

African Pentecostalism and Lived Experiences in Local Cultural, Religious, and Diaspora Contexts

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Abstract

African Pentecostalism is studied as part of the Pentecostal Movement that emphasises direct relationship with God through baptism in the Holy Spirit. Shaping the landscape of Christianity on the continent and in the diaspora, African Pentecostalism stands at the center of the shift in the growth of Christianity from the Global North to the Global South. An interesting current trend is the growth of African Pentecostalism in the diaspora, which also shifts our understanding of missions from a north-to-south to a south-to-north perspective. This necessitates a study on African Pentecostalism that can provide a broader understanding of the movement, its streams, typologies, and shadows. This article aims to provide an understanding of African Pentecostalism as a response to the lived experiences of Africans in different regions. It provides a rationale for differentiating African Pentecostalism from other popular religions in the local cultural and religious contexts. Further, it describes the impact of African Pentecostalism in the diaspora and how this affects our understanding of missions and world Christianity. Most importantly, and in a non-exhaustive way, the article delves into how scholars in the twenty-first century can understand and approach African Pentecostalism from a methodological point of view.

Keywords

African diaspora – African Pentecostalism – global Pentecostalism – lived experiences – local cultural contexts – religious beliefs – syncretism – world Christianity

1 Introduction

Pentecostalism is a Christian movement that emphasises a direct relationship with God, heavily emphasizing baptism in the Holy Spirit as the center of that relationship. African Pentecostalism is part of the broader Pentecostal Movement that also emphasizes Spirit baptism with some distinctive features in the African contexts. African Pentecostalism is a growing movement influencing the religious landscape on the continent. It stands at the center of the shift in the growth of Christianity from the Global North to the Global South in the twenty-first century, as predicted long ago by Kwame Bediako and Lamin Sanneh.¹

Allan Anderson points to the participation of all believers in the African Pentecostal practice of mission and evangelism as one factor for the emergence and growth of the movement on the continent. He explains: “Most forms of Pentecostalism teach that every member is a minister and should be involved in mission and evangelism wherever they find themselves.”² While we cannot underestimate the contribution made by other regions in the Majority World, African Pentecostalism remains the major contributor in this shift. The growth and significant impact of African Pentecostalism in world Christianity are demonstrated by recent statistics. Nimi Wariboko and L. William Oliverio quote the third edition of the *World Christian Encyclopaedia*, which highlights the total number of Pentecostals globally at 644 million—27 percent of the two billion Christians worldwide.³ According to Wariboko and Oliverio, African Pentecostalism, with about 230 million, contributes 35 percent of the total number of Pentecostals worldwide, followed by Latin America, Asia, North America, Europe, Australia, and Oceania. This number is made up of the Pentecostal and charismatic movements in Africa, and to a certain extent, the Spirit-type African Independent Churches. In these statistics, we must also pay attention to what I call unaccounted African Pentecostals, unaffiliated with major Pentecostal denominations in Africa such as the Apostolic Faith Mission, Assemblies of God, Full Gospel, Church of Pentecost, and Redeemed Christian Church of God. We should remain cognizant of the Pentecostals whose churches are not

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- 1 Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 190; Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel beyond the West* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003).
 - 2 Allan Anderson, “Towards a Pentecostal Missiology for the Majority World,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 8, no. 1 (2005): 29–47.
 - 3 Nimi Wariboko and L. William Oliverio, “The Society for Pentecostal Studies at 50 Years: Ways Forward for Global Pentecostalism,” *Pneuma* 42, no. 3–4 (2020): 327–333.

registered with governmental authorities for the census. Therefore, a high possibility exists that the number of Pentecostals in Africa exceeds 230 million. Nonetheless, suffice it to say that the current statistics demonstrate the growth and impact of African Pentecostalism in the world.

This growth and impact of African Pentecostalism in both global Pentecostalism and world Christianity raises important research questions, such as how we understand African Pentecostalism, its streams, types, and shadows. What are the distinctive features of African Pentecostalism in comparison to the expressions of the broader Pentecostal Movement elsewhere in the world? In other words, how do we understand African Pentecostalism within the context of global Pentecostalism and world Christianity? How do we understand African Pentecostalism in response to the lived experiences of Africans in different contexts? How does African Pentecostalism differ from other African popular religions, considering its relevance to the local cultural and religious beliefs contexts? What is the impact of African Pentecostalism in the diaspora, and how do we predict this impact for the future? Most importantly, how can scholars in the twenty-first century understand and approach African Pentecostalism from a methodological point of view?

This article aims to provide a non-exhaustive answer to these research questions in a way that provides a broader understanding of African Pentecostalism. Therefore, its main sections directly address these research questions, beginning with an overview of African Pentecostalism, including different streams and the main features of the movement. I then focus on how African Pentecostalism continues its relevance in the continent through its alignment with the lived experiences of Africans in different contexts. The article includes a section on how African Pentecostalism seeks relevance in local cultural and religious belief contexts though I do indicate how the movement differs from other popular religions in Africa in the adoption of some cultural practices and rejection of others. I discuss African Pentecostalism in terms of its impact on the diaspora. In the last section I propose some methodological considerations for the study of African Pentecostalism by both insiders and outsiders.

2 African Pentecostalism: An Overview

African Pentecostalism consists of the classical Pentecostal churches, started by Western missionaries at the beginning of the twentieth century—such as the Apostolic Faith Mission, Full Gospel, and the Assemblies of God in southern Africa. In East Africa, according to scholars in the region, such as Philomena Njeri Mwaura, Julius Gathogo, Paul Mwangi, and Kyama Mugambi, clas-

sical Pentecostalism is understood in terms of the influences on, for example, Kenyan Pentecostalism by the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC).⁴ Whereas David Maxwell demonstrates that the Congo Evangelistic Mission is considered one of the oldest Pentecostal missions in the Democratic Republic of Congo.⁵ In Ghana, the Church of Pentecost, Assemblies of God, Apostolic Church of Ghana, and Christ Apostolic Church can also be considered as classical Pentecostal churches.⁶ In Nigeria, Matthews Ojo says that “The classical Pentecostal denominations include churches such as Apostolic Faith Mission, Assemblies of God, Foursquare Gospel Church, and The Apostolic Church.”⁷

African Pentecostalism can also be understood in terms of the Spirit-type African Independent Churches that began in the first quarter of the twentieth century, such as the Zion Christian Church in South Africa, Christ Apostolic Church, Cherubim and Seraphim Movement Church, Celestial Church of Christ, Church of the Lord in Nigeria, and many other African Independent Churches that exist in East and Central Africa.⁸

One can also understand African Pentecostalism in the context of what Allan Anderson describes as newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches that began in the third quarter of the twentieth century.⁹ To a certain extent, some of these churches associate with the Word of Faith movement. Among these churches are those such as Redeemed Christian Church of God in Nigeria, the Lighthouse Cathedral in Ghana, the Miracle Central Cathedral in Uganda,

4 Philomena Njeri Mwaura, “African Instituted Churches in East Africa,” *Studies in World Christianity* 10, no. 2 (2004): 160–184; Paul Mwangi and Kyama Mugambi, “African Pentecostalism from an African Perspective,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of Christianity in Africa from Apostolic Times to the Present*, ed. Andrew Eugene Barnes and Toyin Falola (Springer International Publishing, 2024), 607–623; Julius Gathogo, “The Challenge of Money and Wealth in Some East African Pentecostal Churches,” *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 37, no. 2 (2011): 133–151.

5 David Maxwell, *Religious Entanglements: Central African Pentecostalism, the Creation of Cultural Knowledge, and the Making of the Luba Katanga* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2022).

6 Allan Anderson, *Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 116.

7 Matthews Ojo, “Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements in Modern Africa,” in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to African Religions*, ed. Elias Kifon Bongmba (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 295–309.

8 Allan Anderson, “Types and Butterflies: African Initiated Churches and European Typologies,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 25, no. 3 (2001): 107–113; Afe Adogame, “Aiye Loja, Orun Nile: The Appropriation of Ritual Space-Time in the Cosmology of the Celestial Church of Christ,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 30, no. 1 (2000): 3–29; Mwaura, “African Instituted Churches,” 164.

9 Allan Anderson, “The Newer Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches: The Shape of Future Christianity in Africa?” *Pneuma* 24, no. 2 (2002): 167–184.

Christ is the Answer Ministries in Kenya, and Rhema Bible Church in South Africa.

African Pentecostalism includes the new prophetic churches that emphasize one-on-one prophecy, prophetic deliverance, prophetic consultations, prophetic objects, and prophetic titles.¹⁰ These include churches such as the Enlightened Christian Gathering in Malawi and South Africa, Prophetic Healing Deliverance Ministries, United Family International Church, the Spirit Embassy in Zimbabwe, Power Chapel Worldwide in Ghana, The Prophetic Latter Glories Ministry International in Nairobi, Arise and Shine Ministry in Tanzania, and the Synagogue Church of All Nations in Nigeria. Therefore, the main categories in African Pentecostalism can be summarized as classical Pentecostalism, Spirit-type African Independent Churches, Newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches, and New Prophetic Churches. However, as highlighted in the introduction, we cannot ignore many other Pentecostal ministries in the villages, towns, and cities of Africa that do not belong to the main categories highlighted here.

African Pentecostalism, as noted, is part of the broader Pentecostal Movement that emphasizes baptism in the Holy Spirit and the gift of speaking in other tongues as a means for a direct relationship with God. However, it is important to note that in their emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit, African Pentecostals, as argued by leading scholars such as Ogbu Kalu, J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, and Allan Anderson make a distinction between the Holy Spirit and the existence of other spirits in the spiritual realm, found in traditional African religions.¹¹ Writing from a Ghanaian perspective, Asamoah-Gyadu points out that African Pentecostals believe that the Holy Spirit holds the supreme power, in which other powers are confronted in the spiritual

10 Mookgo Solomon Kgatle, *The Fourth Pentecostal Wave in South Africa: A Critical Engagement* (Routledge, 2020); Ezra Chitando and Kudzai Biri, "Walter Magaya's Prophetic Healing and Deliverance (PHD) Ministries and Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe: A Preliminary Study with Particular Reference to Ecumenism," *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 42, no. 2 (2016): 72–85; Joseph Quayesi-Amakye, "Prophetism in Ghana's New Prophetic Churches," *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 35, no. 2 (2015): 162–173.

11 Birgit Meyer, "You Devil, Go away from Me! Pentecostalist African Christianity and the Powers of Good and Evil," in *Powers of Good and Evil: Social Transformation and Popular Belief*, ed. Paul Clough and Jon P. Mitchell (Berghahn Books, 2001), 104; Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2008); Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "Spirit and spirits in African Religious Traditions," in *Interdisciplinary and Religious-Cultural Discourses on a Spirit-Filled World: Loosing the Spirits*, ed. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen et al. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 41–53; Allan Heaton Anderson, *Spirit-Filled World: Religious Discontinuity in African Pentecostalism* (Springer, 2018).

realm.¹² Studies by Birgit Meyer, Opoku Onyinah, and Nimi Wariboko also demonstrate that African Pentecostals are always in confrontation with evil spirits and witches, and other occult powers through the very same power of the Holy Spirit.¹³ Onyinah's study in particular demonstrates the importance of deliverance ministry as the quest to deal with witchcraft and other occult powers in the spiritual realm.¹⁴ This is what Anderson argues in his book, *Spirit-Filled World: Religious Dis/continuity in African Pentecostalism*—that African Pentecostals, unlike other popular religions in Africa, do not appease the spirits but confront them through the power of the Holy Spirit.¹⁵

Therefore, in African Pentecostalism, the Holy Spirit performs tasks beyond tongue-talking as a spiritual force that confronts evil spirits in the spiritual world. This, in a way, becomes a unique element in how African Pentecostals contextualize the notion of Spirit baptism in using the power of the Holy Spirit to deal with their local challenges as emanating from the spiritual realm. Prayer in African Pentecostal spirituality is more than communication and fellowship with God; it is done to confront the evil spirits through the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the prayer night vigils in many African Pentecostal churches are platforms in which the Holy Spirit and other prayer rhetoric, such as “Holy Ghost fire,” are chanted to deal with the evil spirits. This is an important factor, as Anderson highlights, which also helps to differentiate African Pentecostalism from traditional African religions that appease evil spirits. This is something many Westerners do not understand and thus conclude that African Pentecostalism is syncretistic without acknowledging its ability to confront evil spirits as opposed to popular religions that appease the same spirits.

African Pentecostalism is known for holistic salvation where the concept of being “born again” exceeds the traditional meaning of conversion to Christianity to touch on other important areas of life, such as the physical, social, and, to a certain extent, even the political as demonstrated by J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, Joseph Bosco Bangura, and Wariboko.¹⁶ When African Pentecostals refer to being “born again,” they mean a holistic salvation that entails

12 Asamoah-Gyadu, “Spirit and spirits,” 42.

13 Meyer, “You Devil;” Opoku Onyinah, “Deliverance As a Way of Confronting Witchcraft in Modern Africa: Ghana as a Case History,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 5, no. 1 (2002): 107–134; Nimi Wariboko, “Pentecostalism in Africa,” in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History*, ed. Thomas T. Spear, October 26, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.120>.

14 Onyinah, “Deliverance.”

15 Anderson, *Spirit-Filled World*.

16 Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, “An African Pentecostal on Mission in Eastern Europe: The Church of ‘the Embassy of God’ in the Ukraine,” *Pneuma* 27, no. 2 (2005): 297–321; Joseph

salvation of body, soul, and the human spirit. This is the rationale for the inclusion of social transformation aspects in African Pentecostal spirituality in their sermon presentation and other activities. Asamoah-Gyadu explains that from a Ghanaian perspective, Pentecostals see social transformation as part of salvation.¹⁷ In addition, the same rationale exists for the emphasis on healing and deliverance, particularly among the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches and new prophetic churches. Although healing and deliverance are common among Pentecostals in other global contexts, including Europe and the USA, African Pentecostalism puts emphasis on these practices due to challenges of a lack of medicine and inadequate health facilities in countries such as Zimbabwe. Wariboko agrees with Asamoah-Gyadu that salvation in African Pentecostalism includes aspects of the abundant life in Christ beyond the conversion to Christianity.¹⁸ In this way, salvation in African Pentecostalism is not only spiritual, but also material, as it forms part of the life transformation happening in the lives of the believers. Bangura explains:

Unlike other expressions of Christianity across the African continent, African Pentecostalism has been most successful in arguing that salvation represents God's primary message of good news to the poor. African Pentecostalism believes that this message lies firmly anchored in Jesus's public ministry, which they see as having a clear preference for the poor, sick, demon-possessed, and marginalized in society. Salvation, therefore, brings the convert to an embodied place where they can enjoy life in all the veritable fullness God intended it to be.¹⁹

Therefore, salvation in African Pentecostalism is well-packaged to appeal to the ordinary people in Africa, particularly those on the margins. One should never see or define this as a deviation from the function of salvation, as conversion or forgiveness of sins, and so forth. Rather, it should be seen as a way of defining salvation beyond confession into a life of transformation, much needed in Africa—hence the growth and impact of African Pentecostalism.

This approach to salvation in African Pentecostalism has led to serious engagement on sustainable development on the continent. Dena Freeman has

Bosco Bangura, "Salvation in African Pentecostalism," in *Globalizing Linkages: The Inter-mingling Story of Christianity in Africa*, ed. Wanjiru M. Gitau and Mark A. Lamport (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2024), 142; Wariboko, "Pentecostalism in Africa," 7.

17 Asamoah-Gyadu, "An African Pentecostal on Mission," 297.

18 Wariboko, "Pentecostalism in Africa," 9.

19 Bangura, "Salvation in African Pentecostalism," 142.

reflected on how African Pentecostal churches, alongside Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), have been the foot soldiers on the ground at times implementing the government's programs on development.²⁰ Richard Burgess explains that African Pentecostals are involved in politics, economics, health, education, human rights, and peacebuilding.²¹ The recent edited volume by Philipp Öhlmann and Juliane Stork includes contributions by African Pentecostal scholars who have highlighted the contributions made by African Pentecostal churches in issues of sustainable development, including engaging in the three sustainable development goals of the United Nations: Goal 11—"Sustainable Cities and communities," Goal 13—"climate action," and Goal 15—"Life on Land."²² To a certain extent, the holistic salvation in African Pentecostalism has also contributed to an engagement with the political system, particularly among the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches in West Africa.²³ Ebenezer Obadare, for example, discusses the rise of Nigerian Pentecostalism that has somehow coincided with the newer forms of politics in the country, resulting in the production of theocracy. Obadare, therefore, perceives the Pentecostal Movement in the country as having the power to become a force to the government of the day.²⁴ These intersections of Pentecostalism and politics within the context of African Pentecostalism call for thorough development of Pentecostal political theologies relevant in the African contexts.²⁵

3 African Pentecostalism and the Lived Experiences of Africans

African Pentecostalism is a movement not necessarily built on dogma but rather on the lived experiences of Africans in different contexts. The encounters with God are embodied in local congregations, not just in an abstract form but also experientially. In prioritizing experience and performance, African Pentecostals can reach out to Africans in a holistic way as opposed to a ratio-

20 Dena Freeman, *Pentecostalism and Development: Churches, NGOs and Social Change in Africa* (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2012), 38.

21 Richard Burgess, *Nigerian Pentecostalism and Development: Spirit, Power, and Transformation* (Routledge, 2020).

22 Philipp Öhlmann and Juliane Stork, *Religious Communities and Ecological Sustainability in Southern Africa and Beyond* (Globe Ethics, 2024).

23 Adeshina Afolayan et al., eds., *Pentecostalism and Politics in Africa* (Springer, 2018).

24 Ebenezer Obadare, *Pentecostal Republic: Religion and the Struggle for State Power in Nigeria* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018).

25 Ruth Marshall, *Political Spiritualities: The Pentecostal Revolution in Nigeria* (University of Chicago Press, 2019).

nalistic view. This enables African Pentecostalism to reach out to Africans beyond spirituality into other important areas in life. Scholars of African Pentecostalism, such as Ogbu Kalu, Anderson, and Nimi Wariboko, demonstrate how African Pentecostal spiritual experiences can yield fruit in the transformation of society.²⁶ Kalu points out that “Pentecostal experience is reinforced with a new life compass that is personal, cultural, social, and economic; that the movement mounts moral boundaries that redefine the person and the relationship with the social structures.”²⁷ Anderson concurs that African Pentecostalism is based on the lived experiences of Africans, that is, holistic, where spirituality and beliefs transition into other social structures in society.²⁸ Writing from a Nigerian context, Wariboko states how Pentecostalism in the country contributes to the transformation in politics and other areas of influence.²⁹

Although early Pentecostalism in the South African context has been very conservative due to its focus on the imminent second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, in recent times, the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches in the country are moving toward participation in social structures. This changes the perception of African Pentecostalism that it is too conservative and too inward-looking. It also changes the perception of the movement in how African Pentecostals can utilize the messages of prosperity to transform the local economies rather than exploiting the congregants to enrich themselves. In other words, the focus on lived experiences as shared by Ogbu Kalu, Anderson, and Wariboko demonstrates that African Pentecostalism is a movement that can reach out to Africans holistically.

Kalu, for example says that the critics of the prosperity gospel do so by only focusing on the negative statements by media houses without looking at the positive side of prosperity that brings hope to the people in marginalized communities such as Tembisa in South Africa.³⁰ I add that this is done by using the very messages of prosperity, particularly in the economic area. This is important in how we understand the prosperity gospel. In the African Pentecostal context, the prosperity gospel does not always benefit pastors, but according to Olufunke Adeboye, it is also to transform societies in the building of schools,

26 Ogbu Kalu, “Holy Praiseco: Negotiating Sacred and Popular Music and Dance in African Pentecostalism,” *Pneuma* 32, no. 1 (2010): 16–40; Anderson, *Spirit-Filled World*, 7; Nimi Wariboko, *Nigerian Pentecostalism* vol. 62 of Rochester Studies in African History and the Diaspora (Boydell & Brewer Ltd., 2014).

27 Kalu, “Holy Praiseco,” 26.

28 Anderson, *Spirit-Filled World*, 7.

29 Wariboko, *Nigerian Pentecostalism*, 263.

30 Ogbu Kalu, “A Discursive Interpretation of African Pentecostalism,” *Fides et Historia* 41, no. 1 (2009): 71; Anderson, *Spirit-Filled World*, 7; Wariboko, *Nigerian Pentecostalism*.

universities, and clinics, as is the case in the Ghanaian and Nigerian contexts.³¹ We therefore need to take heed of the various features of the prosperity gospel shared by Maria Frahm-Arp:

(1) an attitude of hope in a positive future; (2) an entrepreneurial attitude of “winning ways,” which in Africa usually means making a break with the past and the wider claims of extended families and culture; (3) the use of life improvement strategies that might include an ethic of hard work or how to cope with life through “strong prayers”; (4) consistent tithing or employing various means to sow “seed” offerings, thus, giving money to the church; and (5) preacher-prophets gifted with special powers to speak against and fight the “spirit of poverty.”³²

These features should be engaged thoroughly as experienced by Pentecostals in different local cultural contexts to avoid generalization on the prosperity gospel or only focusing on the negative forms of the prosperity gospel. Allan Anderson says that if the prosperity gospel is understood as the pursuit of God’s blessing for an abundant life, no one in Africa can be blamed for pursuing such a blessing, particularly those regions in Africa ravaged by poverty.³³ Paul Gifford made a similar point some years ago that the prosperity gospel in the African context looks different, as it is the whole idea of accepting God’s blessing rather than the pursuit of material wealth as propagated by American televangelists.³⁴ Another distinction regarding African prosperity gospel is the link that Ruth Marshall makes between the prosperity message in Africa and the idea of defeating the demons that cause poverty.³⁵ Consequently, the pros-

31 Olufunke Adeboye, “‘A Starving Man Cannot Shout Halleluyah’: African Pentecostal Churches and the Challenge of Promoting Sustainable Development,” in *African Initiated Christianity and the Decolonisation of Development: Sustainable Development in Pentecostal and Independent Churches*, ed. Philipp Öhlmann et al. (Routledge, 2020), 115–135.

32 Maria Frahm-Arp, “Pentecostalism, Politics, and Prosperity in South Africa,” *Religions* 9, no. 10 (2018): 298.

33 Allan Anderson, “African Pentecostalism and Prosperity,” in *African Pentecostalism and World Christianity: Essays in Honor of J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu*, vol. 18 of African Christian Studies Series, ed. Nimi Wariboko and Adeshina Afolayan (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2020), 259.

34 Paul Gifford, “Prosperity: A New and Foreign Element in African Christianity,” *Religion* 20, no. 4 (1990): 373–388.

35 Ruth Marshall, “The Sovereignty of Miracles: Pentecostal Political Theology in Nigeria,” *Constellations: An International Journal of Critical & Democratic Theory* 17, no. 2 (2010): 197–223.

perity gospel becomes part of the spiritual weapons that Africans use to defeat poverty. I would therefore reiterate that not everyone in African Pentecostalism is a gospel entrepreneur; there are some who genuinely seek the liberation of Africans from poverty and other social ills.

There is also a link between African Pentecostal hermeneutics and the lived experiences of believers. The biblical text in African Pentecostalism is not only read for understanding but to have an encounter with God through the Scriptures. Two volumes by Marius Nel, *An African Pentecostal Hermeneutics: A Distinctive Contribution to Hermeneutics and Pacifism and Pentecostals in South Africa: A New Hermeneutic for Nonviolence*, are dedicated to making the point that African Pentecostals read the biblical text to experience the power of God as opposed to a critical approach.³⁶ Paul Gifford calls this “the ritual use of the Bible in African Pentecostalism,” where the Bible is understood in terms of “covenants, promises, pledges, and commitments between God and his chosen.”³⁷ Since African Pentecostals, by being “born again,” see themselves as the chosen, they read the Bible to receive the promises of God, as indicated by Gifford. When presenting the gospel to Africans, Pentecostals seek to place the audience on the same level as the chosen ones of God in the biblical texts. For this reason, African Pentecostals do not approach the biblical texts in a rationalistic way but rather in a covenantal way. African Pentecostal preachers are particular in choosing biblical texts that speak directly to the promises of God to the believers. When these biblical texts are recited to the ears of Africans, they become relatable and directly speak to the challenges experienced by many in African contexts. Gifford continues to say that African Pentecostal preachers use the covenantal rhetoric to assure believers that if God has promised them something, he cannot break his promises because he is a covenant-keeping God. African Pentecostals’ use of the Bible is declarative like a judge or referee in any sport would be. Gifford asserts that

A judge, in declaring someone innocent, brings about their innocence. Likewise, the appropriate authority in declaring war, in pronouncing the Olympic games open, in conferring an honorary degree, in pronouncing a

36 Marius Nel, *An African Pentecostal Hermeneutics: A Distinctive Contribution to Hermeneutics* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2018); Marius Nel, *Pacifism and Pentecostals in South Africa: A New Hermeneutic for Nonviolence* (Routledge, 2018).

37 Paul Gifford, “The Ritual Use of the Bible in African Pentecostalism,” in *Practicing the Faith: The Ritual Life of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christians*, ed. Martin Lindhardt (Berghahn Books, 2011), 179–197.

couple man and wife, affects what is said. In the same way, God's promises in scripture are effected in believers' lives through proclamation by an anointed man of God.³⁸

In this way, preachers in African Pentecostal spirituality go beyond sermon presentation by making declarations to believers affirming the promises of God in their lives. This is common in West Africa, where preachers such as David Oyedepo of Winners Chapel and Enoch Adeboye of Redeemed Christian Church of God have the propensity to make declarations of God's promises to the congregants rather than just presenting a sermon to them. This kind of gesture must not be seen as anti-intellectualism and a lack of scientific engagement with the Bible but rather as part of the process of transitioning the written text into an experiential text. In African Pentecostalism, the Bible is not an ordinary book but one inspired by the Holy Spirit; thus, it is a text full of life.

Some Christian traditions approach the biblical text with a critical approach; scholars such as Kalu, Gifford, and Anderson demonstrate that African Pentecostals accept the authority of the Scriptures.³⁹ For the same reason, African Pentecostals distinguish between the Bible and ordinary texts such as newspapers, magazines, and other books. Kalu explains that

Pentecostals understand and utilize doctrine in a fundamentally different way from those traditions that are more thoroughly grounded in rationalist models of considering the question of the authority of the Scriptures. For Pentecostals, doctrine is not essentially generative in function but rather descriptive and used to verbalize lived experience.⁴⁰

This makes the biblical texts applicable to the daily challenges experienced by Africans in various contexts. African Pentecostal preachers, therefore, do not preach abstractly but rather relevantly to the lived experiences of believers. Kalu continues to say that African Pentecostals, in their presentation of the biblical texts, engage in transitioning the written text to the oral and experiential texts.⁴¹ This then translates to addressing the experiences of believers and

38 Gifford, "Ritual Use of the Bible," 180.

39 Ogbu Kalu, "Pentecostal and Charismatic Reshaping of the African Religious Landscape in the 1990s," *Mission Studies* 20, no. 1 (2003): 84–109; Gifford, "Ritual Use;" Anderson, *Spirit-Filled World*.

40 Kalu, "Pentecostal and Charismatic Reshaping," 84–109.

41 Kalu, "Pentecostal and Charismatic Reshaping," 101.

ordinary Africans in different contexts—hence the growth of African Pentecostalism in the twenty-first century.

African Pentecostal hermeneutics becomes a process in which the cognitive learning about the Scriptures transforms into experiential learning that engages the daily challenges of believers in local congregations. The Bible in the hands of an ordinary African Pentecostal becomes a tool in which God delivers the bound and those who have been previously marginalized and oppressed. Therefore, among African Pentecostals, the biblical texts serve the purpose of liberation in addition to encounters with God. This is what African Pentecostals refer to as “the power of the word,” as it applies in their lived experiences. It is not surprising, therefore, that classical Pentecostal churches such as the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa state in their statement of faith that “the Bible is the word of God, written by men as the Holy Spirit inspired them. We believe that it authoritatively proclaims the will of God and teaches us all that is necessary for salvation.”⁴² This is the kind of confession that other streams of African Pentecostalism would include in their statement of faith and constitution. Therefore, newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches, such as the Rhema Bible Church and the Redeemed Christian Church of God, equally believe that the Bible is the Word of God as a transition from the written text to the experiential text, as argued by Kalu. Consequently, Pentecostal hermeneutics becomes the hermeneutics of experience based on the revelation of God in the Scriptures through the work of the Holy Spirit as opposed to a rationalistic approach to the Scriptures.

African Pentecostal churches are strong in packaging their lived experiences as testimonies shared with fellow congregants to encourage one another.⁴³ For the same reason, African Pentecostal theology is more narrative than theoretical in the sharing of testimonies, sermons, and music. Anderson points out that African Pentecostals’ ability to move from theory to the experiences of believers is seen through testimony and personal contact.⁴⁴ Testimonies are used by those found in the margins and the oppressed to demonstrate their victory over the oppressor. Anderson goes on to say that

The narrative most used by African Pentecostal women is that of personal testimony telling of divine intervention in what are often situations of extreme hardship and male oppression. As women predominate in Pente-

42 This statement is taken from the constitution of the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa, accessed October 14, 2025, <https://afm-ags.org/constitution/>.

43 Anderson, *Spirit-Filled World*, 6.

44 Anderson, *Spirit-Filled World*, 6.

costalism, the testimony empowers them every week with an acceptable opportunity to participate in and profoundly influence the theology and witness of the congregation.⁴⁵

This means that testimonies would be used as examples by those who would ordinarily not get the time to preach in church. Thus, the testimony time provides an opportunity for them to also speak to the church about the goodness of God in their lives. This makes African Pentecostal spirituality, as argued by Anderson, liberative in the inclusion of women and children in Pentecostal spiritual services. During the testimonies, individuals share divine encounters with God with their fellow human beings so others can have similar experiences. A testimony service is not only about the conversion to Christianity, but believers testify about daily experiences such as receiving a visa, a job, a promotion, healing from sickness and diseases. This also encourages others outside of African Pentecostalism to join a local Pentecostal church. Therefore, testimonies as part of the lived experiences of African Pentecostals play an important role in the marketisation of the movement—hence their ability to reach millions of Africans. This is the rationale behind the expansion of African Pentecostalism because the gospel moves from one African to another through the sharing of testimonies. In some African Pentecostal churches, particularly the new prophetic churches, these testimonies are broadcast on different mass media platforms and social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and WhatsApp groups. African Pentecostals are unashamed to share their testimonies with the rest of the world through various media platforms, which is the reason the movement has attracted numbers in recent years. Even new converts are encouraged to testify to their experiences when converting to Christianity, bearing witness to what God has done in their lives, which also contributes to the spread of the gospel to others in the African contexts. Therefore, as demonstrated in the works of Birgit Meyer, Marleen De Witte, and Katrien Pype, the media plays an important role in the expansion of African Pentecostalism.⁴⁶ Equally, Asonzeh Ukah has demonstrated how Nigerian Pentecostalism flourishes due to its ability to advertise and market its testimonies

45 Anderson, *Spirit-Filled World*, 204.

46 Birgit Meyer, "Pentecostalism, Prosperity and Popular Cinema in Ghana," *Culture and Religion* 3, no. 1 (2002): 67–87; Katrien Pype, *The Making of the Pentecostal Melodrama: Religion, Media and Gender in Kinshasa*, vol. 6 of Anthropology of Media Series (Berghahn Books, 2012); Marleen De Witte, "Pentecostal Forms across Religious Divides: Media, Publicity, and the Limits of an Anthropology of Global Pentecostalism," *Religions* 9, no. 7 (2018): 217.

in what he calls “roadside Pentecostalism.”⁴⁷ Therefore, African Pentecostalism thrives due to its ability to package testimonies to market its churches to Africans.

4 African Pentecostalism in Local Cultural and Religious Beliefs Contexts

The lived experiences of Africans within African Pentecostalism are applied to the local cultural and religious belief contexts. In other words, African Pentecostals find a way in which the experiences and encounters with the Holy Spirit are experienced within the contexts of the religious and cultural beliefs in Africa. As Allan Anderson points out:

A major reason for the attraction of Pentecostal churches for people oriented to popular religiosity was a sympathetic or at least a serious approach by Pentecostal preachers to African life and culture, fears and uncertainties, and to the worldview of spirits, magic, and witchcraft. The Pentecostal and Spirit churches, with their firm commitment to a cohesive community and their offer of full participation to all, provided substantial responses to universal human needs.⁴⁸

African Pentecostals have also broken the limits of how human beings can now directly speak to God through the work of the Holy Spirit. This is an important factor in how African Pentecostalism can expand due to its human and divine relationship, suppressed in the Christian denominations of Western origins. African Pentecostalism should be seen as a movement that understands both African culture and African religions to offer solutions to African people. This understanding is misunderstood at times by Westerners as an affinity to traditional African religions. The strength of African Pentecostalism is that it finds this balance between culture and religion without losing the essence of the Christian message. On the contrary, Western forms of Christianity often fail when confronted with real African challenges because of a lack of a full grasp of the African spiritual world. Furthermore, African Pentecostalism is more ecstatic and more experiential, given its embrace of the pneumatic gifts

47 Asonzeh Ukah, “Roadside Pentecostalism: Religious Advertising in Nigeria and the Marketing of Charisma,” *Critical Interventions* 2, no. 1–2 (2008): 125–141.

48 Allan Heaton Anderson, *To the Ends of the Earth: Pentecostalism and the Transformation of World Christianity* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 193.

of speaking in tongues, prophecy, and healing. African Pentecostals can easily express themselves in these gifts, which was not the case in the Western forms of mainline Christianity. Therefore, African Pentecostalism provides a platform through which the gifts of the Holy Spirit can operate not only as part of the religious experiences but also within the cultural contexts. This defines the presence and impact of African Pentecostalism in the religious landscape in Africa; it is mainly its ability to appeal to Africans and their culture.

However, some scholars, such as Bengt G.M. Sundkler, Christof Hanekom, and Harvey Cox, while they have identified some continuities with cultural and religious beliefs, have, on the other hand, failed to identify discontinuities.⁴⁹ Hence, the importance of Anderson's book on continuities and discontinuities in African Pentecostalism.⁵⁰ We should also take seriously Joel Robbins' essay, "On the Paradoxes of Global Pentecostalism and the Perils of Continuity Thinking," where he argues for what he calls "anthropology of discontinuity" within the study of Pentecostalism because, for him, Pentecostals in countries like Malawi have broken ties with the past traditional African religions.⁵¹

Scholars like Sundkler, however, fail to see these disconnections; for example, Sundkler connects different practices that happen in the traditional healer's consultation room, such as chanting, vomiting by patients, and other rituals, with what happens in Spirit-type African Independent Churches.⁵² However, Sundkler fails to acknowledge that among African Independent Churches, vomiting as part of healing and deliverance happens because of the power of the Holy Spirit, whereas in traditional African healing, it happens because other spirits in the spiritual realm are invoked on the patient.

Sundkler also fails to acknowledge that both traditional healing and Spirit-type African Independent Churches can use different rituals during healing; however, this does not mean the two are the same.⁵³ Spirit-type African Independent Churches, such as the Zion Christian Church, might use an enema and holy sticks, for example, which are also used by the traditional healer, but this does not make the two religious groups the same. I would also argue

49 Christof Hanekom, *Krisis en Kultus: Geloofsopvattinge en Seremonies Binne'n Swart Kerk* (Academica, 1975); Bengt G.M. Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*, vol. 64 of African Ethnographic Studies of the 20th Century Series (Routledge, 1961); Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Central Publishing, 2001).

50 Anderson, *Spirit-Filled World*.

51 Joel Robbins, "On the Paradoxes of Global Pentecostalism and the Perils of Continuity Thinking," *Religion* 33, no. 3 (2003): 227.

52 Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*, 22.

53 Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*, 263.

that these kinds of practices are not common in classical Pentecostal churches, newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches, or even new prophetic churches. It is therefore unfortunate that scholars such as Sundkler, Hanekom, and Cox would associate African Pentecostalism with the traditional African religions and other popular religions in Africa. It is also unfortunate that African Pentecostalism would be perceived as syncretistic based on the parallelism that these scholars bring between African Pentecostalism and traditional African religions.

On the issue of prophecy, both the prophet in African Pentecostalism and the diviner in traditional African religions might have the skill to diagnose and prescribe certain instructions to deal with the challenge, but they do not use the same sources for their diagnosis and prescription. Marthinus Daneel puts it in this way:

Upon diagnosis of the illness, the remarkable similarity between the [traditional healer] and prophet activities ceases. Both of them find the origin of the disease in the disturbed communal society. Both recognise the bedeviling effect of the powers unleashed in the inter-human relationships and the threatening support of the spirits. But they stave off these powers differently. While the traditional healer seeks a solution that accedes to the conditions of the spirits, the prophetic therapy bases itself on a belief in the power of the Christian God, which surpasses all other powers.⁵⁴

Therefore, these differences, as pointed out by Daneel, should be highlighted to avoid generalizations when it comes to the African Pentecostal Movement. It appears to me that the source of misunderstanding rests on the idea that both traditional African religions and African Pentecostalism have an appreciation for the problems facing Africans. In addition, these religious groups trace the human problems manifesting in the material world back to the spiritual realm. But scholars such as Sundkler, Hanekom, and Cox fail to acknowledge the difference in the source of the solutions brought to Africans, as argued by Daneel. African Pentecostals always rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to confront the evil spirits as causative factors of human problems while traditional African religions appease the same spirits for dealing with the same problems.

54 Marthinus Daneel, *Zionism and Faith-Healing in Rhodesia: Aspects of African Independent Churches*, vol. 2 of Communications/Afrika Studiecentrum, Leiden (Walter de Gruyter, 1970), 43.

The differences highlighted above remain important for concluding that African Pentecostalism is not always in continuity with the cultural and religious beliefs in different contexts. Another burning issue that has both cultural and religious implications is ancestral commemoration, times misunderstood as ancestral worship. African Pentecostals, in their different strands, do not worship ancestors but rather commemorate them as part of the cultural practice.⁵⁵ Even Spirit-type African Independent Churches do not worship the ancestors but acknowledge them in a commemorative way. However, among some Westerners, ancestral commemoration has been confused with ancestral worship. When, for example, African Pentecostals erect a tombstone for their loved ones, it is for the remembrance of their kin but not necessarily to worship them. Hence, even in classical Pentecostal churches like the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa, the erection of a tombstone would not be discouraged among the members of the church. Similarly, a ceremony normally conducted for the unveiling of the tombstone would also not be discouraged. However, classical Pentecostal churches would discourage the slaughtering of cows dedicated to ancestors, which directly speaks to ancestral worship. This is normally done in traditional African religions, where petitions are made for the protection of kin by the ancestors. However, in African Pentecostalism, prayers are normally directed to God in the name of Jesus Christ. African Pentecostals do not pray to the ancestors or make any request to receive blessings from them.

Another burning issue is the confusion that scholars such as Gerhardus Cornelis Oosthuizen make between ancestor spirits and the Holy Spirit. This confusion is also propagated by some of the African Pentecostals' reference to the "Holy Spirit" as the "Holy Ghost." The use of the word "Ghost" confuses some, such that they associate the use of the Holy Spirit in African Pentecostalism with the ancestor spirits. Oosthuizen states in Anderson that "The functions of the ancestor spirits have been transferred to the Holy Spirit, or simply 'the Spirit,' so that in the independent post-Christian movements their 'holy spirit' is no longer the Holy Spirit of whom we learn in Scripture."⁵⁶ As argued in this article, the Holy Spirit in African Pentecostalism is the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures and is defined as a force that confronts evil spirits, including ancestor spirits, rather than functioning like them or appeasing them as it happens in traditional African religions. Again, there is a significant difference between the

55 Allan Anderson, "African Pentecostalism and the Ancestor cult: Confrontation or Compromise?" *Missionalia: Southern African Journal of Mission Studies* 21, no. 1 (1993): 26–39.

56 Gerhardus Cornelis Oosthuizen, *Post-Christianity in Africa: A Theology and Anthropology Study* (Hurst, 1968); Anderson, *Spirit-Filled World*, 189.

ancestral practices in traditional African religions and in African Pentecostalism, which should be acknowledged to avoid labeling the movement syncretistic.

Discontinuities in African Pentecostalism should also be highlighted when it comes to cultural and religious practices, such as initiation schools. Many of the African Pentecostal churches, including the Spirit-type African Independent Churches, discourage their children from participating in the initiation school. However, as part of the cultural practice, they encourage their boys to take part in circumcision. Although circumcision is part of initiation, when done with a medical doctor, it does not include religious rituals inconsistent with the Christian faith. This is because many of the African Pentecostal churches are aware of the kind of rituals that take place in initiation schools, which are linked to traditional African religions. For the same reason, in churches like the Zion Christian Church, when members or their children attend initiation school, they will be excommunicated or asked not to attend church for a certain period until they are cleansed from the rituals that take place in the school. Therefore, initiation cannot be used to motivate syncretistic views in African Pentecostalism, as many of the African Pentecostal churches do not encourage the practice but rather circumcision.

In addition, African Pentecostals are aware of the various rites performed by Africans during funerals, such as observing the body before burial and other practices. However, during funerals, burial rites, and the unveiling of tombstones, African Pentecostals do not engage in ceremonies that might appear to support ancestral worship. Further, African Pentecostals do not subscribe to the slaughtering of cows and the use of blood for the cleansing of the corpse. Most African Pentecostal churches will pray for the family of the deceased and refrain from partaking in other ceremonies. Therefore, other rites, such as those surrounding funerals, cannot be used to motivate the idea that African Pentecostalism is syncretistic.

Moreover, African Pentecostal churches do not practice polygamy but rather believe in marriage as the union between a natural man and a natural woman. Emmanuel Sackitey Teye points out that classical Pentecostal churches in Ghana, like the Church of Pentecost, believe that marriage rites should be performed by an ordained minister, and it should happen between a natural man and a natural woman.⁵⁷ This kind of practice is also exercised by classical Pentecostal churches in South Africa, such as the Apostolic Faith Mission,

57 Emmanuel Sackitey Teye, "The Church of Pentecost and Customary Marriage in Ghana" (PhD diss., University of Cape Coast, 2022).

Full Gospel Church, and the Assemblies of God. Some of these churches will not even enter into discussions about same-sex marriages. Spirit-type African Independent Churches like the Zion Christian Church also believe in marriage between a natural woman and a natural man. Therefore, even the issue of polygamy cannot be used to motivate syncretistic practices in African Pentecostalism.

In summary, African Pentecostalism is aware of the various cultural and religious beliefs in Africa; hence, the movement is attractive to many Africans. However, African Pentecostalism is not always in continuity with these cultural and religious beliefs; hence, the importance of identifying the discontinuities to avoid generalizations.

5 African Pentecostalism in the Diaspora

African Pentecostalism is not only studied and understood in the context of the local cultural and religious contexts on the continent but also in the diaspora. Because of economic challenges facing Africans, including but not limited to poverty, unemployment, and inequalities, many Africans have migrated to other countries in response to these challenges. In addition, political instabilities due to conflicts in wars in countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, and others are the causes of migration from Africa to Europe, the North America (USA and Canada), and Australia. However, some Africans migrate not because of any challenge, such as economic and political instability, but simply for a better life in terms of education and job opportunities. This, too, causes a massive migration of black professionals in Africa to the different continents, as highlighted above. African Pentecostals become part of this migration as they too face the challenges highlighted above and also seek the same opportunities.

For the same reasons, African Pentecostal migration churches are planted in different continents. Therefore, African diaspora Pentecostalism must be studied and understood in the context of migration, as demonstrated in the works of Jehu Hanciles, Afe Adogame, and Stephen Spencer.⁵⁸ Hence, Amos Yong and

⁵⁸ Jehu Hanciles, "Migration and Mission: The Religious Significance of the North-South Divide," in *Mission in the 21st Century*, ed. Andrew Walls and Cathy Ross (Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., 2008), 18–29; Afe Adogame, "Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements in a Global Perspective," in *The New Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Bryan S. Turner (John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 498–518; Stephen Spencer, *Mission and Migration* (Cliff College Publishing, 2008).

Estrela Alexander's use of "Afro Pentecostalism" remains relevant in describing the Afrocentrism of Pentecostalism in different continents.⁵⁹

The point I make here, though, is that migration factors are one of the contributing factors for the establishment of African Pentecostal migrant churches. For example, Nomatter Sande explains that the Apostolic Faith Mission International Ministry in the United Kingdom was started in 1998 by a group of Zimbabwean Pentecostals who fled the country because of the many economic challenges they faced.⁶⁰ Similarly, the Redeemed Christian Church of God in the United Kingdom, the Church of Pentecost in the United Kingdom, and many others have been established because of the need to cater to their members who have migrated to the country. Matthews Ojo concurs that "Increasing migration of Africans to the developed economies of the Western world in the late twentieth century created pockets of African Diaspora communities in several Western countries."⁶¹ Ojo goes on to cite examples of how about two hundred African Pentecostal migrant churches have been planted in countries such as Germany and how in "In Kiev, Ukraine, the Embassy of God Church established in 1993 by the Nigerian, Sunday Adelaja, has grown in 2006 to about 25,000 members in Kiev, where 99% of the members were native Europeans."⁶² These are non-exhaustive examples to illustrate that African Pentecostalism not only exists in local cultural and religious contexts in Africa but also in the diaspora.

The African Pentecostal migrant churches are thriving on different continents in the world because African Pentecostals understand well that the gospel is not limited to the local contexts in the continent but should reach the end of the world as per the Great Commission in the Gospel of Matthew: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Matt 28:19, NKJV). Consequently, African Pentecostals endeavor to preach the gospel to different parts of the world.

Ojo also highlights the fact that churches such as Kingsway International Christian Centre (KICC), founded in 1992 in the United Kingdom by Matthew Ashimolowo, thrive in London in taking sex workers, homeless people, and

59 Amos Yong and Estrela Alexander, eds., *Afro-Pentecostalism: Black Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in History and Culture* (NYU Press, 2011).

60 Nomatter Sande, "Historicizing the Apostolic Faith Mission in the United Kingdom," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 28, no. 2 (2019): 267–283.

61 Matthews Ojo, "Interpreting Pentecostalism and the Changing Religious Landscape in Africa," in *African Pentecostalism from African Perspectives: Volume 1: Methods*, ed. Ezra Chitando et al. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2024): 37–58.

62 Ojo, "Interpreting Pentecostalism," 48.

drug addicts off the streets and into households.⁶³ At about six thousand members, according to Ojo, KICC is the largest Pentecostal church in the United Kingdom.⁶⁴ These numbers by KICC and also the twenty-five thousand-member Embassy of God Church demonstrate that African Pentecostal migrant churches are flourishing in different regions. Moreover, the Apostolic Faith Mission International Ministry in the United Kingdom, as pointed out by Sande,⁶⁵ has grown over the years. Although it does not have the KICC numbers, it is well established in different cities in the United Kingdom. The same can be said about the Redeemed Christian Church of God and the Church of Pentecost, which not only have demonstrated growth in the United Kingdom but also elsewhere in the world. Afe Adogame states that the Redeemed Christian Church of God “represents one of the many African churches that are now consciously engaged in sending missionaries to evangelize Europe, the USA, and other parts of the globe. Many African churches have commissioned missionaries and provided them with financial and material resources.”⁶⁶ I mention these few cases here to illustrate the impact made by African Pentecostal migrant churches. Moreover, we cannot underestimate the role played by African Pentecostal migrant churches in taking care of migrants unfamiliar with the host countries’ laws and regulations, another factor that draws migrants to these churches, thus contributing to their growth.

However, some of the African Pentecostal migrant churches face different challenges. In the case of Apostolic Faith Mission International Ministry in the United Kingdom, they are unable to reach out to the local indigenous people in the country and are only gathering African migrants. This poses a challenge for the sustainability of African Pentecostal migrant churches such as the Apostolic Faith Mission International Ministry. Churches such as these might be unable to sustain themselves should the conditions of migrants’ home countries improve. This might mean that if migrants return to their home country, churches such as Apostolic Faith Mission International Ministry will lose membership, which might lead to closure. This calls for a change in the ways that these churches do ministry—to consider the local cultural contexts in the diaspora.

We should also remember that this was the failure of Western missionaries when arriving in Africa; they failed to acknowledge the local cultural con-

63 Ojo, “Interpreting Pentecostalism,” 48.

64 Ojo, “Interpreting Pentecostalism,” 48.

65 Sande, “Historicizing the Apostolic Faith Mission.”

66 Afe Adogame, “African Initiated Churches in the Diaspora,” in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to African Religions*, ed. Elias Kifon Bongmba (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 310–322.

texts in Africa. Therefore, African Pentecostal migrant churches can avoid the failures of Western missionaries in Africa by adjusting to the local cultural contexts. Nonetheless, this point alone cannot dismiss the impact made by African Pentecostal migrant churches; as Western countries struggle with issues of secularism, these churches are more likely to grow in the decades to come. African Pentecostal migrant churches are better placed in reviving Christian spiritualities in the West through their pneumatic approaches to prayer, church fellowship, and spiritual services.⁶⁷

In addition, as many Africans migrate to the West in large numbers, we are more likely to experience a resurgence of faith in Europe, North America (USA and Canada), Australia, and New Zealand through the growth of African Pentecostal migrant churches. As many Africans seek opportunities beyond their continent, we will experience growth of African Pentecostal migrant churches. Therefore, African Pentecostalism should be studied and understood beyond the African continent, as marked by the growth and impact of the African Pentecostal migrant churches in the twenty-first century. This and other methodological approaches to the study of African Pentecostalism are discussed in detail below.

6 Methodological Considerations for the Study of African Pentecostalism

In his article, “The Biblical Basis for Present Trends in African Theology,” John Mbiti highlights three types of theologies important to the study of African theology: written theology, oral theology, and symbolic theology.⁶⁸ Mbiti notes,

Written African theology is the privilege of a few Christians who have had considerable education and who generally articulate their theological reflection in articles and (so far, few) books, mostly in English, French, German, or another European language. Oral theology is produced in the fields, by the masses, through song, sermon, teaching, prayer, and conversation. It is theology in the open air, often unrecorded, often heard only by

67 Nomatter Sande and Ezra Chitando, “African Scholarship on African Pentecostalism in Diasporic Contexts: An Overview,” in *African Pentecostalism from African Perspectives: Volume 1: Methods*, ed. Ezra Chitando et al (Palgrave Macmillan, 2024), 217–231.

68 John Mbiti, “The Biblical Basis for Present Trends in African Theology,” *Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research* 4, no. 3 (1980): 119–124.

small groups, and generally lost to libraries and seminaries. Symbolic theology is expressed through art, sculpture, drama, symbols, rituals, dance, colors, and numbers.⁶⁹

From these three, as highlighted by Mbiti, I think oral theology should be taken most seriously in the study of African Pentecostalism. Besides, Mbiti notes, oral theology is the mother of all theologies, including written theology, because it is strongly rooted in Scriptures. There are several reasons why oral theology should be considered for the study of African Pentecostalism. First, African Pentecostalism is deeply rooted in oral traditions in the form of songs, reading of Scriptures, sermons, prayers, praise, and worship. Therefore, to understand African Pentecostalism, a scholar or theologian should first be immersed in the oral traditions of the movement. This means that to understand African Pentecostalism is to understand how African Pentecostals sing, pray, preach, read Scriptures aloud, and how they worship within the context of African Pentecostal spirituality.

Another important reason is that to understand the oral traditions in African Pentecostalism, it is important to first understand the oral traditions in Africa, of which oral theology is a relevant approach. Last, much of the knowledge system in Africa, as highlighted by Mbiti, has not been documented; therefore, the rich history in African Pentecostalism remains a narrative that calls for theologians and scholars to listen to old stories about the movement to develop relevant theologies for the movement. The task of African Pentecostal scholars and theologians is to record these oral theologies and transform them into written theology to contribute to the development of knowledge systems in African Pentecostalism. In addition, there is a need to engage African Pentecostals who are increasingly producing written popular theologies through the publication of books, pamphlets, and online posts, as these represent important primary sources, alongside oral theologies.

African Pentecostalism cannot be studied in a vacuum but within the main theological disciplines of the Old and New Testaments, Church history, systematic theology, missiology, and practical theology.⁷⁰ African Pentecostal scholars cannot continue to produce knowledge in the field without streamlining such knowledge in specific theological disciplines.⁷¹ This is because African Pente-

69 Mbiti, "Biblical Basis," 119.

70 Mookgo Solomon Kgatle, *African Pentecostal Theology: Modality, Disciplinarity, and Decoloniality* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2023).

71 Chammah Kaunda, "'Minding the Pentecostal Paradox': Currents and Cross-Currents in Pentecostal Studies in Africa (PenteSA)," *Religion Compass* 18, no. 7 (2024): e12509.

costalism is a Christian movement in which the conventional Christian theological discipline can play a role in shaping the studies in the movement. This will also assist in streamlining the African Pentecostal studies to keep track of the developments within the movement.

In addition, locating African Pentecostalism within specific theological disciplines helps in terms of an appraisal of existing relevant theories. This also helps in terms of developing new theories within the various disciplines that can prove relevant to the study of African Pentecostalism. Therefore, African Pentecostalism can be studied with a particular focus on biblical studies in understanding how African Pentecostals read and interpret the Bible. It can be studied within the context of Church history in how the movement has developed in Africa and to assess the recent developments in historicity.

Scholars such as Anderson have, over the years, developed the history of African Pentecostalism, which now benefits emerging scholars interested in the history of the movement. However, there is a need to develop more of these historical discourses on African Pentecostalism, particularly in specific regions, as so much remains to be discovered.

Moreover, African Pentecostalism needs to be developed systematically and/or about theological ethics, as this can help deal with some of the ethical concerns Christian communities have with some of the strands of African Pentecostalism, particularly new prophetic churches. Much of what has been written on African Pentecostalism is more missiological and more related to practical theology. Nonetheless, these two fields can also be developed in the study of African Pentecostalism.

Therefore, the conventional theological disciplines can add value in the establishment of African Pentecostal studies; some seminaries and universities are already moving in the right direction in this regard. However, we cannot underestimate the ability of African Pentecostalism to be studied beyond theological disciplines in an interdisciplinary way, as Anderson observes:

Probably more than most other subjects, Pentecostalism has been studied in a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary way, and no discipline can rely on its resources exclusively. Social scientists with their emphasis on empirical evidence are essential for a proper understanding of Pentecostalism. The literature on Pentecostalism has been enriched by the proliferation of social scientific studies since the 1960s, particularly in the disciplines of social history, anthropology, and sociology.⁷²

⁷² Anderson, *Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 263.

Elias Bongmba concurs, that any theological discipline is limited when studied in isolation but can be enhanced through the incorporation of various methodological considerations coming from other disciplines.⁷³ In an interdisciplinary study, problems can be reformulated, and solutions can be enhanced beyond the conventional discipline, thus benefiting the scholar or theologian in a big way. The same can be said about African Pentecostalism, whose study can be enhanced by engaging with other scientists such as historians, anthropologists, and sociologists, as suggested by Anderson.

Bongmba goes on to explain that adopting an interdisciplinary approach to a study does not mean that one abandons the original or simply their field of study but rather incorporates other fields while keeping their discipline.⁷⁴ This helps to deal with the challenges of the dominance of other disciplines in one's discipline. Hence, the importance of first establishing African Pentecostalism in theological disciplines and thereafter forging an interdisciplinary study between theological disciplines and other social sciences within the context of the movement. Therefore, an interdisciplinary study or even a multidisciplinary study of African Pentecostalism is important for other disciplines outside theology to engage with the study area. This kind of approach can help scholars and non-theologians interested in African Pentecostalism to engage in important themes such as politics, gender studies, health studies, anthropological studies, ecological issues, entrepreneurial studies, science and technology, sociology, archaeology, and so forth. There is a growing interest in the intersections of Pentecostalism, gender, and sexuality by scholars such as Chammah Kaunda, Ezra Chitando and Sophia Chirongoma, Jane Soothill, and Adriaan van Klinken.⁷⁵

The other important methodological consideration in the study of African Pentecostalism is engaged scholarship. Kaunda states that "Pentecostal theologians and scholars need to position themselves as ecclesiastically engaged scholars who actively participate in the ongoing Pentecostal evolution through

73 Elias Bongmba, "Interdisciplinary and Transdisciplinarity in African Studies: Theology and the Other Sciences," *Religion and Theology* 21, no. 3-4 (2014): 218-250.

74 Bongmba, "Interdisciplinary and Transdisciplinarity in African Studies," 220.

75 Chammah Kaunda, *Genders, Sexualities, and Spiritualities in African Pentecostalism* (Springer International Publishing, 2020); Ezra Chitando and Sophia Chirongoma, eds., *Justice Not Silence: Churches Facing Sexual and Gender-Based Violence* (African Sun Media, 2013); Jane Soothill, "Gender and Pentecostalism in Africa," in *Pentecostalism in Africa: Presence and Impact of Pneumatic Christianity in Postcolonial Societies*, ed. Martin Lindhardt (Brill, 2015), 191-219; Adriaan van Klinken, "Gender and Sexuality," in *Encyclopedia of Christianity in the Global South*, 2 vols., ed. Mark A. Lamport (Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 302-304.

public, prophetic, intellectual, intentional, and constructive dialogue with Pentecostal leadership. This involvement is crucial in the pursuit of viable theologies and a missional approach to pastoral ministry, mission, and socio-political engagement.”⁷⁶ Anyone interested in African Pentecostalism cannot fully understand the movement without engaging Pentecostal communities in the form of local congregations in African contexts. Ethnographic and autoethnographic studies in local congregations can help theologians and scholars gain more knowledge of African Pentecostalism. The oral theologies mentioned above do take place in local congregations, which place them at the center of African Pentecostal theology—hence the importance of not only learning about the movement in literature but also engaging with local congregations at the grassroots level. This helps in making knowledge development not only the task of the institutions of higher learning but also engages those on the margins, particularly local congregations. This also helps as scholars and theologians seek primary data about African Pentecostalism as opposed to always relying on secondary data and is important in ensuring that the knowledge developed by scholars and theologians on African Pentecostalism truly reflects the lived experiences of congregants and pastors in local congregations.

In other words, by engaging Pentecostal communities, biases can be avoided in the study of African Pentecostalism. However, this kind of engagement should not be limited to local congregations but also ecumenical organizations within African Pentecostalism. The various fellowships including Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria, Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council, International Federation of Christian Churches in South Africa, the Evangelical, Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches Fellowship of Southern Africa (EPC-CFSA), Alliance of Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches in South Africa, South African Union Council of Independent Churches, and many other associations and fellowships are important for a scholar and theologian to learn about specific denominations and churches within the context of African Pentecostalism.

7 Conclusion

African Pentecostalism should be understood as part of Global Pentecostalism and Christian movements that emphasize the baptism in the Holy Spirit and direct relationship with God. However, there is also a need to identify the

⁷⁶ Kaunda, “Minding the Pentecostal Paradox,” 9.

indigenous expressions of African Pentecostalism that make the movement unique from other regions. Therefore, the adjective “African” as used in this article specifically speaks to the understanding of the Pentecostal movement in the African contexts. Although it was not possible in one article to cover all the contexts, it was still important to use “African” in differentiating the movement from other regions in the world.

The findings of this article demonstrate that African Pentecostalism has impacted the continent due to its ability to relate to the lived experiences of Africans in different contexts. African Pentecostalism is a Christian movement expressed in the local cultural and religious contexts but should be differentiated from other popular religions in Africa. Therefore, the indigenous expressions of African Pentecostalism must not be misunderstood as syncretism.

African Pentecostalism is a movement also making an impact in the diaspora. However, these efforts should not be conceptualized as “reverse missions” but as “multidirectional missions.” The different discourses on African Pentecostalism, such as the lived experiences of Africans in the local cultural, religious, and diaspora contexts, are important in how scholars in the twenty-first century approach African Pentecostalism. Insiders and outsiders need to pay attention to the continuities and discontinuities to avoid generalizations. The outsiders should be able to engage experts in the field as interlocutors to avoid biases in their study of African Pentecostalism.

There is also a need to consider the various theological disciplines when studying African Pentecostalism, such as Church history, Old and New Testaments, systematic theology, missiology, and practical theology. However, we cannot underestimate the ability of African Pentecostalism to be studied beyond theological disciplines in an interdisciplinary way. Moreover, to better understand the lived experiences of Africans in local cultural, religious, and diaspora contexts, it is important to conduct empirical research with Pentecostal communities and leaders for meaningful engagements.