CHAPTER 1

Introduction
Presence and Impact of Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity in Africa

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During recent decades, Pentecostal/charismatic Christianity (PC/C) has moved from an initially peripheral position to become a force to be reckoned with within African Christianity and sub-Saharan African societies in general. According to the World Christian Data Base, Pentecostals now make up 12 per cent (or about 107 million) of Africa’s entire population (including the predominantly Muslim north), whereas charismatic members of non-Pentecostal Christian denominations represent another 5 per cent (about 40 million).1 Although such numbers need to be taken with caution due to statistical insecurities the rise, in sub-Saharan Africa, of a kind of Christianity that emphasizes the power of the Holy Spirit and the importance of becoming born-again is hardly disputable. The extent to which the explosion of PC/C has contributed to overall Christian growth in Africa (Christians now make up almost half of the continent’s entire population) is uncertain and may, in fact, not be all that significant. Pentecostal/charismatic churches have in some cases gained converts from groups that only practiced traditional indigenous religions (see Anderson, this volume) and some Muslims do convert (see Omenyo 2011), but a substantial number of first-generation converts were already Christians, in some sense of the term, before becoming born-again Pentecostals/charismatics.2 What is significant are the ways in which PC/C has shaped the orientations of African Christianity and extended its influence into other spheres of post-colonial societies.

Bringing together prominent Africanist scholars from a variety of disciplines (theology and church history, anthropology, sociology, religious studies, political science, developmental studies) this volume offers an elaborate treatment of the social, cultural and political impact of PC/C in sub-Saharan Africa. The interdisciplinary range of the volume and its breadth of individual case studies serve to highlight the widespread expansion of PC/C in the region, its particular entanglements with different cultural and political realities and, not

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2 In other parts of the world such as the U.S., there are many non-charismatic Protestant Fundamentalist who stress the importance of becoming born again by receiving Christ as a personal savior. In an African context, however, we can, for all practical purposes, regard PC/C as synonymous with born-again Christianity.
least, the pervasiveness and complex nature of its presence. Thus the chapters
draw our attention to different fields or areas that are in one way or the other
affected by the growth and increasingly assertive presence of this religious
movement. These areas range from various kinds of social relationships and
networks, Christian theology and evaluations of traditional religion and Islam
to different aspects of public life such as political culture, developmental
work and popular entertainment. Furthermore, the combination of scholarly
perspectives found in this volume facilitates a broad understanding of how
PC/C has gained a foothold in African societies, both by responding to existen-
tial challenges stemming from enchanted world views and from particular
economical-political circumstances and by facilitating different kinds of social
and political positioning and claims to power. As in other “big-picture” books
on African PC/C (Kalu, 2008), some attention is given to historical processes,
including early indigenous revivals, to theological thought and developments
and to the role of African agency and initiative in spreading and reshaping
this version of Christianity. But the present volume aims at also providing an
expanded and comprehensive socio-cultural investigation of the multifaceted
impact of Pentecostal/charismatic religion in the private and public lives of
post-colonial African subjects.

The early chapters of the book examine the origins, development and
growth of African PC/C and further cover central aspects of Pentecostal/char-
ismatic theology and ritual practice (Anderson, Garrard, Asamoah-Gyadu,
Gifford, van Wyk, Lindhardt, Soothill, Chapters 2–8). Among other things these
chapters illustrate how PC/C has altered the face of African Christianity, in
large part by placing a stress on spiritual warfare, empowerment and prosper-
ity, by devising a well-defined space for witchcraft, traditional healers and non-
Christian spirits within a Christian world view, by making extensive use of the
mass media, and by providing space for the emergence of particularly charis-
matic leaders and preachers. The second part of the book (Chapters 8–14, by
Soothill, Comaroff, Jones, Heuser, Burgess, McCauley, Pype) examines the
complex relationships between PC/C and wider society in sub-Saharan African
countries. The themes addressed here include Pentecostal/charismatic contri-
butions to the rethinking of African gender ideologies, intersections between
PC/C and the worlds of politics and development and the emergence of a
Pentecostal/charismatic popular culture. Taken together the chapters illumi-
nate the presence of PC/C in Africa, not just as a system of beliefs, meanings
and symbols by use of which individual adherents organize experience and
make sense of the world around them but as a multifaceted social and cultural
force that has shaped societal life in significant ways, evidence that African
PC/C has come a long way since its more modest origins.