This article tries to chart developments in African Christianity south of the Sahara (though leaving South Africa aside, because of its own unique dynamic). It divides African Christianity into two rough and ready categories—mainline and ‘Pentecostal’. For the mainline (or mission or historical) churches the author argues that they are increasingly identified with Western aid. As Africa becomes increasingly marginalised, these aid flows and what they involve become increasingly significant for—even constitutive of—mainline Christianity. For Pentecostalism, while admitting their enormous variety, the article focuses on two characteristics that most of these newer churches share: a stress on spiritual forces, and an emphasis on success or victory. Examples are drawn from across the continent, not least from Nigeria, which powers many of these developments. The article concludes with a brief speculation on the links of Africa’s emerging Christianity with global Christianity; African theology; an emerging use of the Bible; and Christianity’s socio-political role in a marginalised Africa.

Keywords: Ecclesiology in Africa; mainline churches in Africa; Pentecostalism; dysfunctional political systems; Christian NGOs; short-term missionaries (STMs); inculturation; spiritual forces and casualty; witchcraft; transnational denominations

This article focuses on sub-Saharan Africa, with the Republic of South Africa for the most part left aside because of its own unique dynamic. This region is vast, encompassing considerable variety, but despite the variety I will presume that there is such a thing as ‘Sub-Saharan Africa’, and I will characterise its condition as marginalisation. This is a continent excluded from the processes driving most of the world.1 Although it is not directly the focus of this article, I would also maintain (along with a large segment of academic opinion) that the cause of this is not primarily the slave trade, colonialism, neo-colonialism or unjust trade systems, though all are important, but the dysfunctional neo-patrimonial political systems through which an unaccountable elite maintain themselves in power and wealth.

Africa’s situation is not necessarily permanent. The continent is not static, and one can point to important novelties such as the increasing investment from China. So the continent is not ‘hopeless’, as a notorious cover of the Economist trumpeted.2 Nevertheless it is hard to be optimistic, because, when set against the advances of even the rest of the developing world (in education, GDP, health and other development indicators), these gains are hardly enough to enable Africa to compete on the world scene. Unforeseen events and processes could, of course, intervene at any time, but I will presume that

1Collier, The Bottom Billion.
2Economist, 13 May 2000.
Africa’s condition, barring such eventualities, will remain one of continuing – even increasing – marginalisation.

It is in these conditions that Christianity is literally exploding. Barrett’s figures give 22,800 Africans becoming Christian every day.\(^3\) However, statistics are blunt and clumsy. They have little bearing on the main debates, and do not advance the points I want to make here. No one doubts that an increasing number of Africans call themselves Christian; it is the nature, role and significance of their Christianity that are important. For my purposes here I will divide the increasing number of Christians on the continent into two admittedly crude (but I hope adequate) categories, which I will call ‘mainline’ and ‘Pentecostal’. In the limited space available, I will present a general overview, painted in the broadest brushstrokes, of some of their most important features – and from an empirically researchable social science perspective rather than a theological one.

**Mainline Churches**

**Service provision**

What I here call the mainline (or historic or mission) churches – such as Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutheran – have a long and important history in Africa, and their contribution to health and education is well known. This continues, even intensifies. One estimate gives 64 per cent of all Kenya’s educational institutions as church-based.\(^4\) Some governments, like Zambia’s, have even made efforts to reverse the nationalisation of education which occurred after independence. Now, crowning the acknowledged contribution in primary and secondary education, Christian universities are opening. In Kenya at the time of writing there are seven public universities, but they are now outnumbered by private ones, nearly all Christian (mostly, but not exclusively, mainline). In Uganda, there are now four public universities and 18 recognised private universities. Of these 18, eleven are Christian institutions.

The last decades have also witnessed the increasing involvement of Christian bodies in relief and development. Christian NGOs extend from giants like World Vision International, Catholic Relief Services, the Lutheran World Federation, to Christian Aid, DanChurchAid, Cordaid (Holland), Trocaire (Ireland), Misereor, Bread for the World (Germany) and countless others. If one includes the involvement of individual Western churches, and adds what are effectively private initiatives, the list of Christian service-providers is literally endless. Of the high-profile Christian agencies, many obtain most, even all, of their funds from governments or world bodies like USAID, the EU or UN. Indeed, some Christian agencies like the Salvation Army World Service Organisation (SAWSO) or the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) were set up as legally distinct subsidiaries of the churches precisely to capture public money unavailable to the churches themselves. Thus much of this activity is not for specifically Christian aims, but for development – everything from food production to micro-finance, water sanitation, HIV and AIDS education, conflict resolution.

However, Western resources are just as crucial for the functioning of churches themselves. New methods of attracting resources have evolved – like ‘twinning’. England’s Anglican diocese of Winchester has each of its deaneries twinned with a diocese in Uganda and within these Winchester deaneries, some parishes are twinned with a parish in Uganda. The Diocese of Southwark is twinned with three dioceses in Zimbabwe, the


\(^{4}\)National Mirror, July 2006, 10.
Diocese of Manchester with Anglicans in Namibia, the Diocese of London with Mozambique and Angola. Without such modes of resource acquisition, these churches could not function as they do. Thus the Kenyan Anglican Diocese of Bungoma was visited by a group of 103 Canadian Anglicans comprising clergy, nurses, doctors, dentists and engineers for two weeks in 2007. Each visitor spent $3,500 dollars on the trip, and they brought goods valued at $150,000 covering everything from pairs of spectacles to computers. The importance of these resource flows is most obvious in the case of the Roman Catholic Church, which, contrary to public perception, is not so much a single monolithic entity as a vast array of interlocking, semi-autonomous and self-financing bodies. Catholic religious congregations have seen their traditional recruiting grounds like France, Ireland, the Netherlands dry up. Many have implanted themselves in new areas, not least Africa, for their new intake of recruits. This is nowhere more evident than in Kenya, where according to the 2006 Directory (not exhaustive, but about 75% complete), 212 religious congregations are active – an increase of 40% over the list for the year 2000. Nairobi now has probably more religious houses (at least 371) than any city except Rome. Many are the substantial formation houses of these new recruits. Kenya and Nairobi merely highlight a phenomenon widely evident on the continent. For my purposes here, the significant point is that virtually all the resources for this growth are from abroad.

Another novelty is relevant here, namely the growth of short-term missionaries (STMs – ‘short-term’ can signify anything from a few weeks up to one year). Short-term Protestant missionaries from North America to other countries have increased from 540 in 1965, to 120,000 in 1989, 450,000 in 1998, 600,000 in 2000 and reached one million in 2004.5 Some US megachurches now demand that everyone in the church have some experience of mission within, say, a five-year period. The increase is undeniable, though of course not to the same degree in all African countries. I flew to Kenya in June 2007 on British Airways from London; on that single flight there were six different groups of STMs going to East Africa: 22 Presbyterians from Nashville; 12 Baptists from Orlando building their ninth church in East Africa; 23 Methodists from Pennsylvania; and numbers I couldn’t verify from the Fellowship of Christian Optometrists, the Lott Carey Mission, and New Horizon Student Mission.

The effects of large numbers of well-meaning and (at least relatively) wealthy North Americans in Africa are considerable and heighten this identification of Christianity with Western resources. Most STMs are immediately struck by the poverty; often, they offer school fees, scholarships, other assistance. This is precisely the pitfall that the mission agencies seek to avoid. Mission agencies admit the huge problem of dependency within African Christianity, and seem genuinely concerned to address it; in orientation for their own STMs they put great stress on the harm that indiscriminate financial support can wreak. Yet the reality is that many a church, school or orphanage is kept afloat through such Western contacts, and many Africans make a living from them. Through modern communications, many now bypass mission agencies. Approaches are made directly via the internet. I know of enterprising pastors who directly advertise for such contacts on North American radio stations. The rise in STMs makes increasing dependency almost unavoidable, and furthers the identification of Christianity with Western resources.

The identification of resources and Christianity obviously worries some; thus the Papal Nuncio to Kenya feels the need to stress: ‘The role of the Church is not just giving food and health services but also sharing its faith, since it works for the eternal salvation of

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mankind’. Pope Benedict XVI in his first encyclical laboured exactly the same point. Despite such warnings, however, it is undeniable that a substantial amount of Christian activity is not obviously about relating to the divine; it is most obviously about access to Western resources and the whole range of things this brings: education, employment, modernisation, global opportunities. My point here is not that no African ever finds profound spiritual resources within Catholicism or Methodism; the point is that as Africa has become increasingly marginalized, these resource-flows and what they involve become increasingly significant for – even constitutive of – parts of mainline Christianity.

**African Theology**

It used to be said that theology in southern Africa focused on liberation; in the rest of Africa on culture. This was superseded by the view that all African theology was concerned with both, well caught in the title of Ghanaian Emmanuel Martey’s best-seller, *African Theology: Liberation and Inculturation*. I agree that the two concerns are interlocking, but both need some explanation. In the last half of the 20th century, the issue of African self-reliance and authenticity, coupled with comprehensive critique of the West and its role in Africa, has been the principal dynamic of Africa’s intellectual life in all fields, theology included. African theologians accepted, too, the common opinion that Christianity was an integral part of the West’s assault on Africa. So African theology came to revolve around two poles: first, to rehabilitate African culture and religion, and second, to critique the Western impact on Africa, including that of Christian missionaries. Thus the liberation is mainly from Western exploitation. As Bowers has commented,

> From the mid-1970s onward, African theology increasingly included a political theology of liberation as part of its agenda. Unlike Black Theology in South Africa, for the most part this has not attended to forces of oppression within Africa, but has rather addressed the Western political and economic exploitation of Africa. While African church leadership, especially in eastern and southern Africa and not least within Roman Catholic circles, has often found it necessary to speak against the injustice and repression practised by various African governments since independence, little of this has been reflected in theological discussion.

The stress on culture also needs explanation. ‘Inculturation’ became unavoidable in the early 1990s, promoted mainly by missionaries (for the Catholics, as a contribution for the 1994 African Synod of Bishops which had inculturation as one of its main themes). Since then, missionaries have backed out of this field, leaving it to Africans for many of whom it has become a distinct theological project. This project has been less concerned with liturgy, art, music and organisation (the missionaries’ ‘inculturation’) and more focused on culture itself. For this reason, one could more properly call it a ‘theology of culture’ where culture is pivotal; African culture must always be the touchstone, criterion, fulcrum. It seems to be a conclusive argument against something if it can be labelled ‘alien to the African cultural and religious heritage’.

> Its starting point and preoccupations give this culture theology certain characteristics. It starts from the conviction mentioned above that Africans have been despised and
exploited from the time of the slave trade and colonialism till the present day. African Christians must reverse this situation, discovering their own form of Christianity that enables them to be Africans. Just as Africans must make their contribution to the world systems from which they have been so marginalized, so too African Christians must contribute to global Christianity.11

Culture theology privileges what has been called the comparative method: African realities are related to scriptural or traditional data, or to Christian values and ideals. Thus many articles take as starting point the cultural practices of an ethnic group (often the author’s own), suggesting that these reveal something valuable that should be incorporated into Christianity, even global Christianity. These debates, however, often leave rather unclear what exactly African culture is and who would decide, and where one would look to find it. In Africa’s huge informal settlements, what would most naturally be regarded as culture (even an ancestral language) may be fast disappearing. Moreover, some presentations of African culture seem rather idealised.

The preoccupation with African culture precludes much analysis of the rise of industrial or late industrial society, the factors involved in this, the dynamics and the challenges of a globalising world. The rejection of everything non-African in some instances seems to involve rejecting even modern science education as ‘Western’.12 Most significantly, this theology prioritising African culture seems correspondingly to discount the internal socio-political elements, the political reality of Africa. The poverty, ill-health and precarious security of so many Africans today are not unrelated to the well-documented plundering of the country’s resources by an irresponsible political elite. However, theologians of culture tend to deal only with external causes of Africa’s situation. Consider Mugambi’s *African Christian Theology* as an example. Africa has suffered, after colonialism, from institutionalised racism, and ideological manipulation during the Cold War, and economic strangulation.13 The OECD countries and Bretton Woods institutions have deliberately exploited Africa; globalisation is another ploy to dominate Africa,14 and the whole democratisation movement is yet another attempt to keep Africa subservient.15 In fact, everyone and everything Western seems bent on this, even NGOs and the promoters of Millennium Development Goals.16 Western Churches, too, since they now get most of their funds from their exploitative governments, are an integral part of this onslaught.17 All these Western institutions are responsible for the subjugation of Africa; in fact, Mugambi has no references to what might be considered African contributions, apart from one allusion to African ‘shortcomings’, which is immediately followed by the qualification: ‘even though those shortcomings were the result of policies imposed on Africa by multilateral and bilateral institutions’.18

There is no logical incompatibility between them, but in fact it appears that the more churches are involved in service provision, the less they are disposed to challenge dysfunctional political systems. Rwanda is the classic example. If asked before April 1994,

14 Ibid., 127, 145.
15 Ibid., 9, 163f.
16 Ibid., 193.
18 Ibid., 216; there is one other passage where the Western responsibility has the qualifier ‘largely’ (ibid., 79).
most would have said that the Catholic Church’s national contribution was enormous, in education, health and development generally. Yet the Catholic Church was permitted to play that role, earning it such power and status, only by leaving unchallenged the genocidal culture and structures that led to national disaster. It did not do both.

**Pentecostalism**

Kenya requires that churches be registered before operating. In September 2007 the Attorney General announced that the country had 8,520 registered churches, had 6,740 applications pending, and that 60 new applications were filed every month.\(^{19}\) The procedure for vetting new bodies was overwhelmed, and systems had totally broken down. Ghana has a similar requirement. In the 2005 calendar year, so from 1 January to 31 December 2005, out of a total of 1,931 legal entities registered, 443 were new churches.\(^{20}\) I will call this wide variety of churches Pentecostal, or perhaps better ‘Pentecostal-like’, because that enables me to avoid the debate over the degree to which they resemble the classical Pentecostal denominations of North America.

Before proceeding further, I should note that important claims have been made for this Pentecostal-like Christianity – even that in the long run it may do more for Africa than the mainline churches with all their ‘development’. This position is associated with David Martin:

> The lineage running from Pietism to Pentecostalism is linked positively to modernity in respect of the domains of gender, secular law, transnationalism, voluntarism, pluralism, the nuclear family, peaceability, personal release and personal work discipline, consumption, modern communication, social and geographical mobility – as well as changes in mediation, authority and participation.\(^{21}\)

In other words, in all these areas, from gender to law, from work ethic to exercise of authority, Pentecostalism is helping bring Africa into the modern globalising world. As will become clear, I am less optimistic about Pentecostalism’s public effects, precisely because of the two characteristics I will concentrate on here and which in many treatments are underplayed, if not completely ignored. These two characteristics, almost necessarily related but for analytical purposes treated separately here, are the emphasis on spiritual forces, and the emphasis on success or prosperity.

**Emphasis on spiritual forces**

In pre-Christian African religion the physical realm and the realm of the spirit are not separate from each other. Nothing is purely matter; spirit infuses everything. Although natural causality is not entirely disregarded, causality is to be discerned primarily in the spiritual realm. There is no matter or event that might not be influenced by the gods, ancestors, spirits or witches. Any enemy could use spiritual means to bring misfortune into

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\(^{19}\) *Standard*, 4 Sept 2007, 6.

\(^{20}\) Statistics from Registrar General’s Department, for which I am indebted to Dr Michael Perry Kweku Okyerefo.

\(^{21}\) See Martin, ‘Pentecostalism’, 144. See also Martin, ‘Faiths Escaping the Hierarchies’: ‘In societies where politics is carried on by corrupt clienteles a reform of culture through religion may well be the best option the populace has’. 
a person’s life. Religious rituals exist to preserve the proper relationship with these spirits. This world-view largely persists in this Pentecostal-like form of Christianity.

There are different forms of preoccupation with evil forces. One classic presentation is found in the Nigerian Emmanuel Eni’s *Delivered from the Powers of Darkness*, found all over the continent. Eni claimed to have been sucked down into the undersea life of evil spirits by marrying a woman from the spirit world. He could travel at will to any part of the globe. He could change into all kinds of animals. He became a ranking agent of Satan, performing all kinds of wicked deeds including several murders. He killed people by causing natural disasters like the collapse of buildings or road accidents. Only on meeting Jesus in 1985 was his life transformed.  

More routinely, the preoccupation with spiritual forces takes the form of seeking deliverance from spirits regarded as responsible for misfortunes of all kinds. Consider the following. In January 2001 Abraham Chigbundu of Mark of Christ Ministries in Benin City, Nigeria, was one of the main speakers at a convention. Chigbundu takes this spiritual preoccupation to its ultimate conclusion, and argues that ‘behind every bondage, trouble, confusion is witchcraft’. Witchcraft operates through ancestral curses or even things we inadvertently say (for example, in an argument a husband may say ‘I should never have married you’. Even if he forgets he ever said it, that constitutes a witchcraft deposit which can ensure the marriage never succeeds). Again, someone may be named after an ancestor who ‘didn’t perform his destiny’; anyone so named ‘is going to lead a life of underachievement’. Going to *mallams*, even to dubious ‘Men of God’, giving money to a beggar, all may constitute a point of contact (‘not everyone in the street is a human being’; they may be ‘spirits in disguise’). Sex may be a point of contact. Dreams, too: dreams of climbing mountains, of riding an old bicycle on sandy ground, of climbing stairs, or going back to primary school, all indicate spiritual hindrances.

After explaining all this and more, Chigbundu used the service to destroy every blockage. ‘I destroy you, Witchcraft Spirits, all deposits of witchcraft, by the blood of Jesus’. That spirit ‘responsible for stagnancy, backwardness, disappointment, non-achievement in my life, I destroy you now … The years which witchcraft has wasted, I command them to be restored tonight. Whatever they stole from you, be restored sevenfold. The spirit of greatness, I release it! I reclaim the spirit of greatness tonight. Receive it!’ In reply all shouted, ‘I receive it!’ The reaction of his huge congregation showed that Chigbundu was addressing issues of vital concern.

Not all are as explicit as Chigbundu, but I would submit that virtually all Africa’s new churches share that world-view – setbacks and misfortunes are caused by spiritual forces, and it is the function of Christianity to counter them. Churches are cropping up everywhere to address these needs, because in Africa today misfortune is the lot of most and because (it must be said) the mainline churches do so little to meet them.

This enchanted world-view is pervasive. In 1995 President Moi set up a commission of inquiry into devil worship in Kenya. The commission submitted their report in 1995, and, although it has never been officially released, it has been obtainable secretly. The first case study gives a flavour of the whole. A Nyeri schoolgirl was recruited into devil worship when spirits and ghosts took her to their home. The demons made demands on her; that she sacrifice a member of her family, especially the last born (when she refused, the child

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23See Gifford, *Ghana’s New Christianity*, 100f.
fell sick); that she have sex with demons (she succumbed to this last demand). They also cut her body before rubbing in some substance which gave her mystical powers. These enabled her ‘to transform herself into anything’ and to cause accidents, in some of which fellow students and staff were injured. She claimed she was able to turn herself into a man and could ‘communicate with other creatures such as birds, travel to distant places in spirit form and appear/disappear mysteriously’. During seven years of devil worship, she ate human flesh, drank human blood and possessed satanic paraphernalia which included ‘blood in powder form, bangles, rings and a knife’. The girl was rescued from the cult when she was ‘saved’ in 1994, whereupon she entered a Bible school.24

The importance of this report is that it reveals a widespread need to conceptualise in spiritual terms a range of personal and social ills, including cultural dislocation, economic deprivation, the sense of lives wasted. Although the reaction to media disclosures showed that not all Kenyans subscribe to this spiritual conceptualising, it was equally obvious that a sizeable section do. And, just as obviously, recourse to spiritual explanation extends far beyond what might be considered its natural habitat – traditional shrines, African Independent Churches, and the ‘Pentecostal-like’ sector – because this commission was headed by Catholic Archbishop Nicodemus Kirima of Nyeri, the other commissioners being an Anglican bishop, the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church, the pastor of a large Nairobi church, a professor of religious studies at one of Kenya’s universities, a chaplain of a national school, a prominent lawyer and a senior police officer.

The Moderator of Kenya’s Presbyterian Church of East Africa even explains the state of Kenya through such spiritual forces. As is widely known, ‘harambee’ means something like community self-help, and the notion was thought to capture the spirit of post-independence Kenya so that the word was enshrined on the national coat of arms. The Moderator claims that the word derives from the chants of Indians the British brought in to build the railway to Uganda, and it is an invocation of a Hindu goddess ‘Ambe’. As a result, this Hindu goddess controls the city of Nairobi, the army, police and even parliament – in fact everywhere the coat of arms appears. As he told the Presbyterian General Assembly of 2006,

Innocently, we have given the complete reign and rule to this Hindu goddess over our beloved land of Kenya, . . . No wonder our country’s economy is in the hands of the Indians whose god appears and controls our currency, . . . We must now as a nation come together and repent and renounce this goddess and dethrone her from the seat of reign and power over Kenya. Only then shall we be released to move into our wonderful destiny in the areas of economy and education, and freed from all the evils that enslave our nation’. 25

It is obvious, first, that this focus on the spiritual realm and on spiritual causality sharply differentiates this Christianity from what we have above called mainline Christianity. One doesn’t normally go to a mainline church office for curses to be broken, witches to be identified, spirits to be exorcised. But secondly, there need be no hard and fast distinction between a mainline Christian and a Pentecostal one; the categories are fluid, and I have used them here for purely analytical purposes. Many Christians of mainline churches share this Pentecostal world-view, and indeed Kenya’s Presbyterian Moderator heads a church belonging to the World Council of Churches. I heard recently of an Anglican cleric in western Kenya admitting that, at the parish level, of course they

pray against witches and curses; however, when an archdeacon or any senior cleric visits, this activity must be disowned. He was lamenting the fact that the Anglican Church could not publicly admit what it in fact does.

Paradoxically, the culture theology discussed above makes almost no reference to the traditional world-view of spiritual forces and spiritual causality. Malawi’s Patrick Kalilombe, speaking at a workshop on inculturation, is one of the few I have heard deal with this at any length. He insists that it is precisely because this world-view is ignored that ordinary people have little interest in the writings of the theologians. ‘For the people the choice of past elements to which they seem to be particularly attached are in the area of the more basic ideas, attitudes and customs that are linked up with their world-view. They are attached to these because they form the basic spirituality on which the very essential coping mechanism for life itself and its success depend. Such are for instance, the important areas of belief in medicines, magic practices and rituals which give assurance for dealing with the life problems of misfortune, sickness, natural disasters, and witchcraft – problems of failure or success in life, problems of death and survival. . . . In the contact with Christian faith, the challenge is really on these issues’.26

It is remarkable how little attention is paid to this ‘enchanted’ religious imagination in discussions of African culture, especially since the explosion of Pentecostal-like churches (often at the expense of the mainline) is narrowly linked to the Pentecostal celebration of precisely that imagination.

**Emphasis on success**

This ‘enchanted’ Christianity is often found with the second feature; a stress on victory, achievement, success. In this Pentecostal-like Christianity, a Christian is a success; if not, something is very wrong.

Consider one of the most prominent of Africa’s new churches, the Nigerian multinational Living Faith Church Worldwide, better known as Winners’ Chapel, founded in Lagos in 1983. By 2000 it had 400 branches in Nigeria and was in 38 African countries. Winners’ boasts in Lagos the biggest church auditorium in the world, seating 50,400, and in Nairobi they are constructing what they claim will be the biggest church in East and Central Africa. The chief pastors, at least in capital cities, tend to be Nigerians, well schooled in founder David Oyedepo’s teaching and fiercely loyal; they promote his books (he always has four ‘books of the month’) and promote the pilgrimage to the annual conference (‘Shiloh’) at headquarters (‘Canaan Land’, outside Lagos) – a pilgrimage rivalling in importance the Haj to Mecca. At Winners’, it is obvious that although the success promised embraces all areas of life, it is material success that is paramount. In every service in 2006, a pastor led everyone in confessing Oyedepo’s pledge for the year, with the congregation shouting ‘Amen’ after every item:

In 2006: Everything that shall make your laughter complete and total shall be added unto you. The desires of everyone’s heart shall be delivered. Every trial shall be turned to testimonies. Every struggle shall be turned to miracles. Every form of barrenness shall be turned to fruitfulness. Every frustration shall be turned to celebration. Every humiliation shall be turned into honour. Every shame shall be turned to glory. And every curse shall be turned into blessings.

26Kalilombe, ‘Praxis and Methods of Inculturation in Africa’, 45–6, emphasis added.
Oyedepo’s ‘prophetic focus’ for 2007 was ‘From Glory to Glory’ (2 Cor 3.18). At services the preacher proclaimed:

God is saying that in 2007 I am bringing you out of every shame and reproach into realms of glory you had never thought possible in your life-time. That for your shame you shall have double. That it shall be a year of supernatural restoration of his glory in all areas of your lives. . . . God is saying to all of us in the Winners’ family that the year 2007 is a year of going forward. That we shall be moving from whatever level we are now to the next. That it shall be your year of restoration of colour. That it shall be your year of restoration of beauty. That it shall be your year of restoration of dignity. That it shall be your year of restoration of glory. . . . You are emerging more than a conqueror in all areas of your life this year. The news of your triumphs shall hit the headlines in the course of the year 2007.

This emphasis on success is relentless. Winners has developed its own ritual of footwashing, not so much a re-enactment of Jesus’ action at the last supper, as a ritualising of Joshua 14.9: ‘Whatsoever your feet tread upon shall be given unto you for a possession’ – hence an assurance of possession. Even the central Christian ritual of the Eucharist is reinterpreted to fit this message of abundance, success, victory.27 In September 2006 Winners’ in Nairobi celebrated Communion, which the pastor explained as ‘a mystery to swallow every misfortune in your life . . . Let it eradicate all sickness and affliction’. We were reminded that ‘mediocrity is a sickness’. Immediately after receiving Communion, we received a second Communion, to immunise us: ‘Jesus was never sick once. By this second communion you will never be sick again . . . Go and sack all your doctors. Tell your doctors, “I will not come to your clinic again”. You will not contribute to buy their houses and cars; you will buy your own houses and cars’.

Winners’ is admittedly only one of Africa’s new trans-national denominations, but it is not unrepresentative; it is merely the most successful, through its unrestrained and relentless proclamation of a theology that is widespread in Africa’s new churches. It is misleading to describe this Christianity as evangelical, for even basic ideas of evangelicalism (if we take Bebbington’s four: biblicism, crucicentrism, conversion and activism) have been transformed out of all recognition, even if the words are preserved.28 The cross is not frequently mentioned, but when it is, it is more in the following vein: ‘Through Jesus Christ, all curses were destroyed at the cross of Calvary. This implies that every believer is a success in every sphere of life. The sons of God must now refuse completely to dwell in poverty or any form of underachievement’.29 ‘What Jesus has gone through you don’t have to; he became poor so that I might become rich . . . He took my sickness and poverty. “It is finished,” he said on the cross’.30 The blood of Jesus is frequently invoked in the mantra ‘By the blood of Jesus’, but even this is often reduced to a means of possessing. Thus Bishop Margaret Wanjiru of Nairobi’s Christ is Alive Ministries:

Christ shed his blood from his hands and feet so that we may be rich . . . With our hands we labour to make wealth and with our feet we walk into our inheritance . . . the Calvary package not only included salvation but also included the prosperity and inheritance of our hands and feet. We are supposed to be partaking of these blessings every day of our lives as God’s children.31

27See Oyedepo, The Miracle Meal, esp 29–32; 50–3; 79–84.
28Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Modern Britain (1989).
30Winners’ second service, Nairobi, 20 Aug 2006; at the same service: ‘You are not born-again to struggle again. You are born-again to enjoy’.
31In her publication, Faith Digest, 15(2006), 6f.
At least six distinct avenues to this success are discernible. First, through motivation. A church can inculcate drive and determination, preaching that it is your own fault if you are not successful and rich: ‘Anything you want to become you can become; the only thing stopping you is you’.32 Second, through entrepreneurship. At every Winners’ service you will probably have to turn to your neighbour and ask: ‘Have you started your own business yet?’ Third, through practical life skills – like work, saving, investing, organising time. Included here are more traditionally moral concerns like sobriety, marital fidelity, devoted parenting, but I don’t want to overdo the emphasis on these; they are undoubtedly there, at least in many cases, but privileging these elements to the neglect of the others has given rise to the excessively optimistic evaluation of Pentecostal-like churches. Fourth, by exercising faith, expressly ‘seed faith’ from the biblical metaphor of ‘sowing and reaping’. Thus faith and giving tithes and offerings to the church become instruments of one’s advancement. Fifth, and increasingly, success and prosperity come through the ‘anointing’ of the ‘man of God’; pastors increasingly claim the ability to prosper their followers, often making themselves indispensable. Thus David Adeoye of Nairobi Winners’ Chapel argues: ‘God is saying believe Him and you will be established, but your prosperity, success and breaking forth on the right and the left is tied to a prophet… Any trace of disregard for their role in your life is a showcase of unprofitability for you’.33 Sixth and related to this last point, the pastor can drive out the spirits that impede the progress that is one’s due as a Christian. These six ways in which Christianity is understood to entail success and wealth are obviously not incompatible, and many churches (like Winners’) combine them all, seamlessly mixed together. It requires effort to separate out the different strands. Other churches are more associated with one way, less with others.

All these Pentecostal-like churches would claim to be biblical, and in a hard sense, in a sense in which the mainstream churches are not. They have developed a creative and imaginative way of using scripture, a performative, declarative use. In this Christianity, the Bible is understood as a record of covenants, promises, pledges, commitments of God to his chosen. Not just involving others in the past. The Bible is a contemporary document. It is understood to tell my story; it explains who I am. The Bible is much more authoritative about me and my future than what others, or school reports, or medical bulletins, or bank statements, or the visa section of the US embassy, might say of me. The Bible is much more authoritative about me and my destiny than my present circumstances. Thus the Bible is no mere historical record. It is covenant and commitment to me, and to me now. Kenya’s Wilfred Lai explained to his congregation that the promises of Isaiah 60 applied to them: ‘He (the prophet) was speaking of Israel, but you are Israel now’. Lai insists: ‘You can do what the Bible says you can do. You can be what the Bible says you can be’.34 Similarly, the faith confession of Nairobi’s City Revival Temple: ‘This is the Bible, the Everlasting and Living Word… I choose this day to receive the engrafted Word… I agree that I have what God says that I have. I am what He says I am’. This is the understanding of Pius Muiru, founder of East Africa’s Maximum Miracle Centre, when he declares: ‘Maybe you lack credentials for that job, but I’d like to tell you that your life is not measured by the certificates of the amount of education you possess but what measures life is what the Word of God says about you’.35

34At convention of Nairobi Pentecostal Church, 23 Aug 2007.
35In his publication Maximum Miracle Times, Dec 2004, 21.
Thus the Bible has proved a rich resource for this stress on health, wealth, success and victory. The Bible becomes a fund of narratives, often of the triumphs of Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, David, Solomon, Elijah and Elisha, that illustrate God’s desire to intervene and prosper his chosen. This understanding is common to all these new churches. To call this interpretation fundamentalist or literalist is to misunderstand.

I have mentioned the theology of seed faith, of sowing and reaping, of giving and receiving. This is not an optional extra, but has been the motor powering this entire explosion of Christianity. All these buildings, pastors, programmes, vehicles, musical instruments and sound systems have to be paid for, and in economically straitened circumstances. The aggressive, theologically driven quest for funds is the salient characteristic of many churches. Enoch Adeboye, head of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, another Nigerian transnational that claims to be the fastest growing church not just in Africa but in the world, has identified ‘12 Keys unlocking the doors of Prosperity’. It is no accident that key four is ‘Giving’, five is ‘Sowing’, and six is ‘The Principle of the First Fruits’.

The economics of this Christianity deserves more attention than it receives. The pastors of so many of these newer churches are religious entrepreneurs, examples of an entire new class of religious professional, the pastor as founder-leader-owner. So often, the success/wealth/blessing being preached is made dependent on giving. In the words of one Kenyan pastor: ‘If God knows that you do not know how to give to him, He will not heal you of your disease, neither will he be your guide in life. All the chronic diseases you have are a result of the fact that you do not know how to give offering to God’.

Pius Muiru, mentioned above, is explicit: ‘If you want to (get) wealth the only secret is giving’. Again: ‘If you tithe, then your financial doors will be opened. If you don’t, then they will remain closed’. Given this emphasis on blessings as reward for offerings, there have been several well-publicised cases of what is effectively extortion. However, my point is not to draw attention to notorious excesses; the point is that the idea of seed-faith is essential to the whole movement.

Pastoring these newer churches has brought not just a living, sometimes considerable wealth, but also fame and status. Some have tried to utilise this in the political sphere. In Zambia Pastor Nevers Mumba has vied for the Presidency, as did Rev Chris Okotie in Nigeria. Kenya’s Bishop Margaret Wanjiru announced in November 2006 that she would stand for parliament in the 2007 general elections. About the same time, Pius Muiru announced he would contest another Nairobi constituency and also run for President of Kenya. The entry of Wanjiru and Muiru into politics brought an outburst against the new Christianity, extending far beyond Wanjiru and Muiru alone. The wealth and motivation of all the new pastors were questioned: ‘They have not been fishers of men. Instead, they have been reapers of diamond and gold in an endless mine of desperate souls

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36 Among Oyedepo’s many books on the topic: *Success Strategies* (2003).
38 *Redemption News*, July 2006, 8. The RCCG’s aim (trumpeted on much of their promotional literature) is to ‘plant churches within five minutes walking distance in every city and town of developing countries and within five minutes driving distance of developed countries’. In my opinion, RCCG has been totally eclipsed by Winners’.
40 *Maximum Miracle Times*, April, 2005, 20, in article entitled ‘Provoking Thy Wealth’.
41 Ibid., July 2006, 26.
in search of spiritual nourishment'.\textsuperscript{43} One commentator saw Kenyans generally as having a death wish: ‘When they are not willingly being led to the slaughter house by political tricksters, they are willingly following, in droves, another set of con men and women’.\textsuperscript{44} And their quest for political power was often seen as the logical extension of their understanding of their ministry: ‘Having tasted the power that comes with spiritual enslavement of flock, many preachers are casting their net wide for political power and a more regular source of material well being’.\textsuperscript{45} A \textit{Standard} editorial on the whole phenomenon concluded: ‘Church leaders’ activities are a shame to Christianity and they must be stopped’.\textsuperscript{46}

Disgust and anger at the whole ‘Christianity industry’, though seldom mentioned in academic circles, is widespread in Africa. Consider this comment from Nigeria:

The fastest growing industry in Nigeria today – faster growing than even the telecom sector, and perhaps just as profitable – is the faith industry, which feeds off the misery of the people and appeals to their worst instincts and propensity to superstition, illogic and unreason . . . Of course the prophets live spectacularly well off the backs of the foolish multitudes. The faith trade is largely the abode of charlatans and rogues, characters straight out of Wole Soyinka’s ‘The Trials of Brother Jero’.\textsuperscript{47}

The ambivalent attitude to Africa’s Christian growth deserves more attention than it normally receives.

Is Africa’s emerging Pentecostal Christianity global or African? It is obvious that the success motif fits very well with the assumptions of Africa’s pre-Christian religious imagination. However, the way this is expressed is heavily influenced by North Americans like Kenneth Hagin and Kenneth Copeland, respectively the founder and most prominent advocate of the faith gospel, and Mike Murdock of Texas. For example, David Oyedepo, the founder of Winners’ Chapel, claims that the Lord has told him that Hagin’s ‘baton has been passed’ to him, and he claims he received Copeland’s anointing by sleeping in a bed once slept in by Copeland.\textsuperscript{48} In Ghana I once heard Matthew Ashimolowo, the founder of London’s biggest church, the overwhelmingly Nigerian Kingsway International Christian Centre, tell a congregation that if they had ever heard a sermon on sowing (and thereby reaping), the ideas in it probably originated from Mike Murdock. I could cite other evidence indicating that African and North American influences mesh rather well. Similarly, the emphasis on the spirit world corresponds with the enchanted religious imagination. Again, though, the spiritual explanation developed in, say, President Moi’s report is not precisely that traditionally associated with African religious sensibilities, expressed in reference to witchcraft, sorcery, curses, possession. The Moi Commission seems to conflate two worlds: that of the enchanted spirit world, and Western cultism (the report makes much of the Church of Satan set up in California in 1967). Indeed, some key ideas in this report seem to come from sections (even quite marginal sections) of Western

\textsuperscript{44}Gaitho, ‘New Year: Nothing really Changes’, \textit{Nation}, 3 Jan 2006, 8; he concludes: ‘Come to think of it, there are two legitimate industries in Kenya for clever crooks who do not (want) to risk jail time – politics and the church’.
\textsuperscript{45}Ongalo, ‘From Pulpit to Politics’, 13.
\textsuperscript{48}Oyedepo, \textit{Riding on Prophetic Wings}, 103, 121 and 124.
Pentecostalism.\(^{49}\) Again, we seem to have something new, arising from a fusion of two worlds.

David Martin’s view\(^{50}\) that Pentecostal Christianity will help transform Africa is in my opinion not borne out by the evidence, at least so far. I would argue that this Christianity does not challenge dysfunctional structures that are so harmful in Africa, is of minimal help in building necessary institutions, and leads to little critical reflection. It will do little to redress Africa’s marginalisation.

Conclusion

Christianity is exploding in Africa, or at least Africans are increasingly identifying themselves as Christians. I have argued that we can without too much distortion distinguish two increasingly dominant forms of African Christianity today: the mainline and the Pentecostal. Both are linked to Africa’s marginalisation; the mainline connect with the globalising world and bring in much-needed resources, the Pentecostal-like explain the ubiquitous misfortunes and hardships and engender hope that they can be overcome.

Notes on contributor

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Bibliography


\(^{49}\)Most notably Prince, *Blessing or Curse*; Brown, *He Came to Set the Captives Free*.

\(^{50}\)See page 280 above.


Ongalo, Otuma. ‘From Pulpit to Politics: it’s a Race to Usual Greed’. In Standard, 26 Jan 2007: 13.


