What Is Happening to Christianity?
Insights from Africa
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Prophets, Healers, Politicians: Expressions of African Christianity

South Africa, 14 November 2020: The news emerges that the controversial Malawian prophet Shepherd Bushiri and his wife Mary fled the country after absconding their bail conditions for an upcoming fraud trial. With an estimated private fortune of $150 million, Bushiri is one of the richest Pentecostal prophets on the planet, and notorious for his controversial prophesies, outlandish miracle claims, and shady business dealings. Yet he continues to command a substantial following in Southern Africa. Why do African Christians flock to such characters and embrace their promises of miracle healing and personal prosperity?

Redemption Camp, Lagos-Ibadan Highway, Nigeria, 10 December 2021: The General Overseer of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Enoch Adeboye, proclaims that it was prayer (and esp. his own intercession) that kept the pandemic death toll in Nigeria much lower than in the secular West. The RCCG is Nigeria's largest megachurch, and comfortably fills an auditorium of more than 1km² at its revival meetings. At the same time, it runs hospitals, health clinics, schools, and a university, at which the acclaimed virologist Christian Happi became the first to sequence the coronavirus in Africa. What is one to make of such a church? Are its charitable works and public health contributions an asset to development or rather a hindrance due to its foundational spiritual outlook and perceived lack of accountability?

Addis Ababa, 7 May 2020: Zinash Tayachew, the Ethiopian Prime Minister's wife releases a new gospel single. She is a devout Pentecostal like her husband Abiy Ahmed, who in a sharp departure from his predecessors has brought religious rhetoric back to the fore in Ethiopian politics. In the music video Zinash is seen kneeling before a cross, pleading for God's mercy in the troubling times. Undoubtedly, this is an act of intercession for the nation as the pandemic descends upon Ethiopia. It hit the air waves just a day before her husband would announce a State of Emergency and postpone the national election, which set up the country for a constitutional crisis and accelerated its descent into civil war. Has Ethiopia become yet another example of Christian spirituality remaking African politics?

Flamboyant prophets, influential megachurches and Pentecostal politicians - examples like this abound in Sub-Saharan Africa today. In contrast to secular Europe, Christianity remains on the rise here and permeates all spheres of life. It wasn't supposed to be like this. After independence, Christianity was often cast as the coloniser's religion, and many expected that Africans would gradually shed this foreign faith and rediscover their own spiritual heritage, at least in a drastically altered form of Christianity. Others foresaw Africa following Europe's footsteps toward increasing secularity, with Christianity fading into humanitarian values as socialism modernised the continent.

Yet, by the early 1990s it had become clear that instead of Afrocentrist revivalism or developmental secularism a Christian renaissance of sorts was underfoot, fuelled by Pentecostal and Charismatic forms of Christianity that emphasise personal salvation, miracle healing, prophecies, exorcism, and financial prosperity as a sign of God's blessing. By now, socialism had largely failed in its promises while Structural Adjustment Programmes wreaked havoc in countries aligned with the West, all against the background of a

devastating HIV/AIDS crisis and political turmoil as Cold War bloc alliances ceased. This led some observers to view this rise of Christianity in Africa as something of a compensatory reaction, an understandable if regrettable turn to religion in a time of crisis. Others articulated their alarm over what they perceived to be a Westernisation if not Americanisation of African Christianity, proliferating individualism and consumer capitalism instead of *ubuntu* ideals and equitable progress.

As I wish to show in my lecture, these are inadequate analyses, rooted in colonial perceptions of religion and mistaken projections of secularism. Contemporary African Christianity deserves a more variegated and nuanced analysis that brings into focus the historical depth of these current developments, as well as the multiple factors underpinning the attractiveness of Pentecostal Christianity in contemporary Africa. Moreover, the plurality of Pentecostal expression deserves greater attention as we are not simply witnessing the emergence of a new Christian denomination but the continued fragmentation of global Christendom away from large, organised church entities centred in Rome, London, or Geneva.

Healing and Exorcism: Understanding Spirit Aetiologies

A useful place to begin this investigation is with the apparent tendency of African Pentecostals to spiritualise illness and misfortune through healing prayers and exorcisms, which often leaves Western observers perplexed. This is nothing new. Historically, the accusation that Africans are wrongly enchanting the world has accompanied the Christian expansion into Africa from the first Portuguese enslavement expeditions on. On the heels of the reconquista, Christian orthodoxy had been imposed on the Iberian Peninsula, which entailed a series of anti-witchcraft laws outlawing amulets and other magical objects, titled "feiticeros". The Latin roots of this term ("made/manufactured") invoke the proscription of idolatry in the Second Commandment ("Thou shalt **make** thee no molten Gods."), but more importantly for our investigation is that the idea of fetishism arose from this European anti-witchcraft movement. When Portuguese explorers and missionaries encountered objects of ritual importance in Africa, they "recognised" them "fetishes" banned in Europe and demanded their destruction in exchange for Christian objects of veneration. For Africans, this barter made sense, because these alleged "fetishes" not only had cultic functions but stood for political allegiances and economic networks.[1] Taking on the cross or a statue of the Virgin Mary merely expanded this logic to a new contact, while the so-called "fetishes" were often retained alongside these new Christian objects, much to the chagrin of iconoclastic missionaries.

The incorporation of African ritual objects into European discourse of religion subsequently took two forms:

1. **Theories of "fetish*ism*"** emerged as Europe projected its own notions of "enlightened" and "civilised" religion against the background of "benighted" and "backward" Africa. These theories took various forms as colonialism progressed, from writing Africa out of the civilised world altogether in Enlightenment philosophy, to relegating it to an earlier evolutionary stage during the Scramble for Africa, and finally explaining "fetishes" in light of a social function in later stages of colonialism.
2. In **missionary discourse**, these developing notions of African religion were written into Christian cosmology as the gospel was translated into different linguistic and cultic registers. This not only meant to find equivalents for divine entities like God, angels, and heaven, but also for cosmological entities of the ancient Christian underworld: the devil, demons, witchcraft, and such.

Both avenues of framing African rituals as instances of "religion" are somewhat incommensurate with one another, and this tension was often visible in the missionary enterprise. What was one to do with spirit beliefs in Africa? In the discourse of enlightened religion, these were framed as "primitive superstitions", that is "backwards" but ultimately harmless beliefs to be replaced by rational (read: Christian) religion and scientific education. As translations of the devil, however, these beliefs represented dark and powerful forces to be overcome by the spiritual victory of the Gospel. This tension between progressive rationalisation and spiritual warfare was never resolved and led to different missionary approaches along the broad Christian spectrum of liberals to evangelicals, as part of a larger Western discussion about the properly modern expression of Christianity. Pentecostalism was born in this climate of Christian dissent as an amalgamate of different revival, holiness, and healing movements – catalysed by the African American spiritual expression of the

[1]Karl-Heinz Kohl, 'West African Fetish Cult and European Fetishism', in *ThinkingJewellery: On the Way toward a Theory of Jewellery*, ed. Wilhelm Lindemann (Stuttgart: Arnoldsche Arts Publisher, 2011), 219–35; William Pietz, 'The Problem of the Fetish, II: The Origin of the Fetish', *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 13, no. Spring (1987): 23–45.

Azusa Street revival of 1906 that for a few short years added a dimension of racial reconciliation before it segregated and spread along established revivalist and missionary networks.[2]

In Africa at independence, Pentecostal churches were small and, on the fringes, whereas in the mainline churches the rationalists seemed to prevail. The watchword of the day was indigenisation as missionaries adapted to surging African nationalism. Ideas and rituals that missionaries had previously vilified were now framed as cultural resources that needed to be integrated into distinct African theologies and liturgies. Liberal Protestantism, the Second Vatican Council, missiologists and African politicians all aligned in this reappropriation of African traditions. Even the African churches that had broken with the missions and European Christian orthodoxy were largely read as instances of indigenisation rather than for their spiritualising thrust in adopting New Testament miracles and Old Testament purity ideals.

The problem with such culturalist interpretations was that their folkloristic embrace rendered inefficacious the African spiritual forces. This may have dovetailed with any rationalising and secularising ambitions but clashed with how these forces were experienced in vernacular reckoning. Ancestors, spirits, witchcraft, and occult rituals remained efficacious and socially productive in explaining and solving illness and personal misfortune, rather than just serve as cultural symbols in a different theological or political project. This is precisely the open flank into which Pentecostalism thrust a double-pronged attack. As heirs of the pietistic translation of African spirits into demonic forces, Pentecostals, on the one hand, affirmed African vernaculars of spiritual power, while on the other hand proclaiming that Christian exorcism and faith healing would get rid of the spirits once and for all. In essence this amounted to an affirmation of the efficaciousness and potency of African spiritual beliefs in determining personal misfortune and illness, while continuing to offer a modernist promise of life free from "backward" forces. This is a highly effective recipe of Christian contextualisation, as it takes more seriously the local cosmology while offering a Christian reinterpretation with global appeal.

Of course, one should not confuse doctrine with practice, so there are important qualifications to be made:

- Far from overcoming and supplanting African spirit beliefs, Pentecostalism tends to create a feedback loop with witchcraft discourses, amplifying both spirit beliefs and Pentecostal solutions. A vivid example of is the Nigerian film industry, or Nollywood, which offers a whole genre of Christian melodramas centred on witchcraft and spiritual warfare – combining in vivid melange Western horror tropes, Africa cliches, local tabloid rumours, typical street scenes, and violent crime.
- "Spiritual warfare" is not a realm of Pentecostal orthodoxy but of experimentation. People will often combine their visits to Pentecostal healing services with other approaches, including biomedicine and traditional healers. Even within Pentecostalism a range of competing aetiologies is on offer from proclaiming faith in future miracles to finding and casting out devils.
- Authenticity is a highly debated currency in this landscape of doctrines, prophets, and miracles. Suspicion is rife as pastors are known to enrich themselves and Pentecostals believe that the devil can fake healing and success, so one must be careful. In this precarious world, congregational loyalty can take the form of collusion and is usually temporary as people move in and out of churches in an ever-fragmenting denominational landscape.[3]

In all of this, we must be careful not to turn up the contrast too much, however. It is the flamboyant and outlandish which grabs the headlines, while the vast majority of Pentecostals will opt for muted expressions and some form of theological balance. Yet what remains constant throughout is that daily affairs are subjected to a spiritual reading. From health, to careers, finances and relationships – there is no purely secular realm. In doing so, however, Pentecostal aetiologies not simply "re-enchant" the world, but also offer a robust discourse for addressing the larger social, political, and historical forces that shape individual trajectories. Their spiritual vernacular might be unsettling to some observers, but arguably allows for a more realistic philosophy of the entangled self than Western hyper-individualism. Life is not always what it looks like: this assumption rings especially true when one is on the underside of an extractive global economy and must learn to navigate unstable economies and corrupt bureaucracies. In this world, Pentecostal promises

[2]Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Michael Wilkinson et al., eds., *Brill's Encyclopaedia of Global Pentecostalism* (Leiden: Brill, 2021).

[3]Karen Lauterbach, 'Fakery and Wealth in African Charismatic Christianity: Moving beyond the Prosperity Gospel as Script', in *Faith in African Lived Christianity*, ed. Karen Lauterbach and Mika Vähäkangas, Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies; 35 (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 111–32.

of health and prosperity harbour the aspirations of millions of Africans to participate in the global affluence and opportunities that their cell phones promise but often fail to deliver. And of course, this dynamic is not unique to Africa, even if its contours may be more visible here.

Gospel and Development: Prosperity and Participation

This ability of African Christianity to harbour the aspirations of millions and mobilise their resources might make them an interesting partner in development, especially when one considers the current development mantra of sustainability, which seeks to root development in local beliefs and culture. In recent years a small field of study has emerged which looks at the intersection of religion and development, asking whether and how religious organisations can be harnessed for global development, given their charitable works, their ubiquitous local presence, the trust they enjoy among their constituents, and their aspirations to bring a better world. In this literature, development is often cast as secular, which heightens the contrast with religious actors. But this betrays a fundamental historical misunderstanding that we need to look in order to understand the true nature of the disconnect between global development processes and Christian charitable action in Africa.[4]

Development did not begin with Truman's famous Point Four Speech of 1949 but was already at the heart of the European colonial push into the African interior. In the late 1830s it had become clear that the abolition of the slave trade had not led to a reduction of the trans-Atlantic trafficking of people, despite all efforts of the British navy to disrupt the trade. A second generation of abolitionists, led by the MP Thomas Fowell Buxton, now began to drum up support for a different kind of endeavour which was to eradicate slavery once and for all. Remarkably, they located the root of slavery not on the side of demand for forced labour, but on the side of supply. Thus, Buxton argued that a new economy needed to be installed in Africa, boosting "legitimate trade" through new political alliances with the interior, the establishment of infrastructure, improved agricultural methods, literacy and education. This is the modern development project at its core: powerless to change an extractive world system, advocates turn to those most affected by its injustices, hoping to redress global imbalances through better local conditions. Buxton understood this as a deeply Christian project, which would fail without missionary aid. The famous Niger expedition of 1841, thrusting traders, missionaries, soldiers, and scientists into the interior of Africa with disastrous results, was the first instantiation of this project and the template of many such incursions to come. Missionaries remained key to this "civilising" endeavour, with Livingstone's travels and his clarion call for "commerce and Christianity" as most prominent example. Though missionaries did not always align with the causes of expanding empires, the colonial endeavour would have been unsustainable without the missionary investment in schools, hospitals, linguistics, and the mobilisation of the British public.

When Truman's Point Four Speech ushered in the era of post-War development, he drew on this Christian "civilising" legacy. Despite all its pronunciations about scientific and technological progress, the speech culminated in the Sermon on the Mount and an appeal to the Almighty God as motivation for this American investment into the world. And even beneath the increasing secular, high-modernist expression of development in the following decades, one easily finds an ethical framing that invokes generalised Christian values, particularly when authors contrasted Western development with communist progress. The ostensible "rediscovery" of the role of religions for development in the early 21st century was also closely connected to Christianity. It was rooted in the American Welfare Reform Act of 1996 and the charitable choice provision inserted here by the Pentecostal senator John Ashcroft in order to erode the wall of separation between state and church. From the subsequent utilisation of Christian charities for government work arose the concept of faith-based organisations, which under George W. Bush entered the world of development and ultimately academic discussion.

Throughout this history, the various turns in the Western discussion of the role of Christianity in developing the world were rather disconnected from the realities in Africa, both ideologically and institutionally. While the donor nations went through a phase of secularising development and channelling aid primarily through state actors, in many African countries Christian missions and their follow-up organisations remained essential. Depending on the demands of the day, they would mute or re-emphasize their religious profile, but this changed little in their practical work or primary constituents. This disconnect between official development

[4]Jörg Haustein, 'Development as a Form of Religious Engineering? Religion and Secularity in Development Discourse', *Religion* 51, no. 1 (2021): 19–39.

aid and the charity sector was further amplified by the rise of national and international Non-Governmental Organisations.

In this environment, African Pentecostal schools, hospitals, universities or food programmes represent little more than the latest instantiation of Christian charity in a mix of compliance and tension with the global political and economic order, rather than presenting a whole new problem of religion and development. It remains imperative, therefore, to find suitable avenues of bilateral collaboration with Pentecostal Christian actors rather than seeking to discipline them into whatever the latest turn might be in the long conversation about the role of religion in development. Here are some key areas to consider:

1. Governmental development planning and reporting often is woefully disconnected from the religious sector. The latest UN process around the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) has changed little in this regard, despite all its emphasis on grassroot approaches and sustainability. As Emma Tomalin and I have shown in a recent study of the SDG implementation in Ethiopia, India, and the UK,[5] there has been minimal participation of religious charities, Christian or otherwise, as the UN process is subject to considerable state capture. A drastic Pentecostal example of this disconnect is the again the Nigerian RCCG. In its Christian Social Responsibility initiative, the church seeks to rebrand and streamline all the Church's charitable effort under one umbrella, neatly divided into eight key target areas. Though the approach and optics of this effort are extremely reminiscent of the SDGs, the church has absolutely no connection with the UN process, local or otherwise.[6]
2. Pentecostal megachurches, like the RCCG, operate from a position of relative strength and will tailor their initiatives according to the needs of their constituents and to the benefit of their image. Their charities are assets in a competitive religious market, underscoring the success of their particular gospel brand and signalling that the church will take care of its own. In its social engagement, Pentecostal Christianity in Africa has long since ceased to be otherworldly, and arguably this is what makes it attractive.[7] Joining a Pentecostal church affords new opportunities, from welfare provisions to business contacts, and from career opportunities to potential marriage partners. Moreover, Pentecostal support networks extend across the globe as diaspora churches help migrants and send substantial remittances back to Africa. Of course, these enclosed, self-catering communities are a far cry from the systemic and equitable change state-led development programmes aim to achieve, but they are still an important grassroots mechanism in resource distribution, so that their interests, potentials and limitations must be taken into account properly.
3. Pentecostal charities in Africa are not without problems, and examples of fraud, coercion, abuse and weak accountability structures can make them unattractive for secular development actors, alongside particular theological positions, such as in the area of sexual rights. Yet this is where the fractious and plural nature of Pentecostalism provides something of a corrective. Abuses will often be uncovered by other Pentecostal actors and the highly competitive church landscape produces all sorts of theological flavours, including rather surprising outliers, like Pentecostal homosexual activists.[8] Anyone seeking to work with Pentecostal churches in development efforts would be well advised to gain a basic literacy in the plethora of churches and doctrines and with the right advice will almost certainly find a suitable Pentecostal partners for a specific development project.

Christian Politics: Beyond a Narrow Concept of Secularism

Of course, the question remains whether these Pentecostal polities are good for the larger political process, in particular when politicians begin to mobilise them for a particular purpose. Are we not seeing the emergence of a theocratic threat to secular politics in Africa? Or are these Pentecostal politics even a

[5]Jörg Haustein and Emma Tomalin, *Keeping Faith in 2030: Religions and the Sustainable Development Goals: Findings and Recommendations*, 2019, religions-and-development.leeds.ac.uk/research-network.
[6]This insight is based on original research by my PhD student Chris Wadibia, who has produced the first detailed study of the development efforts of the RCCG (forthcoming).
[7]Richard Burgess, *Nigerian Pentecostalism and Development: Spirit, Power, and Transformation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020); Dena Freeman, ed., *Pentecostalism and Development: Churches, NGOs and Social Change in Africa* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).
[8]Adriaan van Klinken, *Kenyan, Christian, Queer: Religion, LGBT Activism, and Arts of Resistance in Africa* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019).

reminder that statehood is fundamentally different in Africa, this "never-secular" continent?

Both these ways of framing the question of Christianity and secular politics in Africa are wrong, because they rely on a narrow and distorted concept of secularity as merely the absence of religion. In this concept, secularisation is understood as the progressive withdrawal of religion from the public realm and into the private sphere or into oblivion, with some classical secularisation theories envisioning this withdrawal as the universal dawn of progressive modernity (albeit in different speeds all over the world). The mistake here is to take a particular formation of the secular as normative, which automatically writes Africa out of the history of secularisation. In reality, however, Africa has been part and parcel of the history of working out secular demands. I could give numerous examples here, from the first secular school in the German Empire being not in Berlin but East Africa, to various versions of the Ethiopian constitution, and the different ways in which African socialist regimes suppressed and co-opted religious institutions.

The influential anthropologist Talal Asad has argued that the secular should not be understood in terms of presence or absence of religion, but as a particular regime of practices regulating religious affairs regardless of their prevalence. In his book *Formations of the Secular,* he wrote:

> *"A secular state is not one characterized by religious indifference or rational ethics – or political toleration. It is a complex arrangement of legal reasoning, moral practice, and political authority. This arrangement is not the simple outcome of the struggle of secular reason against the despotism of religious authority."*[9]

Asad's point is that a secular state persists wherever political regimes seek to discipline religious institutions into a form that is compatible with a religiously plural public realm, a sovereign state authority, and a *legal* relegation of religions to the private sphere. This is regardless of whether these political regimes reject or co-opt religious reasoning for their purposes. Thus, moving the analysis away from a binary judgement about the presence or absence of religion, and toward a more complex understanding of secular formations, allows us to see clearly the intricate relationships religion and politics form within different contexts.

Let me return to Pentecostals in Ethiopia to illustrate this point. Almost as soon as an independent Pentecostal movement in Ethiopia had emerged, it endured political repression, first under Haile Selassie's government and then Mengistu Hailemariam's socialist dictatorship. Political forms of mobilising were unsuccessful both times, but a religiously inspired underground defiance of political authority sustained and grew the church. When a robust system of religious freedom arrived in 1991, Pentecostals still continued to draw on this experience of persecution and refrained from organised politics.[10] If anything, their mission was a spiritual transformation of the country through conversions, which in the end would lead to better politics. This however, left them somewhat vulnerable to the idea of a born-again political saviour figure, but that person would still have to look the part. Hailemariam Desalegn, the first Pentecostal PM in Ethiopia, coming to power in 2012, did not. He had risen through the party ranks, drew a sharp distinction between private faith and official politics, and, moreover, belongs to a widely ostracised Pentecostal sect that rejects the doctrine of the Trinity. Pentecostals welcomed him in a lukewarm embrace.[11]

With the current PM Abiy Ahmed this was different from the start. He was a Trinitarian Pentecostal and stood for a younger generation of Pentecostals who no longer recalled the days of persecution but wanted political influence. Moreover, Abiy's rise to power came swiftly and unexpected, carrying the hallmarks of a political miracle, especially as he embarked on audacious democratic reforms that initially impressed most political observers and culminated in his Nobel Peace Prize. But there is another, much deeper and non-Pentecostal reason for why religious rhetoric became essential to Abiy's political project and helped him build and sustain his political platform even as the country slid into a horrible civil war. Abiy had inherited a political system of ethnic federalism, in which Ethiopia was defined as a state of multiple nations and nationalities and ruled by a coalition of ethnically defined parties. While this was a robust constitutional idea, in practice, Ethiopia was governed by a small ethnic group that monopolised political power and economic assets since they had ousted Mengistu's government in 1991. By 2018 this system had run its course, brought to its knees by years

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[9]Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 255.

[10]Jörg Haustein, *Writing Religious History: The Historiography of Ethiopian Pentecostalism*, Studien Zur Außereuropäischen Christentumsgeschichte (Asien, Afrika, Lateinamerika); 17 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011).

[11]Jörg Haustein, 'The New Prime Minister's Faith: A Look at Oneness Pentecostalism in Ethiopia', *PentecoStudies* 12, no. 2 (2013): 183–204.

of protests from the largest ethnic group, Abiy's own Oromo. As Abiy swiftly moved to dislodge the old power elites, he opted for a radical change in political philosophy, now emphasising Ethiopian unity over ethnic diversity. The Ethiopian template for this were the transformative emperors of the late 19th and early 20th century, who relied on the old Orthodox myth of Ethiopia's sacrosanct Emperors hailing from king Solomon, as they formed the Ethiopian nation through subjecting warring kings and expanding to the south.

It is little wonder then that frequent references to God's special favour on Ethiopia became essential for Abiy's radical nation-building project. This does not discount the possibility that Abiy's politics are indeed driven by a strong Pentecostal faith or his own sense of divine calling, but the main question for understanding the contemporary dynamics must be why his religious rhetoric could gather steam beyond his Pentecostal constituents. Abiy spent much of his first months in office courting Orthodox believers and Muslims with notable success due to his pious rhetoric, and thus built his political project on a broad, multi-religious platform. As a result, his religious tone was not perceived as a Pentecostal idiosyncrasy, and the Ethiopian political conflict now runs through all religious communities rather than between them.[12]

This is just one of many cases I could have brought to show that so-called Pentecostal politics are rarely fully understood if they are framed so narrowly. Rather, one must consider the historical depth and multifaceted role of religious significations within a particular political context in order to understand what gives weight and currency to the Pentecostal articulations in this field. Good political analysis and policymaking requires more than the denunciation of perceived theocratic aspirations, but a deep dive into how historical, socio-economic, political, and theological factors intersect in the invocation of a religious polity.

Conclusion: Mapping an African Christian Present

Such a deep dive is what this lecture has attempted to invite you into, hopefully with some success. In introducing this vibrant new form of Christianity, it has been my proposition that European observers need to move beyond the exoticisation and spectacularisation of African Pentecostal Christianity that is all too easily found in media reports, ad-hoc commentary, or expressions of ideological unease. Such reactions and the tacit assumptions of European superiority they convey are themselves the product a long-shared history between Africa and Europe in the globalisation of Christianity. A proper understanding of African Pentecostalism, by contrast, requires appreciating the depths of this shared Christian history and an attentive eye to how Christianity in Africa has come to embody the fragmentations of our contemporary world in its spiritual vernacular, charitable work, and political rhetoric. This does not foreclose critical engagement, of course, but before this can take place, it is important to map out properly the manifold causes and motivations behind this movement and the plurality of its expressions.

Let me close with a vignette closer to home. **London, 20th April 2012:** It is the RCCG's annual Festival of Life, and as usual, they have packed out the Excel Centre. The hall is full of mostly Nigerian Christians, from the UK, Europe, and overseas. The church's General Overseer, Enoch Adeboye, has flown in himself to grace the festival with his presence. A special guest is announced, and in walks, too much cheer, London's mayor Boris Johnson. In a brief stump speech about the upcoming London Olympics and "beautiful venues", Johnson is beginning to lose the audience. But then he shifts gears. He tells his crowd that the Olympic visitors will also see "the communities of the greatest city on earth, going through a spiritual regeneration and a spiritual rebirth." The hall erupts with cheers as Johnson goes on to thank the RCCG for its work and predicts that in front of him are future counsellors, MPs, High Judges, heads of FTSE 100 companies, and yes, very possibly even his own successor as mayor of London. He has captured the aspirations of the crowd, a political success. Yet, after Johnson finishes, his hosts remind him of a higher power still: He is invited to remain standing for a prayer by Enoch Adeboye himself. The mayor looks a bit uncomfortable as Adeboye holds him by the elbow and prays to loud "Amens" that God would help him, give him wisdom and abilities and grant him the desires of his heart. Ten years on, we know that Johnson's jovial predictions about revival and his successor did not come to pass. But after he had become PM, someone from the RCCG re-released the video with sly the comment that this shows what powerful things can happen when the General Overseer prays.[13] A lesson in African Pentecostal aspiration indeed.

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[12]Dereje Feyissa and Jörg Haustein, 'The Strains of "Pente" Politics: Evangelicals and the Post-Orthodox State in Ethiopia', in *Routledge Handbook on the Horn of Africa*, ed. Jean-Nicolas Bach (London: Routledge, 2020).

[13] "Watch 7 Years Ago: Pastor Adeboye Prays For Boris Johnson Prime Minister Of United Kingdom," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rlnsbQzs2Ko. This particular video was posted by a Tanzanian Christian news

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channel, but title and description suggest that there was an earlier version of this video from an RCCG source.