Pentecostalism and the African Diaspora: An Examination of the Missions Activities of the Church of Pentecost

Opoku Onyinah

Introduction

For over three decades, there has been tremendous progress in African missionary enterprises all over their own continent and also among the migrated Africans in the West, as a result of the Pentecostal and Charismatic Renewal. One of the churches that have been involved in such ventures is the Church of Pentecost in Ghana. Little has been said about this new trend of Christianity in Africa and its proliferation in the West, especially that of the Church of Pentecost, which is the focus of this essay.

Scholars who have touched on the Church of Pentecost’s missions include Gerrie Ter Haar and Rijk A. Van Dijk. In her presentation of the relationship between African-led churches in Europe and churches in the home countries of Africa, Ter Haar gives an overview of the Church of Pentecost’s mission. She remarks that it is one of the most successful of the African-led churches in Europe. But her main focus is on the ‘True Teaching of Christ’s Temple Church,’ a “prophet-healer type church,” which emerged among the Ghanaian diasporic community in the Netherlands. Van Dijk writes about the role “Ghanaian Pentecostalism appears to play in the forming of their [Ghanaian] identity as strangers in Dutch society.” Although he mentions the Church of Pentecost, Van Dijk plays down

4 Ter Haar, Halfway to Paradise, 174.
5 Van Dijk, “From Camp to Encompassment,” 135 (italics mine).
the contributions being made not only by this church but by all Pentecostals and Charismatics; instead, he hypothesizes “the prayer camps” as the “sending discourse.” And yet, there is no direct link, and possibly not even an indirect one, between the camps and the Church’s missions, as Van Dijk suggested. Thus, Van Dijk not only gives his readers a false impression, but he also fails to report about the missionary activities of the Church of Pentecost. Notwithstanding, it is still important to make the Christian world aware of the enterprising missionary activity of the African Pentecostals—for example, that of the Church of Pentecost—to the Ghanaian Diaspora, and by so doing to invite dialogue with them.

Boundaries of nations in West Africa are in many ways artificial, drawn by the colonial masters. Many people have relatives on both sides of the international boundaries, and border guards are easy to avoid. People have traditionally moved to neighboring countries to improve their lives. The 1980s saw a massive exodus of Ghanaian immigrants to the industrialized world. While economic decline has been the main factor of the Ghanaian Diaspora, there are other contributing factors. The effect of these factors is that both urban adults and rural school-leavers left the country in search of greener pastures. Peil rightly observes, “Ghana has become a major exporter of educated people and also of less-educated but well-trained artisans.” It is estimated that about 20 percent of the Ghanaian population is living outside the country.

It is against this background that many Christians left Ghana for the West. The desire to worship God in ways relevant to them, and to maintain

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6 A prayer camp is a place where people go to pray. Some people may reside there for some time, until their needs are met or otherwise.
7 Van Dijk, “From Camp to Encompassment,” 135, 143.
8 Van Dijk’s bibliography shows that he had enough material to have helped him bring the facts to surface. One is inclined to think that he used his authorial skill to fashion such a hypothesis, highlighting “ritualistic religiosity” to arrest his Western audience’s attention.
10 Ibid., 348.
11 These include several coups d’état, increasing political instability, rising educational levels and aspirations unaccompanied by a commensurate level of job creation, low crop prices, low wages, rapid inflations, and a drought in Ghana, in 1982, which was followed by bush-fire, which devastated more than three-quarters of the nation’s farms and vegetation. Ibid.; Douglas Rimmer, Staying Poor: Ghana’s Political Economy 1950–1990s (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1993), 1–6.