

## RELIGION CROSSING THE FRONTIERS: NIGERIAN PENTECOSTAL DYNAMICS IN THE WESTERN WORLD

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### *Abstract*

This article examines how the Pentecostal movements in Africa and most especially in Nigeria are experiencing fast growth and how African Pentecostals are speaking on the global scene, especially in Europe and America in the twenty-first century. This kind of Pentecostal reverse mission from Africa to the Western countries that brought Christianity to Africa in the eighteenth century is not without strengths and weaknesses. This article unveils the nature of the Nigerian Pentecostal movements in the diaspora and how much impact the movements are making in the Western cultures of Europe and America. The passion of the African immigrants' churches in the West is a clarion call to the indigenous churches of the Western countries that there is a need to work together with Africans in fulfilling the Great Commission. Indigenous churches in the West must recognize those Global South churches that hold sound biblical positions to advance the kingdom of God in the world and especially in cultures that seem more antagonistic to God's truth in the twenty-first century.

## INTRODUCTION

In Africa, a significant sociocultural and religious transformation is currently taking place. Nigeria, which many people describe as the giant of Africa with more than 170 million inhabitants, is one of the vanguards of this transformation in Africa. Pentecostal Christianity with its upsurge through exploration of media and its emphasis on the strong connection between the spiritual realm and the material world, which leads to the practice of physical displays of spiritual power, is one of the major signs of this transformation. Ezekiel Oladapo Ajani has alluded to the fact that the Nigerian Pentecostal upsurge has expanded beyond the African continent “to Europe” and “parts of the Middles [*sic*] East.”<sup>1</sup> The enthusiastic interest of Nigerian Pentecostal leaders to take part in world evangelization and global revival has propelled several of them to seek for the empowerment of the Holy Spirit that will enable them to take the gospel beyond Africa to the other continents of the world. Philip Jenkins has explained that African churches, particularly the Nigerian Pentecostals, have targeted the United States and have been multiplying their congregational setups:

Particularly active have been Nigerian churches such as the Deeper Life Bible Fellowship, and with its eighty thousand Nigerian residents, the city of Houston plays a pivotal role in these schemes. The RCCG [Redeemed Christian Church of God] now has two hundred parishes in the United States including operations in “Dallas, Tallahassee, Houston, New York, Washington, and Chicago, Atlanta, Detroit, Maryland, etc.”<sup>2</sup>

Nigerian Pentecostal leaders, searching for spiritual power for their obedience and fulfillment of the Great Commission, have been the reason behind the great crossing of frontiers from Africa to the Western world with African Pentecostal gospel proclamation. Gary McGee affirms that Pentecostals believe that “the only successful course lay in a return to

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1 Ezekiel Oladapo Ajani, “Leadership Dynamics and the Trans-Nationalism of Nigeria Pentecostal Missions,” *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology* 13, no.1 (2008): 154.

2 Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 263.

the dynamic work of the Holy Spirit which accompanied the ministry of disciples in the book of Acts.”<sup>3</sup> Babatunde Adedibu argued that “the African Pentecostal churches’ proliferation is one direct gain of migration to Britain as the churches welcome their kith and kin from Africa and Africans that travel through North Africa to Europe.”<sup>4</sup> Africans, especially Nigerians, are migrating from Africa to Western countries for economic, religious, and academic reasons.

The majority of Nigerian immigrants in Western countries are unwilling to return to their country of origin. No matter the reason for migration, religion plays a significant role in the lives of Nigerians who have migrated. Bolaji Bateye, concerning Africans’ migration to Europe and America with their Pentecostal ideas, noted that whenever people go, they do not only go with their philosophical ideas but also travel with their religious beliefs and practices.<sup>5</sup> Bateye’s observations concerning the religiosity of Nigerians in the diaspora buttress the suggestion of Jehu Hanciles, who asserts, “Immigrants travel with their religion. It is central to their way of life and a crucial means of preserving identity as well as homeland connections. Even the less religious among immigrants often renew or revive their religious commitment as a vital part of dealing with uprootedness and alienation.”<sup>6</sup> Such immigration with one’s religion has brought transformation and influence to the religious landscape of other countries where immigrants travel. Afe Adogame says, “The African diaspora influences culture in Brazil, Cuba and Haiti, partly leading to the development of African-derived religions such as Santeria, Candomblé, Vodun and Yoruba-orisa traditions across the Americas.”<sup>7</sup> In addition, Adogame asserts:

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3 Gary McGee, “Pentecostal Strategies for Global Mission: A Historical Assessment,” in *Called and Empowered: Global Mission in Pentecostal Perspective*, ed. Murray Dempster, Byron Klaus, and Douglas Petersen (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 201.

4 Babatunde Adedibu, “Welcoming Strangers! The Responses of African Pentecostal Churches in London to Europe’s Migration and Refugee Crisis,” *Missionalia* 44, no. 3 (2016), 263.

5 Bolaji Bateye, “Local Relevance and Global Appeal: Nigerian Female Religious Leaders in London: A Case Study of Lady Evangelist/Prophetess Lizzy Ademola a.k.a. Alhaja Jesu, Founder of Gospel Light Evangelical Ministry,” in *Religion on the Move!: New Dynamics of Religious Expansion in a Globalizing World*, eds. Afe Adogame and Shobana Shankar (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2012), 445.

6 Jehu Hanciles, “Mission, and Migration: Some Implications for the Twenty-First-Century Church,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 27, no. 4 (October 2003), 146.

7 Afe Adogame, *The Public Face of African New Religious Movements: Imagining the Religious ‘Other’*

In 1981, an Act of Parliament in Trinidad and Tobago raised the Yoruba religion (traditional religion of western Nigeria) to the status of official religion. In contemporary Cuba, orisa veneration exists as part of a larger continuum of religious change in the Americas in which religious practices, not known as Santeria but also referred to as Lukumi and *regla de ocha*, have transformed the shape of orisa veneration outside of West Africa.<sup>8</sup>

In another work, Adogame notes that there are two types of African Christianity that have flooded the USA and Europe:

The most visible variety within the contemporary geo-religious landscape is the African-led Charismatic/Pentecostal churches, whose histories of emergence can be located at two levels. The first represent [*sic*] churches, which exist in the Diaspora as branches/parishes of mother churches with headquarters in Africa. The other level refers to churches founded by new African immigrants in the USA and Europe. Churches that fall under this second category have their headquarters in the Diaspora from where they are expanding to Africa and other parts of the world. The first two examples above, EBKGC and KICC, fall under the latter rubric while the RCCG typifies the first kind. The EBKGC (formerly known as the Word of Faith Bible Church) founded by the Nigerian-born Sunday Adelaja in Kyiv, Ukraine, is one of the exceptional African churches in Europe as it has a majority non-African membership.<sup>9</sup>

Adogame indicates that Sunday Adelaja's ministry in the Ukraine is exceptional among all African immigrant, Pentecostal denominations because more than half of his congregation is comprised of Ukrainians or Russians.<sup>10</sup> Taking the gospel back to America and Europe by the African

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(New York, Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 17.

8 Ibid.

9 Afe Adogame, "Transnational Migration and Pentecostalism in Europe," *PentecoStudies* 9, no.1 (2010), 59-60.

10 Afe Adogame, "Contesting the Ambivalences of Modernity in a Global Context: The Redeemed

Pentecostals is a new discourse and phenomenon (i.e., reverse mission) that needs serious examination. This article investigates the Nigerian Pentecostal movement's transnational ministry in Europe and the United States with the specific focus on those churches that have headquarters and founders in Nigeria. As a way to support the argument of this work on the transnationalization of the movements, this research will explore the nature of Nigerian Pentecostalism in the diaspora, challenges to the movements in the diaspora, and the effects of the ministry in the diaspora.

## THE NATURE OF NIGERIAN PENTECOSTAL MOVEMENTS IN THE DIASPORA

With the rise and growth of Pentecostalism in Nigeria in the twenty-first century, Christianity grew and leaped into Western countries from Nigeria. Pentecostalism not only aided the rapid expansion of Christianity in Nigeria but also changed the Christian landscape that was introduced by the mainline churches to the country in the 1840s. Passion for world evangelization, appropriation of media, hunger for popularity, recognition of the Pentecostal leaders in Nigeria, migration, and globalization are some of the factors that caused the Pentecostal groups in Nigeria to go international. For instance, Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu notes:

Today, some of the largest congregations in Europe—Western and Eastern—are either founded by Africans or are led by people of African descent. Discussions on African immigrant Christianity usually focus on churches whose memberships tend to be constituted by Africans or people of that descent. A good example is the Kingsway International Christian Center (KICC) in London, led by the charismatic Nigerian pastor, Matthew Ashimolowo.<sup>11</sup>

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Christian Church of God, North America," *Studies in World Christianity* 10, no. 1 (2004), 28.

11 Gyadu Kwabena Asamoah, "African-led Christianity in Europe: Migration and Diaspora Evangelism," *Lausanne World Pulse* (July 2008): 9, <http://www.lausanneworldpulse.com/themedarticles-php/973/07-2008>.

Illustrating the lifestyle of people who must sing the Lord's song in a foreign land (Psalm 137:4), Nigerian people, especially among the Yoruba tribe where KICC's Ashimolowo has roots, are singing the Lord's songs in foreign lands by founding Pentecostal churches that are vibrant and lively in the Western world, especially in Europe and America. Roswith Gerloff affirms the reason why Pentecostal movements thrive:

My thesis is that Pentecostalism had such a global impact, because:  
- It grew from the black scene and the recovery of African elements in the midst of white America, in a specific religious and socio-economic setting of that time. It responded to the quest for a new spirituality by 'marrying' these two cultural traditions, one African (modified and refined under slavery), the other Euro-American; one oral and multifaceted, the other literary and largely one-dimensional.<sup>12</sup>

One of the natures of the transnationalization of Pentecostal movements from Nigeria is their connection to the ministry headquarters in their home country while flourishing in America and Europe as satellite churches. Their connection makes them rooted in their homeland but also connected to Western nations. These ministries succeed and gain strength through the use of media technology and the Internet. Ogbu Kalu, who was born in Nigeria, in his discussion of the role of media in making Pentecostal movements in Africa a transnational religion, notes, "It should be realized that electronic media technology became available to both the American Pentecostals and their African networks around the same time and elicited much enthusiasm as a new instrument for forging transnational relationships, greater mass reach, direct encounter, potential promotional attraction, and world evangelism."<sup>13</sup> The transnationalization which is taking place on account of the Pentecostal upsurge in Nigeria is not only bringing transformation to the society but taking root in other parts of the

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12 Roswith Gerloff, "The African Christian Diaspora in Europe: Religious and Cultural Aspects" (paper presented at the IAMS Conference in Malaysia, July 31-August 7, 2004), 12-13.

13 Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 105.

world to change the face of Christianity, especially in Europe and America, because of the migration of Nigerians to the Western world.

In his discussion of African Pentecostalism, Boadu Ebenezer Adu states, “It is noted that Pentecostalism is seen as basically an ‘ends of the earth, missionary, polycentric transnational religion.’”<sup>14</sup> Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu affirms the dominance of African immigrants in Nigerian-founded Pentecostal churches in Europe and America as he notes that “African churches in Western Europe do not attract many Europeans.” Nevertheless, he has pointed out the significance of their Christian commitment in Western countries as a demonstration and an evidence of their evangelical fervor.<sup>15</sup>

This state of Christianity in Nigeria is noteworthy because the country has been despised, colonized, deprived, and trampled; yet Christianity there has become a beacon of light that will take the gospel to Western nations, constituting reverse Christian mission in the age of postmodernity and the post-Christian era of relativism. Such a time as this in Western countries does not mean that Christianity in those countries is immaterial or extraneous; however, this situation draws attention to the faithfulness of God to his word that says God has chosen the foolish things of this world to confound the wise. Asamoah-Gyadu confirms this as he describes what God has done in Africa: “This does not render European Christianity irrelevant; rather, it shows that at a time when the faith is under siege in its former heartlands, God has placed its destiny in the hands of the people of the South.”<sup>16</sup>

The stagnation and decline of Christianity in Western countries that had been at the forefront of sending missionaries to every nation of the world in the past are invitations by God to Nigerians and challenges to African Christians at large to take the gospel back to the West and re-establish the kingdom of God. In his discussion about the state of Christianity and

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14 Boadu Ebenezer Adu, “Pastoral Leadership among African-Led Pentecostal Churches in the Context of British Society” (Ph.D. diss., North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa, 2015), 1.

15 Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, “African-Led Christianity in Europe: Migration and Diaspora Evangelism,” *Lausanne World Pulse Archives*, accessed July 20, 2018, <http://www.lausanneworldpulse.com/themedarticles-php/973/07-2008>.

16 Ibid.

the church in Africa, Asamoah-Gyadu added, “In African hands, mission and evangelization have truly gone international and African diaspora Christianity is at the forefront of the new initiatives.”<sup>17</sup> Timothy C. Tennent affirms the thought of Asamoah-Gyadu in his work as he declares:

It is thrilling to see those who once were the object of our missionary endeavors now bringing the Gospel back to us and reminding us of that which we have largely forgotten. There is an African proverb that comes from the Akan in southern Ghana: “The mother feeds the baby daughter before she has teeth, so that the daughter will feed the mother when she loses her teeth.” Perhaps there is a lesson here for us. The growing and developing church in the Majority World is producing a number of important theological insights that, if heeded, could help stimulate Christian renewal in the West.<sup>18</sup>

The mission is in reverse, indeed, and Africa is playing a critical role in what God is doing. Nigerian Pentecostal churches in America and Europe have been challenging the culture of relativism in the Western world. Pentecostals achieve this by influencing people to believe in Scripture as the word of God and convincing them that the miracles, signs, and wonders of the apostolic age are still in effect today. Asamoah-Gyadu argued, “Through these churches, the Bible has returned to the life of the Church as the authoritative Word of God. It is the main book from which preaching is done and is considered sufficient for teaching, rebuke, and training in righteousness.”<sup>19</sup>

Nigerian Pentecostal leaders in America and Britain oversee considerable numbers of migrants, and they are aware of the challenges that those immigrants face in Western societies. To grow their churches abroad among immigrant members, they have created strategic initiatives to help their migrant members in several ways and keep them in their churches. Bernard Otopah Appiah in his discussion of how African Pentecostals in Britain help their fellow immigrant members asserts:

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17 Ibid.

18 Timothy Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity: How the Global Church Is Influencing the Way We Think about and Discuss Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 13.

19 Asamoah-Gyadu, “African-Led Christianity in Europe.”

Most of the initiatives to assist their members in integrating are internal in nature. These initiatives have included: welfare assistance to migrants in the form of financial hand-outs; holding immigration and nationality forums to inform members of how to regularize their stay and prevent falling foul of the law; organizing personal development and leadership training for members to give them tools for personal effectiveness and to increase their confidence, which is considered the key to success in every area of endeavor; and financial empowerment and business workshops. The churches have also used external training agencies to bring information and skill development to the members. As part of this, the churches have used both local speakers and international speakers with strong ties to their communities.<sup>20</sup>

To borrow the wisdom from E. U. Dim concerning the African Pentecostal passion for spreading the gospel, it is appropriate to say that the time has come when mainline churches everywhere in the world (e.g., the Anglicans, Baptists, and Methodists) must take into account all that is positive in the Pentecostal movements in Africa if they hope to make progress in the areas of getting the gospel to every corner of the world. Donald A. Carson said, “Whenever a Christian movement comes along that presents itself as a reformist, it should not be summarily dismissed. Even if one ultimately decides that the movement embraces some worrying weaknesses, it may also have some important thing to say that the rest of the Christian world needs to hear.”<sup>21</sup> Most importantly, positive attitudes to movements considered to be heretical might even cause the leaders of those movements to listen to what those who do not endorse their movements have to say. Pentecostal movements in Nigeria have also contributed immensely to mission through interfaith dialogue, the enculturation of Christianity, the ministry of healing (especially towards psychotics and addicts), and new approaches to ecumenism. Dim encourages churches to

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20 Bernard Otopah Appiah, “Negotiating the Integration Strategies and the Transnational Statuses of Ghanaian-Led Pentecostal Churches in Britain,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Birmingham, 2015), 172.

21 Donald A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and Its Implications* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 10.

let go of the spirit of antagonism by saying that “the age of antagonism, indifference, and neglect or even arrogance is over.”<sup>22</sup>

African Pentecostal Christianity plays a crucial role in global Christianity through her ministry in the diaspora, particularly in Europe and America. Kwame Bediako recognizes this crucial position of African Christianity:

I do not wish to exaggerate the significance of the African dimension in the present global transformation of Christianity. Yet, it seems that the sheer surprise-element in the emergence of that continent as a major base of the Christian faith at the close of the twentieth century makes it important that we seek to understand what this might mean both for Africa and for the Christian faith too.<sup>23</sup>

Although their ministry in the diaspora has not so much affected the indigenous people of Europe and America, the transformation that such ministry has brought to the religious landscape abroad deserves attention. A critical need exists to examine the development and theology of African Pentecostal movements in Western countries and most especially the Nigerian Pentecostal ministries in the diaspora. Olofinjana also notes this need as he affirms that African Pentecostal churches keep increasing in Britain, but the pastors of those churches are not writing “theological textbooks or books that demonstrate they are reflecting on their church and history.”<sup>24</sup> Olofinjana’s opinion is crucial because African Christian propagation of the gospel in Europe and America is happening in the midst of secularism and relativism. Craig Scandrett-Leatherman asserts: “Afro Pentecostalism is in a good position to minister to many in the Euro-American culture in its ‘post-modern’ age which seems to have exhausted its absolute dependence on the god of reason, has become fascinated with

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22 E.U. Dim, “New Religious Movements: Notes for Seminary Formation,” in A.G. Nnamani (ed.), *The New Religious Movements: Pentecostalism in Perspective*, Proceedings of the 21st CATHAN Conference (Benin: Ava Publishers, 2006), 116.

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

24 Israel Olofinjana, “Emerging African Theologians in Britain,” *Israelolofinjana*, January 8, 2015, accessed July 20, 2018, <https://israelolofinjana.wordpress.com/2015/01/08/emerging-african-theologians-in-britain/>.

cultural diversity, and has assimilated numerous forms of African culture, especially musical forms.”<sup>25</sup>

Both Nigerian Pentecostals and other churches that are of African origin in the Western world need sound theological training and faithful ministers who can handle the challenges of postmodern ministry in Europe and America. Experienced pastors who are called to minister in those societies must ensure that they strike a balance between theological knowledge and ministerial experience. Pastors must be able to combine the head and heart with cultural adaptation to attract the indigenous white people into the African-founded churches in the Western world. The reverse mission will take place if the Nigerian Pentecostal Movement’s leaders in the diaspora can engage the indigenous people of those countries with the gospel. Engaging with people other than those that are of African background will establish the reality of reverse mission and African Pentecostal transnationalization to the Western world.

The Nigerian Pentecostal churches in the diaspora emphasize house fellowship, discipleship, and social work, especially among their own immigrant countrymen. In addition, Nigerian Pentecostal ministry in the diaspora has contributed new vitality to Christianity in the West, especially in the area of spirituality and Christian programs such as New Year’s Eve services, Christmas Eve services, night vigils, and prayer and fasting. These churches have also contributed to the global spreading of the gospel that has been the monopoly of Western mission agencies in the past. Israel Olofinjana mentions another significant contribution of Nigerian Pentecostal movements in the diaspora:

The emergence and growth of these churches have led to new academic disciplines and modules in some British Universities. I was privileged in 2011 and 2012 to help teach a course at the School of Oriental African Studies (SOAS) on the subject of African Pentecostals in Britain.<sup>26</sup>

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25 Craig Scandrett-Leatherman quoted by Roswith Gerloff in “The African Christian Diaspora in Europe,” 15.

26 Israel Olofinjana, Joel Edwards, and Ram Gidoomal, *Turning the Tables on Mission: Stories of*

Although Nigerian Pentecostal church leaders in Western countries have not fully engaged the indigenous people of those countries in as high numbers as had been expected, the leaders have contributed immensely to new ways of doing church and ministry in Western countries.

### **Challenges to Nigerian Pentecostal Movements in the Diaspora**

The growth of African Pentecostal movements in Europe and America is not without serious problems. Joe Aldred in his foreword to the work of Israel Olofinjana states, “The challenge of the 21st Century is, can Africans become successful in taking the Gospel of Jesus to Europeans in Europe who have become hardened and indeed darkened to the Gospel of Jesus?”<sup>27</sup> One of the problems in doing so is the challenge of acclimatization to the culture of the new society. Another challenge is that of getting the gospel to the heart of the indigenous people. Afe Adogame also comments on the challenges facing Nigerian Pentecostals in Europe:

Some of the problems encountered by these communities in different parts of Europe include the language barrier, the lack or paucity of space (accommodation), the hostile reaction of neighbours to loud services, the transient nature of membership. Other problems often faced by African religious groups also include administrative matters, i.e. the status of the churches and the legal status of church members, cultural barriers, understanding of the host welfare system, finance, weather conditions, the long duration of services, and the nature of some practices or tenets, e.g. the prohibition on the use of alcohol and tobacco.<sup>28</sup>

Nigerian Pentecostals in the diaspora, like every other immigrant, face the possibility of experiencing discrimination in various forms in the

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*Christians from the Global South in the UK* (Watford, England: Instant Apostle, 2013).

27 Joe Aldred, “Foreword,” in Israel Olofinjana, *Reverse in Ministry and Missions: Africans in the Dark Continent of Europe: An Historical Study of African Churches in Europe* (Central Milton Keynes, England: Author House, 2010), xvi.

28 Afe Adogame, “The Quest for Space in the Global Spiritual Marketplace,” *International Review of Mission* 89, no. 354 (July 2000): 407.

Western world as sojourners and foreigners, and this discrimination has an effect on the growth and expansion of the ministry. Philip Jenkins has pointed out the challenges concerning the growth of the newer Nigerian churches in America. Jenkins asserts:

Although these newer churches might have a major impact on the United States, and particularly on urban communities, the many cultural differences make it unlikely that they will have anything like the transforming effect that we will likely see in Europe. Yet in the United States too, the coming decades should witness a wholly new phase of religious synthesis and hybridization, as immigrant communities Americanize.<sup>29</sup>

The transnationalization of Nigerian Pentecostal movements has led many Pentecostals who felt the call into the ministry to rush and accept pastoral leadership from their church founders or General Overseers without much analysis and examination before beginning. Adu has called attention to challenges similar to those noted by Philip Jenkins that exist in Europe: “In their quest to bringing [*sic*] the gospel back to British society, African-led Pentecostal pastoral leaders face cultural hurdles in making the gospel relevant.”<sup>30</sup> Pentecostal movements in Nigeria through transnationalization have been some of the strongest forces that have activated the reverse mission in Europe. For instance, Adu notes, “Some of these churches mentioned earlier are among so-called ‘mega-churches’ within Pentecostalism. Of course, there are other smaller churches still struggling to find their feet in British society.”<sup>31</sup> Paul Freston also points out that churches being led by the African Pentecostal leaders in Europe have been accused of concentrating on serving their own immigrant people/colleagues, which is of little benefit to the indigenous people.<sup>32</sup> Kim Knibbe buttresses the opinion of Freston and Adu as he proclaims,

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29 Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 264.

30 Boadu Ebenezer Adu, “Pastoral Leadership among African-Led Pentecostal Churches,” 157.

31 Ibid.

32 Paul Freston, “Reverse Mission: A Discourse in Search of Reality?” *PentecoStudies* 9, no. 2 (2010): 169.

“Nigerian Pentecostals are planting churches at an amazing rate in Europe, but they are hardly reaching ‘the natives’ of Europe. . . . [T]heir churches are filled with transnational migrants from the African churches and occasionally other continents (of course, with the notable exception of Sunday Adelaje in Kiev).”<sup>33</sup> Several questions are to be answered by the African Pentecostal churches in the diaspora and most especially the Nigerian churches. How did the early missionaries in Africa from Europe and America break into the African culture in order to bring Christianity? What can the African Pentecostal churches do to engage white culture and bring the gospel? How can African Pentecostal churches in the diaspora become a representation of the culture where it is situated? What can the church do to avoid the mistake of the early missionaries to Africa regarding bringing their culture into the gospel? Ajani notes that in the transnational effort of Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministry, which is one of the big Pentecostal denominations in Nigeria, the focus of their ministry in foreign countries is the Nigerian and African diaspora. Ajani declares: “In the transnationalisation of the group to the Netherlands, the primary targets were Nigerians and other Africans in the Diaspora. Along the line, some other persons who are not Nigerians are also attracted to the group for one reason or the other.”<sup>34</sup>

In the same discussion of the challenges confronting Nigerian Pentecostal ministry in Europe and America, Asamoah-Gyadu suggests that African Pentecostal churches in Europe do not attract the indigenous Europeans but declares, “The very presence of African-led churches in Europe is a testimony to the dynamic quality and significance of African Evangelical witness.”<sup>35</sup>

Another significant challenge facing Nigerian Pentecostal movements in the diaspora is the contextualization of the African worldview of the

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33 Kim Knibbe, “Geographies of Conversion: Why Space Matters” (introduction lecture to the Glopent [European Research Network on Global Pentecostalism] Conference “Geographies of Conversion,” Amsterdam 2010), accessed July 23, 2018, [http://www.academia.edu/224270/Why\\_space\\_matters\\_introduction\\_lecture\\_to\\_the\\_Glopent\\_conference\\_geographies\\_of\\_conversion\\_Amsterdam\\_2010](http://www.academia.edu/224270/Why_space_matters_introduction_lecture_to_the_Glopent_conference_geographies_of_conversion_Amsterdam_2010).

34 Ezekiel Oladapo Ajani, “Leadership roles in the Transnationalisation of Nigerian Pentecostal Churches: The Mountain of Fire and Miracles Church in the Netherlands and Ghana” (Ph.D. diss., Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, 2013), 213-14.

35 Asamoah-Gyadu. “African-Led Christianity in Europe.”

leaders of those African-led churches in the Western world. Nigerian Pentecostal movements have been characterized by an emphasis on the spirit world, which makes them concentrate on deliverance and healing, which is quite different from the Western religious worldview. Adu suggests that “their approach to deliverance and healing must be reviewed within the British context to forge a balanced biblical and theological approach to such real issues facing people.”<sup>36</sup> In his interview with an anonymous Dutch man attending a Nigerian-led Pentecostal church in Europe, Adu quoted Kim Knibbe, who recorded a Dutch member’s concern and warning to the African church leaders about the lack of contextualization in the European context:

I always tell them, they are making the same mistake as we did. We used to go to Africa, and preach a European gospel to them. We insisted on wearing a three piece suit while going into the interior. And now they are coming here, also wearing a three piece suit and we are not wearing that kind of thing anymore!<sup>37</sup>

Nigerian-founded Pentecostal churches need to engage in serious contextualization in the European and American culture in order to be able to get the gospel into the hearts of the Western people. Failure to contextualize the Gospel into the Western culture will result in running African ministry on Western soil without incarnation into the culture of the West. African Pentecostal church leaders in America and Europe have been interpreting the Scripture through the lens of African culture on the soil of Europe and America. This African strategy of scriptural interpretation, which is colored by the indigenous religion in Africa, is difficult for Westerners to embrace and appreciate. To reach the Western nations, biblical discipleship must be promoted in the church among the youth and children who were born and reared in Europe and America as instruments to spread the gospel into Western culture.

Another challenge to Nigerian Pentecostal movements in the Western world is the focus on the prosperity gospel. Israel Olofinjana raises

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36 Boadu Ebenezer Adu, “Pastoral leadership among African-Led Pentecostal Churches,” 188.

37 Kim Knibbe, quoted by Adu, *Ibid.*, 159.

concerns about how the Kingsway International Christian Centre, whose pastor is Matthew Ashimolowo, emphasizes prosperity and consumerism in England.<sup>38</sup> David W. Jones and Russell S. Woodbridge have pointed out that the “Prosperity Gospel is built upon a quasi-Christian heresy, popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, known as New Thought” and that “New Thought is marked by a distorted view of God, an elevation of mind over matter, an exalted view of humankind, a focus upon attaining health and wealth, and an unorthodox view of salvation.”<sup>39</sup> Bearing witness through preaching the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ and making disciples are the mandates given to every Christian in the past and in the twenty-first century. However, the church must ensure that the message is biblically based and not a mere prosperity gospel of materialism. The African Church is also included among those to whom God has given a mandate by Christ to bear witness, not only in Africa but in the whole world, which includes Europe and the American continent according to Acts 1:8. The current challenges of relativism, postmodernism, and homosexuality in Western countries call for the church in Africa that had been the beneficiary of Western missionary efforts in the past to now engage the Western culture with the authentic witness and effective testimony of the gospel. Obadara Tope noted:

Homosexuality is gaining ground in the West as an acceptable way of life, and some of those promoting it are Christians. These ‘Christians’ hinge their argument on the fact that since God is a loving God, He accepts people the way they are. But, does God’s love overrule His righteousness? Does the Scripture contain only loving promises, and not standards that God wants us to live by? When the angel asked John to eat the scroll, he told him that the scroll would taste sweet in his mouth, but bitter in his stomach. And that was exactly what John experienced. The Word of God is

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38 Israel Olofinjana, “Nigerian Pentecostals in Britain: Towards Prosperity or Consumerism?” in *The Public Face of African New Religious Movements: Imagining the Religious ‘Other,’* ed. Afe Adogame (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2014), 233-254.

39 David Wayne Jones and Russell S. Woodbridge, *Health, Wealth, and Happiness: How the Prosperity Gospel Overshadows the Gospel of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2011), 38.

not only to give us His sweet promises, but also the bitter warnings against disobedience and of judgment.

We have a message of hope and love for our world. But our message must not leave out God's warnings about sin and the impending judgment against ungodliness.<sup>40</sup>

Only the biblical gospel propagation can provide a sound basis for the mission of African Pentecostal Churches in Western countries instead of the prosperity gospel that focuses on materialism. The present situation of the African Pentecostal churches on the continent demands a biblical gospel that will produce African missionaries in the diaspora who will influence the Western world with the authentic gospel of the kingdom.

## CONCLUSION

Despite the fact that the early missionaries from Europe and America had been criticized in several ways, including the lack of contextualization in their efforts to take the gospel to African soil, Pentecostal movements began to make the same mistake while engaged in ministry in Europe and America without contextualization into Western culture. The growth of Christianity in Africa also attests that Africans understood the gospel of Christ brought to them by the early missionaries, but African Pentecostals have not been able to do much in winning the indigenous people of Europe and Americans into their ministries. While Nigerian Pentecostal movements have their problems and challenges because they are hardly reaching Western people, they must be commended for rising above mainline denominations in Africa, which were funded and financially supported by Western missionaries, and extending their influence to Europe and America. Nigerian Pentecostals are planting churches at an amazing rate in Europe and America. Mission in the context of the discussion in this article has to do with knowing God and having a relationship with Jesus by being born again and allowing God to work inside and through one's life. The Scripture says, "For it is God who is at work in you, both to will

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<sup>40</sup> Obadara Tope (Obasky), *Seek Daily* of The Nigerian Baptist Convention, July 19, 2017, accessed July 24, 2018, <https://ngstudentforum.com.ng/p/20978/seek-daily-nbc-wednesday-july-19-revelation-10-8-11>.

and to work for His good pleasure” (NASB). Pentecostals in Africa must understand their ministry in this context to achieve the divine purpose of God and be successful in gathering people of different cultures together as members through the transforming power of God.

A need exists for all African churches in the diaspora, especially the Pentecostal churches founded by Nigerians in Europe and America, to work out strategies and modalities to reach all peoples, races, and cultures that are represented in Europe and America. The focus of those churches must not just be on Nigerians or Africans. A healthy church should attempt to reach everybody in every culture represented in a particular area, because the diversity of the area should be reflected in the local congregation. The church should include “all saints” with an open door to be a house of prayer for all nations, cultures, and tribes. The church in Antioch in Acts 13 reflected such racial, cultural, and social diversity in the five prophets and teachers leading the church. Two of those leaders were from North Africa, one was from Cyprus, one was from Cilicia, and one was from Palestine. One was raised with royalty, another was wealthy, and another was from a rabbinic family. The driving force of a biblical congregation must be the will of God, Who did not want anyone to perish but all nations, tribes, and tongues to come to the knowledge of Christ and to become responsible disciples and members of a healthy church.

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