

# Encountering Jesus in African Christianity: A Ghanaian evangelical/pentecostal thought on faith, experience, and hope in Christ

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## Abstract

*This article constitutes a preliminary attempt at reflecting upon Ghana's journey with a particular tradition within the Christian faith. The author discusses the relevance of Jesus in the contemporary Evangelical/Pentecostal Churches by taking a closer look at how the person of Christ and other elements of evangelical spirituality are appropriated within the indigenous cultural matrix of the country.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This article constitutes a preliminary attempt at reflecting upon Africa's journey with Jesus.<sup>2</sup> Africa is a vast continent with many different cultures and experiences so although I do not purport to speak for the whole continent, my reflections, which are conducted from a Ghanaian perspective, may to some appreciable extent reflect developments in sub-Saharan Africa. Theologically, there are three emphases that give Evangelical/Pentecostal Christianity its uniqueness: faith in Jesus Christ as the only mediator of Salvation, acceptance of the Bible as the authoritative word of God, and belief in the presence, power and experience of the Holy Spirit as normative for church life

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today. Of these three, the most fundamental is the exercise of faith in, and the experience of, Jesus Christ as one's Lord and personal Savior. The other two are dependent upon this one. Historically classical Pentecostals for instance identify with a four-fold pattern of theological emphasis. These are Jesus Christ as Savior, as Healer, as Baptizer in the Holy Spirit, and as a "Soon Coming King."

Taken together this four-fold theological emphases, as we can see, are dependent on Jesus Christ as Lord, and as the focus of faith, experience, and hope. The Evangelical/Pentecostal emphasis on experiencing Jesus Christ as the entry point into Christianity fits the proposition of I M Lewis that "experience" is critical to religious belief. In his book *Ecstatic Religion*, Lewis refers to three main characteristics of religion: faith, belief, and experience and of these three, the greatest is "religious experience" (Lewis 2003). The Apostle Peter also drew attention to the importance of experience in response to the query of his listeners, "what shall we do":

Repent of your sins and be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, for the promise is for you and your children, and for those who are afar off.

(Acts 2:38-39)

This text has become one of the main biblical passages that Evangelical/Pentecostal Christians would usually cite for theological legitimacy as far as their stream of Christianity is concerned. I am not oblivious of the debate regarding what it means to "receive the Holy Spirit". Theologically, the insistence on personal conscious decisions to accept Jesus Christ as Savior as the most important indicator of Christian commitment unites Evangelicals and Pentecostals. Those who insist on belief in, and experience of, Jesus Christ as Savior and tenaciously bear witness to that creed are often labeled pejoratively as "Christian fundamentalists". For example, a 2005 BBC *Focus on Africa* magazine report refers to "Evangelical Christianity" as, a "fundamentalist version of the Protestant faith" (Goffe 2005:11-12). The authors give the erroneous impression that African Evangelical/Pentecostal Christianity is of North American import, which is thriving in Africa as a result of the vulnerability of the continent in the face of poverty, disease, and squalor.

This image of Evangelical/Pentecostal Christianity is false. The argument that Africa's new Christianity is a clone of North American Christian fundamentalism ignores the internal dynamics of transformative religious encounters around which the testimonies of African Christians revolve.

A number of these crisis-conversion testimonies were the first steps towards the formation of indigenous churches in Africa following the early western missionary era. African Christians are in church because they have encountered Jesus Christ in profound ways that are reminiscent of similar encounters in the Bible such as that of St Paul on the road to Damascus. In other words Christianity is thriving in Africa because of the African Reformation led by the independent indigenous Evangelical, Pentecostal, and Charismatic churches and movements on the continent. Most of these constitute novel African initiatives in Christianity. The quantitative proliferation of churches of Evangelical/Pentecostal persuasions has led to a qualitatively new religious atmosphere as far as African church life is concerned.

## **2. THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST: AN AFRICAN EVANGELICAL/PENTECOSTAL RESPONSE**

The most important thing for our purposes, as far as the BBC report is concerned, is that different streams of Evangelical/Pentecostal Christian churches and movements form the growing edges of Christianity in Africa. Of that there is no doubt, and this has occurred as a result of Africa's journey with Jesus Christ. The different responses to the film of the moment, *The Passion of the Christ*, elucidate the meaning of Simeon's "rising" and "falling" in respect of the mission of Christ. The insistence on experiencing Jesus Christ has proven highly divisive especially in a world of religious pluralism and alternative spiritualities and lifestyles. There have been very critical reviews of Mel Gibson's film. Most of the criticisms accuse Gibson of "glorifying violence". Public protests have also been mounted against what some consider a Gibson anti-Semitic agenda. On both occasions that I watched the film myself, I wept on account of the horrific pain that I envisioned Christ endured for me.

Responses to the film from Africa, especially from Evangelical/Pentecostal Christians, have generally followed this emotional line of faith. "Believers" on the continent, as Evangelical/Pentecostal Christians usually called themselves, have dwelt more on the salvific, transformative or experiential impact of the message of the film, than on its offence to personal and racial sensibilities. I quote below the representative view of an Evangelical career laywoman and church leader from Ghana who said she had watched *The Passion of the Christ*. She did so in the company of a pastor after which she sent me a personal letter that read in part:

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My Easter was good. I watched *The Passion of the Christ* on Sunday afternoon ... with Pastor Andrew. ... I made the decision [to go] and I am glad I went. I cried, ... but so did Pastor Andrew. A few people I talked to were left speechless, and said they needed time to reflect. "Overwhelmingly stunned into silence and reflection", could be a summary of the reaction of the few I spoke to. Pastor Andrew and I could not talk for a long time in the car. All I could think about when watching the film was that I couldn't afford to live anyhow since Jesus suffered so much for me! ... Now I appreciate what the Scriptures mean by saying the he broke his body and shed his blood for our iniquities ... "God, please change my heart and let me yearn for the things you yearn after, and let me desire the things you desire, but above all, let me exercise my will for you. Amen. That is my prayer".<sup>3</sup>

This representative African Christian response to Gibson's film is typically Evangelical as it articulates for us the various dimensions of Evangelical/Pentecostal Christianity. The first response, "I couldn't afford to live anyhow since Jesus suffered much for me", focuses on the reality of the story of Christ; the second response, "I appreciate what the Scriptures mean by saying he broke his body and shed his blood", affirms belief in the authority of the Scriptures; and the third response, which is a prayer, to "exercise my will for God", affirms the social import of Evangelical/Pentecostal faith.

John Stott points out in his recent work, *The Incomparable Christ*, that Jesus is "the center of history", "the focus of Scripture", and the "heart of mission". Evangelicalism usually stresses the power of the Word. Pentecostalism takes the matter further by its emphasis and active promotion of the experiential presence of the Holy Spirit in new tongues, healing, deliverance, revelations, and other such pneumatic phenomena. In African initiated Christianity, the Evangelical emphasis on the power of the Word and the Pentecostal emphasis on the power of the Spirit are usually not mutually exclusive. Indeed sub-Saharan African Christianity, as I know it, rarely draws hard and fast distinctions between Evangelicalism and Pentecostalism. This is perhaps as it should be, for as Stott would have it, "salvation" has two components, "forgiveness" and "transformation". "Forgiveness", he writes, "eradicates our past", and the Spirit, he says, "transforms our future" (Stott 2001:33). Taken together this way, I will contend that Evangelical/Pentecostal Christianity in Africa would have three main facets as far as the journey with

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<sup>3</sup> Letter written to me in April 2004. The writer worships with a thoroughly Evangelical congregation, the Legon Inter-denominational Church, located on the campus site of the University of Ghana, Legon. She is a manager with a reputable international bank in Ghana and has recently participated in the Leadership Training Seminar offered by the Haggai Institute in Singapore. The quotation here is used with permission.

Jesus is concerned. These are the doctrinal/theological, moral/ethical, and social/political facets of Christian expression. The task that faces us in Africa as we walk with Jesus is how to translate these three dimensions into practical everyday actions that affect persons, churches, and ecumenical relations.

### **3. AFRICA, JESUS CHRIST, AND THE CHOICES OF FAITH**

To begin with, Africa, like the early church, has had to make some difficult choices in her journey with Jesus. This includes the reformation of Christianity in order that it might cater for indigenous worldviews of mystical causality, incorporate divine healing into the theological agenda, and integrate charismatic renewal phenomena into worship. For example, leaders of Christian religious innovation in Africa faced fierce resistance from colonial authorities and historic mission denominations in their attempts to initiate new paradigms in Christianity, that it may address African theological concerns. Nonetheless new visions of Jesus have continued to create new altars in Africa and the result has been the massive expansion and indigenization of Christianity under the leadership of local Christians. Notable are the efforts of prophets William Wade Harris, Joseph Babalola and Garrick Sokari Braide of West Africa, Simon Kimbangu of the DR Congo, Isaiah Shembe of South Africa, and those who have carried the mantles of these prophets forward, leading to the rise of old and new independent indigenous Evangelical/Pentecostal, and Charismatic Christian churches of different persuasions. In almost every case, the desire has been to return to the Christianity of Jesus as read in the vernacular Bible.

This point can be aptly illustrated with the case of William Egyanka Appiah of Ghana. This early 20<sup>th</sup> century Methodist catechist had established a Prayer Camp to help members of his church make up for the perceived lack of spiritual emphasis in the life of the church. Catechist Appiah's story as narrated by Christian G Baëta (1962:31) states in part:

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of August 1919, when Appiah was praying in the "camp", he heard a noise as of a great crowd singing and praising God. As he listened the Angel of the Lord revealed himself to him, coming towards him with a Bible in his hand, opened at the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Book of Acts of the Apostles, and pointing out this chapter to him. Then God's Spirit descended upon Appiah. When this revelation was ended, Appiah realized that he had become a new man. He began to speak in a new tongue, and from that time onward he performed many miracles.

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In 1923, Catechist Appiah's new superintendent minister, Gaddiel Acquah, interpreted Appiah's new experience as belonging to the "occult" and not in keeping with Methodist tradition. Catechist Appiah felt unable to obey an injunction to stop what his superintendent referred to as "occult activities". He was thus forced to leave the Methodist Church (Baëta 1962:75). The result of that walkout was the formation of the Musama Disco Christo Church or "The Army of the Cross of Christ Church". Catechist Appiah's experience is one example of similar developments across Africa at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I find Lamin Sanneh's (1983:180) summary of their contribution to the African Christian enterprise very accurate:

A process of internal change was thus initiated in which African Christians sought a distinctive way of life through mediation of the Spirit, a process that enhanced the importance of traditional religions for the deepening of Christian spirituality. ... Biblical material was submitted to the regenerative capacity of African perception, and the result would be Africa's unique contribution to the story of Christianity.

The contributions of the older African Reformation churches have been sustained, and we find continuities in their theological emphases and in those of the new charismatic churches burgeoning throughout the continent. The two groups of churches address themselves to the lacuna in the rationalist theologies of historic mission denominations although this has been done within different historical and even ecclesial contexts.

## **4. ISSUES FACING AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY**

The issues facing Africa in her walk with Jesus are many, and straddle all areas of life. In spite of whatever theological flaws found in the various streams of Christianity in Africa, the faith is growing because the churches, led by the Evangelical/Pentecostal streams in particular, have made certain difficult but evangelically necessary choices. These choices as I argue in *African Charismatics*, have helped to sustain the Christian faith in Africa through effective inculturation, the normalization of charismatic experiences in Christian worship, practical views of salvation, the employment of oral theological discourses, and an innovative gender ideology (Baëta 2005:35-59). Several other challenges have emerged including how to respond to the challenge of HIV AIDS.

HIV AIDS has been made an African problem yet the solution is usually driven by western donor mindsets and agenda. African Christians have generally found the promotion of condom use over and above abstinence from pre-marital sex and marital fidelity unacceptable. In response Evangelical/Pentecostal churches and fellowships have continuously drawn attention to the fact that what the Bible teaches is that sex outside marriage and adultery are sinful in the eyes of the Lord. Unfortunately, adequate credit has not been given to the fact that the insistence of African Evangelical/Pentecostal Christianity on abstinence and the large number of young people in church who are taught that Jesus is against premarital sex has done much to help control the spread of the disease on the continent. I contend that the HIV and AIDS situation in Africa which is considered bad would have been worse without the Evangelical/Pentecostal “fundamentalist” approach to the issue of premarital sex and marital infidelity.

There are other challenges such as the imposition of the *Sharia* law in some parts of Africa, the theological response to dehumanizing cultural practices, the unavailability of the Scriptures in many vernacular languages and the dangers posed by the emphasis on “prosperity gospel” found in many of the new Pentecostal churches. There is also the question of the patriarchal nature of African church leadership, and how to bridge the gap between academic theology and the African oral/grassroots theological discourses to achieve relevance in ministerial formation and education. In addition, there is an ardent desire for Evangelical/Pentecostal theological education at the tertiary level that has led to the rise of many Bible Schools some of which are obviously of dubious origins and quality.

## **5. STANDING UP FOR JESUS**

In matters relating to Evangelical/Pentecostal Christianity, the primary aim of those who make the choices whether on the doctrinal/theological and moral/ethical sides of our three dimensions of Christian expression is to be on the side of Jesus Christ guided by faith in the Bible. Let us consider two issues and the responses to them on this premise. First, there is the case of the Ugandan Bishop who refused badly needed financial aid for HIV and AIDS programs because he believed that the Episcopal Church in the USA had compromised the gospel by electing a gay priest as bishop. It was reported in the London *Guardian* of Tuesday, March 22, 2005 that Jackson Nzerebende Tembo, the Bishop of South Rwenzori in Uganda had rejected the sum of \$350,000 from the USA Diocese of Central Pennsylvania, because its clergy and their bishop, Michael Creighton, had endorsed the election of Jean

Robinson as Bishop of New Hampshire in 2003. In a statement released to an American conservative Episcopalian website, Bishop Nzerebende affirmed:

South Rwenzori Diocese upholds the Holy Scriptures as the true word of God ... Of course [the rejection of the grant] will affect some of our programs. This includes our AIDS programs and the money they have been sending for ... orphans' education. We pray and believe that our God who created and controls silver and gold in the world will provide for the needs of His people.

## **6. TO DRUM OR NOT TO DRUM**

The second case has to do with a raging controversy between Evangelical/Pentecostal Christians in Ghana and traditional religious authorities regarding certain ritual injunctions associated with festivals. The Ga-Dangme peoples of the capital Accra, for example, are angered by the fact that Evangelical/Pentecostal Christians in particular flout traditional injunctions prohibiting “drumming and noise-making” during “sacred periods” of the year. These bans are imposed for varying periods of time, usually for up to one month. They are considered sacred periods during which noisy activities are suspended for prayer to be made to the appropriate deities so that economic activities which they control like fishing, farming, and hunting, may continue to prosper. The churches contest the religious implications of these bans. Historic mission denominations have in the past complied not so much out of respect for traditional custom, but to avoid trouble. Evangelical/Pentecostal churches have, on the other hand, been adamant that the observance of traditional injunctions on “drumming and noisemaking” imposed by the traditional authorities are un-Christian. Their observance is thus tantamount to a tacit approval of the authority of the gods/deities over the affairs of the Christian community and compromises the lordship of Jesus Christ.

In one case, affecting the Half Assini area in the Western Region of Ghana in the early 1990s, structures of the Church of Pentecost were burnt to ashes and in the religious power contests that ensued, some traditional people lost their lives mysteriously. In the interpretation of the Pentecostal pastor who led the Christian resistance, “the power of darkness had ruled the place for a long time and we believed it was now the appointed time for us through the Holy Spirit and the power of God, to wage war against these domineering and territorial evil spirits of Nzemaland” (Koree 1994:4). The injunction was fiercely resisted and by the time the matter was resolved, there had been several “casualties”, including the conversion of a leading traditional chief who openly confessed that the God of the Christians had prevailed.



What makes this case an interesting one is the position of the Pentecostal pastor that the Christian community knew they could worship God without drumming and noisemaking. However, on that particular occasion, the traditional injunction had to be disobeyed because in his words, it must be done if and only if as Christians, “we observed it out of own WILL and by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, who leads us to DO and to WILL, according to his purpose” (Koree 1994:5).

The rejection of the HIV AIDS grant, in my understanding, did not mean the Ugandan Bishop did not consider gay and lesbian people human. It is simply that in a world of growing moral compromises rather than absolutes, materialism, and secularism, Evangelical/Pentecostal Christians in Africa have had to take a stance on various difficult issues. This stand is made in the attempt to reach out to all people, including people with “alternative lifestyles” and still be faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ, as they understand it from the biblical viewpoint. It is with the same understanding that the Ghanaian Christians responded to the ban on drumming and noisemaking. In the modern West, modernity, which implies the application of systematic rationality, science and technology to appropriate nature to service human ends and problems, has generally engendered anti-supernaturalism, religious rationalism, unbelief and moral relativism leading to the relegation of religion to the private realm. In Africa, experiencing Jesus Christ and living for him is still very much at the heart of Evangelical/Pentecostal Christianity, and this I believe is why the faith has taken “refuge” in Africa so that its theological and moral absolutes might be preserved to the glory of God.

## **7. JESUS OF AFRICA AND GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY**

In our journey with Jesus, the influence of Evangelical/Pentecostal Christianity in Africa has, geographically speaking, transcended the continent. Africans lead some of the largest Christian congregations in both Western and Eastern Europe. I speak here of the London-based Kingsway International Christian Center led by Matthew Ashimolowo and the Kiev-based Church of the Embassy of God for all Nations led by Sunday Adelaja. Pastor Ashimolowo’s church consists mainly of West Africans. Pastor Adelaja’s church has more than 20,000 registered members and more than 90% of them are Eastern Europeans from Ukraine and Russia. What is common to the various developments that have engaged our attention is the decided Evangelical/Pentecostal focus of the spiritualities of the churches and movements involved. Wilbert R Shenk puts the accession of African

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Christianity and the recession of the faith in the western world in the perspective of Christian mission:

A leitmotif running through the modern period is the bankruptcy of Christendom as carrier of Christian reality. ... How dare anyone claim that Western culture is *Christian*? The tension produced by the discrepancy between churchly reality and official creed has caused concerned people in every generation to press for the renovation of the church so that it might live wholly under the lordship of Jesus Christ.

(Shenk 1995:12)

Indeed Diane B Stinton (2004:3) begins her study on *Jesus of Africa* with the poignant statement that, "at the heart of the Christian faith is the person of Jesus Christ." Stinton proceeds to reconstruct African Christology through a careful synthesis of academic and popular writings, thoughts, and experiences of Jesus Christ. The reconstruction is conducted under four main functions of Jesus Christ: "life-giver", "mediator", "loved one", and "leader". These christological models are examined in juxtaposition with African traditional concepts such as those on ancestors, healers, and chieftaincy. Stinton's data gathered from popular conceptions, shows how in the popular imagination, Jesus functions as the ultimate source of "true salvation", which encapsulates health, healing, mediation, and liberation" (Stinton 2004:180, 204, 251).

In the role of Jesus as "life-giver", for example, Stinton makes the point that in spite of the reluctance of Western mission agents to imagine him as healer, ordinary African Christians nonetheless view him in this traditional role. The perception of Jesus as healer is so central to popular African Christology that all the other images could be said to hinge on it. The relevance of African Evangelical/Pentecostal Christianity is therefore located in this ability to propagate a powerful and efficacious practice of Christianity that promises freedom not simply from sin, but also from the dangers and troubles of life. God, it is thought, can be experienced in the midst of his children in very demonstrable ways. This broad view of salvation as encapsulating new life, healing, and intervention in all its forms, is usually expressed through African oral theology at the grassroots.

## **8. SALVATION IN GRASSROOTS/ORAL THEOLOGY**

A great deal has been achieved in the attempt to bridge the gap between oral/grassroots theology and academic theology since the days when scholars

like John S. Pobee and John Mbiti had agitated over such an enterprise. Today, books like African Evangelical scholar Kwame Bediako's *Jesus in Africa* and several others have used oral/grassroots theology extensively and in the process, demonstrated its viability as a valid theological form (Bediako 2000). The greatest advantage of such informal theology is that it is born out of real encounters with Jesus Christ, how African Christians understand their walk with him, and how they as ordinary people express the faith. The rise of the many renewal movements in Africa is itself an indication of grassroots responses to the initiative of God in Christ. The composition of Gospel music is an example of grassroots/oral theology and one of the defining characteristics of contemporary African Christianity and public life. Ghana's Bernice Offei has for instance recently composed a song called *Mogya*, "Blood", and the lyrics read in part:

The blood, the blood, I've been saved by the precious blood ...  
The blood, the blood, through which we are made complete ...  
Because of the power of his blood, we've received forgiveness of sins,  
Everlasting life, healing and salvation  
The blood, the precious blood which was shed at Calvary  
The blood that never loses its power  
It is our mighty weapon  
The devil is defeated  
God's children have won the victory.

In the theological thinking underpinning the lyrics of this song, the blood of Christ has not only delivered from sin, but "everlasting life, healing and salvation" are seen to belong together. They are all found in the power of the blood, which is also described as "our mighty weapon through which the devil is defeated and God's children have the victory." The theological basis of this music is Hebrews 9:12-14. The religious import of blood is not alien to African religions. N Y Nabofa has shown how various concepts of human existence are unequivocally in harmony with the Levitical idea that blood is life. Blood therefore "occupies a very significant place in African beliefs and thought forms, especially in sacrificial rites" (Nabofa 1985:390). Blood possesses a "mysterious spiritual power", and "is regarded as the animator and stabilizer of human life" (Nabofa 1985:391). Indeed one of the most important annual traditional festivals in the Eastern Region of Ghana, the *Odwera*, "Cleansing", which is celebrated to cleanse or purify the soul of the nation from ritual filth, revolves around the symbolic slaughter of a lamb that is "without defect" and the sprinkling of the blood on houses and people around the traditional area.

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The female Ghanaian Pentecostal, Afua Kuma, is another useful example of the sort of contribution that oral theologies make to the dynamic presence of Evangelical/Pentecostal Christianity in Africa. It has been pointed out elsewhere that the Pentecostal background of Afua Kuma is critical to her oral theological discourse. Although without formal education, it is highly significant that in the work of both Bediako and Laryea, Afua Kuma is referred to as a “grassroots theologian” who has played a significant role “in the development of Christian thought” and whose theology “is foundational for [African] Christian theology in the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (Laryea 2000:50-60).

In Afua Kuma’s prayers, Jesus is imaged as *Obaatanpa* (Capable Mother/Guardian), *Kronkron* (Holy One), *Otumfo Nyankopon* (Almighty God), *Ohene* (King) and *Nyansabuakwa* (Custodian of Wisdom). These titles have been borrowed from both traditional appellations for Ghanaian chiefs and biblical discourse. Consider her application of the Akan expression *Obaatanpa* for Jesus. This image is derived from the natural and biological roles of women as mothers with exceptional qualities of emotional attachment and care for their children. The expression is however not restricted to the feminine gender. It is also used for guardians or benefactors, male or female, and also for any human institution that performs the functions of providing care and emotional support. The theological import of Jesus as *Obaatanpa* lies in the fact that “although the Jesus of history comes to us as a male, our conception of him as Jesus of faith transcends gender. The Jesus of faith is *Obaatanpa* because “in him both genders cohere” (Laryea 2000:50).

In another of Afua Kuma’s “prayers and praises”, Jesus is imaged in his supremacy as having no equal in the universe:

Mere chiefs and kings are not his equals,  
Though filled with glory and power,  
Wealth and blessings, and royalty  
In the greatest abundance  
But of them all, he is the leader,  
And the chiefs with all their glory follow after him.

(Laryea 2000:20)

This particular prayer of Afua Kuma connects with St Paul’s reference to Jesus as one “for whom all things were created” (Col 1:16-20). In the African imagination, one who is greater than the chiefs who sit on the stool of the ancestors as custodians of power, authority and tradition must be supreme indeed. This has profound implications for the experience of Christian

conversion in Africa. If Jesus is the “leader” of all the authorities and if the chiefs with all their glory follow after him, then it is in order that conversion in Pentecostal experience means the dethronement of all rival authorities in the traditional religio-cultural sphere. Such dethronements of rival authorities include the worship of ancestors in whose stead the chief rules.

## **9. JESUS AND THE “DESIGNER CLOTHES” THEOLOGY**

The triumph of African Christianity has unfortunately, often been mixed with what can only be described as the dross. This paper on Jesus in Africa will not be complete without reference to development with regard to this aspect of contemporary African Evangelical/Pentecostal history. One example is the case of the new Pentecostal churches and their insistence that new life in Christ must necessarily be accompanied by material prosperity. A representative figure of these new developments is the founder and leader of the Christian Action Faith Ministry (CAFM) in Ghana, Archbishop Nicholas Duncan-Williams. Even his avowed critics cannot fail to appreciate his ecclesial achievements in the last twenty-five years. Not only is his Prayer Cathedral the biggest church building in Ghana at the moment, but also many founders of other charismatic churches openly speak about his direct influence on their ministry. His high profile personality expanded with his ministry and within the last two and a half decades, has graduated from pastor, to bishop, and archbishop.

In Ghana, this charismatic figure, Archbishop Duncan-Williams introduced a paradigmatic shift in the outlook associated with preachers of the gospel. When he came in flamboyance and taught by his appearance that it was possible to serve God in “fashionable” clothes and outfits, and to be prosperous, the young people began to feel at home in this trendy Christianity. Indeed to justify what was seen as his opulent lifestyle, Duncan-Williams claimed publicly that he was entitled to lead such extravagant lifestyle because after all, “Jesus wore” designer clothing. These teachings are widespread and on Tuesday September 20, 2005, it was the subject of a *Joy FM Super Morning Show* program in Ghana. In phone-in responses taken during the program, the general public freely castigated a Ghanaian Pentecostal bishop for implying in an earlier contribution that a person’s blessing in life is directly related to how much he/she contributed to God in tithes and offerings.

The *Focus on Africa* magazine article referred to earlier, speaks of the Pentecostal faith in Nigeria as “a veritable goldmine, judging by the opulence of most of its pastors.” The basis of this is that because the soldiers at the

foot of the cross “cast lots” for Jesus’ garment, it must have been custom made. The result of such a “theology of prosperity” is that those who follow its principles of “claim-it-and-have-it” have a correspondingly weak theology of pain and suffering. Such church leaders do not feel accountable to anybody on how they use their gifts of ministry and the resources provided by their congregations. At the popular level, people have come to believe that the pastors are entitled to such a lifestyle, and so its promises are publicly advertised in order that people may tap into its blessings. Sola Odufa of the BBC talks about how “powerful Nigerians” run after Pentecostal pastors for “spiritual protection” from what the article refers to as “imaginary enemies”. These powerful individuals, having bought into the erroneous theological mindset that sponsoring a pastor attracts special blessings from God, pay for pastors’ trip abroad “complete with accommodation in five-star hotels and money for shopping in exclusive boutiques”. As the BBC article illustrates with concrete examples, there has been serious fallouts in people’s lives as a result of such “give-to-get” or “sowing and reaping” employed to fund the extravagant lifestyle of his pastor and the church in anticipation of breakthrough in life from God (Odufa 2005:15). Such stories about in contemporary African Pentecostal churches are making parts of the public skeptical of the intentions of pastors in the formation of churches.

## **10. CONCLUSION: AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY AND ECUMENISM**

It is not possible to exhaust discussion on the different dimensions of Africa’s walk with Jesus Christ in a single paper. I have here attempted to discuss the relevance of Jesus in contemporary Evangelical/Pentecostal Christianity. African Evangelical/Pentecostal churches are thriving because they emphasize belief, experience, conviction and commitment to what the Spirit of God is doing in the world. The churches concerned constitute new paradigms in Christian mission. One of the most important lessons that their emphasis on personal experience teaches is that in Evangelical/Pentecostal Christianity, religion is expected to be a matter of personal choice rather than of institutional presence (Wilson 1988:199). African Evangelical/Pentecostal Christians are serious with the study of the Bible, with prayer, evangelism and above all, serious with things of the Spirit. A number of these developments have occurred under the dynamic leadership of individual charismatic pastors, leaders and prophets. However these churches have not yet come to an appreciation of the value of ecumenism. Conversely, the unwillingness of many of the existing older historic mission churches to recognize what God is

doing in these newer movements has led to exclusivist attitudes on both sides thus creating an additional obstacle to their working effectively together. The potential exists for the churches of Africa to impact the continent in very transformative ways. However, this is unlikely to happen if they do not work together to give meaning to the prayer of Jesus Christ, “that all may be one”, for it is through such oneness that the world will recognize Jesus Christ as lord of all.

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