and as part of a growth strategy, the founder identified the importance of training as a means of building the labour force. Initially, the training was basic ministry training focused on raising church planters and pastors. This was mainly at certificate and diploma level and was necessary to support the church's fivefold mission and vision statement, which is often called the RCCG Mandate.

The RCCG Mandate comprises the following:

1. To make it to heaven personally.
2. To take as many people as possible with us.
3. To have a member of RCCG in every family of all nations.
4. To accomplish no. 1 above, holiness will be our lifestyle.

5. To accomplish nos. 2 and 3 above, we will plant churches within five minutes' walking distance in every city and town of developing countries, and within five minutes' driving distance in every city and developed town.

The focus of the training is to equip ministers who will take the gospel of planting churches across the globe. The RCCG is presently in over ninety countries of the world with more than 800 churches in the UK, while its training system has a global reach.

This drive for mission and church planting also resulted in the establishment of schools to meet different needs of the membership, spiritual and otherwise. While the emphasis is still on training ministers for the mission field through Bible colleges, Schools of Mission and specific discipleship training such as Schools of Disciples, Schools of Prayer, Schools of Leadership etc., the church has also diversified into training that is outside the core ministry arena. Its university, Redeemers University, has religious studies as a department along with a secular suite of programmes. The training is underpinned by Pentecostal principles. The Redeemer School of Science and Technology provides higher technical education. Christ the Redeemer College in the UK operates as four schools: Practical Ministry, Theology, Business, and Education. Validation arrangements are entered into by the colleges. For example, the Redeemed Bible College in Nigeria offers programmes validated by the University of Ibadan and Redeemer's University. Christ the Redeemer College UK is currently validated by Birmingham Newman University. In addition to these institutions, there are many nursery and primary schools, secondary schools, technical schools and training institutions. The aim of all these institutions is to ensure that a holistic education is provided that is focused on discipleship, ministry and preparation of members for the world of employment and business. It is this drive that has made the RCCG a leader in the provision of Pentecostal Christian education in the

world.

The RCCG's educational institutions are characterized by the following features, among others:

- *Emphasis on the Bible:* The Bible is the foundation of education in RCCG schools and universities. All students are required to take Bible classes, and the Bible is integrated into all subjects.
- *Emphasis on character development:* RCCG schools and universities focus on developing Christian character in their students. This includes teaching Christian values and providing opportunities for students to apply their faith to their lives.
- *Emphasis on practical skills:* RCCG schools and universities focus on teaching practical skills that will be useful in the workplace and in society.
- *Emphasis on community:* RCCG schools and universities strive to create a supportive community where students can learn from and with each other.
- *Emphasis on global relevance:* RCCG's educational philosophy extends beyond national boundaries. The church has a global presence, and its educational institutions often incorporate a global perspective into their curriculum. This perspective emphasizes the interconnectedness of the worldwide Christian community and encourages students to engage with global issues and mission.

The distinctive features of education and training within the RCCG reflect the broader values and beliefs of Pentecostalism about the active presence of the Holy Spirit and the transformative power of faith, thus shaping the educational experiences of trainees. Understanding these distinctive features is essential for educators, researchers, and policymakers seeking to engage with Pentecostal education within the RCCG and similar denominations. Moreover, doing so highlights the complex relationship

between faith, education, and the broader socio-cultural context in which Pentecostalism thrives.

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

RCCG training institutions, and Pentecostal education generally, face a number of challenges in providing education in the twenty-first century. Anderson (2004) identifies the tension between academic integrity and spirituality, especially when education does not seem to further Christian spirituality. Klaus and Triplett (1991: 225–41) speak of Pentecostalism's tenuous relationship with theological training and a “dead intellectualism” that “stifles the Spirit-filled life”. Kay (2004) observes that a challenge facing Pentecostal education concerns its identity, as it will need to develop forms of teaching, formation, curriculum, and resources that are experiential and flexible.

One practical challenge is that the cost of education is rising rapidly. Another practical challenge is that the world is changing rapidly and educational institutions need to keep up with the latest trends and technologies. For tertiary institutions, there are tensions between the Pentecostal worldview and the expectations of the validating or approving authorities.

Despite these challenges, Pentecostal churches have a number of opportunities to provide education in the twenty-first century. One opportunity is that Pentecostal churches have a strong global network that can be used to share resources and expertise. Another opportunity is that Pentecostal churches are committed to providing education that is both academically rigorous and spiritually transformative.

### **Conclusion**

This paper explored the distinctive features of African Pentecostal approaches to education and training, focusing on the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) as a case study. RCCG is a prominent global

Pentecostal denomination that places a significant emphasis on education within its religious framework. By examining the RCCG's educational practices, this paper sheds light on how Pentecostalism influences educational philosophy, pedagogy, and the integration of faith into the educational process. Key distinctive features include a strong emphasis on spiritual formation, emphasis on the whole person, integration of faith and learning, practical ministry training, relevance to the African context, and a global perspective on education.

The RCCG's approach to education and training has been successful in producing graduates who are well-educated, spiritually grounded, and committed to serving their communities. The RCCG's educational institutions are also known for their high academic standards and their commitment to excellence.

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# When is an African Christian Couple Considered Married in the Sight of God?

*Onesimus A. Ngundu*

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## **Abstract**

This article explores the difficulties that arise from the importation of western marriage laws and practices into the countries of sub-Saharan Africa. Marriages in these countries are traditionally conducted and formalised under the *lobolo* system. The addition of a western-style government-approved wedding, which often happens much later than the traditional ceremony, has created confusion, especially around the date couples can be considered married in the sight of God. The article identifies a range of other issues flowing on from this, and then provides a solution in the form of an African Christian marriage practice that combines both traditions.

**Key Words:** African marriage, *lobolo*, church weddings, marriage laws, husbands and wives

## Introduction

Marriage has governed the existence of humankind since the beginning of human history more than any other human social relationship. According to Christian theology, marriage between a man and a woman was instituted and designed by God the Creator (Gen 2:24; Matt 19:4-6). Human beings are thus not themselves credited with the founding of the husband-wife relationship. As a social institution, marriage affords the most personally intimate union that can ever exist between two people, through which biological procreation results in the formation of traditional families, which eventually grew into ethnic groupings: “From one man and his wife, God made every nation of men that they should inhabit the whole earth, and He determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live” (Acts 17:26).

Biblically and historically, we learn that God the Creator sovereignly determined where each ethnic grouping would settle and establish itself as a people or a nation. For example, Indians in India, Chinese in China, Africans in Africa, etc. Each ethnic grouping eventually devised not only its own language, but also developed its cultural mores and customs, including marriage formation regulations. In all ethnic groupings or nations or cultures, whenever a man and a woman enter into a marriage relationship it is actually God Himself uniting them as husband and wife, just as He did with Adam and Eve, the first couple He created and united in marriage for life: “*What God has joined together let no one separate*” including the parties themselves (Matt 19:6).

## African Marriage Formation

In Christian theology, an ideal marriage between a man and a woman in any culture should be characterised by the *consent* of both, a public *covenantal life commitment* to this unique relationship, a *celebration* of the marriage with family members and friends, and *consummation*, an exclusive intimacy between a man and his wife (Gen 2:24; 1:26-27; 24:1-67; Matt 19:1-10).

Since the establishment of the husband-wife relationship of Adam and Eve, the ethical question becomes: In the different ethnic groupings of the world, at what point does marriage occur? Historically, the question *at what point should a man and a woman be considered married* (in the sight of God) was first posed to Pope Nicolas I in the ninth century in a European cultural context. A similar question was raised in the twentieth century in an African context. According to research, African Methodist church leaders in Zimbabwe were the first clergy in sub-Saharan Africa to search for a cultural, theological, and ecclesiastical answer to this important question in the wake of the introduction and imposition of European civil and church marriage laws and practices. Africans already had their own marriage custom of *lobolo*.<sup>1</sup> However, the marriage question from African church leaders in sub-Saharan Africa was subsequently sent to and debated at the Methodist Missionary Society Conference Headquarters in London. Unfortunately, European Christian leaders in London did not provide a convincing answer to the urgent and perennial question: *At what point should an African (Christian) couple be considered married in the sight of God?*

Before its commercialisation, *lobolo* as an institution was never intended as a source of material and financial gain. It was simply concrete and significant enduring evidence of the binding of two families together through the marriage of the bride and the groom (Samkange, 1970). We can safely say marriage formalization based on *lobolo* is a common practice among Africans in marriage formation in all sub-Saharan African countries. Both Protestant and Roman Catholic scholarly studies on African Christian marriage in sub-Saharan Africa, e.g., *Christian Marriage*

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1. *Lobolo* is a Zulu or Ndebele noun from the verb *lobola*. It may be known by different names in the different languages of sub-Saharan Africa. For example, in Shona, *rovoro* is the equivalent of the Nguni or Zulu or Ndebele term *lobolo*. In Sotho or the Tswana of Botswana it is known as *bogali*. It is *awaree* in Akan of Ghana, *ayie* in Luo, *ngasya* in Kambas of Kenya, *eru iyawo* in Yoruba, and *rubu dinar* in the Hausa of Nigeria, etc.

in *Africa* (Hastings, 1973) and *African Christian Marriage* (Kisembo, 1977), confirm that marriage formation, even among African Christians in Africa, is wholly based on *lobolo*. Thus, refusal and failure by church mission societies to recognise *lobolo* as the *sine qua non* method of establishing and confirming that marriage has occurred, has resulted in perennial cultural confusion and conflict, social and moral dilemmas for African Christians at marriage.

### **Social and Moral Dilemmas for African Christian Couples**

If an African Christian couple consummated their marriage *after* their customary marriage ceremony but *before* a church wedding, they were often subjected to public and humiliating church discipline for “fornication”. In some churches such discipline included being barred from participating in any church ministry activities, and even from taking Communion, etc. The reason why African Christian couples consummated their marriage after their customary marriage ceremony was that they rightly viewed the requirement for a foreign marriage solemnization, either at a government building office before a white government marriage officer or a church white wedding officiated by a white missionary, as simply a means of satisfying the civil or church law (Broderick, 1945: 49). In other words, Africans saw European marriage formation practices in an African cultural context, not as foreign, but as unnecessary.

Therefore, any meaningful discussion of African Christian marriage formation in sub-Saharan Africa cannot ignore either the historical and theological background of European civil and church marriage laws and traditions from the places where settlers and church mission societies originated, or how they subsequently introduced European marriage practices in sub-Saharan Africa where people still regulate marriage by *lobolo*. In African society, a valid marriage is said to have been contracted and is considered legitimate only when the *lobolo* negotiations and transactions between the members of the *lobolo*-giving and *lobolo*-receiving

family are entered into or completed. Therefore, African Christian couples should consummate their union following the customary marriage ceremony with a clear conscience before God. In fact, in the Bible there is no mandate for Africans to marry according to the marriage laws and practices of another nation or people. In the Old Testament, the Jews as God's people married according to their own cultural marriage practices.

In the Old Testament, marriage ceremonies and celebrations were neither conducted in religious buildings nor officiated over by a religious leader. Marriage among the Semitic peoples was more of a social undertaking than a religious or civil responsibility. All the same, the Old Testament narrators present God as being involved in such non-religious social and cultural marriage ceremonies and celebrations (Genesis 24), just as Jesus socialised with people at the marriage celebration or reception (not ceremony) of Cana, as recorded in John 2:1-12. Whatever arguments Christian proponents of church weddings, symbols, and rituals may seek to generate, they cannot legitimately claim the Bible as their heritage, because marriage as a private affair required no public ceremony, religious or otherwise, for its legalisation and validity. However, in all cultures, couples, especially Christians, are expected to acknowledge and honour God the Creator of the marriage institution by the way they enter into the unique and life-long husband-wife relationship.

### **Proposed African Christian Marriage Formation**

Interestingly, at independence, African governments adopted virtually all aspects of the statutory marriage laws under the Marriage Acts put in place by the pre-independence European authorities. Therefore, the co-existence of African traditional marriage practices and civil and church marriage laws and requirements has continued to cause confusion and conflict for Christian couples in African society. The proposal presented here for an African Christian marriage ceremony reconciles African marriage formation customs with the requirements of state marriage

laws as well as with timeless biblical principles for marriage formation for Christian couples. Since the introduction of European statutory and church marriage laws in African society, African Christian couples find themselves faced with a particular sense of being torn between the three corners of a triangle: the claims of African tradition, the claims of a new-found faith, Christianity, and the claims of the state (Hastings, 1973: 45).

The historical links between the cultural, legal, and Christian aspects of marriage formation in modern African society naturally led to fundamental questions that have not yet been adequately addressed. Which of these three “worlds” has the right to declare an African Christian couple married so that they might consummate their husband-wife union with a clear conscience in the sight of God? Is it in the traditional world, after following *lobolo* transactions and the woman has been led to, and handed over to the man in the presence of key family members and relatives, that the two can consummate their marriage? Is it in the legal world, when a magistrate or other government marriage officer signs a marriage certificate in the presence of a stipulated number of witnesses, as required by the state law concerning marriage? Or is it in the Christian or religious world, when, at the end of a church service, a bride in a white wedding dress, and a man in a suit are pronounced married by a pastor or priest? In reality, in African society neither a civil nor a church marriage wedding ceremony can precede an African customary marriage formalised by *lobolo*. This is because in African society, a valid customary marriage is said to have been contracted and is considered legitimate *only* when *lobolo* negotiations and transactions between the members of the *lobolo*-giving family and the *lobolo*-receiving family are entered into or completed (Chavhunduka, 1970: 5; Samkange, “Draft Letter.”). It is extremely important to acknowledge and accept this if African Christians are to make sense of this triangle and avoid the legal, social, and moral problems that face all African Christian couples in modern African society at marriage. For example, how should an African Christian couple respond when their

relatives assign them a single bedroom and expect them to consummate their marriage as husband and wife *after* the customary African marriage ceremony and celebration, but *before* the church ceremony, which usually takes place several months or even years later? For if the African Christian couple go ahead and consummate their marriage after their customary marriage ceremony but before a church wedding, they may be subject to humiliating public church discipline for “fornication”. Such church discipline may include suspension from church membership, being barred from taking communion or the Lord’s Super, being barred from participating in any church related-ministry, for example, teaching Sunday School, or even dismissal from church-related employment. In some cases, such couples could end up leaving the church altogether. The reason why African Christian couples consummate their marriage after their customary marriage ceremony is that Africans view the requirement for a foreign marriage solemnization, either at a government building office before a white government marriage officer or a church white wedding officiated by a white missionary, as merely the means of satisfying the civil or church law (Broderick, 1945: 49). Ecclesiastical, legal, social and moral dilemmas that face African Christians at marriage in African society (where, unlike in western society, couples are not expected to start living together before marriage formalization) are basically the same right across sub-Saharan Africa.

### **Suggested Features of an African Christian Marriage Ceremony**

Here I propose a proven, practical and pastoral approach to African Christian marriage formalisation in African society, in which African customary marriage formation by *lobolo* is reconciled with state statutory marriage laws, while also upholding timeless Christian biblical principles of marriage formation in independent African states. The African Christian marriage ceremony presented here not only “feels at home” in African society, to use the memorable title of a book by Welbourn and

Ogot (1966), but also fulfils requirements for a valid, legitimate and legal Christian marriage in modern African society.

Since Adam and Eve were brought into a husband-wife relationship by God Himself, every subsequent marriage formation has taken place within a cultural context, because no meaningful and acceptable marriage ever occurs in a cultural vacuum. Therefore, an African Christian marriage formation ceremony should be contextualised to reflect the cultural values and norms and customs of that particular African society. Because Africans aren't Europeans, Indians, or Eskimos, it is culturally imperative to create an African Christian marriage formation ceremony that "feels at home" in African society, just as European churches in western societies create marriage ceremonies that "feel at home" in public places (either in churches or at government offices) before witnesses, as they seek to discourage and outlaw clandestine unions.

Living together before marriage seems to be acceptable and common in western cultures, especially in the United Kingdom, and even among Christians. In the United Kingdom, subjecting any Christian couple to discipline for living together before marriage is unheard of, because living together before marriage or pre-marital sex is not viewed as sinful behaviour before God. Unfortunately, this is becoming increasingly common practice in urbanised African society under the influence of western culture, also. However, the Bible does not condone sex outside marriage (Deuteronomy 22 and 24; 1 Cor 6:9-20; 7:1-39; Heb 13:4).

The first important feature of the Christian marriage ceremony in African society would be a series of pre-marital sessions with the couple who are to be married, and separately with their respective sets of parents, leading up to the actual planned marriage ceremony. The church pastor or minister, as a qualified government marriage officer, and also as someone who is familiar with the historical theological development of church marriage formation and procedures in western society, will explain his unique role in the planned African Christian marriage ceremony. This is

essential if such a Christian marriage union is to be legally recognised and registered by the state as valid, according to the statutory marriage laws of the country, and thus acceptable both culturally and by the Christian church. Most African Christians rely on what their church leaders say as their guide to Christian marriage formation. Therefore, in his capacity as a government marriage officer, only the church minister or pastor can reconcile African marriage customs with the requirements of the marriage laws of the country and timeless biblical principles.

Second, another significant feature of an African Christian marriage ceremony should be the actual *lobolo* negotiations and transactions. Just as the established state and ecclesiastical marriage formation laws in western Europe resonated with some of those of the pre-Christian Greek, Roman, and later the German, Frankish and Celtic cultures, so too the African Christian marriage ceremony, which cannot be conducted in a cultural vacuum, should feel culturally “at home” in African society. As noted, in African society *lobolo*, as an enduring and concrete way of binding two families together and signifying an acceptable and legitimate husband-wife relationship between the bride and groom, is an established and accepted tradition and practice. Before its commercialisation, *lobolo* as an institution was never meant for financial gain and took the form of cattle or other affordable material items that might be as simple as a hoe. Similarly, the giving of the *mohar* in ancient Jewish culture (Genesis 24), in the form of presents to the father or guardian of the bride, was the physical testimony and evidence that a marriage between two parties had been established and accepted. Rebecca’s family (Genesis 24), Dinah’s family (Gen 34:12) and Michal’s father (1 Sam 18:25) received a marriage transaction in the form of a *mohar*. In the story of the marriage between Isaac and Rebekah, the servant, as a go-between Abraham had commissioned to find a wife for Isaac, “brought articles of silver and articles of gold, and garments” as *mohar* (Gen 24:53). Here the presentation of the *mohar* signifies the transfer of the bride from the authority of her family to that of the

bridegroom. In the same way, in traditional African society the giving of *lobolo* signifies that the bride can now move from her family home and join her new family, that of her husband, for life. By this transfer, certain vital rights over the woman, and consequently over any children she might give birth to, are transferred from her father or guardian to her husband and his family. In other words, consummation followed presentation of *mohar* and never came before.

The reading or publication of the marriage wedding banns for three consecutive Sundays in churches where the couple are members, as required by the Marriage Act of that country, should be conducted in view of the date of the customary African *lobolo* transactions. In reading marriage banns for the customary marriage formation by *lobolo*, and as a government representative, the church minister or pastor would be publicly and officially recognising such customary *lobolo* negotiations and transactions as the *sine qua non* African practice of establishing a valid, acceptable and legitimate husband-wife life relationship. And in African culture, the solemnisation of a marriage, either in church or a government office cannot precede customary African marriage formation. Hence, African couples see the subsequent solemnisation of their marriage in a church or a government office as simply the means of satisfying the civil marriage law or church marriage requirements (Broderick, 1945). It is very important to come to terms with this if a genuine African Christian marriage ceremony is to be realised in an African context.

Historically and culturally, African women preferred to start living with a man *only* after the marriage negotiations and *lobolo* transaction had been entered into and agreed upon (Chinyenze, 1983-84: 229). If a woman started living with a man *before* marriage formation by *lobolo* negotiations and transactions, she might have been considered a prostitute, because she could exit the relationship to join another man at any time. Therefore, the *lobolo* transaction seems to have a deeper significance than just the acquisition of cattle and other material items

(Schapera, 1967:8). Regrettably, in the modern African cash economy, *lobolo* has been commercialised for financial gain. It is no longer viewed simply as a significant institution that signifies that a marriage between two parties has taken place. By asking exorbitant and unaffordable sums of money for *lobolo* for their daughters, African Christian fathers seem to view and value their daughters only as a means of financial gain. In the end, if the young man cannot afford the *lobolo*, the couple will start living together and even start a family before they are properly married. Modern African Christian fathers would do well to reconsider the original concept and purpose of *lobolo* for the sake of their daughters and sons-in-law.

Third, immediately following the marriage negotiations and *lobolo* transactions, the church pastor, as a government marriage officer, will begin to officiate the African Christian marriage ceremony. Out of respect for the bride's parents and relatives, the pastor and some of his leaders should accompany the groom and some of his relatives to the bride's home where *lobolo* transactions normally take place. *Lobolo* negotiations and transactions in African society always take place at the home of the bride's parents, whereas in western society, marriage ceremonies take place in either in a church building or a government office. So, at the conclusion of the customary marriage procedure of *lobolo* transactions, the pastor, as a state-registered marriage officer, could start officiating the African Christian marriage ceremony by first highlighting the biblical principles of Christian marriage, which indicate that the unity of a husband and wife is somehow stronger than that of a man and his kindred (Gen 2:18-24; Matt 19:1-10). It is essential for the parents or representatives of the groom and bride to hear what the Bible says about Christian marriage. Perhaps the greatest challenge of the Bible to an African society lies just here, but once again it has to be said that it lay here in European society in the past also. Yet for many Christians of every age the husband-wife relationship has in many ways continued to take second place to that of the man and his lineage group (Hastings, 1973: 63-64).

It may be pointed out here that African women are under tremendous social pressure to wear white wedding gowns at their marriage ceremonies and celebrations. If they were able to do so at the African Christian marriage ceremony conducted in the village, that would be a very meaningful gesture, especially for those who have maintained their virginity until marriage. But if the rural village setting proves a challenge, they could plan to put on their wedding attire at a later marriage reception when they return to their urban church after the African Christian marriage ceremony. In this case, the church pastor should make a clear distinction between a *marriage ceremony* conducted in the village and a *marriage reception* conducted later at an urban venue. This would be a reception at which a marriage ceremony is neither needed nor conducted.

The pastor should stress, as the Bible does, that as a married couple, the bride and groom, though they remain related to their social family groups, are now a separate new entity of a Christian couple uniquely united by God Himself. The Christian pastor should explain and stress to the couple the biblical concept of *covenant*, which is at the heart of Christian marriage. The primary purpose of the covenant marriage relationship of man and wife is to reflect God's covenant relationship with his people, which God always remains faithful to fulfil as a moral obligation.

Fidelity in marriage is one of the challenges facing Christian couples, including African Christian spouses. Culturally, African married men are expected to sleep around, but their wives are not. One of my male relatives once commented he had not come across an African man who does not sleep around. According to a recent survey by the *Sunday Mirror* of Zimbabwe (29 April 2006), all respondent men said that "women must accept that man is a nomadic entity meant to serve as many women as want his services". This was in response to respondent wives who suspected their husbands pathologically cheated on them (*Sunday Mirror*, 18 April 2006). The wives said that they also cheated on their promiscuous husbands as a means of getting even with them. Promiscuity is not uncommon, even

among Christians, hence many African Christian women do not trust their husbands.<sup>2</sup> African church pastors should teach Christian couples about the ethical and spiritual consequences of unfaithfulness, as Paul did with the Corinthian Christians (1 Cor 6:16-20). According to Malachi 2:10, we should not “profane the marriage covenant” by breaking covenantal faithfulness in marriage either by polygamy or divorce. This kind of Christian moral advice can only be provided in the context of a Christian marriage ceremony.

Fourth, at the end of the formal African Christian marriage ceremony, in accordance with the requirements of the marriage laws of the country, the pastor can pronounce the couple married in the sight of God and the witnesses present. The groom and bride would then sign a marriage certificate in the presence of the pastor and some of their close relatives. It was Justinian, a Christian Hellenistic-Roman Emperor, who was the first to introduce the marriage certificate in the sixth century. The significance of the marriage certificate is that its date reflects the exact time of the African Christian couple’s marriage. Since the introduction of the European marriage tradition in sub-Saharan Africa, the date on all African marriage certificates does not reflect the actual date of the customary marriage contract, which always takes place *before* either the church wedding or civil marriage ceremony. I know of a Christian couple who were married according to African customary marriage by *lobolo* on 31 March, and subsequently had their required church wedding on 15 August. The latter date appears on their marriage certificate. The real question is this: in the sight of God, *when* did this African Christian couple actually get married? The two dates cannot reflect the same marriage event. Hence, only one appears on their marriage formation certificate. Therefore, the proposed African Christian marriage ceremony should be seriously considered and

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2. There has been an increase in clergy and church members dying of HIV/AIDS, especially in African urban areas.

implemented as a solution to current marriage certificate date anomalies in African society.

At the end of the proceedings, people may be treated to a marriage celebration meal. However, if, as is often the case, the couple want to have a marriage reception for their urban friends and other church members weeks after their African Christian marriage ceremony, it should be made clear to the whole church that this is a marriage celebration for friends, relatives, and church members and *not* a marriage ceremony. We read of such a marriage reception or celebration (not a ceremony) to which Jesus, his mother, and his disciples were invited as guests in John 2. And the pastor who officiates at the African Christian marriage ceremony at the home of the bride's parents, should introduce the couple to the rest of the congregation as Mr and Mrs.

Activities like beer-drinking, suggestive dancing, and non-Christian songs have usually been discouraged at African Christian marriage celebrations. This was also true of marriage celebrations of Christians in the early church. John Chrysostom, bishop of Constantinople, exhorted Christians to exclude from their customary marriage receptions things like suggestive dancing, use of cymbals and flutes, shameful words and songs mocking the bride, drunkenness, and revelling. He also encouraged brides to dress modestly and not overdo the dressing up at marriage ceremonies and celebrations, because God was more interested in their inner beauty than their outward appearance. He told all Christian women that it was their inner virtue and not their outward appearance that made them marriageable. Furthermore, Christians of the early church were encouraged to substitute pagan songs to heathen family gods with Christian praises, psalms and hymns to God at their marriage celebrations. Chrysostom's timely reminder to Christian couples is relevant even today, because whenever and wherever Christian marriage formation ceremonies and celebrations take place, Christians should always remember that their public marriage formation ceremonies and celebrations are an opportunity

to honour God, and not to show off (1 Cor 10:31).

At the end of the proceedings, the couple and their respective relatives could proceed with some of the clean, cultural rituals (for example, taking the bride to her husband's home). The taking of the bride to her husband's family home, where the couple will be assigned their own bedroom for consummation of their marriage takes place at the end of the marriage formation celebration at the bride's parents' home. Apart from an African Christian marriage formation ceremony approach, African Christian couples will continue to find it difficult knowing *when* to consummate their marriage with a clear conscience before God when their relatives assign them a single bedroom and expect them to consummate their marriage as husband and wife after the customary marriage ceremony but before a church wedding ceremony which usually takes place several months or even years after the customary marriage. Therefore, the African Christian marriage formation ceremony approach is the only practical and pastoral and cultural answer to the perplexing situation which confronts every African Christian couple in the wake of the European tradition of church weddings.

### ***Advantages of the African Christian Marriage Formation Ceremony***

The African Christian marriage ceremony approach to marriage in an African context has several advantages. First, while maintaining African marriage custom as the essence of a valid and legitimate marriage formation in African society, the approach also takes seriously the statutory marriage laws of the state by involving the church minister, who also functions in society as a government marriage officer in publishing or reading wedding banns in church. This is done in coordination with the African customary marriage by *lobolo* that is to take place in the home of the bride's parents as sign of respect. Traditional African marriage formation by *lobolo* in sub-Saharan Africa was always contracted at the home of the bride's parents, whereas in western society it was/is always contracted at neutral venues

(for example, designated government building offices, registered church buildings, etc.) By officiating the Christian marriage formation ceremony at the home of the bride's parents, the Christian church in sub-Saharan Africa will make African Christian marriage formation "feel at home" in African society.

Second, the date which appears on the marriage certificate will be the actual date of the marriage. Since the introduction of the solemnisation of African marriage formation, either in government building offices or in registered churches, African marriage certificates have never reflected the actual date of the African marriage formation by *lobolo*, only that of the civil or church marriage ceremony. I have already mentioned the Christian couple who were married according to African customary marriage on 31 March, and subsequently had their church wedding on 15 August. It is the latter date which appears on their marriage certificate. The question is, in the sight of God when were the couple actually married? The two dates cannot reflect the same marriage formation. This date discrepancy is common with the current approach to African Christian marriage formation in sub-Saharan Africa. Therefore, the African Christian marriage ceremony approach seems to be the solution to the conflicting marriage formation dates in African society.

Third, because the couple can consummate their marriage with a clear conscience at the end of the African Christian marriage ceremony proceedings officiated over by the church minister/pastor as a government representative, there will be no need for the unnecessary church discipline common in many African Christian churches that results from a couple consummating their customary African marriage before a white wedding in church. Many Christian couples in societies where pre-marital sex is prohibited have been subjected to unnecessary public and humiliating discipline for having consummated their marriage after the customary marriage by *lobolo* but before the church wedding. African Christian couples admitted in their questionnaire responses that it is very difficult

to abstain from sex during the long interval between customary marriage formation and marriage solemnisation in church, which can be as much as two years, due to the high cost of church weddings and commercialised celebrations. An African Christian marriage ceremony is thus the practical answer to the moral challenge faced by every African Christian couple.

The effectiveness of the same day approach to African Christian marriage formation ceremony in African society has been demonstrated at Harare Central Baptist Church and other sister churches in Zimbabwe where this new paradigm of African Christian marriage formation was first practised. Since adopting this approach to Christian marriage formation in African society, Harare Central Baptist church and its sister churches have effectively dealt with the social and moral dilemmas face African Christian couples face at marriage.

Fourth, this approach to African Christian marriage formation places less economic pressure on the couple than the current system introduced to African Christian churches by missionaries. According to a leading church academic and church leader in Kenya, expensive and elaborate church weddings and celebrations resulted not only from watching and imitating the Europeans, but also from the input of Christian missionaries, who would often bake cakes, provide expensive wedding clothes, and help their African Christian workers financially, in order to make it possible for such attractive church weddings to take place for all to see (Kivunzi, 1994: 119). In reality, many African Christian couples cannot afford expensive marriage ceremonies and celebrations. As a result, they often start living together before any marriage formation ceremony of any kind.

And finally, the African Christian marriage ceremony approach to marriage formation in African society will seriously challenge African Christian fathers to view their daughters as precious gifts from God, rather than as potential sources of personal gain (Ps 127:3). The Bible calls upon all African Christian fathers to “be renewed in their thinking” (Rom 12:1-2) with regards to their view of their own daughters and the

original purpose of *lobolo* transactions in African society. So, for the sake of Christian young people who end up living together before marriage formation because of the exorbitant and unaffordable *lobolo* asked of the grooms, African Christian fathers should become exemplary in African society by returning to the original purpose of *lobolo*.

## **Conclusion**

The proposed approach to African Christian marriage formation challenges African church leaders in sub-Saharan Africa to contextualise Christian marriage formation by making it “feel at home” in African society. European church leaders, theologians, historians, and governments worked together to establish what became the acceptable civil and church marriage traditions in Europe, which reflected some customary practices of the pre-Christian Greek, Roman, and later the German, Frankish and Celtic cultures. It is hoped that by realising and accepting that they are not Europeans, Indians, or Eskimos, African Christian theologians and African church leaders will work together to examine Christian marriage formation in African society from a biblical and cultural perspective. Christian principles, such as marriage formation, are not made in a cultural vacuum. In the past, mainline denominational churches in African society have wholly depended on the European tradition of marriage formation, which resulted in moral and social dilemmas for all African Christian couples. All established mission churches in sub-Saharan Africa not only translated the marriage service books of their mother churches into their own local languages, but they also adopted culturally meaningless marriage symbols (such as wedding rings and kisses). It is emphasised here that in the contextualisation of Christian theology and the practice of Christian marriage formation, the authority of the Scripture should remain central and supreme. Cultural values and practices should never be viewed as a substitute for the authority of the unchangeable Word of God, the Scriptures.

This approach to African Christian marriage allows for a marriage certificate that reflects the exact date the couple married. As things stand today, couples in African society have two marriage dates: one being the unregistered customary African marriage, and the other reflecting the date the couple had either a church wedding or civil marriage ceremony at a government office. In the sight of God, only one of the two can be considered the actual date of the marriage. Thus only a combined African Christian marriage ceremony is the answer to the perennial confusion over dates in African marriage formation. Today, if you ask any African Christian couple the date of their marriage, they will give two dates: one for the traditional marriage, and the other for the church wedding. In other words, apart from a combined African Christian marriage ceremony, African couples will continue having two marriage dates. However, in the sight of God, there can only be one day of marriage formation, not two.

This study is also a challenge to all African Christian parents, fathers in particular, who unashamedly ask exorbitant sums of money for *lobolo* before any young man can ask for their daughter's hand in marriage. Since the commercialisation of African economies, African fathers, including Christians, view *lobolo* transactions as a source of personal income. The original purpose and place of *lobolo* transactions in African marriage formation has been lost. It seems as if African fathers view and value their daughters simply as chattels for financial gain. The history of *lobolo* reveals that before it was commercialised, *lobolo* was originally a visible symbol showing that a marriage relationship had been established between two families through the union of the bride and bridegroom. In other words, *lobolo* transactions in their symbolic form cemented the new relationship between two families who were previously unrelated. Historically and traditionally, *lobolo* transactions were never intended to be treated as a means of gaining riches through the marriage of one's daughters. By demanding unaffordable *lobolo*, African Christian fathers are indirectly hindering and, in some cases, delaying marriage for their daughters.

Many African Christian young men living and working overseas are now shunning African Christian girls for fear of being charged unaffordable *lobolo* for them. Many young African Christian young men in diaspora end up in interracial marriages in which *lobolo* transaction is not part of the marriage formation process.

There is a compelling need in African Christian churches for teaching on the Christian family, including Christian marriage formation in African society. Biblical teaching in churches is the responsibility of African church leaders, just as it was for church leaders in New Testament times, and for church Fathers like Tertullian and John Chrysostom in their respective local churches in Greco-Roman society. It is also incumbent on African church leaders to familiarise themselves with realities facing the African church and society, and also with the historical and theological development of church marriages in western society from whence they were imported into African society. The purpose of so doing is to make African Christian marriage formation feel “at home” in African society.

It is my humble submission that African Christian leaders, theological college lecturers and students training for Christian ministry, African Christian parents and African Christian couples contemplating marriage in sub-Saharan Africa, seriously consider the *African Christian marriage formation* approach to Christian marriage in African society where marriage formation is still based on *lobolo*.

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# Faith, Politics and Civic Participation: Exploring Current Attitudes Among Black Immigrant Pentecostals in Norwich and Environs

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## **Abstract**

This article examines perceptions of Black immigrant Pentecostals in Norwich and its environs concerning involvement in local community politics. A mixed-methods approach was used to integrate quantitative and qualitative data. Questionnaires were distributed to the target population, achieving a 45 percent response rate for closed-ended questions (quantitative) and a 36.6 percent response rate for open-ended questions (qualitative). Twelve face-to-face interviews and three focus groups were conducted as part of the qualitative method. Using descriptive statistics, quantitative data were analysed to identify trends and patterns, while qualitative data were organised thematically to gain a valuable understanding of the topic from the perspective of the participants. The convergence of findings through a triangulated analysis highlights both consistency and divergence across data strands, enhancing the depth and credibility of the conclusions. The study reveals that while political action is increasingly seen as a spiritual responsibility, structural and racial exclusions shape both participation and scepticism, while dual affiliations produce nuanced and sometimes ambivalent political attitudes. The research contributes to a more holistic understanding of the political perspectives of Black immigrant Pentecostals in small urban settings in the United Kingdom. Limitations are acknowledged; nevertheless the research offers valuable insights that can inform both academic discourse

and practice within Black Pentecostal communities and local authorities.

**Key Words:** Immigrants, Civic Participation, Urban Settings, Politics , Norwich

## **Introduction**

For Black Pentecostal immigrants in Norwich, UK, faith is more than just a personal spiritual practice; it serves as a foundation for active civic involvement. Participants in this research articulated an action-oriented theology in which prayer, prophecy, and political participation are intertwined. A member of one congregation described voting as “my democratic right as a citizen of the UK”. A member of another congregation said that he “wants to see Christians occupy political positions”. These pronouncements suggest that democratic involvement is viewed as an ethical imperative, rooted in spiritual conscientiousness.

This perception challenges the prevailing assumption of apoliticism within Pentecostal spaces. It demonstrates instead a more complex and evolving type of engagement, which suggests the advancement of faith-based political activity. Muir (2019) notes that the popular perception of political passivity is a view that misrepresents the level of both spiritual vitality and civic engagement. Despite the growing scholarship on Pentecostalism, diaspora identity, and political engagement, a significant gap in scholarship exists concerning the lived theological influence of Black immigrant Pentecostals in UK regions beyond major cities (Adedibu, 2021). This paper fills that void through a study of the views and activities of Black Pentecostal immigrants in Norwich and its vicinity. The aim is to understand the impact of theology, migration, community, and identity on their participation in local governance, thereby offering a distinct perspective on diasporic political behaviour. The article contributes to a deeper understanding of political engagement among

minority religious communities, especially within the under-researched context of Black Pentecostal immigrants in small urban, semi-urban and non-urban centres. Investigating the interplay of theology, migration, and civic activity helps bridge existing gaps in interdisciplinary scholarship.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The article draws on political theology and diaspora theory to examine the political attitudes of Black immigrant Pentecostals in and around Norwich.

#### *Political Theology*

Political theology provides the foundational lens through which participants' engagement with civic life is interpreted. Building on liberationist and prophetic traditions, the article considers how theological themes—such as divine justice, moral responsibility, and eschatological hope—inform political attitudes and behaviours. Rather than viewing Pentecostalism as politically disengaged, this framework foregrounds its capacity to cultivate civic agency through spiritual praxis. Moltmann (1969) envisions the future with God as a present and transformative reality in his historical eschatology. He argues that Jesus' victory on the cross compels believers to participate in the ongoing renewal of creation, both spiritually and socially. Bretherton (2019) argues that politics is integral in establishing collective well-being. A person's individual well-being is important, but active participation in community life is essential for establishing health, righteousness, and collective thriving. Political theology motivates Christians to scrutinise the interrelations of their theological beliefs. Participating in community life is crucial for determining health, justice, and human flourishing. Political theology prompts Christians to investigate the connections between their theological ideas. Political theology also encourages Christians to recognise how theological principles intersect with the social, economic,

and political factors that shape everyday existence. It invites reflection on how Christian ethics, historical context, and eschatological vision guide public engagement and institutional critique—recasting politics not merely as strategy, but as a moral and spiritual endeavour.

### *Diaspora Theory*

Diaspora theory offers a vital framework for analysing how migration, displacement, and transnational connections shape political perspectives and church identity. Král (2014) and Mogaji (2021) argue that diasporic identity is not merely about physical boundaries, but also involves a strong partnership and is deeply rooted in ancestral memory, cultural interaction, and hybrid belonging. The concept of translocal ecclesiology (Vertovec, 2009) offers insight into how Pentecostal congregations remain connected theologically and communally across borders, encouraging civic responsibility through shared liturgies, testimonies, and narrative traditions that span both home countries and host societies.

Black political mobilisation must be understood in all its complexity. Gerloff (2010) argues that the migration narrative of African-Caribbean communities in Britain informs a distinct diasporic theology—one that contests citizenship norms and expands definitions of political participation. Drawing parallels with the Exodus narrative and Black liberation theology, Pentecostalism emerges not as apolitical, but as an alternative political vision.

Collectively, these theoretical frameworks clarify the elaborate methods through which Black Pentecostal immigrants interact with public life. They enable us to view churches not only as religious institutions and passive recipients of political conversation, but as vibrant arenas where theology, immigration, and politics converge to shape identity, power dynamics, and a sense of belonging.

## **Methodology**

A mixed-methods design was employed to investigate the political attitudes of Black immigrant Pentecostal communities in Norwich, UK, and its vicinity. Quantitative survey data were integrated with qualitative insights to capture both the breadth and depth of participants' political orientations and theological influences. Participants were recruited from four Black-led Pentecostal congregations. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to reflect internal diversity across age, gender, levels of political engagement, migration history, and denominational affiliation. In total, seventy-two survey responses were collected, and twelve in-depth interviews were conducted across the congregations. Additionally, three focus groups, comprising a mix of participants from the four churches, provided nuanced narratives of political engagement and theological reflection. Interviews were transcribed and analysed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. Themes were developed inductively, with attention to cultural nuance, diasporic memory, and the role of church leadership in shaping political discourse. Integrating the data from both sets revealed convergences and tensions between religious convictions and political perspectives. The triangulation clarified the multifaceted interaction between spiritual essence and civil involvement in Pentecostal groups living away from their homelands.

## **Ethical Considerations**

The relevant committee at Christ the Redeemer College, London, granted ethical approval. All participants provided informed consent and were assured of their confidentiality and privacy. They were told that they could withdraw from the research at any point. To respectfully present participants' voices, the study prioritised cultural sensitivity, incorporating reflexive journaling and member checking.

## Findings and Discussion

To shed light on the complex interaction between religion, immigration, and civic involvement, survey data, and interview and focus group transcripts were analysed. Findings were interpreted in conversation with scholarly literature on Pentecostal political discourse, immigrant political mobilisation, and the civic role of religious institutions in diaspora contexts. The data sources enabled a rich exploration of the lived experiences, motivations, and political attitudes of Black immigrant Pentecostals in Norwich. Responses were anonymised and analysed through an inductive thematic method. These included (1) familiarisation with raw data, (2) initial coding and concept identification, (3) iterative theme development, (4) review of themes, (5) defining and naming of themes, and (6) narrative report generation.

Themes rooted in participants' narratives emerged and were triangulated across various data collection methods, indicating consistent viewpoints on local political engagement. This article discusses three core themes:

### *Theme 1: Perceptions of, and Motivations for Political Engagement*

This theme is connected to the sundry opinions and perspectives on local politics among Black immigrant Pentecostals in Norwich, ranging from deep scepticism and apathy to strong convictions about civic duty. An intricate dynamic interaction between personal history, theological orientation, and migratory experience shapes these perceptions.

#### A. Perceptions of Politics: From “Dirty Game” to Civic Duty

Many of the participants described politics using terms such as “dirty”, “corrupt”, and “war”. This outlook reflects past exposure to politics in their countries of origin—particularly Nigeria—where electoral processes are frequently associated with violence, manipulation, and mistrust.

“Voting is war, war, war. In Nigeria, people get hurt just for going to the polls. That fear never leaves” (Interviewee, RCCG Great Yarmouth).

Such deeply embedded fears discourage involvement and generate

detachment, even in comparatively stable political systems. These findings support Jones-Correa's (2008) claim that political socialisation spanning nations—especially when marked by detrimental experiences—can construct lasting obstacles to political participation in receiving countries. Additionally, Ramakrishnan and Espenshade (2001) argue that newcomers often carry over prior political failings to new locales, which can lead to suspicion and retreat.

Nevertheless, many participants hold the conviction that political engagement is both a key democratic freedom and a moral duty. Many respondents recognise that policy choices directly influence their everyday existence and the welfare of their communities. This recognition was frequently articulated as a faith-based ethical requirement.

“If politics decides our schools and housing, why shouldn't I care? Faith tells me to seek justice, not ignore it” (Interviewee, Jesus Christ Church of Life Church, Norwich).

The civil voluntarism model of Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) suggests that a primary incentive for political involvement is a sense of civic obligation. With its foundation in the Pentecostal doctrine of community transformation, this view indicates similarly that individuals holding strong theological beliefs often view political involvement as a means of improving society.

Nevertheless, findings uncovered an uncomfortable reality: religious motivation does not often materialise in civic action, due to deep-seated perceptions of politics as morally compromised. Cho, Gimpel, and Wu (2006) agree with this position. They contend that structural influences from both the country of origin and the host country collectively shape the political engagement of immigrants. From conceptual scepticism to moral obligation, a central tension exists in the political leanings of Norwich's Black immigrant Pentecostal community.

## B. Motivations for Participation

Community advancement, democratic responsibility, and theological imperatives are the motivations for civic engagement. Participants voiced an aspiration “to make the community and the world a better place”, along with the belief that “Christians ought to be in office to put God’s values into power”, and a dedication to fairness, acceptance, and championing policies for disadvantaged populations.

It is a Pentecostal principle that faith is not passive but transformative, even within the realm of politics. Miller (2007) notes that contemporary Pentecostalism often extends beyond prosperity into broader social change. Yong (2010) adds that Pentecostal theology inherently involves interaction with societal “principalities and powers”, including government.

“We are called to righteousness. If we don’t speak up in politics, we’re silent in the places that matter” (Interviewee, RCCG Norwich).

Black Pentecostal churches in the UK view civic engagement as a prophetic mandate (Hunt, 2002), while Putnam’s (2000) social capital theory reinforces the idea that communal solidarity fuels political action. For many respondents, religion serves as both a moral compass and a mobilising structure—a framing echoed by Bruce (2003), who argues that churches can effectively translate values into civic influence, especially among immigrant populations.

## C. Barriers to Participation

Despite strong theological and moral motivation, participants identified several obstacles that frustrate formal political engagement. Practical barriers included “time—hectic schedule due to work”; recent arrival in the UK; difficulty navigating political systems; and candidate information. Wong (2006) lists limited time, money, and access to information as major impediments to immigrant participation. Ramakrishnan (2005) refers to “learning costs”, where unfamiliarity with host country political systems

impedes integration. Bass and Casper (2001) find similar knowledge challenges among ethnic minorities in the UK. Perceptual and systemic barriers are also pronounced. These include fear of political corruption, experiences of racial prejudice and stereotype, a perception of limited opportunities for minority involvement, and a lack of visible migrant political representatives, especially in constituencies like Great Yarmouth.

These observations corroborate Heath et al.'s (2013) finding that underrepresentation and discrimination are linked to disengagement. Sobolewska (2013) notes that ethnic minorities adopt “defensive disengagement” if institutions are exclusionary. The Migration Observatory (2020) highlights the prevalence of civic and political bias against migrants in the UK. New immigrants face strategic exclusion due to practical limits, systemic deficits, and perceived racial hurdles. These issues significantly reduce the political involvement of Black immigrant Pentecostals (Bloemraad, 2006 and Pantoja, Ramirez & Segura, 2001).

### ***Theme 2: The Church's Role in Mobilising Political and Social Action***

This theme explores the meeting point of religious identity and civic mobilisation among Black immigrant Pentecostal churches in the UK, with a focus on current practices of engagement and potential strategies for future participation. It presents a dynamic portrait of churches as community anchors—agents of social support and latent political mobilisation.

#### **A. Current Social Engagement**

Churches in this study function as deeply embedded community institutions. They carry out door-to-door evangelism and distribute tracts to promote public engagement in various locations. Charitable endeavours are widespread and include activities such as providing Christmas hampers, distributing foodstuffs, and collaborative support with other organisations, such as the Salvation Army.

Churches organise coffee mornings, children's choirs, music groups, and barbecues to promote intergroup connection and foster trust. These groups operate as "parallel institutions" providing critical support for both old and new members (Ebaugh and Chafetz, 2000) and as "ethnic social service agencies" (Ecklund, 2006), striving to preserve their culture while integrating into their host communities.

The majority of respondents (83.0 percent) indicated that their church helps people in need within their communities, which shows a strong inclination towards civic engagement and suggests that Black immigrant Pentecostal churches serve essential social welfare functions beyond spiritual guidance. These social actions position churches as core nodes of community cohesion. Putnam and Campbell (2010) describe this as the "social capital" function of religious institutions, predominantly minority churches, which act as bridging organisations connecting congregants with broader networks and resources. Foley and Hoge (2007) further depict immigrant churches as "community centres", filling service gaps left by government structures.

## B. Current Political Engagement

While churches are socially vibrant, most exhibit limited direct political engagement. Sixty-six per cent of participants reported that their churches were either "slightly involved" or "not at all involved", and 43.4 percent perceive a limited mobilising capacity of their churches in terms of voter participation. Many respondents reported that their congregations were either "not much engaged" or were deliberately remaining neutral; a portion of these respondents were concerned about being "manipulated by politicians". Bruce (2003) describes this intentional reticence as the "neutrality dilemma", which highlights how the diverse, multicultural constituencies of religious organisations inhibit overt political alignment.

Political caution may hinder the policy advocacy of churches, particularly regarding issues of racial injustice or socioeconomic disadvantage, as

argued by Wald, Owen, and Hill (1988). Hunt (2002) also observes that UK Black Pentecostal churches often keep a “political distance”, even on issues affecting members.

However, indirect mobilisation—such as prayers for governmental leaders and affirmations of civic responsibility—is more common. Churches gently push back against negative perceptions of politics by encouraging members to view participation as a duty rather than a defilement.

Djupe and Gilbert (2009) term this “mobilisation through moral framing”, advancing involvement using religious rather than political language. Appeals rooted in faith enhance credibility. For that reason, Peterson (1992) supports the deployment of a moral framing strategy where direct activism is debated.

### C. Strategies for Voter Mobilisation and Political Engagement

Participants propose actionable strategies to elevate church-driven civic engagement. These include frequent pulpit messages emphasising the importance of elections and voting as a moral duty, the use of church media (e.g., WhatsApp groups and projected videos) for election reminders, and the integration of political education into adult Sunday School sessions, all rooted in biblical frameworks.

This approach builds on Rosenstone and Hansen’s (1993) claim that repeated mobilisation efforts by trusted local leaders significantly improve turnout. Campbell (2004) adds that religious mobilisation is most potent when it stems from spiritual—not political—authority, lending theological weight to civic action. Grounded in the work of Skillen (1994) and Mouw and Griffioen (1993) on Christian public involvement, discussing governance in Sunday School increases theological literacy and reorients political engagement from suspicion to stewardship.

Finally, addressing logistical barriers is vital. The practical support offered by churches can help surmount “resource barriers” that unfairly

impact immigrant communities. This activity will stimulate engagement and buttress ethical identity. Churches can offer transport to polling stations, organise group voting outings, and provide childcare services on election days.

### ***Theme 3: Impact of Local Politics on Immigrant Pentecostal Churches and Communities***

This theme analyses how local and national political decisions—especially concerning immigration and social policy—directly shape the lived realities of Pentecostal immigrants and the capacity of their churches to flourish and mobilise.

#### **A. Impact of Immigration Policies**

The cost of obtaining and renewing visas is high. Restrictions on family members joining the principal person and “hostile environment” policies cause considerable anxiety among respondents. Additionally, frustration arises from the perceived “two-tier policy” with its inequities between legal immigrants, who pay substantial fees, and asylum seekers, who are viewed as receiving free services. According to this view, immigration policy produces a state of “stratified rights” (Bloch and Schuster, 2005) by creating a tiered access to benefits and protections. Such policies lead to “chilling effects” (Jones et al., 2017) and a “culture of disbelief” (Gentleman, 2019), thus reducing trust in government and hence civic participation.

#### **B. Impact of Social Policies**

There are tensions caused by controversies between religious/cultural groups and liberal social policies, especially concerning LGBTQ+ rights. Respondents describe these policies as against “biblical principles” and feel the church’s voice is increasingly “diminishing” in public dialogue. Bruce (2002) identifies this as “moral displacement” among religious

minorities in secular democracies. Rapid social change often precipitates a “cultural backlash” (Norris and Inglehart, 2004), as communities fear that their values are under threat. Changes to child discipline laws, including potential criminalisation of traditional practices like smacking, are also viewed as intrusive. Gelles and Straus (2017) state that migrant families often face identity stress when their parenting norms conflict with host country legislation.

### C. Effects on Church Operations and Visibility

Immigrant Pentecostal churches are tangibly affected by local regulations concerning noise ordinances, venue restrictions, gathering limitations, and instrument usage. African Pentecostal churches often lack permanent structures, impeding community and civic engagement. Hunt and Adogame refer to this as “spatial marginalisation”, which limits visibility and impact.

Churches aspire to achieve recognition and esteem within wider society—sometimes framed as gaining respect in “white man’s land”. These churches aim to purchase local media space and participate in visible service activities. Yang (1999) terms this the “legitimacy challenge”, wherein immigrant religious institutions seek public validation to serve as credible agents of representation.

### Conclusion

The research assessed the perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours of Black immigrant Pentecostals in Norwich and its vicinity about participation in local politics, and identified barriers and enablers that impact political involvement in their communities. The article sheds light upon a community in an agonising tension between a non-negotiable faith-based call to political action and practical or historical hindrances. Even though churches are significant social actors, their political actions are often implicit, typically because politics is considered “dirty” and they

adopt a cautious approach to neutrality.

The findings underscore the importance of increased awareness, education, and grassroots support from church leaders in facilitating members' participation. They highlight the immense, yet underdeveloped, potential of Black Pentecostal congregations to become a formidable civic and political force, if they can leverage their social influence, numbers, and combined strength to advocate for policies that are relevant to their lives and values. Such findings serve as the basis for purposeful strategies to eliminate the participation gap and boost the church's contribution to the future of Norwich's politics.

Despite inherent limitations, such as varied response rates and the constraints of self-reported data, the research successfully achieved its objectives. Thus, this article adds to a growing body of scholarship that recognises diasporic faith communities as active participants in civic life. It challenges assumptions of political apathy and highlights the theological sophistication and strategic agency within Black Pentecostal churches.

Future research may advance this topic by undertaking comparative analyses between cities or denominations, conducting longitudinal studies of political involvement over an extended period, or conducting a thorough look into gender and class-specific factors within these populations in greater detail. Additionally, contemporary generational differences need to be investigated by comparing theological interpretations and civic priorities of younger congregants with those of older members.

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# Pentecostal Churches: Then and Now

*William K. Kay*

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## **Abstract**

The article explores the dramatic birth and growth of Pentecostalism in the United Kingdom. Key figures are identified as the author traces the changes wrought on the movement by the tumultuous world wars of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the revivals and social changes of the second half. The article concludes with an assessment of the contemporary and diverse forms of Pentecostalism that can be found in a globalized and digitalized Britain, and also identifies that which has changed, and that which has remained constant through the history of the movement.

**Keywords:** Charismatic movement, church growth, revival, twentieth century, new millennium

## Introduction

For the purpose of this analysis I have divided Pentecostal history into three blocks of time: the first from 1907 to 1950, the period when Pentecostal churches were being established in Britain; the second from 1950 until the year 2000, which includes the planting of Afro-Caribbean and West African churches, as well as the charismatic movement; and finally, the period from 2000 till today. Having said this, dividing history up by precise dates is always slightly artificial, but in the space available, the three blocks provide an opportunity to present an overview and make comparisons.

### From 1907 to 1950

This was a period of social change in Britain and covered two world wars, 1914-18 and 1939-45. The period was one of gradually increasing economic prosperity as well as of reduction in Britain's imperial power. Britain had largely been at peace since the defeat of Napoleon in 1815, and was a predominantly rural country with farming, horses, villages and a few factories in cities, mainly in the north of England, and all linked by the growing railway.<sup>1</sup> Pentecostalism appeared on the scene in 1907 and a number of people (about 500 in total by August 1908) began to speak in tongues (Hudson, 2001). Many of the meetings were in small Gospel halls and holiness prayer groups, but also, surprisingly, within an Anglican parish in Sunderland under the Rev. Alexander Boddy (Wakefield, 2007). At first there was little understanding of how spiritual gifts should operate; what this meant for healing and prophecy in home groups or congregations; how close the second coming of Christ was; what the implications were for overseas mission; or how the outpouring of the Spirit would impact the ministry of women.

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1. Britain was involved in a war in the Crimea from 1853-56 and another in South Africa from 1899-1902.

Alexander Boddy wanted the outpouring of the Spirit to revitalise existing denominations. He did not see the need for specifically Pentecostal denominations. Boddy organised an annual convention in Sunderland every year from 1908 to 1914. At these meetings, debates about how the outpouring of the Spirit should be understood took place, and we can read of these discussions in the magazine, *Confidence*, which he published. Gradually Pentecostals organised themselves into denominations, the first being the Apostolic Church in 1910, and then Elim in 1915, and the Assemblies of God in 1924. These denominations were Pentecostal in their understanding of the experiential reality of spiritual gifts in the church today. They believed in healing and prophecy. The denominations were different from each other, mainly in terms of their church governance rather than in the essentials of their doctrine. The Assemblies of God held an annual conference where each assembly was entitled to one representative (usually their pastor), who took part in debates and decisions about matters that affected all the churches together (e.g. missions and evangelism or the denominational magazine). Elim also held an annual ministerial conference where collective decisions were made. The Apostolics tended to vest more power in their designated apostles and prophets.

And what sort of churches were they? For the most part they were small and lacked their own buildings. Gradually they began to collect money for buildings, to employ full-time pastors, and to reach out into their neighbourhoods. By 1939 there were 600 Pentecostal congregations in the UK (Kay, 1990).<sup>2</sup> In the years since their founding, congregations moved from hired rooms to buildings they bought or erected, a process that took decades and continued right through till after 1945. The early Pentecostal

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2. The Assemblies of God had 350 congregations by 1939 although many would have been in hired premises. Elim had perhaps 250 assemblies at that time and the Apostolic Church would have had fewer again. Consequently, the number of buildings Pentecostals owned rather than rented at that point in their history is hard to estimate.

assemblies were small, and would expect spiritual gifts to operate freely in their meetings so that people might speak in tongues and wait for interpretation or prophesy, describe visions, or testify to healings. The picture was mixed. Some churches were dominated by a few individuals who valued their own free expression over the edification of others, and who did not want to be told what to do by anybody. Others wanted stability, order, and organisation, with recognised pastors and deacons. We can say that once the denominations were formed, Pentecostal doctrine and practice became more measured, more consistent, and less wild and unpredictable. By about 1930, Pentecostals had gained denominational identity: they had their own weekly or monthly magazines; they had annual conferences where ministers could meet; they each had training colleges which allowed Pentecostal doctrine to be taught and understood; they expected their congregations to tithe; and they respected and supported missionaries who went overseas and evangelists who worked in Britain.

As far as we can tell there was a kind of balance between preaching and charismatic gifts in the congregations. Meetings made time for preaching and there was a regular pattern of Whitsun or Easter conventions when a group of churches would come together over a long weekend. There would be several sermons preached from Friday to Monday night with fellowship, testimonies and a church tea offered to visitors. In this way nearby churches got to know each other. Preaching was important, but there would be prophetic words or prayer for healing. The basic pattern of the meetings would be ordered, and pastors were confident enough to ask those who brought inappropriate words or utterances in tongues to restrain themselves so that preaching might occur and the timetable of meetings not be disrupted.

There was industrial unrest in Britain in the form of a general strike in 1926 and the unemployed (such as miners or men in heavy industries such as ship building) received little financial support from the government. However, the Pentecostal churches largely ignored all this. They believe

that revival would cure all social and economic ills and that they must preserve their energies for evangelism. The outpouring of the Spirit was seen as having the purpose of mission and evangelism rather than social work or creative initiatives in the community.

It is true that in the 1930s, as the political situation darkened in Europe with the rise of Hitler and the persecution of Jews in Germany, there were Pentecostals who began to speak about the battle of Armageddon and the near return of Christ. Some tried to calculate from the prophecies in the book of Daniel exactly when Christ would return and there were those who believed that they would not die, but would be caught up in the rapture, much like Enoch (Heb 11:5) at the return of Jesus (*Redemption Tidings*, 1934).<sup>3</sup> Others were less willing to commit themselves to fixed eschatological schemes and continued to pray and give their energy and money to church planting and church growth without worrying about prophetic visions of the future.

The outstanding British evangelist of the era was George Jeffreys (1889-1962) who founded the Elim churches in 1915. He began in Northern Ireland but moved across to London in 1921 (Kay, 2017). He was a Welshman, and his dignified delivery, logical preaching and healing ministry attracted large crowds. Between 1926 and 1939 he would hire the Royal Albert Hall for a day and hold three meetings (for breaking bread, healing, and water baptism) and his messages and miracles were reported in the national newspapers. In those days without mobile phones and internet, newspapers were proportionately more important. From the late 1920s until 1939, Jeffreys preached up and down mainland Britain, including in Scotland and Northern Ireland, and in his heyday would attract a sufficiently large number of converts after each campaign to form a completely new congregation in a few weeks. He would hire

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3. *Redemption Tidings* was the weekly or monthly Assemblies of God magazine.

cinemas and theatres, town halls, and ice rinks, and manage to see them all filled. Often he would start with a small number of people in an afternoon meeting but then, once people had been healed, the numbers would grow as these miracles were communicated by word-of-mouth. In those days, the National Health Service did not exist and medicine was less advanced. There were thus perhaps more sick people than we have today, or, at any rate, medication was less easily available. Jeffreys was a remarkable evangelist, although he unfortunately veered off in the direction of British Israelism, and believed that the ten lost tribes of Israel had migrated to England and Ireland. This doctrine was not accepted by Elim pastors and so, in 1939, Jeffreys left the denomination he had founded and started another (called Bible Pattern) which never grew beyond about 60 congregations. In any case, Jeffreys developed diabetes towards the end of the 1930s and was not able to sustain long campaigns preaching day after day and night after night (Kay, 2017: 256).

Public proclamation of the gospel was also part of the ministry of Smith Wigglesworth (1859-1947), who was famous for his dramatic active faith and healings. His ministry began to take on an international dimension in that he travelled to different parts of the world and his impact on Britain was thus lessened (Carp, 2015: 56, 117).<sup>4</sup> He did not belong to any one denomination. He preached in North America, New Zealand and Australia, among other places, but he did not organise or plant congregations and so did not build a denomination.

During the 1920s and 1930s when the Pentecostal churches were being established in Britain and growing, Pentecostal doctrine was being elaborated from Scripture and Donald Gee (1891-1966) was writing a biblical theology of spiritual gifts (tongues, interpretation, prophecy, etc.) and of ministry gifts (apostles, prophets, evangelists and teachers) and

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4. He was in Scandinavia in 1921, 1929, 1931, 1932 and 1934, and in Australia and New Zealand in 1922.

showing how all these fit together into congregational and denominational life. How should we understand the role of the apostle or the role of healing within the ministry of the evangelist? By careful examination of the New Testament, Gee was able to produce and publish a logical biblical understanding of these matters that was widely accepted in Britain and in other parts of the English-speaking world (Gee, 1930; Gee, 1928).

There was nothing fancy about Gee's exposition. It was simply a careful analysis of the words of Scripture, and, because he had pastoral experience, he understood congregational implications and saw how local churches function in relation to their denomination and in relation to the big public meetings of men like Jeffreys and Wigglesworth. Teaching might appear less glamorous than prophecy, and pastoral work less exciting than evangelism, but Gee was able to show how all believers could contribute to the edification of their congregations. Pentecostalism mobilised the church.

We do not have figures showing the exact sizes of Pentecostal congregations but many were relatively small (less than sixty congregants) and struggled. It was probably necessary for a congregation to have about twenty-five tithing adults for stability and for the pastor to go full-time and give up secular employment, while still leaving enough income to allow for expenditure on the building. Elim had several large congregations of a few hundred people as a result of the Jeffreys campaigns and these quickly bought their own buildings and raised the profile of Pentecostalism as a whole. At this stage, however, Pentecostals were not ecumenical in outlook and did not collaborate readily with, or find themselves welcomed by, other denominations. In the Assemblies of God there were fewer large congregations, although one in Manchester pastored by Nelson Parr was famous for its flamboyant ability to attract people through hot evangelistic

sermons and a lively band (Kay, 2000: 210).<sup>5</sup> The big churches functioned as preaching centres and would not have encouraged home groups.

Britain can claim to have been a Christian country in the 1920s and 1930s (Currie, Gilbert, and Horsley, 1977: 25).<sup>6</sup> Many people, perhaps the majority, were christened and nominal members of the Anglican church. There were Roman Catholics and small Jewish communities and Sunday church attendance was probably evenly divided between the Anglicans and other Protestant churches. Many children were sent to Sunday school, even if their parents did not attend church, and the underlying assumptions in public life were Christian (McCartney, 2023). The Charismatic movement had not yet happened and so the Anglicans were more formal and hierarchical than today. Divorce was much rarer than it became in the postwar period and almost all marriages took place in churches.<sup>7</sup> Many people smoked cigarettes and enjoyed a pint of beer, but there were no drugs for sale in the schools or on the streets. The police and schoolteachers were respected and most people had a general knowledge of the New Testament. The times of church services might be advertised in the weekly local newspapers, and that is how George Jeffreys publicised his crusades. If you attended a service you would expect to sing from a

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5. My study of Pentecostal denominations in the 1990s found they shared a common profile: a few large congregations and a long tail of smaller ones. Sixty-eight per cent of Apostolic congregations attracted fewer than fifty people and the same was true of 59 per cent of Church of God congregations. About 44 per cent of Assemblies of God congregations and 40 per cent of Elim congregations fell into this size category. The Apostolics had only 2.8 per cent of their congregations numbering over 200, and comparable figures for the Assemblies of God were 10 per cent, Elim 13 per cent and the Church of God 9 per cent.

6. In 1900, the population of the UK over fifteen years of age was 24.6 million and at that time 5.5 million were members of Protestant churches and 2 million of Roman Catholic churches. Thus 30.5 per cent of the population were church members, and higher numbers would have attended.

7. About 80 per cent of men married in 1940 but this dropped to about 20 per cent in 2019. Only 18.2 per cent of weddings were church ceremonies in 2019 (<https://revisesociology.com/2020/06/29/trends-in-marriage-divorce-and-cohabitation-in-the-uk/>). Marwick (1996) points out divorces rose from 3.7 per cent per thousand of the married population in 1968 to 6 per cent per thousand in 1971.

well-known collection of hymns (e.g., the *Redemption Hymnal* published in 1951, which contained many Wesleyan as well as evangelical hymns) and at Christmas you would sing carols which you probably knew by heart from childhood. In other words, Britain was not a multi-cultural, multi-religious society, but one with deep Christian memories and practices.

The Pentecostal churches came through the 1939-45 war weakened but in good heart (Kay, 1990). Bombing had damaged many buildings and rendered a significant number of people homeless.<sup>8</sup> Congregations were smaller during the war because of the absence of men (and women) in the armed forces fighting overseas. The war prevented evangelistic campaigns and crusades because petrol rationing and blackouts were enforced to reduce the visibility of cities during nightly bombing raids. But at the annual ministerial conferences, which were held throughout the war years, earnest and uplifting intercessory prayer was offered and believers were united in heart.

### **From 1950 to 2000**

In the decade after the end of World War II, Britain and most of Europe was recovering. Infrastructure was being rebuilt, the economy was being repaired, but British social attitudes were essentially conservative and this was in part the result of the lack of international travel. Holidays in the family car or flights to warmer parts of Europe were beyond the pocket of most people. There was no Internet, no websites, no pre-recorded blogs, videos or sermons. The churches were led mainly by men who had been born before 1900. They were in late middle age and some had lost their first enthusiasm for church growth or campaigning. In recording the difference between “then” and “now”, we need to take account of the lack of information available to most church leaders and their ignorance about

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8. The bombing blitz on London from 7 September 1940 to 11 May 1941 killed 30,000 people (Taylor, 1985: 611). During October alone 6,334 civilians were killed including 643 children under sixteen (Gilbert, 1998: 345).

what was happening in other parts of the world. Very few Pentecostal preachers in Britain fully appreciated the worldwide extent of the Pentecostal movement, although Gee was an exception because he had preached all over the world in the 1930s.

Although George Jeffreys had spearheaded Pentecostal revival by holding campaigns up and down the country in the 1930s, there was no one to replace him in the late 1950s (Jones, 2023).<sup>9</sup> That honour went instead to a young American Baptist preacher, Billy Graham, who made a national impact with huge meetings, larger than anything George Jeffreys had managed (Graham, 1998). He was acting interdenominationally, and thus the benefits of Graham's crusades were not only in converts but in church cooperation among evangelically-minded Christians.

What happened next took everyone by surprise. The outpouring of the Spirit on mainline denominations resulted in Methodist, Baptist, Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Brethren, Salvationists and others speaking with tongues and entering into the excitement of a new life in the Spirit. This had happened at the beginning of the Pentecostal movement, and so Pentecostals expected that these new tongues-speaking Christians would be expelled from their denominations and find a home in the Pentecostal churches, but this did not happen. The other churches began to make room for what came to be called the "charismatic movement". Charismatics took a more relaxed stance towards holiness than Pentecostals in matters such as cinema going, clothing, sport and even consumption of alcohol in moderation. Charismatics were also musically creative and wrote fresh worship songs. Pentecostals found themselves looking old-fashioned. What should they do?

The answer is that there were mixed responses. In some places Pentecostal congregations relaxed, welcomed newcomers, and grew;

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9. Elim's best evangelist after George Jeffreys was Percy Brewster. There were others, though none rose to national prominence.

but others found all the newcomers were migrating to lively Spirit-filled mainstream congregations. Pentecostalism struggled to understand what was happening theologically and socially. Were Roman Catholics who venerated the Virgin Mary really baptised in the Spirit? Weren't our preachers good enough anymore? How could we compete with those big buildings and well-funded clergy?

In the Assemblies of God there were complaints at the annual general conference in the 1960s that the whole of the AoG had become bound up with its constitutional procedures and committees. Donald Gee, as chairman in 1960, said the body needed surgery (Massey, 1992).<sup>10</sup> There were attempts to simplify the organization, but despite sympathetic consideration, little was achieved.

By the 1970s there had been a new development. Perceptive charismatic Christians realised that their own denominations were structurally unaffected by the outpouring of the Spirit. The new life in the parishes was not paralleled in a similar renewal of spiritual life among the bishops or senior clergy. The old hierarchies were going to remain in place. So, the boldest charismatic Christians began to leave their denominations and strike out on their own to form new groupings, and they did so with a desire to keep their lives simple and without denominational machinery or trappings. Everything was to be "relational", and so congregations, networked under leading preachers who came to be recognised as apostolic, emerged. The best of the new networks were apostolic in terms of the care given to congregations and the initiation of church planting. In other words, at their best, the new apostles were recognised for their pastoral and spiritual gifts rather than for the offices they held. The networks made mistakes and received criticism ("How dare you call yourself an apostle

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10. Gee was Chair of the AoG Annual Conference in 1960 and took the opportunity to preach a keynote message entitled "Another Springtime", in which he recounted the story of how had been taken ill in Germany and told he needed surgery or he would die. The surgeon said that if he had the surgery he would enjoy another springtime (Massey, 1992).

and compare yourself to St Paul?”) and there was certainly occasional exploitation of young Christians. However, when they worked well, the new networks were healthy and biblical in their conduct of Christian life. The apostolic networks grew and there were at least a dozen of them of different sizes and emphases, while their impact on the rest of the church was out of proportion to their numbers (Kay, 2007). They seemed to demonstrate a new way of “being church”, not in doctrine, but in practice.

Less beneficially, authoritarian tendencies appeared within the so-called Shepherding Movement of the 1980s (Moore, 2004), and later the G12 movement that lasted into the 1990s (Castellanos, 1999). Both of these movements began with good intentions, but after a while thoughtful Christians in Britain considered them controlling, unnecessarily restrictive, even cultish, and contrary to the servant leadership of the New Testament. Such ideas were attractive to some pastors but rejected by the majority. The charismatic movement had given us ministers and members with an experience of the Holy Spirit but with little extensive grasp of doctrine or church history. It is not surprising that—often independently of denominational affiliation but with the beginnings of an internet influence—“winds of doctrine” (Eph 4:14) blew over the church.

The appearance of apostolic networks was known within the existing Pentecostal denominations and added impetus to a reforming zeal that was bubbling under the surface. A group of leading younger ministers continued to complain about the long-winded business sessions even if the large public meetings at the conferences continued as before with fervour and joy. Family members attended the General Conferences in the 1980s and large holiday camps were hired and huge, exciting evening meetings of several thousand were held. Yonggi Cho came over from Korea and spoke about the benefits of home groups. Charismatic worship songs were readily accepted and enjoyed (Ma, Menzies, and Bae, 2004). So there was a double effect: among the ministers there were younger men pressing for simplification and reform, but in the public meetings

there was a surge of energy and worship and the churches as a whole were alive. Expectations of a national revival were fuelled by declarations on conference platforms by Australian preachers who had themselves seen booming growth in their country.

There were also changes brought about by newly pioneered black churches. Oliver Lyseight (1919-2006) had come from the Caribbean in 1951 and started congregations in the Birmingham area, which, after 1957, affiliated with the New Testament Church of God (Lyseight, 1995). In 1970, the Aladura International Church arrived, the Celestial Church of Christ in 1974, and the Christ Apostolic Church (Mount Bethel) in the same year. The Church of Pentecost planted its first UK congregation in 1988, which was the same year as the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG). Kingsway International Christian Centre (KICC) started in 1992 (Goodhew, 2012). According to Brierley's survey (based on a questionnaire mailed out to 38,000 local churches in England), 214,600 people attended Pentecostal churches on Sundays in 1998 and 14,700 of these belonged to the New Testament Church of God and 5,600 to the Church of God of Prophecy. These figures are the best measure we have, although there are gaps because, unfortunately, not all churches completed the questionnaire (Bierley, 2000: 42).<sup>11</sup>

This set the scene for a "Decade of Harvest" which was to run during the 1990s and culminate in the year 2000.<sup>12</sup> The Assemblies of God in Britain proclaimed its intention of doubling its size in ten years, but sadly, few plans were put in place for training ministers or working out the

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11. Church statisticians need to distinguish consistently between membership and attendance and to decide whether to include children. Some churches have higher membership than attendance and others are the other way round. Figures therefore need to be read carefully.

12. In the UK Assemblies of God General Conference report of 1995, Warwick Shenton, the General Superintendent, was to write, "We started the year in the afterglow of the JIM challenge [an advertising campaign], which although it did not reach the sought after targets, did bring a new spirit of evangelism, and many creative ideas into the field of reaching the lost for Jesus" (2). See also, Francis and Roberts (2009).

actual details of how this would happen, and the result was that, despite high hopes and genuine efforts, no doubling took place and an element of disillusionment set in. It is true that the “Toronto Blessing” swept through churches for several years in that decade, but although there were revival phenomena, such as falling over under the power of the Spirit and joyful laughing and dancing, the churches, despite being warmed up and loosened up, did not change substantially (Hilborn, 2001; Arnott, 1995). The arrival of the new millennium was greeted at midnight with fireworks in the capitals of the world and some preachers had thought revival would follow, but everything remained calm.

## **2000 to the Present**

So where is the Pentecostal Church in Britain today? We can identify six characteristics: First, it is much more varied than it was in the 1920s and 1930s. Not only are there many Pentecostal groups in Britain but these Pentecostal groups reflect a spectrum of opinions and practices within themselves. There are groups originating in West Africa, but also Brazilian, Polish and even messianic Jewish groups. The black churches have contributed enormously to the vitality of British Pentecostalism and have brought with them a positivity and discipline in prayer that is exemplary. Moreover, the Pentecostal churches are usually willing to collaborate and cooperate with each other as well as with other Christian denominations. In this sense they are ecumenically positive. No longer are Pentecostals isolated or shunned or protective of themselves, but most are reaching out to their neighbourhoods and many are members of the Evangelical Alliance (EAUK) and/or Churches Together in England (CTE).

Second, Pentecostal churches have embraced the digital technologies associated with websites, WhatsApp, video conferencing, social media and streaming. In short, although Pentecostal churches are conservative in their social attitudes and theological beliefs, they are willing to experiment in the cyber realm. Above all, Pentecostal churches want

to communicate internally and externally. They are willing to link together into networks that may be different from, or wider than, their denominational affiliations. In this way, there is cross-fertilisation within today's Pentecostal movement. Magazines have given way to blogs; music accompanied solely by a piano has given way to high-quality bands and skilled worship leaders; and everyone can visit everyone else online and see how they conduct their services and what their preachers have to say. Everyone can learn from the best.

Third, and probably flowing on from feminism, there is probably a greater role for women in Pentecostal churches than there was in the 1920s and 1930s. There have always been women's meetings in Pentecostal churches and women have served as missionaries, but women on the platform of Pentecostal meetings preaching or exhorting would have been uncommon in the past. In line with Acts 2, Pentecostals always believed the Spirit is poured out on men and women equally, but even so, the majority of pastors were men and the committees and conferences were dominated by men. There is now more space for women to contribute, especially in leading worship, prophecy and humanitarian activity. Women have gained confidence in public speaking and this may serve them well in their professional capacities if they enter day school teaching or business.

Fourth, nearly all churches now use small groups meeting in the home as a way of encouraging fellowship, pastoral care, and a sense of belonging. In other words, home group leaders are important to Pentecostal churches, and, although these are given varying degrees of systematic oversight and training by pastors (some group leaders have no training whatsoever), there is clearly a valuable role here for men and women who are either retired or have full-time secular jobs. The home group leader is not likely to be an elder, but does have genuine responsibilities within the church. This gives members a better quality of church life, while also enabling these leaders to test their own gifts in case they feel the call to full-time ministry. These small groups may be organised by age, gender, interest or in other

ways, and can be held at various times of the day to accommodate those who do not wish to go out in the evening. Additionally, small groups can be the place where spiritual gifts are manifest if pastors who are streaming services do not wish spiritual gifts (that need to be weighed and tested) to be publicly observed. Thus, the congregation with well-planned and predictable public services and more experimental home group meetings is a model adopted by some churches.

Fifth, the prevalence of safeguarding policies, as well as the influence of the Charity Commission, has ensured that Pentecostal churches are properly run and audited and that training is given to church members with any kind of ministry. Children's workers, for instance, almost certainly need safeguarding training and Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks and this was never the case in the past. The result is a better understanding of vulnerability as well an extra cost to the church budget.

Sixth, today's Pentecostal churches include among their number megachurches (over 2,000 by one definition) which are so large they do not need their denominations but can stand apart from them: denominations need megachurches more than megachurches need denominations (Hunt, ed., 2020; Cartledge et al., 2019). The megachurch has enormous human and budgetary resources and, if well run, can offer many kinds of humanitarian ministries in the community as well mission to other parts of the world. As well as raising denominational profile, these massive churches may offer Bible training programs on campus and may also contain one or more shops as well as counselling and debt advisory services for vulnerable people (Wellman, Corcoran and Stockly: 152–71). This sort of multi-purpose church was unheard of in the 1920s and 1930s in Britain.

## **Conclusion**

Over the 115 years since the first was formed in Britain, the Pentecostal churches have grown and diversified. They are no longer situated almost

invisibly in backstreets, but have moved out into their communities with the result that they operate in the mainstream of religious life and often have good relationships with their local councils because of the humanitarian services they offer. Social media have given the churches an online voice and presence which allows them to share their stories and advertise their services. It is true mainstream broadcasting and media frequently ignore the religious dimension of British life, but the mainstream media are in danger of being sidelined by frenetically active social media platforms (especially by the young). The diversity of Pentecostalism within the UK has resulted in core beliefs in the presence of the Holy Spirit as the central point, and to this is added variations over matters of mission, evangelism, money, miracles, governance and pastoral care. Speaking in tongues is retained but not always hotly defended. End-time beliefs over the return of Christ remain an important doctrine, but sometimes fade into the background. Beliefs about marriage and the family remain largely unchanged. Preaching is the golden thread that has run through Pentecostalism from the beginning. There is much to be thankful for, but, in the words of the Book of Joshua, 13:1, much land remains to be possessed.

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# The Influence of Indigenous Ontological Beliefs on African Pentecostalism: A Qualitative Perspective on Spiritual Warfare Songs

*Babatunde Adedibu*

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## **Abstract**

The main point of this essay is to present a unique view of how African indigenous ontologies shape narratives of African Pentecostalism as an example of the contextualization of global Pentecostalism. This is achieved by presenting the meaning of these ontological beliefs and explaining what African Pentecostalism signifies. The essay identifies some perennial themes in African Indigenous cosmologies as emergent theological themes in African Pentecostalism. It underscores “spiritual warfare songs” as a lens of hope and shows how African ontological ideas have continued to rise in African Pentecostal/charismatic Christianity and Spirit-inspired artistic expressions.

**Keywords:** African Pentecostalism, Indigenous, Ontological beliefs, Songs, Spiritual Warfare

## Introduction

The presence of spiritual warfare songs in the *Songs of God* repertoire, as well as in spiritual warfare, exorcism and songs aimed at “mobilizing” the spirit world, reaffirm Edward H. M. Kamau Brice’s work on the existence of spiritual warfare songs in the traditional Igbo music genres of Nigeria. The socio-religious and spiritual relationship between humans and the spirit world or supernatural does indeed attest to the survival of indigenous religiosity in African churches. The spontaneous and dynamic ebbs and flows of mutuality and co-dependence of these relationships attest to them as dynamic forces of Christian life, especially in Africa. Safety from the supernatural is arguably guaranteed in traditional religion.

The analysis deepens if we start from the fact that in African Christianity, most native practices and ideas have survived in modified forms in their indigenous contexts, e.g., African-Catholic syncretism in Brazil (Camara, 1988: 299) and in African Pentecostalism (Adedibu, 2024). In this regard, African Christianity diverges from traditional Catholicism and resembles traditional African religion, revealing “the same dialectical basis: ritualistic and mystical on the one hand; experiential, practical and given to magic on the other.... [I]t was a dialectic that opposed and unified the concern with the business of saving souls and that of integrating diverse cultural elements” (Camara, 1988: 303).

The imprint of indigenous ontological belief on the incarnation of Pentecostalism in Africa is a major source of creativity and contextualisation for African Pentecostal leaders. African Christianity intentionally combines foreign and indigenous features to establish a sense of relatedness and mutual borrowing described as syncretism (Droogers, 1989: 13–14). However, the aforementioned syncretism can also be described as the Africanisation of Christianity, with “reference to the incorporation of indigenous religious thought and practices into African Christianity ... making tradition an important part of African cultural and religious heritage” (Meyer, 2004: 455, 457). Integral to the

realities of the indigenous ontological beliefs in sub-Saharan Africa is that many Africans learned these beliefs from oral traditions, as they are not written down, but nevertheless provide familiar interpretative frameworks for addressing the existential realities of people. It is from this context that the motivation to theorise about the impact of native ontological beliefs on African Pentecostalism through the lens of spiritual warfare songs in Nigeria arises.

### **Background and Rationale**

The many permutations and variations in cultures, conventions, and institutions of the different denominations in Africa, mean that it is right and proper to say that the difficult-to-receive ideologies introduced by hardworking missionaries often received unimaginable constructions, and thus the various denominations adorned with their glittering ornaments in the churches are now part and parcel of the rich theological heritage of African Christianity (Iheanacho, 2021; Lamak, 2023). African Christianity can rightly and properly be called African or African-style Christendom. The reformation of Christianity by Africans aims at incorporating indigenous worldviews, overcoming resistance from colonial authorities and mission denominations in Africa, and in so doing promote mystical causality, divine healing, and charismatic renewal (Asamoah Gyadu, 2013). This is the expression of the conspicuous development and flourishing of the spirit of the African people, and their unquestionable meaning and practice which have no coequal in any religion. The intention of this study is to show why African Indigenous ontology—that is, worldviews of the African spiritual world—have influenced African Pentecostalism. The study also contends that Pentecostals can use any method to preach the gospel and make it relevant to people's situations of servitude (Adedibu, 2013: 110–17; Lamak, 2023).

## Conceptual Frame

### *Concept of Ontology*

The term “ontology” is derived from the Greek words “*onta*”, meaning existence, and “*logos*”, meaning study or discourse. Ontology, a sub-branch of metaphysics, studies the meaning and nature of reality, focusing on the reality of existence. It seeks to determine the general conditions and properties of beings and their understanding. In African philosophy, ontology deals with the idea of being, existence, reality and its properties, and the basic structure of this being, which should be the object of human existence (Ekeh, 2020: 89). In African ontology, “reality can be subsumed” under the categories of “Spirit, human, things, place, time and modality” (Ogunde, 2005: 68). For Africans, form is the nature of being, as everything must fit within specific categories and is not considered substance. Hence, the “African world-view is essentially holistic in the sense that it accepts the material world as given, thus making possible empirical science”, as observed by Keita (1984: 72). It is pertinent to point out that because Africa is diverse in nature, some generalisations are needed. These are not meant to stifle African thought but rather to identify common features that facilitate scholarship. Hence, “generalisations can be made about African religions and moral understanding without violating either the integrity or the particularity of tribal groups” (Paris, 1995: 27).

Within the purview of this study, ontology is the way of viewing existence. It is the study of a particular world, the a priori way of existence, conditioned by its African ancestry view. On this basis, the study of African primal/Pentecostal ontology deals with the idea of the African primal world (Kalu, 2002: 136); the Infinite Being; God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit [which is the Godhead]; and the Spirit or the spirits [which includes evil spirits, the devil and his demons] (Kalu, 2006: 91, 92). Ofuasia (2022) suggests that God acts persuasively, allowing all beings to exercise free will and sustain the harmony of the universe. He argues that

evil and suffering result from failing to meet God's ideals, explaining both natural and moral evil as the outcome of deviations from His intentions (70). The well-known belief of Africans in good and evil spirits resonates with the praxis of Pentecostal spiritual warfare (Onongha, 2022: 35–45; Onongha, 2017). Singing of Pentecostal spiritual songs is one of the methods of Pentecostal spiritual warfare. The experience of African Pentecostalism, of training believers and teaching the Pentecostal way of life informed by indigenous ontology, is yet to be adequately explored by scholars.

### *Theoretical Framework*

This is a conceptual and theoretical thesis about Indigenous ontological epistemological beliefs in Africa. It is the first descriptive and institutional marker of indigenous religiosity explaining Pentecostalism in Africa. Four substantive claims about Indigenous ontological beliefs and Pentecostalism in the African context can be made. The rise of Indigenous Pentecostalism in African countries represents the ritual and symbolism of purity and power as a mode of sustenance in a broken world, and preserves a few core normative features of Indigenous ontological beliefs as part of an indigenous epistemology of African society. Spiritual warfare is one of the core rituals, indeed, a favourite ritual. Sadly, people detest Indigenous religion. The late Jason Hart, writing in *Spiritual Warfare* (1971: 1–21), draws attention to the core ritual of spiritual warfare. Similarly, as words, fire and its material symbol in Nigeria is as endogenous to the constitution of the new Pentecostal family as it is to the institution of the ritual (Alamu & Dopanu, 2020: 145–57; Adedibu, 2018: 21). Moreover, from the perspective of German Wittgensteinian semantics, the claim is made that the linguistic object and all things existential arise from the socio-biography and natural history of a country (Bartunek, 2021: 80–95). It is further claimed that a socio-biography is the context for determining the

speaker's signifier. Speech can be interpreted, analysed, and visualised as situated in a context. Such semiotic meaning of the sign in its situatedness in context is equivalent to being situated in its ontological meaning in a society. An indigenous ontology is the metaphysical belief of a culture (Botha et al., 2021).

### **Indigenous Ontological Beliefs in African Contexts**

Another defining feature of the African experience of participatory and experiential religious worship is the engagement with the syncretism of indigenous belief systems, and their cultural affinity with the vicissitudes of life in the transcendental African worldview. Such worship is a participatory, effervescent and spiritually effective experience that will stir the hearts and minds of all who share in its effervescent feasts, antique rites and gnostic traditions. Such affinity and depth longitudinally transcends cultural frontiers, depolarising a multiplicity of communities in a shared and uninterrupted spiritual inter-connectedness. The lineage of such worship is secretively embedded in the wisdom of the antique traditions that meander organically across aeons of cultural relations and the mustered stoicism of honourable sacred ancestries. African traditionalistic belief systems are informed by a cocoon of holistic and sacred belief systems that exalt the inviolability of the sacredness of the godhead as the philosophic oasis of their holistic cosmology, while also specifying the existential imperatives of all who are framed within the African cosmos. This robust and entrenched syncretism provides the structural and metaphysical scaffolding upon which African peoples construct and navigate their existential edge (Oguntola-Laguda, 2020: 29–33; Cordeiro-Rodrigues & Agada, 2022: 1–11).

This ontology led to the polysemy and poly spirit known as African spirituality, which is located in diverse cultural, religious and spiritual expressions. It is this marriage of Indigenous ontological concerns that is manifest in traditional African figurations of human beings as animals,

as trees and rivers, as mountains, as God and as the Personal God. This phylo-sacred order is charged full of explosive beauty, of the strange and the homely peculiarities of what is called the music of contemporary Pentecostalism, the sense of which, as participant and researcher, is made possible. This ontological world is the backdrop to the spiritual warfare music in the African Independent Churches (AICs).

### **Pentecostalism and Spiritual Warfare**

Genealogically, spiritual warfare is a transnational Pentecostal/charismatic Christian tradition, and there is no aspect of the global Christian tradition more central to understanding Pentecostalism than this fact (Kisungi, 2020: 53–72; Nyske Ewelina, 2021). For Murphy (2012: 54–55), the Pentecostal doctrine of spiritual warfare means, “We [Pentecostals] are at war”. The war will not end until the final judgment of evil, as recorded in Revelation 20. Murphy emphasizes that it is possible to defeat evil spirits by following Jesus Christ’s example, and that experienced deliverance ministers possess the same potential.

Ferguson (2019: 91–106) notes that the Christian notion of participation in a spiritual war is deeply indebted to Pauline notions of spiritual warfare as portrayed in Ephesians 6:10–12. The ritual battles of spiritual warfare have moved to the forefront with the rise of Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity globally. Evil forces are believed to impede and frustrate human flourishing and prosperity. As Asamoah-Gyadu (2013) posits, for “many African Christians, especially Pentecostals, spiritual warfare ... has come to be seen as a way of achieving a good life and prosperity”.

Nyske (2021: 129) adds that the assumption of such evil spirits postulates a continuous cosmic war between these demons and the holy forces of the Divine God, in which the latter will triumph, for God “can do away with his enemy,” but man cannot. Murphy, as quoted in Coleman (2020:172), comments: “the human-based continuous-cosmic drama is

nothing more than sin war”. This war is against sin, Satan, and the world. The human condition of being continually “called to be warriors in a continuous cosmic war” necessitates a continual re-processing, and re-projecting (reanimation), of war images onto Pauline images of shield and weapon (Ephesians 6: 11ff). As Coleman (2021: 172) notes, this “reification of the spiritual metaphor of militant agency ... has its origins in the 19th-century missionary message”, and this has now become something that Pentecostals take as an “explicitly thematic consideration of action”.

In the African context, perhaps most clearly articulated by Jean and John Comaroff (Hughes, 2024; Comaroff & Comaroff, 2020), the low-grade war of everyday life is here: Pentecostal “warriors” frame and supply the discursive and practical grammar of spiritual warfare against “witches and demons”, and most often, solidified compounds of the two – “witches and wizards” (Coleman, 2020; Gukurume amp Taru, 2021; Heuser, 2021; Garrard, 2020; Richman, 2020). Pentecostal discourse, and more specifically, Pentecostal worship, keeps this discourse on spiritual warfare at the highest and most proximate levels.

### **Historical Development of African Pentecostalism**

There is some consensus that in Africa, as in many parts of the world where Pentecostalism emerged, the First Wave of the charismatic renewal of the mainline churches preceded African Pentecostalism (Kgatlé, 2018; Kgatlé, 2021; Nel, 2020). Although many Pentecostal or Charismatic events were unfolding under the aegis of the mainline churches, the pioneering of the “traditional” Pentecost Coast must be credited to Apostle Peter Newman Anim (or Apostle Anim No. 1) and his founding of Christ’s Apostolic Church in 1917. Anim was dead by 1922. His Tabernacle Church (later to be disbanded in 1927) was allegedly responsible for the emergence of the three mainline Pentecostal Churches in Ghana: the Christ Apostolic Church International, the Apostolic Church of Ghana, and the Church

of Pentecost. The founding pastor of Christ Apostolic Church can also be credited for some Pentecostal practices he introduced in 1932 (Anim, 1960; Larbi, 2001: 32–33; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005: 23). During the same period the Spirit of Pentecost was igniting numerous church and movement leaders in Nigeria. The developments during the First Wave of Pentecostalism (or spiritual revival) commonly occurred along the lines of the sub-movement.

### *Growth and Founding of Denominationalism*

Even less is known about the middle period of African Pentecostalism, the period of church growth of the movement. Within this period of apostolic organisational consolidation and numerical growth, African-initiated Pentecostal Christians gave denominational focus to the movement. It is a standard error of older scholarship to merely conflate this period of movement growth with the earlier White Pentecostal mission. Such movements were usually doctrinal and leadership-based.

In 1918, a group of Anglican laypeople, led by a deacon, launched the Precious Stone Society, an organisation that prayed to slow the expansion of the influenza epidemic in Nigeria. In the 1920s, the Philadelphia-based offshoot of the Faith Tabernacle produced the Aladura prayer movement, a Nigerian Pentecostalism that spread rapidly throughout the country, attracting people on the margins who were thirsty for spiritual renewal and empowerment. The word Aladura is Yoruba for “owner of prayer” (Oshun, 1994: 246; Aiyegboyin & Ishola, 1999: 16; Ayegboyin & Azonzeh, 2002: 76–77).

According to Helleman (2023), the growth of Pentecostalism can be documented as follows: The Pentecostal renaissance led to the need for new churches in the 1970s. Pentecostal revivals in the 80s and the 90s gave birth to many new churches, such as Living Faith Ministries (1986), founded and led by Bishop David Oyedepo. Hundreds of Pentecostal revivals in 2000–2022 brought forth more churches. The

churches that experienced explosive growth in the above-mentioned periods were Pentecostal denominations including Grace of God Mission International, Christian Pentecostal Mission, Dunamis International Gospel, Synagogue Church of All Nation, New Covenant Gospel Church by Rev Felix Omobude, and the Latter Rain Assembly. Other Pentecostal denominations to witness tremendous growth included Lord Chosen Charismatic Renewal, Christ Embassy, Omega Fire Ministries, God's Delight Assembly, Global Dynamic Miracle and Deliverance Fellowship, Omega Power Ministry, and a host of others (Hellenman, 2023: 12–15).

### **Early Roots and Growth**

African Pentecostalism began as an amalgamation of Western Christianity (Catholic and Protestant missionaries) forced Christianity upon the continent through Eurocentric and imperialist missions (Anderson, 2001; Anderson, 2004). However, African Christians clothe Christianity with an African cultural worldview and an authentic and aggressive belief in the supernatural and the spirit world. But with the explosion of Christianity in Africa, rapid growth, and a merger of orthodoxies, the imperative of spiritual power, even to the point of changing orthodoxies to spiritual power, is seen by many today as a defining feature of Christianity. Belief in the supernatural, the spirit world, and spiritual power have become key features in African Christianity (Kalu, 2016). In this context, change in the orthodoxies of the main Pentecostal movement, and growth of the movement best encapsulate what Dewey considers the “standard moral fibre” running across the lifespan of the Pentecostalism in the African continent and diaspora (Adedibu, 2024).

African Pentecostalism thus embodies multiple, even contradictory, religious impulses and movement registers. For many African Pentecostals, prophetic empowerment means resistance to a determinative discourse of abjection and a moral discourse of outrage. As for other Pentecostal (and charismatic) congregations globally, by creating an opaque and

deep ontological experience of unhinging and rehousing, dismissing and normalising, the moral universe of naming and shaming produces for the dispossessed, the denigrated and the oppressed hope, empowerment and triumphalism in its capacity to promise and provide salvation. This was true from the very beginning of African Pentecostalism (1900) with the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles (Robeck, 2006: 247), and the South African Johannes Vilakazi and his AFM of South Africa the following year, which subsequently proliferated in the conditions of warmth and informality of apartheid South Africa (Maxwell, 1999: 245–46).

African Pentecostalism's transformative potential has been underrated in scholarly discourse, with arguments suggesting that Pentecostals in Africa reject social justice and are apolitical, a view that has been discarded or remoulded in recent times (Haynes, 1996: 204; Heuser, 2026: 7).

### **Key Figures and Movements**

Then there is the complex and contested transnational history of African Pentecostalism reaching its modernist crescendo with formative prefigurations of the politicisation of the movement in the life and death of pioneer leaders such as John Chilembwe (first leader of the 1915 insurrection against British colonial rule in Nyasaland), and Booth as “embodiments of the protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism” (Brian, 2016: 152–55). The Tongan prophet Alexander Ajo (1921) claimed to have received a “call to prophecy”, and Simon Kimbangu of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 1921 were among a range of homegrown root prophetic movements that emerged during the early twentieth century on the bedrock of African Indigenous spirituality and Indigenous prophecy (Kalu, 2008: 23–26). These contested, everyday lived religious traditions have been shaped and reshaped by a veritable host of protagonists, such as the Akan prophet Enoch Ofori Donkor, who claimed to have received a spiritual call in the early twentieth century, and who preached a new prophecy to the Ghanaian population, notably in rural areas.

It was not until 1930 that Joseph Babalola (c.1904–55) of Christ Apostolic Church in Western Nigeria left an indelible mark on the development of African Pentecostalism as a mass phenomenon. He is popularly known as the second charismatic forerunner and father of the homogenous homegrown apostolic faith movement in sub-Saharan Africa, known as the Aladura faith (the “workers of the prayers”), because of his dramatic spiritual ecstasies. This movement grew into a global mission. Originating from the Church Missionary Society, Christ Apostolic Church held many itinerant revival meetings in different parts of Yoruba in Western Nigeria. In some of these meetings, through spiritual exploits and on-the-spot healing crusades against supposedly territorial demonic forces, Babalola demonstrated his spirit of prophecy, a role credited with saving many souls and inspiring the founding of several Aladura churches (Oshun, 1994: 23ff).

Rowland Bingham, Thomas Kent, and Walter Gowan were pioneers of the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) in 1893, which aimed to abandon the coast-lands and reach the interior. Despite initial failures, Bingham persevered and established the first Sudan Interior Mission station at Patigi in 1901 (Langena, 2009: 53).

Furthermore, Western Lutheran and Quaker denominations have been the suppliers of pioneers and founders of African-initiated churches, e.g., William Wade Harris of West Africa and the adopted SIM prophetic, Christiana Abepa, in Southern Cameroons, each establishing a legacy in the religious history of the region that symbolized the beginning of a spiritual journey: a seed that dropped and germinated and from which the tree of life is still standing.

Moreover, many African-initiated churches owe their origins to Western mission churches because of the European structures and content of Christianity and the lack of cultural intelligence about Africans, as well as the exclusivist nature of Europeans. Among these, as noted, William Wade Harris of West Africa and SIM orphan Christiana Abepa from

today's Southern Cameroons, stand out as prominent figures. They left an indelible legacy in the religious architecture of the region, an entry point into an ongoing spiritual pilgrimage.

### **Indigenous Ontological Beliefs in African Traditions**

Four indigenous ontological constructs are basic in most African traditions: First, there is a belief in a Supreme Being regarded as creator of all things, along with lesser divinities who assist the Supreme Being in the running of the cosmos. The intermediary divinities are consulted to solicit help from the Supreme Being (Igboin, 2014: 189–208). Second, ancestors are essential in African cosmology (Chuks, 2021; Ige, 2006; Mbiti, 1975; Wiredu, 2013) as they are intermediaries between God and humans and “can communicate both the language of the invisible world and the language of humans” (Mbiti, 1975: 63). Affectionate ancestors may communicate with living families through dreams or diviners, who often interpret family misfortunes as calamities sent by angry ancestors starved of veneration (Chuks, 2021: 471). Meanwhile, the dead are maintained by the living and are appeased through libations and blood sacrifices in return for good health, success, justice and fertility. Third, the belief in the power of rivers, trees and mountains (sometimes understood as local or parochial fragments of the divinities of the sun, the rain etc.) constitute part, certainly not the least part, of the ecological camouflage of African indigenous religiosity. Fourth, there is a belief in witches and witchcraft as causative agents of such misfortune as poverty, barrenness or disease. Therefore, the need to ward off witches and freedom from their witchcraft power is a priority in traditional religion. Indigenous ontological constructs and practices are woven across all aspects of African life in the most general sense, and across life in African Christianity, particularly the Neo-Pentecostal churches. Nevertheless, Robbins (2003: 223) argues that, “in attacking local cultures, Pentecostalism tends to accept their ontologies—including their ontologies of spirits and witches and other

occult powers—and to take the spiritual beings these ontologies posit as paramount among the forces it struggles against”. African Pentecostals reflect continuity and rupture within and outside traditional African religions and cultures.

### **Intersections of Indigenous Beliefs and Pentecostalism**

Scholars have noted some corresponding features between Indigenous worldviews and Pentecostalism. We term this phenomenon syncretism or hybridity. And this means that there is a very real negotiation in which people with Pentecostal and charismatic affiliations also hold on to what I would call an Indigenous theology. However, syncretism is always integrated systems of meaning rather than a simple commingling of religious traditions. Sometimes the two systems do not blend and coincide, and one cannot say that the two happen at once from the standpoint of the informant. The person may say that they consider themselves as simply one thing or the other. They engage in some rites of passage and may even call these events or ceremonies religious feasts, but they would not consider the “resource” or “access” to be part of their rituals. The exchange discussed thus far raises important questions, but whether the exchange appears synchronically or diachronically is significant. One area where Western or European exchanges with African indigenous theological systems of meaning and belief take place is in the world of the spirit and in spiritual warfare.

### **Syncretism and Hybridity**

As Babalola (2016: 73–110) has reported, because of the dissonance of the interworld that mutes the remarkable divide between the temporal and spiritual life worlds of Sub-Saharan Africans and between the church and the world, African Pentecostals are twice committed to their country and their fellow labourers. Witches and principalities-and-powers are appealed to for mundane religious help. In this worldview, the concepts

and networks of the power of earthly authorities are translated into the hierarchies, offices and enthroned power of godly space. In this interface and dialogue between Pentecostalism and African traditional religion and heritage, neither Pentecostalism nor African conventional religion and heritage remain static. They change. One of the questions or issues arising out of the change or shift is whether this is indeed a matter of syncretism or hybridity, or if it is a matter of belief.

The popular understanding of syncretism and hybridity invigorating religious cultures through cross-cultural and cross-civilisational encounters between traditional African religion and Christianity, and between traditionalism and Pentecostalism in African Christianity is a recent development that points to the significance of African traditional and cultural values for Christian ethics/morality (Berner, 2001:499–509). But clearly, syncretism/hybridity is a phenomenon with the potential for a cross-cultural/trans-civilisational influence that might cut both ways. It can propagate in a symbiosis between cultures that are not contiguous. Yet there is a danger in understanding syncretism inductively. Some analysts confuse the meanings of vitalising forms of religious cultures, by seeing syncretism and hybridity as interchangeable terms (without distinguishing their different references).

### **Spiritual Warfare Songs in African Pentecostalism**

The doctrinal emphasis on spiritual warfare in Ephesians 6:12 is central to much of African Pentecostal worship. If warfare is one side of the coin, spiritual worship is the other, often turning on the expectation of venom from evil spirits. Ruth Marshall, Elizabeth McAlister (2016: 114–30); Francis Benyah (2020: 1–25); Simeon Coleman (2020: 171–86); Sean McCloud (2015), Kimberly Marshall and Andreana Pritchard (2020: 327), Virginia Garrard (2020: 648) and S. Jonathan O'Donnell (2020) have characterized spiritual warfare as a supernatural Pentecostal practice which engages with the politics of spiritual access. Many of the

aforementioned scholars focus on spiritual warfare within the context of a specific country or region. However, Adedokun (2023: 282) observes the transnational and boundless nature of the Holy Spirit, in “soliciting angels to move from one part of the world to the other”. This point highlights “the Holy Spirit’s boundlessness, the open-source architecture of the invisible world as practitioners comprehend it, and the ways the belief and subsequent practices sustain the faith globally”, thereby providing interpretative frameworks to address the existential realities of Pentecostal adherents. The warfare waged in African Pentecostal worship and church services reflects traditional African notions.

The spiritual warfare songs in question are musical expressions of worship that might also be sung during a physical war. Songs of spiritual warfare express the twin spiritual themes of military and religious virtue. As described earlier, the symbiotic relationship between worship and war finds its frozen pulses in songs and prayers. These are shaped to understand war and worship as indivisible. In the Bible, the foundation for war is declared just before Jehoshaphat’s victory, and the Israelites even solicit God with super-ceremonial prophetic action by singing as they “go out to battle” (2 Chronicles 20). These are songs and prayers converted for war, aimed at edifying battle campaigns. Others might sing laments of sad distress, tunes of plaint that conjure a firm hope in God’s deliverance from the miseries that prompt the need for divine intervention. Thus there may be both sad and joyful spiritual warfare songs needed when spiritual warriors are called upon to rely upon divine intervention.

### **Definition and Characteristics of Spiritual Warfare Songs**

Spiritual warfare songs are important for understanding African Pentecostal worship. Spiritual warfare songs stand as individual war chants among converts of an indigenous fringe church in Nigeria. Also, they point to a possible extension in which non-Christian religious groups might use them express their fear of attack or to initiate spirit possession.

Unsurprisingly, the repertoire of African Pentecostalism is replete with warfare songs. Their frequent performance during most events of Pentecostal spiritual warfare—such as Neo-Pentecostal miracle nights of deliverance—reflects the appropriation of these warfare songs and ecstatic singing. On the one hand, performative utterance short-circuits the norms of language. It moves, like glossolalia, into repetitiveness and emphatic eucharistic chanting. Still, on the other hand, its reception and effect can be circumscribed by its signifying function—its words, names and statements aren't arbitrary or random. Similarly, spiritual warfare songs relate poverty and spirituality, diachrony and ritual change, tradition and modernity.

Secondly, spiritual warfare songs are a powerful weapon in the battle against the devil or demons. Hence, through spiritual warfare, the sociocultural problems and the personal needs of the faithful caused by non-Christians are engaged. Spiritual warfare, therefore, is for today's African Pentecostal Rhema or prophetic or deliverance ministries an urgent problem. Within some African Independent Churches (AICs), the language battle has had more of a semantic than a truly existential meaning (as now under Pentecostalism). One speaks of a history of "cheating", transforming the history of "competition" and a public language contestation into an entire public language of interpretation. But instead of verbal mutual detraction, the two AICs—Pentecostals and African Independent Churches such as the Aladuras in Southwestern Nigeria—battle over an interpretation of cultural symbols in which cosmology and ontology are at stake.

### **Role and Function in Worship**

The above elements provide a backdrop for an account of how such songs are phenomenologically and thematically relevant. By directly influencing the spiritual dynamics of Pentecostal worship, their role and function in the context of spirituality "from below" indicates "people expressing their

(pre)conscious needs and desires publicly and dramatically, before and perhaps for God and the (un)seen spiritual world”. Spiritual warfare songs bring the spiritual ontological hopes of deliverance and help concerning threats of various forms and degrees and from different quarters (including from the devil) from people and communities to the God of the world and the “layered reality” of the entire spiritual cosmos of seen and unseen beings (Iheanacho, 2023: 7) .

As Welch (2010:) indicates, Christianity provides ample spiritual shelter, but people might find more layers of shelter in the context of these spirits, including the body and the home. God-of-Sunday has curative, controlling drive and protecting powers for otherworldly forces. It is this dynamic that petitioners find in their spiritual warfare songs when they approach their God for deliverance from controlling evil powers.

Spiritual warfare songs are relevant here for religious anthropology, because elsewhere in Christian and Muslim orthodoxies, there is resistance to the recognition of these essential problems in African traditional religion, which is the only belief system that cares about people’s everyday sense of this primitive, metaphysical enmity. But still, there are meanings that are more in line with the imagination of the religious faithful. That is, the meaning that new believers invest in the song and the original meaning of the song that they are confronted with. This means that 1) the meaning then changes; and 2) the pastor is the one with a (de)legitimate meaning.

## **Implications**

As the numerous documented links between African religions and African Christianity seem to indicate a kind of openness for Christianity and African indigenous religions (in the African context) to enter a dialogical relationship, the findings of this research contribute to an understanding of the nature of that dialogue and its potential contemporary significance. An approach that reads contemporary cultural phenomena through such a lens brings into focus issues often dealt with in deionising and under-

theorised ways. A better understanding of the matter could contribute to more equitable and respectful cross-cultural engagement between African Christians and Christians of other than African heritage, and between African Christians and adherents of African traditional religion.

Lastly, in providing the framework for Pentecostalisation in contemporary African Christianity, there is a need to highlight the socio-cultural consequences of Indigenous ontologies. African societies are patriarchal, conservative and Puritan, and culturally-maintained values remain central to social cohesion and general welfare. Cultural colonialism and Western traditions of modernity, including colonial policies and practices, and Christian sensibilities on ascetic lifestyles, presented threats to cherished traditional cultural mores and values, and have proven uncondusive to practices and beliefs concerning the Spirit realm.

## **Conclusion**

The study probed how indigenous ontological beliefs illuminate African Pentecostalism through spiritual warfare songs. My findings indicate that indigenous ontological beliefs underpin visual and performative expressions of spiritual warfare in African Pentecostal contexts. In most cases, spiritual songs provide a channel through which ordinary forces and ordinary human beings enter into organic association with one another, this being often synonymous with indigenous ontologies of ordinary versus extraordinary (or unseen spiritual forces and their manifestations), to present human agents as possessors of what is temporal in the world.

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