2 Spirit and empowerment

The African Initiated Church movement and development

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Introduction

This chapter explores the relationship between the African Independent/Instituted/Initiated Churches (AICs) and development. The Christian religious sphere labeled 'African initiated' has widened considerably since these movements came to attention in the early twentieth century. Christian independence of the pneumatic kind started in Africa with the Spiritual (Ghana), Aladura (Nigeria) or Zionist Churches (South Africa), but today they include various contemporary urban-centred independent Pentecostal and neo-prophetic movements that came into being at the end of the twentieth century. The new urban-centred and prosperity-preaching Pentecostals receive a disproportionately higher attention in this study because, although some of their activities have been inspired by North American televangelism and in spite of their transnational networks, they are also 'African' and 'independent' of the historic mission denominations. In order to bridge the historical and doctrinal divides among the various independent Christian movements, we will use the umbrella expression African Initiated Churches when referring to them as a collective entity with shared characteristics and call each of them by name when we need to highlight their distinct historical and religious identities.

I refer to 'Spirit' in the title because the movements we deal with here – whether they belong to the older Independent Church tradition or the more contemporary Pentecostal and neo-prophetic categories – all privilege the experiences of the Spirit in their activities (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005). It is as a result of the experience of the Holy Spirit as the defining factor in their theological self-definition that in referring to them, I sometimes use the expression 'pneumatic movements' in order to accommodate the different versions available. Indeed, in African countries like Ghana, the older Independent Churches would normally be called 'Spiritual Churches' as the experiences, power, and expressions of the Holy Spirit loomed very large in their worship, prayer, and activities (Baëta 1962, 1). The expression 'empowerment' is chosen as a category of development because ultimately, development has to do with the power to forge ahead in the desire for a better life. And, indeed, the older Spiritual Churches in Ghana have often advertised their services in terms of places where

people could go for *mpontu*, literally, development in all areas of their lives. This theology of *mpontu*, development, is what has been reinvented in contemporary Pentecostal prosperity discourses as ‘dominion’ and both expressions relate to the idea of human flourishing.

Religion and development

The original African Independent Churches developed rapidly from the early decades of the twentieth century, becoming the representative face of Christianity on the continent. This only changed from the 1970s with the rise of the contemporary urban-based prosperity-preaching Pentecostals or Charismatics. This chapter deals with the interface between religion and development generally but examines in particular the relevance of Africa’s independent Christian pneumatic movements to development on the continent. Development has to do with visible, enduring, and measurable qualitative upward mobility in human life and society. Its associated terms and expressions include expansion, growth, progress, success, and prosperity. Religion, on the other hand, is about the relationship between two realms of existence – the divine and the human – and all that goes into making life empowering, better, and worth living. When people and societies develop, the desire to live increases because life becomes meaningful. Religion and development is now an important area of academic study, especially within the social sciences (Haar, 2006, 351–367). In both the Old and New Testaments, human development seemed to be at the centre of religious life as it relates to God. Thus, following creation, God details Adam and Eve to take care of it and therefore make a living out of creation:

And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’ And God said, ‘Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food.’

(Genesis 1:28–9)

The very survival of the human species, according to this text, was going to depend on the extent of creation care. The continuous existence of creation including human flourishing was therefore going to depend on proper care of the resources made available through divine initiative. Thus, to exercise ‘dominion’ here meant to take responsibility so that humanity could work on creation for sustenance, survival, preservation, and well-being. In the New Testament, too, we find that several of the interventions that Jesus made in the lives of people was to ensure that they would be able to eke out a living without having to depend on others because of various disabilities. If we consider the woman with the 12-year-old haemorrhage, for example, we are told that she had spent

all her money on healthcare without results (Luke 8:43–8). This meant that her condition had affected her severely in economic terms, and, presumably, also her personal well-being. The fact that she suffered ritual marginalisation was dehumanising but Jesus worked towards the restoration of such persons to proper functioning order. The words of Jesus are that, as the Good Shepherd, he came, so that people ‘might have life and have it in its fullness’. In contrast, the devil comes to ‘steal, kill and destroy’ (John 10:10).

In the theological discourses of the African Initiated Churches we discuss here, the statement of Jesus could never have simply meant that believing in him had only eschatological implications to the exclusion of existential ones. In other words, the fullness of life that Jesus talks about is understood in the African Initiated Church movement to have existential relevance. Our faith, it is thought, must always have a developmental agenda at its core because God delights in human flourishing. How this developmental agenda is expressed in the lives and ministries of Africa’s Independent Indigenous and Pentecostal/Charismatic movements is what this chapter is about. Thus, whether we are talking about the prayer gardens and mountains of the older Independent Churches or the summits and conventions of the more contemporary ones, the fact that the forces of delay, oppression, stagnation, and negativity – in both their physical and spiritual manifestations – ought to be exterminated in the power of the Spirit features very strongly in the religious practices of the African Initiated Churches we discuss in this chapter.

The African Independent Church movement

We need to place the movements I have mentioned above in their proper historical context before we proceed. The African Initiated Church movement, we have noted, was from its beginnings in the early twentieth century associated with the work and experiences of the Holy Spirit. They were called ‘African’ because they were indigenous and the expression ‘independent’ referred basically to their relationship with western mission bodies and agencies. The emergence of the African Independent Churches was the result of disenchantment with what was considered the staid and cerebral forms of Christianity associated with the historic mission denominations with their weak sense of supernatural power, especially the interventionist nature of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. They were followed from the 1930s onwards by the classical Pentecostal denominations. A number of these like the Assemblies of God and various Apostolic denominations came from Europe and North America. However, several of them, such as Ghana’s Church of Pentecost, have also become very indigenous with time. Except for South Africa, because of its peculiar political heritage, the early-twentieth-century African Independent Churches are not doing too well in terms of survival and growth and the factors accounting for this trend are many. They include the incapacitation of the original founders due to ill health, old age, or both. Some of the original leaders have passed on and for movements built on the personal charisma and psychology of its leadership, the decline is

understandable as many did not train successors to take over from them. The propensity towards secession was also very high and this coupled with their failure to develop intergenerational ministries, lack of accountability, and the routinisation of charisma have all contributed to the decline of the African Independent Churches (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005).

In spite of their decline, to concentrate on that development would be deceptive because even if they perish, their contribution as trailblazers of pneumatic Christianity in Africa would continue to stand as testimony to their historical impact. In my book *African Charismatics*, I have discussed the contribution of the Independent Churches to Christianity in Africa under six main themes. These are: the integration of charismatic renewal into expressions of Christianity; a practical orientation towards salvation that created the theological space for rituals that accommodated real needs such as health, unemployment, marriage, and successes in business; a dynamic pneumatology in which the empowering presence of God was coveted not just for the manifestations of the gifts of the Spirit but also for various practical life concerns; the use of oral theology in liturgical expressions such as the use of locally composed choruses and the narrations of personal testimonies of salvation; and an innovative gender ideology in which space was created for women to exercise leadership based on their charismatic experiences rather than the stereotypes that excluded them from Christian leadership. We will not concern ourselves much with the classical Pentecostal traditions, as the interest of this chapter lies more with African Initiated Christianity, both the classical Independent Churches and the new prosperity-preaching Charismatic ministries, as they are popularly called in Ghana.

The study of Christian religious innovation in Africa must consider the fact that there is some measure of continuity between the early-twentieth-century African Independent Churches and the late-twentieth-century contemporary Pentecostal movement. For example, the early Independent Churches were associated with prophetic and healing ministries, but those phenomena have been reinvented within contemporary Pentecostal religious practices as well. On the matter of continuity, my favourite quote on it comes from the doyen of the academic study of Christianity in Africa, Andrew F. Walls:

Until recently these prophet-healing churches could be held the most significant and the fastest-growing sector of the indigenous churches. This is no longer so certain. Nigeria and Ghana, to name but two countries, are witnessing the rise of another type of independent church.... Like the prophet-healing churches, they proclaim the divine power of deliverance from disease and demonic affliction, but the style of proclamation is more like that of American Adventist and Pentecostal preaching.... Yet these radical charismatic movements are African in origin, in leadership, and in finance. They are highly entrepreneurial and are active in radio and television and cassette ministries as well as campaigns and conventions.... All these new movements share with the prophet-healing churches a quest for the

demonstrable presence of the Holy Spirit and a direct address to the problems and frustrations of modern urban life.

(Walls 1996, 92–93)

In West Africa the growing unpopularity of African Independent Churches led to a number of them shedding their traditional outlook and taking on some of the phenomenological characteristics of the contemporary Pentecostals. The characteristic features of the contemporary Pentecostals are fairly well known: they are led by very gifted and better-educated (as compared to prophets of the Independent Churches) charismatic leaders; they hold a great attraction for Africa's upwardly mobile youth and young professionals.

Contemporary Pentecostal and neo-prophetic movements boast of urban-based mega size congregations, a very international outlook and they belong to important transnational networks. They make extensive use of modern media technologies and foster in their members an entrepreneurial spirit through motivational messages of success, prosperity, positives, and possibilities. As Andrew Walls alludes to in the quotation above, they also seem to pursue an ardent quest for the demonstrable presence of the Holy Spirit to address the problems and frustrations of modern urban life in Africa. This is what prosperity preaching is about. Spiritual and physical empowerment for upward mobility lies at the heart of the discourses on prosperity. The contemporary Pentecostals, as independent churches, have shed some of the Old Testament and traditional religious features of the African Independents such as wearing white and red garments and worshipping bare-footed in imitation of the experience of Moses on Mount Sinai. They also do not subscribe to those Levitical codes that became an albatross around the necks of women in spite of what we have referred to as their innovative gender ideology.

History of religious innovation and development in Africa

Christianity has now developed as a non-western enterprise with Africa as one of its major heartlands. This is surely one perspective in which to appreciate the need to examine the relationship between faith and development from the perspectives of the movements that we are referring to collectively as African Initiated Churches. Besides the biblical mandate, this topic of the relationship between Christianity and development is also important for several other reasons. We examine this connection from the perspective of the African Initiated Church movement in Africa. Ultimately, religion, including those with strong eschatological orientations is generally expected to lead to some measure of development in human life and society. Religion that is socially retrogressive must be considered inimical to human progress and development. Considered from the viewpoint of the historic mission denominations, in particular, they have always maintained a strong relationship between Christianity and development in Africa. In an edited volume by Paul Gifford on Christianity and democratic governance in late-twentieth-century Africa, contributors lauded

the efforts of the historic mission denominations for their interventions in saving various countries from descending into sociopolitical anarchy at the hands of Africa's military dictators and civilian autocratic leaders (Gifford 1995). These traditional historic western mission denominations, for example, have always also been appreciated for their interest in the promotion of formal education, literacy work, and medical care. In the last couple of years some of these historic mission denominations in Africa have moved into higher education. There are now Methodist, Catholic, Presbyterian, Anglican, and Baptist Universities spread across various African countries including Ghana, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe.

During the second half of the twentieth century, this attention to socioeconomic and human development by the historic mission denominations led to popular accusations that the African Independents, and later the Pentecostals, had become too 'heavenly minded' to be of any 'earthly good'. And indeed, for most Pentecostals, there was much emphasis on the Second Coming of Christ leading to cautionary sermons on the pursuit of wealth and the acquisition of material things in this world. There are testimonies in Africa of people abandoning their university education to preach the gospel, because, for them, the Second Coming of Christ was imminent. Until the emergence of the prosperity gospel within contemporary Pentecostalism in Africa, for example, wealth had been generally demonised as constituting the greatest obstacle to spending eternity with God. The early African Independent Churches and the classical Pentecostal Churches that came after them stressed the eschatological importance of Christianity to the neglect of its existential relevance for the lives of people in this present existence.

The questions that were raised in relation to the earthly relevance of African religious movements were legitimate for two simple reasons: first, the African continent has for the longest time been associated with all that was wrong with human society – hunger, poverty, economic deprivation, and squalor – and it was to be expected that Christian movements would be at the forefront of the developmental agenda of the continent. Second, and related to the first reason, was that the African Independent Churches had attracted masses of people, and it was expected that since development was about human life and well-being, they were going to take advantage of their leverage in numbers to pursue a developmental agenda. In many cases, unfortunately, this did not happen, at least not to the extent to which society expected it to. The early Independent Church movement paid considerable attention to the personal development of their patrons, especially when it came to issues relating to marriage, employment, and ill health. Their relevance for the African context lay in the fact that these Independent Churches took African worldviews of spiritual causality seriously, and, as we argue here, sought the intervention of the Holy Spirit in dealing with those forces of retrogression in human life.

In 1979, one of the pioneering scholars in the study of new religious movements in Africa, Harold W. Turner, issued in one volume a number of his previously published essays under the title *Religious Innovation in Africa*. He is the one

who first used the expression 'prophet-healing churches' to describe the classical African Independent Churches (Turner 1979). The chapters were placed under such headings as 'methodological and bibliographical', 'historical', 'religious case studies', 'theological and liturgical', 'missiological', and, very instructively, 'socio-political'. That the first of three essays in the sociopolitical section was titled 'The Place of Independent Religious Movements in the Modernization of Africa', was itself very instructive. It brought to the fore the tensions that had emerged in popular discourses on the relevance of the churches initiated in Africa to the development of the nations in which they seemed to be thriving. In many countries, they had been castigated by officialdom and berated as a 'nuisance' because they 'polluted' the atmosphere with excessive noise, exploited vulnerable Africans, especially women, ran down the public-school classrooms in which a lot of them were meeting, and took people away from productive activities through endless prayer meetings and prolonged church services. Nevertheless, they had their admirers among the populace. There were many political and public office holders who patronised the prophetic and healing activities of the African Independent Churches for whatever spiritual benefits that inured to them from the charismatic figures who led these African religious movements.

At the overthrow of Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah in February 1966, for example, the Christian Council of Ghana, which is constituted by the historic mission denominations, felt scandalised by the fact that it was Apostle C. K. Wovenu of the Apostles Revelation Society who was invited to 'cleanse' the seat of government before the new military junta moved in. The historic mission denominations had from the beginning considered the African Independent Churches as constituting aberrations of Christianity. The therapeutic methods of the new movements were considered to be too close to traditional religious practices for comfort and the lack of theological education in their leaders served to cast doubt on the ability of these self-proclaimed prophets in providing quality and balanced pastoral care for the teeming following. The fact that most of the members of the Independent Churches came from the older denominations did not help matters and Apostle Wovenu himself was a former lay leader of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, a leading member of the Christian Council of Ghana. The worldview behind this invitation to cleanse the castle of evil influences was simple: whereas the average historic mission minister was considered theologically educated, the prophets of the African Independent Churches were considered the custodians of real charismatic power. What was needed at the time were not services of a pastor with the ability to read ceremonial prayers or collects, but one with the requisite anointing of God to deal with what vestiges of evil influence presumably lingered at the seat of government as left by President Nkrumah. The general belief was that behind the facade of his Catholic faith and political charisma, President Nkrumah also patronised the activities of various occult groups and traditional shrines for power to govern (Fernandez 1970).

The general impression at the time then was that the African Independents, led by their prophets, concentrated on dealing with the spiritual problems of

their clientele. People came looking for love potions, healing for chronic ailments, employment, good fortune, and other such needs that lay within the realms of the worldviews of mystical causality that still drives people to look for help from various religious functionaries. This is a matter that has been held against the independent church movement since their inception and it is a reservation that has followed the operations of certain contemporary Pentecostal prophets too. It is considered developmentally retrogressive for seemingly mundane problems in life to be so spiritualised that people refuse to take responsibility for their actions and inactions and rather explain their problems in terms of supernatural causes. This worldview of mystical causality extends into national life in many African countries. Corrupt governments have fallen on it to explain the hardships of their people and called for periods of national fasting and prayer for God to intervene when in fact the problems have been caused by the misappropriation of state resources and the abuse of political power. The political alienation and social anomie experienced by many ordinary Africans meant that the spiritualisation of national problems was perhaps the only way in which people could come to terms with the socioeconomic challenges.

I have already stated that the early African Independent Churches have made some positive contribution to the history and growth of Christianity in Africa. It has not all been doom and gloom for within the many African Independent Churches that have existed in Africa, there are a good number that have been led by credible prophetic figures whose contribution to Christianity and political life has not been in doubt. The point is that given this backdrop of the obsession with the so-called spiritual matters by the African Independent Churches in the minds of the general public, especially their critics, it was groundbreaking for Turner to have given some attention to 'the place of independent religious movements in the modernization of Africa'. The abstract to the essay which I reproduce below makes clear that Turner was in fact responding to the general opprobrium against the African Independent Churches for being developmentally retrogressive as compared to the more established historic Mission Churches:

This essay seeks to counter the image of these movements as ignorant and reactionary, compensating people for their miserable lot in life in a turbulent Africa, but diverting energies from national development and modernization. The deeper dimensions of the cultural changes necessary for such development are explored in relation to the new forms of life and the new world views offered by the new religious movements.

(Turner 1979, 297)

At the beginning of the essay, Turner alludes to the contribution of Christian missions and churches to the development of the new independent states of Africa through formal education and 'their association with Western culture and its political forms and ideas' that had been a major factor 'in the growth of

nationalist sentiment and the achievement of political independence' (Turner 1979, 298). Given that these earlier contributions were fairly well known, Turner turns his attention to 'an examination of the relation between the modern secular nation-states and other less-known religious groups' (Turner 1979, 298). These, as he notes, claimed a Christian orientation and had emerged from the older missions and churches in increasing numbers since the end of the nineteenth century (Turner 1979, 298). In this essay Turner refers to the contributions of various religious movements to the revolt against European political oppression from the nineteenth century and how in the early-twentieth century, independent Christian prophets like Simon Kimbangu of the Belgian Congo had led protests against these colonial hegemonic tendencies in governance. In other words, Turner was arguing that the emergence of nationalism in the immediate pre-independence period was not to be restricted to the more elite leadership of the historic Mission Churches. He goes on to make this telling observation based on the work of Prophet Simon Kimbangu:

The relation between the religious and political components in these independent movements varies from one to another and at different periods in the history of any one group, so that generalizations must be treated with the greatest care. Some movements have been primarily religious in their original concerns and activities but been forced into political action or revolt when colonial authorities have misinterpreted them as centers of subversion, insofar as any new independent African activity and organization was regarded as politically dangerous. This seems to have been the fate of the genuinely religious healing movement of Kimbangu, although no one can say that it would never have developed political concern if the Belgians had not greeted it with severe repression.

(Turner 1979, 299)

Based on the experiences of Simon Kimbangu and others including the work of the Liberian Prophet William Wadé Harries of West Africa, Turner concludes that 'a considerable number of independent religious movements in Africa [had] actively contributed to the development of political nationalism at some stage in their history' (Turner 1979, 299).

In relation to their contribution to the emergence of pro-political independence in Africa, Turner also cites the ability of many African Independent Churches to transcend 'the limitations of language, tribe, and region' to create a wider community of people. There were a number of Independent Churches, such as the Aladura movement of Nigeria that were very ethnically biased in terms of composition, nevertheless it could be said that especially in urban Africa these movements were able to establish communities of faith that dissolved tribal considerations and more importantly created space for the socially marginalised in their religious communities. The African Independent Churches also spread beyond national boundaries with churches from Ghana, Nigeria, and South Africa spreading into other countries and bringing together people who

were otherwise separated by socio-ethnic backgrounds. On the importance of this to the modernisation of Africa, Turner concludes:

Here we have the beginnings of a new sense of identity over against other races and their churches, often coupled with the vision of great African church that will command the respect of the whole world and make its own special contribution to the religions of [hu]mankind.... In spite of the fissiparous nature of these religious movements this sense of belonging to a great African spiritual and Christian community seems to be more conspicuous than notions of a single church for the nation.

(1979, 301)

There are other areas in which the African Independent Churches could be said to have contributed to the development of modern Africa. The historic mission denominations were elitist in many senses on account of the close relationship that they had created between Christianity and education on the one hand and public service on the other. A majority of African public servants were trained in mission schools and in urban Africa, many of the historic Mission Churches preferred to worship in foreign tongues through the use of western hymnody, homiletical exercises, and even church wear. In contrast, the classical African Independent Churches did well in forming churches that helped those down the social ladder to feel at home. Their modes of worship, liturgical practices, and physical structures were less sophisticated and so they helped to create space for those feeling the heat of the religious anomie in the older denominations. Beyond that the use of the vernacular in Christian worship helped to make practical the translations of the Bible in various vernaculars by the agents of Christian mission and give indigenous languages life beyond the classroom. Harold Turner is not the only scholar to pay attention to the relationship between the African Independent Churches and development. An edited collection, *Engaging Modernity: Methods and Cases for Studying Independent Churches in South Africa*, also gives considerable attention to this matter (Venter 2004). One of the essays here by Robert Garner studies the 'African Independent Churches and Economic Development' in a South African township, Edendale. In Zimbabwe, creation care, in terms of environmental preservation through best practices in reforestation, has been the primary preoccupation of the Independent Church movement for many years. Thus, as Harvey Cox notes in reference to the writings of Inus Daneel, the African Independent Churches in Zimbabwe were not only healers but also ecological preservationists. Any activities that lead to soil erosion, fouling the water supply, or chopping down trees without replacing them constitute ecological offences against the Earthkeeping Spirit (Cox 1995, 245).

There are a number of important conclusions that the essay arrives at, but perhaps the most important is the stress on personal transformation in these churches and its implications for ethics and morality on societal development. The legacy of the African Independent Churches includes the affirmation of

African identities and cultures through indigenous expressions of the faith evident in their therapeutic methods and the preaching of the gospel in familiar idioms. A few of them went on to invest in physical development such as schools and hospitals although on the whole this was not a major strength. Their fissiparous nature affected their economic muscle, and, so, in the end, many remained very small and virtually fizzled out when their founders either became invalid, lost their charisma, or passed on. On the whole it would be difficult to talk about Christianity as a non-western religion without reference to the theological innovation of the Independent Church movement that burgeoned across Africa from the last decade of the nineteenth century, becoming the representative face of the faith until the rise of modern Pentecostal movements from the middle of the twentieth century.

Paradigms of prosperity

Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori have referred to sections of the contemporary Pentecostal movements as Progressive Pentecostals (Miller and Yamamori 2007). The authors define Progressive Pentecostalism as '[Pentecostal] Christians who claim to be inspired by the Holy Spirit and the life of Jesus and seek holistically to address the spiritual, physical, and social needs of people in their community' (Miller and Yamamori 2007, 2). Progressive Pentecostalism thus stems from the clear attention that a number of them are now giving to social developmental issues. This places on the back burner the eschatological message relating to the Second Coming of Christ and the coming judgement that will result in some spending eternity in hellfire and others enjoying with God in heaven. These eschatological discourses do not feature much in contemporary Pentecostal sermons. This orientation towards social and human development is seen in the massive support that Ghanaian Charismatic Churches now give to charitable courses. Mensa Otabil's International Central Gospel Church (ICGC) has built a new information technology centre for Ghana's biggest orphanage, the Osu Children's home. ICGC is also the single highest donor to the cardiothoracic centre at Ghana's main teaching hospital. It has established a private university – the first Pentecostal university to be chartered by government – and its focus is to develop capacity in the areas of business management, entrepreneurial studies, and medical professions such as nursing. This story of ICGC is equally true of David Oyedepo's Living Faith Church Worldwide, also known as Winners' Chapel, and Enoch Adeboye's Redeemed Christian Church of God both based in Nigeria. What this means is that contemporary Pentecostals, which in the past propounded a simplistic gospel of prosperity now combine that with significant emphasis on social and economic development.

The emphasis now remains on prosperity as the divine right of every believer, but, as we shall note below, the message is now a bit more nuanced than when these churches started preaching in the late 1970s. When prosperity preaching which has its source in North American televangelism started, there was much

emphasis on the name-it-and-claim-it approach. In what Nimi Wariboko refers to as the 'covenant paradigm' in prosperity thinking, the metaphor used is the agricultural one of sowing and reaping:

[Sow] tithes and offerings, among other elements of a self-sacrificial way of life, into the church and reap bumper harvests of wealth. Lives flourish when these gifts are blessed by or joined with quasi-magical gifts of certain pastors (the fertile soil). The covenant paradigm emphasizes the status quo or ignores it; it is not oriented social change.

(2014, 234)

In this sowing-and-reaping approach to prosperity, as Wariboko has articulated here, Christians are encouraged to be positive in their verbal declarations, fulfil their tithing obligations and sow seeds of money and other gifts in the life and ministry of their anointed charismatic leaders, and simply reap the results in material blessings.

To a large extent, this approach continues unabated, especially among a new crop of prophetic figures who through increased sophistication in terms of how they operate have followed the same approach as was found in the *modus operandi* of the old prophets of the African Independents. Andrew Walls gives us a clue why this is so:

Christianity has thus necessarily inherited all the old goals of religion; in particular, the association with protection and with power is undiminished.... The effectiveness of the Christian faith, or any particular manifestation of it, is accordingly open to the test of whether it gives access to power and prosperity to protection against natural or spiritual enemies (purposes to which much traditional practice was directed) and satisfactorily enforces familial and social duty.

(2002, 122)

The new prophets operate through Independent Churches either as founders and pastors or simply as itinerant guest functionaries at revival meetings; they are present on television, radio, and even internet websites. These prophetic figures have many followers. Given the added fact that the worldview of mystical causality is still very much present in African ways of interpreting the world, the prophets rely on that and in some ways this leads to the exploitation of the fears and insecurities of their patrons to accumulate personal wealth. In this vein Paul Gifford who has explored the relationship between Christianity and development in Africa against the backdrop of the strong belief in mystical causality has noted that the enchanted religious imagination, as he calls it, has not died out on the continent (2015, 14). The prosperity preachers in this covenant paradigm, Wariboko notes, do not merely address poverty and fuel greed. They produce desires and dreams and connect them to the transcendental God. There is some positive element here in that the preachers 'motivate believers to become

agents of their own personal economic improvement' but the downside of it is that it takes a simplistic approach to development and leaves those who fulfil their covenant obligations and yet continue in poverty and suffering without adequate answers to the quagmires of life (Wariboko 2014, 236).

Hermeneutics of black empowerment and development

There is a second model of prosperity that Wariboko terms the 'excellence model'. This model, according to Wariboko, dwells on human capability development and Afrocentric sentiments. He explains how this model works in prosperity gospel hermeneutics within the context of contemporary Pentecostalism or Charismatic Christianity in Nigeria:

If Nigerians are sowing and reaping material blessings, they must do so, according to the proponents of this model, with the best machinery and organization. The operation of these technologies must be sustained and advanced by the ethos of professional excellence. This model says that Nigeria has failed in economic development because there are too few sane, resourceful, and patriotic managers who can bring together and develop the right talents to orchestrate development in the various spheres of the economy. The excellence model is a triangle of nationalism (Afrocentric view), professionalism (human capacity building), and the prosperity gospel orientation to development.

(Wariboko 2014, 238)

What this means however is that in recent decades, the simplistic positive confession and sowing-and-reaping forms of prosperity, have been balanced by other charismatic pastors with a more pragmatic approach in which the stress is on hard work, the constructive and wise use of gifts and talents, and the pursuit of relevant educational programmes. One of these new motivational speakers is Mensa Otabil of Ghana and his approach to prosperity has been very well analysed by Paul Gifford (2004) in his book *Ghana's New Christianity*. This chapter is written under the broad title of spirit and empowerment for the reason that spiritual and human development lies at the heart of the new hermeneutics we come across in contemporary Pentecostalism in particular. A representative list of the preachers of this new hermeneutic of black empowerment would include Bishop T. D. Jakes of the Potter's House Church in Texas, USA, Matthew Ashimolowo of the Kingsway International Christian Center in London, and Mensa Otabil of Ghana. In *Nigerian Pentecostalism* Nimi Wariboko gives the following succinct summary of the sort of hermeneutics of development or empowerment that I speak of here:

It is the belief in the power of Pentecostalism – the movement of the Holy Spirit and the power to initiate something new – to transform and elevate African society and the dignity of the black race. Within a certain segment

of Nigerian Pentecostalism the only way of living acceptably to God was life not merely of holiness and personal salvation and wealth but by the fulfilment of an obligation to be God's battle-ax to uproot and destroy economic backwardness and the black race's indignity. This was their calling. They saw themselves as an instrument of the divine in the history of Africa.

(2014, 230)

Wariboko then discusses how Pentecostals are 'bearing the weight of blackness' by articulating ideas of Christian citizenship and the desire for the 'greatness of the black race' (2014, 232). One of the books written by Mensa Otabil (1992), *Beyond the Rivers of Ethiopia* deals precisely with this sort of hermeneutics of empowerment. In this book Otabil writes that the average black person had to contend with western values and would be shaped by them. The end of our society having been suffused with western things is that blacks end up feeling inferior to the white race. Even Christian missionaries, he writes, assumed that everything African was evil and our indigenous names were demonised as satanic (Otabil 1992, 15). He then gives Africans the following charge in relation to our Christianity:

I do not believe the church in Africa should be ruled from anywhere but Africa! Our leaders must be *home brewed*. Our finances must be generated from the productive work of our own resources. Our headquarters must be in Africa! When it becomes necessary to co-operate with other churches and ministries beyond our continent, it must be based on mutual respect and love. We were not made in God's image to receive mercy drops! The times have changed, and God is calling on us to change our attitudes and expectations.

(Otabil 1992, 68)

The reference to Ethiopia in the narrative is very instructive. The country became the symbol of black emancipation as it was the only African country that resisted colonial rule and domination. Besides Ethiopia appears in the biblical narrative as quickly stretching out her hands to God (Psalm 68:31) and bringing God an offering (Zephaniah 3:10). These texts including the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch by Philip in the Acts of the Apostles have inspired the thinking that Africa looms large in God's imagination and westerners must not be allowed to hold him in their custody. These thoughts are also present in the writings of Matthew Ashimolowo of the Kingsway International Christian Centre. In his book *What Is Wrong with Being Black?* he writes as follows:

It is my opinion that there is no culture that transcends any other culture, or stands superior to other cultures. The Bible is raised as the standard here because it is in it that we find what I consider the key root to Black

pathologies and the final solution that will cause Blacks to come into the fullness of who they will be. It is the Bible that will cause them to come to a place of the true identification of their gift in God, transformation and a manifestation of the gifts and abilities that have been deposited in them from time immemorial.

(2007, 12)

The subtitle of Ashimolowo's book – *Celebrating our Heritage [and] Confronting our Challenges* – is very instructive regarding the sort of black empowerment hermeneutics that the new crop of motivational speakers are developing in Africa within the context of independent Pentecostalism.

Pentecostal citizenship and social engagement

The sort of contemporary Pentecostal social engagement that motivational pastors like Mensa Otabil and Matthew Ashimolowo represent begins with responsible citizenship. Miller and Yamamori summarise this orientation to civic responsibility as follows:

Progressive Pentecostals in most cases actually embrace capitalism and attempt to work within the system. In our opinion, however, Pentecostals are actually doing something fairly subversive. They are teaching their members that they are made in the image of God; that all people have dignity and are equal in God's sight; and that therefore they have rights – whether they are poor, women, or children. These values are fundamental to the creation of a democratic government, and therefore, at the very least Pentecostalism is preparing good citizens who may exercise their vote in ways that affect egalitarian values.

(2007, 4–5)

The reference to 'preparing good citizens who may exercise their vote' brings to mind a sermon that Pastor Mensa Otabil preached in his church titled 'Your Vote'. The message was first preached in the run-up to Ghana's presidential and parliamentary elections in 2012 and rebroadcast on various networks through his *Living Word* television, radio, internet stations, and websites prior to the 2016 elections. 'A vote is like an offering', Pastor Otabil continued and 'when we give to God, he gives it back to us in blessings'. In the same way, when we give politicians our vote, we must expect them to deliver on their promises. 'A vote is sacred', he explained, and therefore it is a way of entering into a covenant with the one for whom one votes. In a modern democracy, Pastor Otabil preached, citizens possess the right to vote and voting connotes endorsing an idea or system of governance. This was done in expectation that those we vote for would serve our interests: 'voting means giving support to an idea in expectation that the idea will benefit you; something beneficial must come out of one's vote' he explained.

Pastor Mensa Otabil gave three main reasons for voting. First, 'your vote' is your sovereign will and when one votes he or she cedes that sovereignty to those in government. 'Your vote is about surrendering your sovereignty to the President and it is a very serious action because no citizen can govern legitimately without the collective votes of those who go to the polls' he noted. In voting, therefore 'each citizen must ask himself or herself: "does the person I am voting for deserve my sovereignty?"' Second, according to Pastor Otabil, we vote as a 'sacred responsibility of citizenship'. He explained how we must go beyond advertisements to scrutinise political party proposals to ensure that they serve the best interest of the nation. He cautioned that it was irresponsible to put one's vote on 'autopilot', meaning, citizens must never vote simply because they were affiliates of a particular political party or are related to someone seeking election into parliament: 'Be free to change your mind if those you have voted for in the past have not delivered on their proposals' he advised. Third, Pastor Otabil noted that 'our quality of life is determined by the results of our votes and therefore we should never allow any politician to take our votes for granted'. 'Vote for your beliefs and values', he advised and as a Christian your values must consist of truth, honesty, and integrity. 'Do not vote with selfish interests in mind', rather, he noted, 'vote for the best interest of the country'.

Pastor Otabil's sermon was relevant for citizenship and social engagement, because, in many African countries the loss of elections had not been taken lightly. Incumbent governments have sought to manipulate the systems of governance in order to perpetuate their regime leading to some of the bitterest conflicts that have occurred in countries like Ivory Coast, Liberia, and more recently the Gambia, all in West Africa (Gifford 1979). The connection Pastor Otabil makes between voting and a person's quality of life is also instructive. In African politics it is common practice for politicians to dole out little monies and gifts to especially poverty-stricken communities in subtle and blatant attempts to 'buy' their votes. Such people and communities are then neglected once the political office has been secured (Ranger 2008). What this sermon 'Your Vote' tells us is that certain categories of Pentecostals are taking public life and social engagement very seriously indeed. It further demonstrates that given their endurance and increasing influence, religious institutions like the Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches that are now dominating African religious life represent an important source of hope in times of social and political uncertainties. Certainly, the new charismatic motivational speakers fulfil such a role. Pastor Otabil cautions here about citizens not falling for vote-buying deceptions in Africa because, as he notes, those temporal gifts do not determine what quality of life one would have in future. 'It is your vote that counts!' He concluded.

Conclusion

The history of Christianity in Africa cannot be told without the influence and impact of the Independent Church movement. Although originally the

expression African Independent Churches was used to describe the older forms of Christian religious innovation, it is becoming redundant for two reasons: first, although the classical African Independent Churches did not specifically refer to their movement as 'Pentecostal', phenomenologically, they were the first to exhibit a strong pneumatological religious culture in African Christianity. Second, although the contemporary Pentecostals may appear like North American versions of the same phenomenon, they are indigenous both in leadership and resource mobilisation. In both movements, the belief in mystical causality has been sustained. It is part of what makes the African. However, the initial concern with eschatological matters, especially in the contemporary Pentecostal movement, seems to have given way to more pragmatic matters as attention is now paid to social developmental issues. In that sense, in spite of whatever reservations one may have concerning the obsession with evil and rituals of exorcising it, African Initiated Christianity in both its classical and contemporary forms can to some reasonable extent be considered as constituting vehicles of modernity and development. What the examples in this chapter tell us is that the other-worldly characteristic initially associated with Pentecostalism is changing. An emergent group of Pentecostals, Miller and Yamamori observe, 'is pursuing the integral, or holistic, gospel in response to what it sees as the example of Jesus, who both ministered to people's physical needs and preached about the coming kingdom of God' (2007, 21–22).

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