

***The African Diaspora and the Shaping
of Christianity in Africa:***

Perspectives on religion, migration, identity and collaboration

Roswith Gerloff

Introduction

The concept of 'diaspora' is one of the most inspiring research topics in the context of globalisation. Contemporary studies in anthropology and sociology of religion speak of '*religions on the move*', or the process of transmigration and transculturation, as it refers to dynamic, reciprocal, transitory and multidimensional creations in shaping a "poly-contextual world" (Hock 2002; Warner & Wittner 1998:15). This implies that religions have to be regarded as cultural and spiritual phenomena whose 'taken-for granted' essence has resulted from transcultural and transnational processes of mutual influence, interaction and continuous adaptation to new environments, developments and encounters. The emphasis here is on "a new model of understanding religion which emphasizes process and practitioners over form and content"(Yawney 1999:185). Religions, including different forms of Christianity, respond to ever changing circumstances and play a role in constructing and re-constructing cultural and national identities. They play a significant role in the spiritual and socio-political survival of a people and the construction and re-construction of identities. This consequently demands new theological considerations and fresh educational tools

The continent of Africa, with its traumatic experience of the transatlantic slave trade as an unprecedented mode of forced exile, the apartheid history of Southern Africa, and the development of an accelerated intercontinental African migration in the context of globalisation in the second half of the 20th century, is a case in point. Africa has gone through numerous phases of internal and external migration which has also affected the arrival and settlement of larger or smaller African groups in Europe and America and, in fact, the presence of religious traditions quite alien to western established religion. Today, the western world is faced with the arrival of indigenous religions in cross-fertilisation with contextualised Christian interpretations on its own shores.

Moreover,¹ the historical circumstances surrounding colonialism, the partition of Africa, and present political and economic upheavals have generated intended and unintended consequences for Christian mission in contemporary Africa, in the diaspora, and within the spiritual maps of the globe. As Africa was divided not only into artificial boundaries to facilitate subjugation and exploitation, the partition transcended geographical, political and economic terrains to include religious divisions. African philosophies, cultures and indigenous religions were suppressed, ignored and often ridiculed. European missionaries became largely streamlined among new boundaries on the levels of nationality and denominational affiliation. In the transmission process, western denominationalism which marked European Christianity became one of the discreditable legacies of mission-oriented Christianity in Africa. Yet, the indigenous communities on the grassroots of diverse regions – caught up in the tension between imperial powers and the quest for freedom, socio-cultural control and resistance to domination, the colonial face of mission, and the tenacity of religion as understood by Africans – continued to shape people's identities, developments and expressions in the struggle for survival in human dignity. Their desire to "speak for themselves" and to reject being jeopardized by past western confessional disputes, grew proportionately to the struggle for social and political emancipation. Hence current manifestations are *not new* but have had precursors in a multi-faceted history, stretching from the 'Middle Passage' and religious responses to it in the 'new world' in the 18th and 19th centuries (widely overlooked in both historical and theological studies which would give credit to this unique experience), to the process of increased Africanization of Christian churches from the turn of the 19th to the 20th centuries, to modern developments. So the complexity of *contemporary* transmigratory processes from and to Africa, the Caribbean and America must be considered in the light of this history of western colonial expansion and the western missionary movement; and vice versa the turbulent history is also now discovered as facilitating a global transformation of modern Christianity not only in the South, but also beginning to affect the northern hemisphere. Cross-cultural

¹ Parts of the following two paragraphs are taken from the joint "Introduction" by Adogame, Gerloff & Hock, published by Continuum, 2008: 1-5, the outcome of the Third African Christian Diaspora Conference, Berlin-Hirschluch, 2003.

transplantation from either side, and the capability of Christianity to re-interpret faith in diverse contexts, have forged an understanding in which traditions and activities overlay one another, overlap, blend, create new forms on the margins and therefore challenge the validity of all boundaries, exclusivist doctrines and centres. Or with the late Ogbu Kalu, in the context of an assessment of the impact of Pentecostalism on Africa today:

It is the claim of Pentecostal faith and the warrant of Pentecostal ministry to insist that the Bible provides the materials out of which an alternately construed world can be properly imagined. Pentecostalism is, therefore, a child of the demise of modernism, a product of the great shift in interpretive practice which asserts that in the post-Cartesian situation, knowing consists not in settled certitudes but in the actual work of imagination. (Kalu 2000: 108)

Excuse

The concept 'African Diaspora' (see Gerloff 2006: 220-221) has become, at least for those once forcibly removed from their homelands, and their descendants, a viable instrument of *empowerment*, based on the biblical imagery of Exodus and Pentecost, and the history of endurance, survival and perseverance of human values. There are European scholars of religious studies who question the term 'diaspora' because of the historical difference between the past enforced exile and present voluntary migration from Africa; and because the concept can exegetically and linguistically provoke negative connotations of persecution in Jewish history. Yet, we give priority to the *self-expression* of blacks who, inspired by liberational biblical stories, for centuries identified with Israel seeking the 'Promised Land' and developed physical, cultural and spiritual means to resist bondage. For the slaves and ex-slaves, in particular with the development of strong *Ethiopian* ideas in the Caribbean and North America in the 18th and 19th centuries, and their transmission to West and South Africa by means of a "Black theology of missionary emigrationism and racial destiny", based on an "aggressive thrust of black folk-religion" (Wilmore 1998: 134), the concept *African Diaspora* confirmed *continuity in variations* (Aleyne 1988); granted Africans access to alternative interpretations of power and destiny; and can therefore be used as the description of past and present processes secular and religious processes. Among others Martin R. Delaney and Edward W. Blyden laid the ground-work for Pan-Africanists such as Garvey, Padmore and Sylvester-Williams and later for

the Rastafari movement. Significantly, African and Caribbean youths on both side of the Atlantic today are increasingly guided by similar concepts and values spelt out in Pan-Africanism and Africentricity.

Black Christianity in Europe

A telling illustration is Black (African and Caribbean) Christianity in Europe, its spread, shape, conflicts, influence and dilemmas. The following therefore is a *summary* on *Black Christianity in Europe*, to be published in the *Encyclopedia of Christian Civilization*. (Gerloff 2009).

South has come North. Mass immigration from the Caribbean to Britain began in 1952, followed by immigration from Africa in the 1960s. Ever since there has been a steadily growing influx also from sub-Saharan Africa to the European continent, swelled in the eighties and nineties by the flow of refugees and asylum-seekers from troubled countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Nigeria, Togo and Eritrea, into diverse European regions. In Britain, the Caribbean community originally consisted of ex-servicemen and labourers, and the African community of male students and seamen; but over five decades, as families arrived and children were born, there has been a major shift to long-term migrants or settlers. Societies and churches are faced with a "staying power" (Fryer 1984) of people who will, voluntarily and involuntarily, remain: the old, who more easily still relate back to their original cultural and spiritual traditions, and the young who search for a new 'Black European', 'Black British', 'Black German', 'Black French' or 'Black Dutch' identity without being yet fully accepted as co-citizens by the indigenous populations. Over years, the position of all these has become even more precarious under governments who have cut back aid, introduced restrictive regulations on immigration, employment and education, made the entry of refugees and asylum-seekers electoral issues, and have begun to query the very concept of 'multiculturalism'. Additional predicaments are economic imbalance, unemployment, new poverty, cultural exclusion, and endemic racism in Europe, political instability and deprivation in Africa, and an overall lack of preparation and recognition by European institutions (including the churches) that the historical relationship between the 'first' and the 'third' worlds has

changed profoundly. In the third Millennium, with the expansion of the European Union, the debate about the Reform Treaty, and disagreements about Europe's self-image as a Federation of nation states, a Super-state, or rather a union of most diverse cultural, linguistic and religious identities, the issues of human rights, religious freedom, racial equality, and social justice play a decisive role. However, it appears, this is even less than before recognized as such by populations and politicians alike: the most recent elections for the European Parliament [June 2009] confirm even stronger conservative and right-wing tendencies. In this, the position of the African Diaspora from both sides of the Atlantic, especially the legal status of youths, women, refugees and asylum seekers is crucial, as the relationship of 'whites' to people of colour, and the east/south connection are put to the test. And as religion "forms the foundation and the all-governing principles of life for Africans" (Abiola n.d.), the commitment of Christian churches, white and black, western and eastern, is highly significant for determining the relevance of Christianity in post-modern times. The black-majority churches in Britain, and African communities in Germany, Netherlands, Belgium, France, Switzerland, Scandinavia, Ireland and other regions, contribute greatly to the social life, cultural protection, religious revival, growth and consolidation of Christian congregations in the inner cities. Indeed, many have bought and refurbished redundant church buildings and re-dedicated them to their original purpose. In some places they begin, in number and enthusiasm, to outgrow the indigenous church-goers.

Next to the intentional expansion of religious movements by mission, peaceful or forced *migration* is one of the most significant factors bringing about religious dispersion. The intercontinental departure of black populations to other geo-cultural regions in the context of globalisation has effected, we said, the arrival and settlement of larger or smaller black migrant groups in Europe and the western world, and with it the presence of new religious traditions. Hence practitioners as well as scholars of religious, anthropological and theological studies are *compelled* to acknowledge these 'religions on the move' in their midst: In many parts of Europe, independent churches, the majority pentecostal/charismatic, grow in number and self-confidence, reflecting a worldwide

phenomena. They "do not take a backseat any more" (Gerloff 2000 276),² but gain steadily in assertiveness and evangelism in societies that lost faith in two world wars. Some attract white Christians who, in situations of crisis and exclusion, ask for prayer and healing rarely offered in historic churches.

At stake are two items, the inevitable process of adaptation and *contextualisation*, and the concept of *mission*, not managed (as in western Christianity) mainly by agencies and based on pre-fixed strategies, but - not separate from the political realities of xenophobia, racism, violence and issues concerning minorities! - open to challenge and change. As African missions do not distinguish between the spiritual and the material, they base, at least in the diaspora, evangelism on spiritual empowerment as well as on social care. They try to respond to human social and political circumstances in diverse, flexible and adaptive ways. Different from western-style linear structures, they travel along pre-existing social relations such as family, friendship, village or island community, trade and work comradeship. They rest on charismatic leadership, communicate in songs and signals, and understand the human person in his or her relationship to community. They rely on the Holy Spirit as the ordering principle of personal, communal and international life and strongly believe in the eschatological renewal of the earth. Thus faith becomes the light, reliable and comforting baggage in the process of migration. and extremity. It testifies to a God who wanders with people through the wilderness. It believes in mutual respect and sharing. It turns individual witnesses into vehicles for the proclamation of the Gospel. Yet, European institutions, including the churches, suffer from wide-spread ignorance, paternalistic attitudes and behaviour, exotic and derogatory images of Africa, and an overall lack of interest in a fair assessment of her historical and contemporary development. Hence the western indigenous populations remain largely unprepared and tend to interpret the new black presence as a cause for concern rather than as a social, cultural and religious enrichment.

A brief overview shows the following (cf. Gerloff 2000: 434-483; 2001:276-289):

² Pastor L. Bailey of the New Testament Church of God, Harehills, Leeds, UK.

Britain, with her colonial past in the aftermath of World War II, was first in mass migration to Europe. Most Caribbean immigrants to the U.K. after 1948, ironically, saw themselves as "children of the motherland": British citizens who had fought fascism in the army, were invited by London Transport, the Restaurants' Association and the National Health Service to help rebuild the national economy. This process, caused by unemployment and disasters in the Caribbean, became accelerated by legislation which effectively closed doors to North America. Comparable developments took place in migration from francophone Caribbean to France. Anywhere the new arrivals underwent a culture shock, facing racial discrimination in housing, labour, education and churches. Black Christian congregations responded to this experience of rejection by offering people a 'spiritual home', self-respect, life in 'holy' discipline, confidence, and overall protection. Sunday worship became the joyful party before the Lord - a celebration of blessings amidst the hardships during week. Some blacks in the established denominations joined independent groups or held dual membership. Essentially, they saw themselves as part of an *expanding movement*, kept alive by constant traffic across the Atlantic, and counter to English monoculturalism. They created a symbolic space in which the 'saints' could find an identity, different from "the one historically imposed by British society as not derived from particularity but a common humanity"(Chivallon 1997; cf. Chivallon 2000). So Black grassroots theology in Britain has never been simply an offshoot of American evangelicalism, but a genuine creation which had weathered the storms of time.

From 1952, we find twelve quite different traditions or theological families, turning the British Isles into a unique meeting place for contextual theologies, besides the influence by Garveyism, black liberation theologies, black power, and (later) the Nation of Islam: - AME and AMEZ churches, the oldest independent African churches in North America; - Revivalists and Spiritual Baptists from the Caribbean; - Sabbatarian movements (Seventh-day Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, Seventh-day Pentecostals); - Holiness congregations grounded in abolitionist theology; - three types of (classical) Pentecostalism: Trinitarian Pentecostals and the Church of God movement, Oneness (Apostolic) Pentecostals, and Charismatic Healing groups; - Anglo-Catholic traditions

mingled with pentecostal features; the Ethiopian Orthodox (Oriental) Church organised in England by Rastafari; the African Instituted churches (AICs) from Nigeria (e.g. Aladura, Cherubim & Seraphim), Ghana (e.g. Musama Disco Christo Church, prophetic churches); Asian independent Christian fellowships; - and, from 1990 in the context of globalization, the ever growing African Charismatic movement as part of the 'third wave' of global Pentecostalism with an emphasis on healing, success and deliverance (Gerloff 2003: 407-408).

Initially, movements were closely connected to their motherland, but soon the process of adaptation to new contexts set in, with congregations desiring autonomy and others separating on racial or gender grounds. Only those already fully indigenized 'at home' succeeded in consolidating work in Britain. Caribbean organizations began to contest the white supremacy of American headquarters in favour of true 'internationalization'. Following civil unrest in the inner cities, African and Caribbean Christians organized regional and national councils such as the Council of African and Allied Churches, or the African Caribbean Evangelical Alliance. They interact with local and national authorities, and, denominationally speaking, with Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists, and ecumenical bodies such as Churches Together in Britain and Ireland or the Evangelical Alliance, but do this by sustaining their particular cultural or theological traditions. Bridge-building between African and Caribbean Christians leaves much to be desired; as some Caribbean Evangelicals regard the AICs as too steeped in African traditional religion. Radical black scholars utilize the African heritage in Caribbean history and theology, but seem to avoid getting involved with contemporary Africans. Dialogue between the British churches and the African Diaspora, such as promoted by the Centre for Black and White Christian Partnership (CBWCP) from 1978, has not progressed as hoped, as culturally and theologically white churches have stayed within their domain, and black churches have begun to imitate western denominationalism. Different from the European continent, there is growing political involvement of black Christian leaders "who share a common vision for social significance and measurable transformation" of the U.K. society. A critical academic Black theology develops which draws its impetus from liberational theologies, but grounds itself firmly in the British context. It regards itself "as a radical

re-interpretation of the revelation of God in Christ, in light of the struggles and suffering of black existence ...a form of black theology in operation in Britain since the operation of slavery" (Jagessar & Reddie 2007:1).

On the *European continent*, from the 1980s, we find a growing number of both anglophone and francophone African churches, the majority of the African neo-pentecostal-charismatic type. The francophone African Diaspora in France, Belgium, Switzerland and parts of Germany hail mainly from the Congo (Baptists, Kimbanguists), Togo, Senegal, Madagascar, and the French Caribbean; the anglophone in the Netherlands, Scandinavia and Germany mainly from the Horn of Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Angola, Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Cameroon, Mozambique, Kenya, Liberia, and to a lesser degree from East Africa (Ugandans in Sweden), South Africa, and African America.

In *France* they have organized La Coordination des l'Eglises Africaines (Paris), in Belgium a Congolese Pastorate with participants from other EU countries (Brussels), and in Switzerland a Council of African churches (Geneva). These function as supportive structures in conflict situations, partners to European churches in solidarity with the continent of Africa, and instruments for developing a "professional code of ethics for God's servants", and for raising "collective awareness of the missionary role of the Christian diaspora in Europe" (Kabongo 2000: 457-458). Mark Spindler speaks of an "ecclesiogenesis" (Spindler 1998: 6, 9-11) or the creation of new churches of migrating communities which, whether active in "pastoral services" and intercultural ministries within Catholic or Protestant churches, or as free self-regulating groups, are not tied to traditional systems. However, there is also the risk of confusing the Gospel with culture, setting apart personal salvation from social justice, yielding to American entrepreneurship, or ignoring the history and values of the European environment. "Evangelism cannot – anywhere in the world - begin with a tabula rasa approach. If African missionaries make the same error in the west as western missionaries in Africa, they will deserve the same condemnation" (Spindler, quoted in: Gerloff 1999).

In *Germany* and the *Netherlands*, anglophone African congregations gather mainly in the large industrial conurbations, either renting or buying traditional church premises or

meeting in the 'underground' of inner cities. This points to a close interaction between religion, ethnicity and social politics. In the Netherlands, there are at least two inter-church networks, one being SKIN in which 54 Christian migrant groups work together, the other GATE ("Gift of Africa to Europe") active in the field of evang-elization (Hoekema 2008; cf. Ter Haar 1988). In Germany (see Gerloff 1998: 199-223), a number of regional councils have been formed, in the North (Hamburg), the West (Rhineland), the East (Berlin) and the South, in connection with the ecumenical bodies of the land. In Hamburg, the Ghanaian pentecostal-type groups prevail, one with British links, but there are also American links and the 'African Christian Church' sponsored by the German Protestant church. In the Rhineland, there are anglophone (Ghanaian and Nigerian) and francophone (Congolese) and some bi-multilingual congregations (besides Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox churches) mainly of the independent. non-denominational type (Währisch-Oblau 2000: 479-480). In the Rhine-Main area, we find besides the Coptic, Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox churches and, again, an African congregation sponsored by the Protestant church, genuinely independent groups such as the Church of the Lord (Aladura), Celestial Church of Christ, Church of God in Christ, and various refugee congregations from war-stricken nations. In Berlin, besides the oldest Oriental churches, there are Adventist, Pentecostal, Charismatic-Evangelical and 'ecumenical' congregations from fifty-three nations. Those which define themselves more or less interculturally, use besides the colonial languages the vernacular (Twi, Lingala, Amharic/Eritrean etc). We also observe in Berlin that there seems a split between the more ecumenical congregations, involved in social affairs, and the Pentecostals whose emphasis is on spirituality and independency and who nourish a deep-seated (partly justified) mistrust of established Christianity. By linking themselves with German Pentecostal associations, they appear to lack contact with worldwide Black Pentecostalism.

In *Scandinavia* (Sweden, Denmark, Finland) gatherings with Baptist, Pietist and pentecostal-style backgrounds develop in the larger cities. As the Lutheran state religion in Sweden is a rather cold affair for most Africans, and distances are far, there is a want of regular worship and a desire to invite international African evangelists.

Southern regions of Europe such as Italy, Spain and Austria are under-researched, as is the European East. Wide-spread xenophobia, especially in East Germany, may prevent

Africans from settling there. Generally speaking, missing altogether on the continent of Europe – in contrast to increased research undertaken in Britain and the Americas - is the scholarship and intellectual analysis from an *African perspective* of the black religious presence.³

The overall scene therefore demonstrates a reticulate (or net-) structure – the vast variety and pluriformity of Christian families including African traditional elements which overlap denominationally, culturally and linguistically. This phenomenon of increased superabundance of different activities and traditions, and 'overlays' of African with western concepts, has been described as a kind of Christianity that "was and is created and re-created at the margins, the boundary, the periphery; and so doing challenges the validity of all boundaries and peripheries" (Ward 1996: 2). They form the 'tip of an iceberg', or better, waves of a new 'post-denominational' understanding of religion and faith from other continents. Historic confessional structures and their past arguments give way to the presence of the Holy Spirit in every-day life and to self-expression. In this way, Christ's church in a particular cultural context meets the church in other cultures and socio-political milieus. On new shores people must relate to their own heritage as well as to the conditions and values of the new environment.

The Shaping of African Christianity

The relative success story of Christianity in Africa and African Christianity⁴ is not unconnected with its translatability and vernacularization, or what some African Christians describe as 'power-in-participation' in the Spirit. Especially, the language factor is central to the contextualization of Christianity in Africa. The place and role of indigenous agencies therefore become crucial in this respect. The emergence of African Instituted churches (AICs), the rise of Pentecostal and Charismatic movements, their encounter, and their interface with Islam and other religions, generates a level of action

³ There is, regrettably, an overall lack of funding for research from migrant churches' perspectives, in this case from the 'insider-position' of Africans and their social and theological analysis.

⁴ The following two paragraphs are again taken from the joint "Introduction" by Adogame, Gerloff & Hock 2008: 2-3.

reaction and tension. On the other hand, it produces a certain degree of mutual influence and accommodation, even respect and a degree of acceptance.

This is reflected in the global stature of contemporary African Christianity. It portrays how world Christianity must be realised in local contexts, as local contexts are now reckoned as the qualifier of world Christianity, both in Africa and in diasporic movements. While the significance of Africa as one of the new Christian centres of gravity cannot be underestimated, we should equally attend to the ways in which African Christianity has joined other religious traditions in the religious diversification of western societies. As an example, the claim of a 'reverse-mission' or the re-missionization of Christianity in the secularized west is fast becoming a major feature of their evangelistic strategies and mission agendas. With the conscious appropriation of new media technologies, participation in both theological and public discourses, the engagement in intra- and inter-religious links and networks, these varieties of African Christianity are systematically inserting themselves into global religious landscapes.

Notable also is the tendency of migrant communities, the longer they reside in a western society, to become more politicised and involved in social affairs. This is obvious in Britain where black churches of all traditions, especially black Pentecostals, engage themselves with the racial and social issues that inflict the country; and black leaders of various backgrounds meet with representatives of the government and local authorities. This is especially true for London and the West Midlands. This development, however, stands in contrast to the European continent, especially Germany, where many African charismatic congregations develop their spirituality without involvement in socio-political affairs and social analysis. This, of course, can be attributed to a number of factors, the overall powerlessness in a majority culture, the influence of a global charismatic theology that locates salvation in the spiritual belonging to an alternative community, and also to the disillusionment with the rather rigid German legal system which gives little recognition to other patterns of social formation. The Council of African Christians in Berlin-Brandenburg develops conscious plans to overcome these obstacles.

This paper has concentrated on the African diaspora in *Europe* after World War II in terms of sample illustrations from different European countries. This inevitably was done without a sufficient account of the *overall* history of slavery, the enforced exile, the partition of Africa, and the development of global African migration to other parts of the world, e.g. to North America (see Olupona & Gemignani 2007). Yet my frequent visits to Africa, especially South Africa, Ghana and (to a lesser degree) Kenya made me discover similar developments on the continent.⁵

With Tinyiko Maluleke of UNISA [with whom I discussed the development of African theologies and churches, and who insists that African Christianity is "not defined as mere translation, inculturation or even contextualization, but...touted as something new altogether – new in Christian tradition and new in African religion"] (Maluleke 2003: 293), we agreed that in view of the steadily growing charismatic movement on the African continent, we must more vigorously inquire in their significance and attraction for the generation of educated young Africans, especially in the context of battling with the spiritual, material and psychological violence Africans had to endure and the worsening economic tensions. As A.P. Nkwoka wrote with reference to Nigeria:

The Pentecostal theology as it concerns work ethics has made a significant social impact. The concept of work as God-given for which everyone is accountable not so much to the employer as to God poses a great challenge to the social norms of selfishness, corruption, laziness and eye service."⁶ (Nkwoka 2005: 173)

⁵ Visits to South Africa in 1997, 1998, 2000, 2005, 2008; to Kenya in 1995, and to Ghana in 2001.

⁶ .The author refers to M.A. Ojo (1996), pointing out to four distinctive approaches of charismatics to work: "First, they are prayerfully selective of the kind of work they do. They would rather remain jobless than accept an employment fraught with corruption...Second, secular employment must be done 'as unto the Lord' devoid of gratifications, kickbacks, partiality or pilfering stationary for personal use. Third, as a follow-up to avoidance of corrupt practices, 'the born-again' Christians are dutiful, conscientious and hardworking. One's seniors whether good or bad must be respected and prayed for. As one's promotion comes 'from the Lord', eye-services or lobbying for positions has no place in the working agenda. Finally, every believer must find something doing in the light of Paul's directive to the Thessalonians that anyone who would not work should not eat (2. Thess. 3:10). No one should be a parasite on his neighbours or other Christians." (ibid.)

To add some anecdotal observations in South Africa between 1997 and 2005, the foregoing clearly resonates with the lively conversations I had with my host in Centurion, Sibusiso Mazibuko (son of the late Bongani Mazibuko) who after many years of unemployment worked with a small black company, had joined a charismatic church, Bethesda Christian Centre, and received from this church a sense of belonging, moral support, confidence in life, and faith 'in the Lord'. In his company,⁷ I enjoyed the thousand young people gathered, their music and worship, and the practical, outspokenly economic, advice offered by the resident pastor. I equally became concerned about the white American preacher of the day, who, obviously only faintly acquainted with South African history and culture, branded "ancestor worship" and admonished the congregation "to forget about the past", in open contrast to the official governmental policy of remembrance. When hesitantly I mentioned my reservations, I found a critical mind and open ear and understood that he would not easily be taken in by what does not apply to his situation.

This tendency to chose what might be useful and reject what might be not,⁸ I made out also years ago in a weekly healing campaign in Venda when the presiding pastor not only attracted a large rural community, including whole families and children, but in a splendid bi-lingual performance together with a Venda speaking companion successfully addressed their social problems, economic damage, superstition and individual inertia of the listeners. Or similar in GaranKuwa near Pretoria where in an evangelistic campaign a hundred young people not only prayed hour-long for the social and health predicaments of their township, but also volunteered practically to help solve these problem. Mensah Otabil, the influential leader of the International Central Gospel Church in Accra, opts for equipping the congregation to share their wealth and material means with the poor of society and to adjust to changes in society. As he said in an interview: "Time and again

⁷ Bethesda Christian Centre, Centurion, Sunday morning service, June 2005.

⁸ Visits to Thohoyandou, Limpopo, and GaranKuwa, Pretoria, February 1997.

we have to *refocus* in view of new developments and crises!"⁹ With the analysis of Ezekiel M. K. Mathole, pastor of Grace Bible Church in Soweto:

Many of the Pentecostal-Charismatic Evangelicals have started to practice ministry in a manner that avoids polarity between faith and works, evangelism and social action, the eternal and the temporal, church and the world. They are beginning to balance the quest to save individual souls and the transformation society to be part of the holistic mission as a church...They have to continue to selfcritique and dialogue with other members of the universal Church and keep on renewing their witness.(Mathole 2008:75)

Young Africans today, in my experience, seek solutions for society's instability, cultural paradoxes, generational conflicts, unemployment, poverty, exclusion, environmental changes, rural-urban tensions, health hazards [including HIV/AIDS], violence and wars. Hence research in the role of African religion is needed on a large scale, not only in Christianity, but Islam and Traditional Religion. With regard to charismatic movements, two directions must be taken, to equip members of African congregations with critical theological and social tools, and at the same time counteract generalisations and prejudices fashionable among the older denominations and western mass media.

The Global Stature of African Christianity¹⁰

The growing influx of African charismatic Christianity both on the continent and in the diaspora, has on one hand globalized the movement in terms of putting it into a worldwide framework of commonly shared concepts and songs beyond boundaries. On the other hand it demonstrates that contextuality supersedes theological import, and new religious identities and landscapes are shaped afresh in response to local conflicts, power relations and shifting boundaries. Social and migratory patterns stimulate contextual enterprises and trans-national networks. In all this, the struggle for freedom and

⁹ Dr. Mensah Otabil, Pastor of the International Central Gospel Church, Accra, Ghana, in an interview with the author, April 2000.

¹⁰ Cf. "Introduction" by Adogame, Gerloff & Hock 2008:3.

emancipation creates a new role for church and religion in such a transformation process, and points to the global stature of African Christianity. It shows how especially Pentecostalism and the charismatic movements serve as catalysts for closer identification with the spiritual and physical needs of Africans. Hence the future criterion of interdisciplinary research is to engage in critical discourses, how movements respond (or fail to respond) to the need for consistent socio-political and economic analysis and action. Regarding theological/missiological and intercultural considerations, it means to deconstruct colonial mission in favour of a gospel transmitted by cultural means. Africa as the 'laboratory for the world' (Bediako 1995: 252) carries a potential for the renewal of contemporary Christianity, the 'rebirth' of African theology, and the lived-out diasporic conviction that our universal humanity counts more than any nation state.

Living in such a world of increased interdependence, not only demands *theological re-considerations*, but also *fresh educational tools* which equip congregations for local contexts, and at the same time for dialogue, exchange and collaboration with the wider world. Summing up, I quote here from some "urgent issues facing black churches in Britain to be tackled in future", which I left with friends when departing from England in 2007. They certainly are relevant also in our context:

- The unity of black theology and black empowerment (contextual, experiential and working for change).
- The development of an intercultural *theology of hope* across denominational, cultural and racial boundaries, healing the wounds inflicted by slavery, racism, injustice and ineptitude to dialogue.
- The rediscovery of the *emancipatory ideas* that marked Caribbean and African Christian history (hermeneutic of Scripture), and the revolutionary potential in early Pentecostalism which could help formulate an alternative theology.
- A redefinition of syncretism, or the *contextual approach* to theology (*all theologies!*), a process to be learned by all Christians including evangelical-pentecostal-charismatic groups, tied to fundamentalism..
- The claim by African and Caribbean Christians of a *reverse mission* to the West, expecting to be 'recognized as gifts of the Holy Spirit for today's society', and

- 'living communities which long for unity in mission and evangelism in today's political world';
- Fostering an *open-ended identity*, exploring the Christian faith as a vehicle for constructing and re-constructing identities in transitory and transcultural processes, especially among youths who have to live in a polytextual world (Gerloff 2007).

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