

## THE SECULARIZING AND ANTI-SECULARIZING POTENTIAL OF AFRICAN PENTECOSTALISM

[www.academia.edu/36202864/THE\\_SECULARIZING\\_AND\\_ANTI\\_SECULARIZING\\_POTENTIAL\\_OF\\_AFRICAN\\_PENTECOSTALISM](http://www.academia.edu/36202864/THE_SECULARIZING_AND_ANTI_SECULARIZING_POTENTIAL_OF_AFRICAN_PENTECOSTALISM)

Jerry M. Ireland, PhD

Dallas Willard once said, “our souls are...soaked with secularity” (Willard 1997, 91). By this he meant that we live in a world permeated by secular notions and that Christians often go about unaware of the secular tendencies to which they normally drift. Willard’s comment though was largely directed toward Western culture where secularism has been on the rise and where religion was once expected to disappear entirely. Normally, though, we do not associate secularism with places like Africa. If anything, Africa has proven to be a terrible nuisance for those who had hoped for religion’s demise, which has long been one of secularism’s anticipated outcomes. As J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu (2013) points out, this enduring persistence of religion can especially be seen in the work of scholars such as Harvey Cox, reflecting on Pentecostalism and who once counted himself among the “death of God” theologians, but who now declares “today it is secularity, not spirituality that may be headed for extinction” (1; Cox 1995, xv). Today one quarter of all Christians in the world reside in Africa and by 2030 it will likely be home to one out of three (McClendon 2017). By far the fastest growing form of Christianity in Africa is Pentecostalism, even though it remains a movement of great diversity (Kalu 2007, 9; Anderson 2010, 13-20). Indeed, it is no exaggeration to speak, as does Asamoah-Gyadu (2013), of “the Pentecostalization of Africa” (9).

This essay explores the ways in which the growth of Pentecostalism in Africa represents both hope and concern in the area of secularization. My thesis is that 1) the prosperity gospel, or “prosperity Pentecostalism” as I am calling it, represents the betrayal of Pentecostalism’s historic

and theological roots and a sell-out to secularism, while at the same time 2) what I will refer to as “missional Pentecostalism” represents great hope not only for African Christianity but also for the renewal of Christian mission around the globe.

### **Secularism and African Pentecostalism**

Secularization describes “a process in which religion diminishes in importance both in society and in the consciousness of individuals” (Berger 2005, 384). Modern notions of secularism often owe some lineage to, among others, Max Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, wherein Weber argued for a connection between the ‘worldly’ or practical ethics advocated by the Reformers and the emergence of market capitalism. The Protestant ethic which Weber described and linked to capitalism focused on hard work and delayed gratification, and was set intentionally within a material, or in Weber’s terminology, a “disenchanted” framework. Key to understanding the Protestant ethic in Weber’s work was a certain irony in which, as Nogueira-Godsey (2012) explains, “the rational discipline required of the Calvinist was intrinsically tied to modernization, scientific discovery, maximizing efficiency, and cultivating a rationalistic approach to all areas of life” (55). That is, the very basis of this Protestant ethic would lead to its own demise because it was a system in which religious belief was unnecessary to the achievement of its goals. But Weber noted that Calvinism promoted a work ethic that served as evidence of having been part of the elect. In short, “the accumulation of wealth was morally sanctioned in so far as it was combined with a sober, industrious career; wealth was condemned only if employed to support a life of idle luxury or self-indulgence” (Giddens 2005, xii). It is not difficult then to see the inevitable comparison that some contemporary scholars are making between the legitimation of wealth acquisition in Calvinism and that of the modern-day prosperity gospel in places like Africa (Ogunbile 2014, 132).

From the mid to late twentieth century, American Sociologist Peter Berger championed Weber's ideas by proposing (though eventually withdrawing) his own secularization thesis prognosticating the diminishing role of faith ("Secularism" 2008, 803). Berger and others specifically attributed their predictions to the growing power of modernity, which they expected to eventually erode the role of faith (Berger 2005, 384-86; Hewitt 2015, 547). Central to this thesis was Weber's notion alluded to earlier of the "disenchantment of the world." As Berger (2005) explains, "put simply, the idea has been that the relation between modernity and religion is inverse—the more of the former the less of the latter" (284). Berger's most significant contribution and extension of Weber's theory may be his focus on pluralism as a product of modernity and thereby secularism. Pluralism, made possible by globalization and technology, forced to the forefront a situation in which religious belief exists in a marketplace of competing ideas. "In other words, pluralism forces the religious believer to recognize that their sacred reality is subjective" (Nogueira-Godsey 2012, 58).

It is not uncommon in Africa or elsewhere for people to hold contradictory ideas. For example, a 2016 study done by LifeWay Resources observes of U.S. Christians that "many Americans live with a great deal of theological confusion and even hold contradicting sets of beliefs" (n.p.). This is certainly the case regarding religion and secularism in Africa, as both seem to flourish side by side, to varying degrees. It would be short-sighted to assume that Africa's strong and pervasive belief in the supernatural keeps secularism at bay, as the presence of pluralism shows. In Africa, secularism and the attenuating pluralism it produces has proven especially problematic in that it has brought about a resurgent syncretism between Christianity and African Traditional Religions. As Mashua (2009) observes, "[Pluralism] has promoted a spirit of accommodation and tolerance to the point that it has become almost impossible for one

to rebuke the spirit of syncretism without being accused of having a judgmental attitude” (120). While it is true, as Anderson says, that Pentecostalism (indeed, all Christian theology) is syncretistic to some extent (Anderson 2013, 7), this does not mean that all forms of syncretism are equally destructive. That is, some forms of syncretism are non-theological in nature such as the inclusion of local forms of dance or music, while others are theological in nature, such as the use of charms and amulets, and therefore reflect a departure from Pentecostalism’s historic and biblical roots (Ireland 2012).

The rapid growth of Pentecostal Christianity, especially in the global south, has necessitated a reassessment of those predictions, referred to earlier, concerning the demise of religion (Berger 2005, 386; Droogers 2010, 46; Nogueira-Godsey 2012, 52). Indeed, some have seen the emergence of Pentecostalism in the early twentieth century as a reaction to modernity, and thereby to secularization, even if the precise nature and classification of that reaction remains the subject of some debate (Hunt 2010, 180-81).

For the purpose of this study, then, I will define secularization as giving maximal attention to the forces of modernity and thereby denying the necessity of religious faith. Secularism effectively moves religion to the periphery of culture making it increasingly irrelevant. It does this most potently by its denial of the supernatural. This ultimately threatens to undermine the role of faith because any system that can function without God eventually will. By this I mean that even though some have seen the secular and sacred as complimentary and not opposing concepts, the reality is that secularity often leads to the neglect and eventual rejection of the sacred (Mmassi 2013, 234). As Mashua explains, “secularization is the process through which everything considered to be secular is detached from the church. When this process takes place, humans rely mainly on their own knowledge and findings, considering God to be

redundant” (Mashua 2009, 110-11). This is precisely what gave rise to liberal theology in the first place. Enlightenment-influenced theologians, such as Schleiermacher, sought to “protect God” as it were from the seemingly unstoppable forces of modern thought, embodied especially in higher criticism and evolutionary theory, and they did this by relegating God to the inner realm of subjectivity and values. In doing so, the very idea of “God” became unnecessary. In some ways, secularization describes the process of subtle distraction, in which the church takes its eyes off of its eternal destiny and exchanges it for a temporal one (Mashau 2009, 11).

### **Secularism and African Pentecostalism**

Owing to the vast diversity among movements variously classified as “Pentecostal,” Allen Anderson, who has written extensively on both Pentecostalism in general and African Pentecostalism specifically, has argued for defining the term broadly according to a “family resemblance” that emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit (Anderson 2010, 15). Speaking more specifically of African Pentecostalism, Anderson describes it as “divergent African churches that emphasize the working of the Spirit in the church, particularly with ecstatic phenomena like prophecy and speaking in tongues, healing and exorcism” (Anderson 2016, 114). Anderson’s (2010) concern is to be as inclusive as possible regarding more recent churches who bear this family resemblance, whether they be independent, Charismatic or neo-Charismatic in nature—that is, whether they call themselves Pentecostal or not (15). For Anderson

In the multidisciplinary study of global Pentecostalism, a broad taxonomy must use the family resemblance analogy to include its historical links and its theological and sociological foci. Pentecostalism continues to renew and invigorate itself in countless new forms of expression. Seen from this perspective, it is not a movement that has a distinct beginning in America or anywhere else, or a movement based on a particular theology; it is instead a series of movements that emerged after several years and several different formative ideas and events. (27)

While I generally agree with Anderson on the need for etic definitions and with his desire to recognize the diverse history, origins, and contours of global Pentecostalism, I also believe that emic and theological definitions that are more exclusivist can be useful as well, especially when it comes to defining a particular species of Pentecostalism. As such, I will argue in this paper that two strands of African Pentecostalism, which I will refer to as “prosperity Pentecostalism” and “missional Pentecostalism” respectively represent secularizing and anti-secularizing forces within the movement. In what follows I will articulate the contours of these two opposing strands of African Pentecostalism.

### **Missional Pentecostalism**

Generally, contemporary scholars divide Pentecostalism into four categories: 1) Classic Pentecostals—representing those churches that emerged in the early twentieth century with connections to global revivals like the one at Azusa Street, 2) “churches of the Spirit”—those that do not self-identify as Pentecostal but whose practices closely resemble those of recognized Pentecostal churches (which in Africa includes African Initiated Churches, or AICs), 3) Charismatics—usually traditional denominational churches such as Catholics and Anglicans that advocate spiritual gifts and Spirit baptism, and 4) Neo-Pentecostal churches—that include prosperity, word of faith, Third Wave and many independent charismatic churches (Anderson 2010, 17-19; Ogunbible 2014, 133-134). This study focuses, first, on those churches with connections to Classic Pentecostalism, or to what I prefer to call “missional Pentecostalism,” and second, on a strand within Neo-Pentecostalism that I will refer to as “prosperity Pentecostalism.”

I will begin my discussion by describing “missional Pentecostalism” since it likely represents the least-well-known among the two. Anderson (2013) rightly says that “Pentecostalism is above all else a missionary movement,” (1) and “the fundamental conviction

of Pentecostals is that the power they receive through the Spirit is to evangelize all nations and so glorify Jesus Christ” (2). Similarly, Byron Klaus (2007) has argued that Pentecostalism must be understood “through a lens of mission” (39). Klaus helpfully points out the various historical influences that combined to give birth to modern Pentecostalism, and how these contributed to the missional nature of the movement. These included a Wesleyan-Holiness emphasis on the Spirit’s power for entire sanctification for service to God, the Keswick emphasis on Holy Spirit empowerment for evangelism, a millennial focus on the immanent return of Christ that empowered and motivated socially marginalized groups, restorationist expectations of a return to the nature and power of the New Testament church, and a multi-culturalism that anticipated the new heaven and new earth (40). As Klaus notes:

the common thread in this stream of influences is the sovereign gift of power that God is using in a significant new chapter in this stage of redemptive history. A sense of participation in a story of eschatological significance, supported by supernatural Spirit empowerment(s) creates a strong sense of destiny in the Pentecostal identity. (40)

Citing the work of Margaret Paloma, Klaus also notes that Pentecostalism, challenges “the sacred/secular dichotomy that characterized modernity” and instead gives rise to “an affirmation of the immediate availability of God’s power and presence” (46; cf. Maxwell 2015, 904). For this very reason, and speaking of North American Pentecostalism, Frank Macchia says that “Pentecostals need to rediscover the eschatological fervour that allowed them in the early years of the movement to swim against the spirit of the age” and thereby challenge many social paradigms that were oppressive to women and minorities (Macchia 1991, 23).

Interestingly, Klaus (2007) also shows, citing McClung, that in the developing theology of Pentecostalism there has been a detectable movement away from an early emphasis on evangelism, epitomized in William Seymour’s admonition, “do not go forth from this meeting and talk about tongues, but try to get people saved” (41). This shift does not represent an

abandonment of Pentecostalism's missional emphasis, but rather an increased attentiveness to the meaning of the kingdom of God, along with explorations of applying that in a Pentecostal perspective beyond missions. This has for example been a dominant theme in the work of preeminent Pentecostal scholar Gordon Fee, and in more recent works such as that by Frank Macchia, in his *Baptism in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology* (47-49). Similarly, arguing for understanding European Pentecostalism as a reaction to the Enlightenment and to secularism, Allan Anderson (2006) says that "for Pentecostals, a rationalistic intellectualism has destroyed the soul of Christianity" (277). This leads to his conclusion that "Pentecostal mission is fundamentally and essentially proclaiming and demonstrating a holistic message" (278).

In ways very similar to Klaus, Allan Anderson (2012) says "Pentecostalism is a mission movement par excellence" (231). He identifies "five cardinal features" of what I am here referring to as missional Pentecostalism (231). First, Anderson notes that eschatology and the expectation of an end-times revival proceeding the return of Christ was a driving force in the emergence of the Pentecostal movement. Second, Pentecostalism's beginnings were multi-cultural. This was true not only of the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles, led by African American pastor William Seymour, but also in that global revivals were taking place around that same time in places like India, Korea, and China (232-235). Third, "Pentecostalism placed emphasis on missions as a result of the experience of Spirit baptism" (235). That is, many who experienced these Pentecostal revivals went out as missionaries, sensing an urgency to the task and an empowerment for mission. Fourth, Anderson notes that many early Pentecostal missionaries were guilty of colonialism and paternalistic tendencies, often (though not always) failing to recognize the contributions of others, especially indigenous people or of women (237-238). Finally, Pentecostalism's missionary nature was evident in its extraordinary capacity for

contextualization. “Because of its emphasis on the empowering ability of the Spirit to equip ordinary believers for missionary service without requiring prior academic qualifications, Pentecostalism was more dependent on national workers than other missions were at the time” (240).

Further evidence of the missional nature of early Pentecostalism described by Klaus and Anderson can be seen in many of the publications that helped sustain the movement. Publications such as William Seymour’s *The Apostolic Faith*, and E. N. Bell’s *Word and Witness* frequently published testimonies of visions, prophecies, and Spirit-inspired songs that underscored the urgency of global evangelization in light of Jesus’ soon expected return. Consider this typical example from the inaugural issue of *The Apostolic Faith* (1906):

Many are the prophecies spoken in unknown tongues and many the visions that God is giving concerning his soon coming. The heathen must first receive the gospel. One prophecy given in an unknown tongue was interpreted ‘The time is short, and I am going to send out a large number in the Spirit of God to preach the full gospel in the power of the Spirit.’ ”

Similarly, Anna Hall, from Houston, Texas, who was a worker at the Azusa Street revival, offered this testimony in the same issue of *The Apostolic Faith*:

I heard the beautiful warbling of a bird, and thought it was a mocking bird which one might hear there. But no, it seemed away own in my soul. And as that beautiful bird began to sing, I saw a little infant face right before my eyes. And as the song of the bird began to ripple, it began to sound like water running over pebbles. It increased till it sounded like many waters, and the face enlarged till it was a full grown [sic] face. I said “Surely this is a messenger from the holy country.” The voice answered, “Yes and I have to tell you that Jesus is coming. Go forward in My name, preach the Gospel of the Kingdom, for the King’s business demands haste. My people have only time to get on the beautiful garments and prepare for the wedding supper in the Heavens.” (1906, 3)

Early Pentecostal publications were riddled with similar warnings and admonishments. They served to sustain a sense of urgency created by the dynamic experience of God’s presence that accompanied the many global revivals that birthed modern Pentecostalism. The specific

focus of that urgency was the task of world missions. Thus, when the Assemblies of God organized in 1914, it did so specifically “for the greatest evangelization the world had ever seen.”

This of course raises the important question of whether this missionary urgency that defined many of the turn-of-the century global revivals is also true today of African Pentecostalism. Along these lines, D. J. Garrard (2009) says that African Pentecostals do indeed “see themselves as engaged in fulfilling Christ’s mandate to go into all the world to teach and evangelise” (240). It must also be remembered that the success of many Western missionary efforts in Africa was owed to the efforts of indigenous workers and that the contribution of these workers is often absent in many mission histories (Anderson 2016, 9; Maxwell 2015, 909-910). It is therefore far more accurate to speak not of the success “Western missions” *to* Africa, but of mission movements from *within* Africa that succeeded largely because of cooperation between mission workers and vast numbers of indigenous peoples. This distinction is important because it helps not only overcome the racial and cultural superiority that often found their way into missionary hagiography, but also because it shows that “missional Pentecostalism” maintained its evangelistic fervor even as it took root in African soil. Thus, the missional nature of early Pentecostalism in Africa cannot be said to be a western adornment, but rather constituted a central and enduring feature. Plus, many African churches were immediately engaged in cross-cultural work within their own artificially-created borders right from the beginning, as local workers engaged in evangelism across the many tribes found within one nation (Mkwaila 2017, 5).

Of course, contemporary mission among African Pentecostals looks different from that of its Western counterparts. In some ways, this difference represents a return to the roots of missional Pentecostalism, which first sent out missionaries with little resources, financial or

otherwise. Many early Pentecostal missionaries sent out from Azusa Street, for example, were materially poor themselves, and went with scant backing and supplies (Anderson 2012, 235). Some even packed their belongings in coffins, never expecting to return from the land of their calling (Guthrie 2014, 106). They proceeded though in deep faith in the Spirit's leading and empowerment. In a similar manner, many African missionary efforts today also operate on a shoestring and in extreme hardship, and sometimes struggle against indifference and malaise within their own denomination. What Mkwaila (2017) says of the Malawi Assemblies of God (MAG) holds true for much of Africa when it comes to sending missionaries across geographic borders. He rightly observes, that "it is possible, therefore, to concur that far more can and should be done in missionary outreach, while simultaneously acknowledging that great strides have been made towards fostering a critical mass in the church that has been inculcated with a missionary vision" (6).

African missions has also somewhat reversed the order of the older missions movements that occupied much of the "Great Century" of missions during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. While the defining ethos of that era was "the West to the rest," Africans are now bringing the gospel and evangelistic fervency back to North American and European nations that are indeed soaked with secularity, to the point, in some cases, of being completely antagonistic toward Christianity. Yet, as Asamoah-Gyadu (2002) points out, "some of the largest and fastest growing churches in western Europe today are those set up and run by immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa" (14). African Pentecostals are also vigorously pursuing the *missio Dei* regarding unreached people groups (UPGs). When the Africa Assemblies of God Alliance (AAGA), a network of over forty Assemblies of God churches from all across sub-Saharan Africa, met in Accra Ghana in February of 2018, they set in writing the goal of sending missionaries and

establishing national indigenous churches in Western Sahara, Mauritania, Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, Djibouti, Comoros, Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan and South Sudan—all by the end of 2022. Clearly, missional Pentecostalism is alive and well in sub-Saharan Africa and not only among African churches, but with African Pentecostal churches at the forefront.

### **Prosperity Pentecostalism**

Regarding “prosperity Pentecostalism,” I have chosen this term over terms such as “neo-Pentecostalism” because the latter is too broad to accurately depict the movement I have in mind (Anderson 2010, 19). Specifically, I refer to those forms of African Pentecostalism that promote a health and wealth understanding of Pentecostalism, in which proponents preach that faith in Jesus produces wealth and prosperity, and that sickness and suffering reflect a lack of faith. “Thus, according to this Gospel, getting rich is seen as God’s will and an outward manifestation of his blessings” (Togarasei 2011, 339). As Togarasei (2011) explains regarding the prosperity gospel, “the belief is that since God owns everything on earth, those who follow Jesus have a claim in God’s riches. Believers therefore have a right to the blessings of health and wealth through positive confession and sowing seeds of prosperity” (341). Additionally, some have seen in the prosperity brand of African Pentecostalism the embodiment of many of the same secular notions articulated by Weber and others (Gifford and Nogueira-Godsey 2011; Comaroff 2009, 20, 28). Comaroff (2009), for example, notes that “there is an avid endorsement, most evident in the ‘prosperity gospels,’ of a desire for material things” (27). Ogungbile says that the prosperity gospel in Africa, almost always associated with Pentecostalism, represents a paradigm shift from the theology of many AICs which taught an other-world asceticism. Instead, prosperity Pentecostalism teaches that “material prosperity”—or an explicit affirmation of this world—“is

God's blessing and gift to a successful Christian" (Ogungbile 2014, 135). Thus, prosperity Pentecostalism represents the very embodiment of secularism.

Prosperity Pentecostalism has found fertile soil in Africa owing to poverty, African notions of the "Big Man," and to traditional understandings of the interrelatedness of spiritual and material success (Ogungbile 2014, 136-139; Kalu 2007, 27). Prosperity preachers have cast themselves as the new "Big Man," roles that were first held by local chiefs and later by colonialists and missionaries alike. Their message of spiritual power available for the acquisition of wealth resonates deeply within a culture that has long held that material and spiritual prosperity are inseparable realities, and that malevolent spirits often hinder both. Ogungbile also points out, though, that the prosperity gospel contributes to the very things it claims to solve, especially poverty and the oppression of the poor, not to mention bringing disrepute to the Christian faith (147).

Some claim that prosperity forms of Pentecostalism benefit places like Africa by reducing poverty, or at least, changing people from a pessimistic, poverty mentality to an optimistic, hopeful one. This is the argument put forward by Lovemore Togarasei (2011, 339). While acknowledging the work of other African scholars, such as the study done by Nigerian A. O. Dada which concluded that the prosperity gospel peddles false hopes and delusion, enriching only its leaders, Togarasei believes that the prosperity brand of Pentecostalism has contributed to poverty alleviation. Even though he acknowledges its secular bent, evident in its emphasis on market capitalism and materialism, he says that prosperity teaching helps the poor especially through its advocacy of entrepreneurship (345). Prosperity teachers often emphasize that having a job is tantamount to being just one paycheck away from poverty, and therefore the goal of every believer should be to become an employer, rather than an employee. Plus, Togarasei says

those churches that preach a prosperity gospel often bring in lots of money from their congregants and build large auditoriums, which can create jobs for as many as five hundred workers. But contradictions abound in this logic, especially on the very issue of entrepreneurship. For example, one of the lessons learned in the micro finance industry has been that not everyone has the capacity for business, even when given the proper tools (Fikkert 2017, 144-149). Not only that, but in some African countries, like Zimbabwe, fifty percent of the population belong to Pentecostal churches (Anderson 2014, 114). It would simply be impossible for all of them to become employers. Beyond these basic logical issues, there are the far more pressing theological ones. Does anyone really believe that depriving widows and low-income families of their meager resources—resources that they desperately need for daily survival—does justice to Scripture’s many commands to defend the cause of the widow and orphan, the poor and needy? Is not the very act of building giant auditoriums on the finances of the poor merely the most modern form of slavery, of inducing God’s people to make bricks without straw, all on the unrealized promise of material and physical well-being, on the hopes of an exodus that never comes, or comes for only a select few? The point here is that entrepreneurship can be a good opportunity for some of Africa’s poor, but there are far better theological resource for promoting economic independence than the prosperity gospel.

I have sat in services in Lomé, Togo, West Africa at Assemblies of God churches in which offerings were taken in such a way as to praise those who could give more and thus humiliate those who gave less. One such offering process lasted well over an hour, with the preacher starting at an exorbitant amount for anyone—roughly the equivalent of \$500, and then slowly working his way down to one of the most common pieces of money available in West Africa, the 100 XFO coin, or about 19 cents. The preacher began at the higher amount, asking

“Qui peut donner 500,000?” Since the person giving must walk to the front of the congregation, everyone knows exactly who gives what. The whole process is designed to put pressure on the congregation to give more than they might otherwise, because of the public spectacle being made. Congregants are prodded to give more in order to be blessed in greater ways. In this, the worshipful aspect of stewardship is reduced to a purely secular act—an act rooted in this-world values and in materialism. Whether the approach is effective or not, is hard to say. By far the largest group to come forward were those in the 500 XFO group, roughly \$1. For most, even this amount probably meant a tremendous sacrifice, given that fifty-five percent of the population in Togo live below the poverty line of about \$2 per day. More disturbing, was that I witnessed this practice twice in Assemblies of God churches in Lomé, one of those times being during a multi-church Easter service. Given that Assemblies of God churches are generally considered part of “classic Pentecostalism,” or what I have termed “missional Pentecostalism,” this suggests that the boundaries between missional Pentecostalism and prosperity Pentecostalism can sometimes become blurred. It also suggests the need to articulate the theological foundations for missional Pentecostalism not only as an anti-secularizing force, but also as a means of helping churches with an historic emphasis on missions to maintain a trajectory toward the *missio Dei*.

### **Implications for African Missions**

I propose that the following important missiological implications follow from understanding the two strands of African Pentecostalism described above:

1. There is a need for clarity among scholars of all persuasions and disciplines when referring to African Pentecostalism to therefore distinguish between its prosperity version and its missional version. Terms such as Classic Pentecostalism and Neo-Pentecostalism are too heavily laden by historic baggage and contemporary diversity to be of much use when referring to modern day

Pentecostalism in Africa, even though they continue to be vital for describing historic currents. The terms “missional Pentecostalism” and “Prosperity Pentecostalism” more accurately describe precise contemporary approaches to Pentecostalism that are both alive and well on the continent. Furthermore, these terms address the theological motivations of various strands of Pentecostalism and might also then serve as a rubric for African Pentecostal churches in determining who and what they wish to be. This also underscores the growing need for African Pentecostal scholars to articulate a biblical and robust theology of mission that draws on Africa’s deep appreciation of the Spirit’s power and presence.

2. The notion of secularism and anti-secularism can also help African Pentecostals attempting to clarify the relationship between evangelism and social concern. There has been a discernable drift of late toward a more holistic approach that sets the two on a level footing. The claim has been that even though early Pentecostals clearly emphasized evangelism, lately Pentecostals have become more theologically astute and see more clearly the need to undertake social action for its own sake (Warrington 2011). I would argue, contrarily, that Pentecostal pioneers like William Seymour got it right. They understood that social concern should flow from a transformed life, but that eternal matters always are most pressing. E. N. Bell, the first leader of the Assemblies of God, USA, once said, in the context of advocating that missionaries engage in caring for orphans, that “primary emphases, too, should always be laid upon the direct proclamation of the gospel of salvation as God's ordained and primary way of reaching the lost” (*The Weekly Evangel* 1917, 6). The tendency in modern Pentecostal theologies to describe mission as involving word and deed without giving priority to evangelism represents a move away from Pentecostalism’s historic roots. Yes, Pentecostals have since the beginning been involved in social justice, but they did so with overriding urgency for evangelistic witness.

Missional Pentecostalism must maintain that focus if it is to remain the ant-secularizing force it has long been. Emanuel Katongole argues this very point in his book, *The Sacrifice of Africa* (2011, under Chapter 2, “Reimagining Social Ethics in Africa”). Here Katongole observes that for the most part, many Christian approaches to social change are indistinguishable from their secular counterparts. Thus, he calls for a “mythological adjustment” of the imagination. I would contend that such an adjustment requires attention to the spirituality that has long defined missional Pentecostalism. In other words, it requires a re-enchantment of a Weber’s disenchanted world. And this is at task for which missional Pentecostalism has long demonstrated a propensity. Plus, the ability of the church to critique social structures stands on its possession of an inspired revelation (i.e., enchanted) that stands above the human prognostications about our own limited potential. The priority of a word from God in Scripture and in Christ is perhaps the most anti-secular tool the church possesses, and early, missional Pentecostals seemed to know this intuitively. Thus, prosperity Pentecostalism cheapens and secularizes God’s special revelation by making material prosperity its most desired outcome.

3. Pentecostalism in Africa has largely succeeded because of its basis in the supernatural (Kalu 2009, 86; Garrard 2009, 233-234). Missional Pentecostalism has historically grounded its power in prayer and in contemporary experiences of the Holy Spirit. But experiences of the Holy Spirit were never conceived of as a means to an end, but as both an enacted eschatological event and as empowerment for global witness. Conversely, not only is the message, but also the tools for the propagation of prosperity Pentecostalism are mostly secular, and include especially the use of technology, media, and marketing. As Pentecostalism spreads and becomes arguably the dominant form of Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa, missional Pentecostals should take heed of the dangers of losing its historic dependence on Spiritual power even as it makes use of these

things. This is not to say that the use of these modern advantages and resources for spreading the gospel are inherently problematic. Rather, as Kalu (2007) says, “there is often a thin line between religious and secular techniques in the use of media communication” (23). The ability to successfully send missionaries and plant churches in North Africa and in the Horn of Africa will depend heavily on maximizing the anti-secularizing, supernatural power of God that ignited indigenous movements throughout the continent. And the danger of coming to rely wholly on non-spiritual and secular techniques is ever present in everything Pentecostals do from the way they take offerings to the sending and support of missionaries. Furthermore, compromise in one area often leads to compromise in another.

4. Harvey Cox (1991) once wrote that “Christian theology if it is truly biblical theology must always be prophetic” (388). Missional Pentecostalism functions in many ways a prophetic branch of African Pentecostalism and as a potent African critique of the excesses of the prosperity stream of Pentecostalism. Prosperity Pentecostalism will only bring Africa ideologically close to secular Europe. Missional Pentecostalism can bring Europe ideologically close to Africa. But to do so it must remain prophetic. And the essence of a prophetic church is to call God’s people back to faithful and holy living. It was this sort of prophetic call that gave birth to modern Pentecostalism in the first place, and it is this prophetic calling that will sustain it for the future.

5. Prosperity Pentecostalism represents an abandonment of the very things that drive missional Pentecostalism because mission has always come at great personal sacrifice. When material well-being becomes the high-water mark of the Christian life, then the inevitable consequence is the faltering of missions. African’s have long valued community and viewed with suspicion those who were outsiders or radically individualistic. Yet, prosperity Pentecostalism is

individualistic to the core, and thus a betrayal not only of the gospel, but of African indigenous identity. James K. A. Smith, (2014) in his exposition of Charles Taylors *A Secular Age*, points out that one of the things that helped secularism overtake the deeply rooted religiosity of the middle ages was the loss of community and consequent heightened individualism. “Once individuals become the locus of meaning, the social atomism that results means that disbelief no longer has social consequences. ‘We’ are not a seamless cloth, a tight-knit social body; instead, ‘we’ are just a collection of individuals.” Smith adds, “this diminishes the ripple effect of individual decisions and beliefs. You’re free to be a heretic—which means, eventually, that you’re free to be an atheist” (31). Missional Pentecostalism in Africa will succeed most when it closely guards its most treasured value, that of community. It is through community that missionaries are called and sent, and in community that missions movements emerge. And no greater threat exists to undermine African indigenous notions of community than Prosperity Pentecostalism and its rampant individualism.

## Reference List

- Anderson, Allan Heaton. 2010. "Varieties, Taxonomies, and Definitions." In *Studying Global Pentecostalism*, edited by Allan Anderson et al., 13-29. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- . 2012. "The Significance of Pentecostalism to Mission." In *Mission in Context*, edited by John Corrie and Cathy Ross, 229-241.
- . 2013. *To the Ends of the Earth: Pentecostalism and the Transformation of World Christianity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2016. *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Asamoah-Gyadu, J. Kwabena. 2002. "Pentecostalism in Africa and the Changing Face of Christian Mission: Pentecostal/Charismatic Renewal Movements in Ghana." *Mission Studies* 19 no. 2: 14-39.
- . 2013. *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity: Interpretations from an African Context*. Oxford: Regnum.
- Berger, Peter. 2005. "Secularization and De-Secularization." In *Religions in the Modern World: Traditions and Translations*, edited by Linda Woodhead, 384-393. New York: Routledge electronic edition.
- Comaroff, Jean. 2009. "The Politics of Conviction: Faith on the Neo-liberal Frontier." *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice* 53 (1):17-38.
- Cox, Harvey. 1991. "Pentecostalism and Global Market Culture": A Response to Issues Facing Pentecostalism in a Postmodern World." In *The Globalization of Pentecostalism: A Religion Made to Travel*, 286-295. Oxford: Regnum.
- . 1995. *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press.
- Droogers, André. 2010. "Essentialist and Normative Approaches." In *Studying Global Pentecostalism*, edited by Allan Anderson, 30-50. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Droogers, André. 2010. "Essential and Normative Approaches." In *Studying Global Pentecostalism: Theories and Methods*, edited by Anderson et al., 30-50. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Giddens, Anthony. 2005. "Introduction by Anthony Giddens." In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* by Max Weber. 1930; Reprint edition. Routledge Classics.
- Gifford, Paul, and Trad Nogueira-Godsey. 2011. "The Protestant Ethic and African Pentecostalism: A Case Study." *Journal for the Study of Religion* 24 (1):5-22.
- Guthrie, Stan. 2014. *Missions in the Third Millennium: 21 Key Trends for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Revised and Expanded. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock.
- Hewitt, Roderick R. 2015. "The Changing Landscape of Christianity and the Challenging Context of Secularism." *The Ecumenical Review* 67 (4):543-558.
- Hunt, Stephen. "Sociology of Religion." In *Studying Global Pentecostalism*, edited by Allan Anderson et al. 179-201. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Ireland, Jerry. "African Traditional Religion and Pentecostal Churches in Lusaka, Zambia: An Assessment," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, 21 (2012): 260-277.
- Kalu, Ogbu Uke. 2007. "Pentecostalism and mission in Africa, 1970-2000." *Mission Studies* 24 (1): 9-45.
- Katongole, Emmanuel. 2011. *The Sacrifice of Africa*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. Kindle.

- Klaus, Byron D. 2007. "Pentecostalism and Mission." *Missiology* 35 (1):39-54.
- Lifeway. 2016. "The State of Theology." <https://thestateoftheology.com>.
- Macchia, Frank. "The Struggle for Global Witness: Shifting Paradigms in Pentecostal Theology." In *The Globalization of Pentecostalism: A Religion Made to Travel*, edited by Murray W. Dempster et al., 8-29. Oxford: Regnum.
- Mashau, T. D. 2009. "A Reformed missional perspective on secularism and pluralism in Africa: their impact on African Christianity and the revival traditional religion." *Calvin Theological Journal* 44 (1):108-126.
- Maxwell, David. 2015. "The Missionary Movement in African and World History: Mission Sources and Religious Encounter." *The Historical Journal* 58 (4): 901-930.
- McClendon, David. 2017. "Sub-Saharan Africa Will Be Home to Growing Shares of the World's Christians and Muslims." Pew Research. [pewresearch.org](http://pewresearch.org).
- Mkwaila, Andrew. 2017. "Theology of Mission in the Malawi Assemblies of God: An Ecclesial Omission." *Missio Africanus: The Journal of African Missiology*. 3(1): 4-11.
- Mmassi, Gabriel. 2013. "Secularism in the face of African traditional religions." *African Ecclesial Review (AFER)* 55 (3-4): 227-242.
- Nogueira-Godsey, Trad. 2012. "Weberian Sociology and the Study of Pentecostalism: Historical Patterns and Prospects for the Future." *Journal for the Study of Religion* 25 (2):51-70.
- Ogungbile, David. 2014. "African Pentecostalism and the Prosperity Gospel." In *Pentecostal Theology in Africa*, edited by Clifton Clarke, 132-149. Eugene, OR: Pickwick.
- "Secularism." 2008. In *Global Dictionary of Theology*, edited by William Dyrness and Veli-Matti Kärkäinen, 801-804. Downers Grove: InterVarsity. Kindle.
- Smith, James K. A. 2014. *How (Not) to be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Togarasei, Lovemore. 2011. "The Pentecostal Gospel of Prosperity in African Contexts of Poverty: An Appraisal." *Exchange* 40 (4): 336-350.
- Warrington, Keith. 2011. "Social Transformation in the Missions of Pentecostals: A Priority or a Bonus?" *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 31 (1): 17-35.
- Willard, Dallas. 1997. *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God*. New York: HarperOne.