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Word Made Global : African Christianity in New York City

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**Word Made Global:
African Christianity in New York City**

Mark R. Gornik

**A Thesis Submitted to
The University of Edinburgh
For the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

**Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World
School of Divinity, New College**

March 2008



DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis constitutes my own research and writing and has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Mark R. Gornik

March 2008

For my parents

Raymond and Sally Gornik

my sons

Peter and Daniel Gornik

and my wife

Rita Aszalos

With gratitude and love

*“Now those who were scattered went from place to place,
proclaiming the word.”*

Acts 8:4

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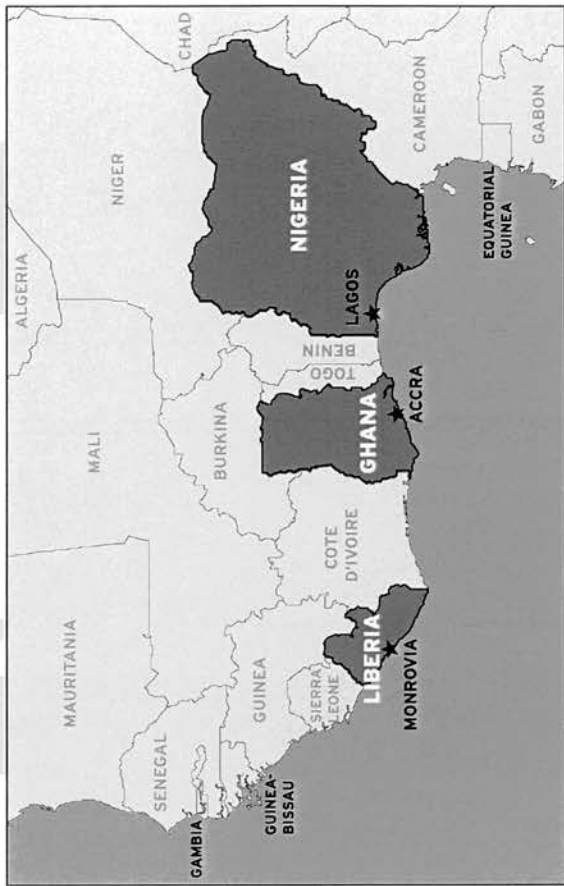
ABSTRACT

This thesis documents and analyzes African churches in New York City, devoting particular attention to the experiences, beliefs and practices of the Church of the Lord (Aladura), the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, and the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn. Based largely on ethnographic fieldwork, this work engages multiple disciplines including globalization theory, theology, and global city studies.

Following an Introduction to the topic and research framework, this thesis is comprised of three sections. Section One is devoted to “Formations,” which in three chapters assesses the work of pastors in building congregations, provides an overview of the three focus churches, and offers a broad survey of African Christianity in New York in relationship to the global city. Section Two, “Encounters,” analyzes in three chapters the use of prayer, the Bible, and mission at the point of contact between faith and the city. Section Three, “Directions,” explores in two chapters the trajectories of the three churches through the mobility of spiritual geographies and the second generation of membership. The Conclusion suggests a vision of “Catholicity” for how the West can respond to the presence of African Christianity. Finally, an Afterword updates developments in the three primary congregations.

By providing new documentation of broad developments in African Christianity outside of Africa along with a series of case studies, this thesis makes an important contribution to religious scholarship, New York City history, and urban theory. I contend that New York’s African Christianity is an embodied faith that is growing because of its location in global urban networks, its social importance for everyday life, and its theological meaning to persons in a new setting.

GLOBAL CIRCULATIONS: AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY IN NEW YORK CITY



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INTRODUCTION

NOT WITH PAPER

INTRODUCTION

When Marie Cooper, known to everyone around her as Mother Cooper, arrived from Monrovia, Liberia at New York's City's John F. Kennedy Airport in 1984, she brought with her two very full suitcases. Among her possessions were white religious garments, a small wooden cross, and her Bible. With the robe, cross, and Bible, Marie Cooper brought across the Atlantic to New York not merely items of personal significance, but religious beliefs, practices and experiences shaped by and representative of the Church of the Lord (Aladura), a church begun in Nigeria with a strong presence in Liberia.¹ At first attending an African American church, Mother Cooper felt something missing spiritually. Taking the initiative, this daughter of the Church of the Lord (Aladura) soon began a prayer group. Within a decade, the prayer group became an official branch of the Church of the Lord (Aladura), the first in North America, meeting in a newly formed house of prayer in the Bronx, a community where Spanish is the language heard in the shops, Merengue music is the rhythm of the streets, and the storied Yankees play baseball. At the Church of the Lord (Aladura), members wear white robes with colourful sashes, pray and fast for days and weeks at a time, and provide care for one another in daily life.

Like agents of Christian expansion before her, Mother Cooper's transatlantic journey and its end result recalls Irenaeus' observation in the second century that the Christian tradition is most ably transmitted not with words composed on paper but through human flesh.² The cross-cultural diffusion of African Christianity occurs not through free-floating aspirations and ideas, but travels through inspired bodies that

¹ Marie Cooper, Interview, June 23, 2005.

² Margaret R. Miles, *The Word Made Flesh: A History of Christian Thought* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 29, 391.

transport histories, experiences, beliefs, and practices. In a world of global pathways, networks and circulations, the movement of faith depends on the body; the body and faith are one. It is in the movement of the body that new spiritual-social spaces are created in the city. God is not “out there” to be encountered only in the world of the intellect or the providential encounter, but present in everyday life.³

The possibility of the universal Christian body, speech, and thought unfolding in the infinite singularities of human culture is eloquently attested to by Andrew Walls. Walls emphasizes that Christianity, the Word incarnate, as the Gospel of John speaks of Jesus in its opening sentences, is inherently filled with the possibility of new translations. “Christian faith rests on a divine act of translation, summarized in the Gospel of John: ‘The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us’ (John 1:14).”⁴ For Walls this process stands at the heart of Christianity.

Time is valorized by the incarnation, by the fact that the divine Word took flesh in a datable historical setting. The fact that Christ continues to be formed in local Christian communities whose ways of life are quite different from the one in which the incarnation took place means that for Christians, “sacred time” is not confined to the period of the incarnation, but extends to the whole historical process in which the work of salvation goes on, Christ’s presence being demonstrated as he is received by faith.⁵

Following a translation from the thought and idioms of Judaism to Hellenistic culture, Christian history has repeated itself in non-identical stories of successive crossings, translations, and invigorations.⁶

In this global moment, New York City is a point of convergence, a hub for the spread of Christianity born in Africa and equally a place of new encounter between faith and culture. A city in the West becomes a classroom on African churches and faith. The

³ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2007), 554.

⁴ Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996), 26.

⁵ Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002), 74. See further Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 26, 47, 51, 85-86, 94, 235, 255, 260.

⁶ Lamin Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations: Pillars of World Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

word made flesh is still flowing, moving, and travelling, the body impressed as a letter, the Spirit incarnate in physicality.⁷

THE PURPOSE AND AIMS OF THIS STUDY

This thesis examines African Christianity in New York City and the ways in which it is lived and performed in ecclesial communities and daily life. I emphasize what Manuel Vásquez summarizes as the “material, embodied, and place-making dimensions of religion”⁸ in migration. This entails not only locating and encountering African Christian faith in New York City, but examining how religion is performed in a global world.⁹ When African Christianity travels to New York City, it moves not as “mental concepts” but as stories, histories, and experiences of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.¹⁰ Against the background of the body as the locus of faith, and global networks as the world in which the body travels, this thesis is an exploration of the Word made global.

While in chapter 3 I offer a representative survey of the more than 125 African churches in New York City, ethnographic narratives of three churches anchor this study: the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York based in Harlem, the Church of the Lord (Aladura) located in the Bronx, and the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn. Although I will argue in chapter 3 that older typologies of African churches must be replaced by a more fluid model, respectively the three focus churches of this study represent three streams of African Christianity: Protestant denominational or mission-founded, Independent or Indigenous, and Pentecostal or Charismatic.

⁷ Karmen Mackendrick, *Word Made Skin: Figuring Language at the Surface of Flesh* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 25-47.

⁸ Manuel A. Vásquez, “Historicizing and Materializing the Study of Religion: The Contribution of Migration Studies,” in *Immigrant Faiths: Transforming Religious Life in America*, eds. Karen I. Leonard, Alex Stepick, Manuel A. Vásquez, and Jennifer Holdaway (Lanham, MD: AltaMira, 2005), 224. [219-242]

⁹ Peter Beyer, *Religion in a Global Society* (London: Routledge, 2006), 142-147; Manuel A. Vásquez and Marie Friedmann Marquardt, *Globalizing the Sacred: Religion Across the Americas* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003); Hent de Vries ed., *Religion: Beyond a Concept* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

¹⁰ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 553-554.

Each of the three focus churches was selected because of their historical resonance, theological emphases in Africa, distribution in three different sections or boroughs of New York, and diversity of primary country of origin. Michael Burawoy's proposal for global ethnography is suggestive for the present study: "In conducting...multi-sited ethnography the purpose is not to contrast perspectives from each site but instead to build a montage that lends greater insight into the whole, into the connections, disconnections, and reconnections."¹¹ My purpose is to craft a portrait of a heterogeneous African Christianity in New York, lending understanding to the processes of the diffusion of faith in a context of globalization and the city.

Throughout this study ethnographic description is intersected by a multidisciplinary approach. African immigrant congregations cannot be separated from a wide range of social, historical, and cultural contexts, and therefore their study requires and benefits from a variety of lenses. Along the way I interact with urban studies, globalization theory, religious and theological studies, history, and literature.

While I stress the particularity and uniqueness of each congregation, there is also a representative element, with the three churches telling a larger story of African Christianity, religion in a global world, and the changing church in New York City. Put another way, the churches are not "case studies," but a lens through which to view a much wider set of processes, both global and religious.¹² It is anticipated that this thesis has potential implications for a number of fields of scholarly inquiry, including religious, globalization, cultural, and urban studies; New York City history; and Christian mission and theology. With fewer studies of multiple African churches or movements than there are of single churches, the present study of three churches may have some significance in this area as well.¹³

¹¹ Michael Burawoy, "Manufacturing the Global," *Ethnography* 2:2 (2001): 156.

¹² I am making a parallel argument from Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 18.

¹³ Birgit Meyer, "Christianity in Africa: From African Independent to Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33 (2004): 451.

Proceeding forward in this chapter, I will next present the background of this study, spell out the practices of research that guide my research approach, arguing for an urban account of the global scale in relationship to religious processes, and then suggest the importance of an ecclesiology and theology in relationship to ethnography. Finally, I will overview the parts and chapters of this thesis. In this chapter I am offering not just theoretical background for the present research, but a conceptual framework for engaging church life in a highly mobile urban world.

THE BACKGROUND OF THIS STUDY

I first came to think about African Christianity in New York City in Harlem. In 1998, I was new to New York, an “immigrant” from Baltimore working in central Harlem, when I noticed that the sidewalks surrounding the 125th Street subway station were crowded with groups of African women. Dressed in bright and colorful traditional clothing, they were trying to draw customers to the African hair braiding salons that had sprung up in the surrounding commercial corridor. Just south on 116th Street, the blocks were so filled with Senegalese that it is referred to as Little Dakar or Little Senegal, with shops displaying bright African garb, Youssou N’Dour compact discs, and telephone cards with bargain rates for Africa. Stereo speakers facing the street sent out praise music from West Africa to Harlem. Small businesses catered to the banking and travel needs of Africans. Two local mosques frequented by West Africans drew large worshipping communities.

Such experiences of sidewalk life suggested, first, that there was a significant African presence in New York City, and, second, that Harlem was not an isolated inner city, but part of an interconnected global world. It is the city where the connections and changes of a global world reveal themselves.¹⁴ As Jane Jacobs, the

¹⁴ Saskia Sassen, ed., *Deciphering the Global: Its Scales, Spaces, and Subjects* (New York: Routledge 2007).

great urban theorist and activist emphasized, the sidewalks of New York are like a “ballet,” a place where “something is always going on.”¹⁵ I knew there had been a religious transformation in Africa of historic character. At the beginning of the twentieth century, just under 8 percent of the population in Africa was identified as Christian. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the estimated Christian population of Africa approached 50 percent. By the numbers, that is from just shy of 8 million adherents to 500 million Christian believers.¹⁶ If Africa was experiencing historic Christian growth, would it not follow that at least some of the new African immigrants would be Christian? And if the answer was yes, in what churches were they worshipping?

I decided to follow these questions. The first African church I learned of was an Ethiopian congregation on East Tremont Avenue in the Bronx. Venturing to the church on a Sunday morning, I encountered the Ethiopian Evangelical Church, a vibrant Pentecostal church. From this church I learned the name of another African church in the city, and it wasn't long before my short list of African churches in New York City grew much longer.

As Andrew Walls has argued with great acuity for over four decades, the Christian “centre of gravity” is moving from the West to the non-Western world.¹⁷ Whereas in 1900 some 80 percent of the world's Christian population came from Europe, America, and Russia, and less than 5 percent from Africa and Asia, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the majority of the world's 2 billion Christians now live in the “Third - World.”¹⁸ Consequently, Lamin Sanneh speaks passionately of world

¹⁵ Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage, 1992).

¹⁶ David B. Barrett, George T. Kurian and Todd M. Johnson, *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed, vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 4.

¹⁷ Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* and *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History*.

¹⁸ For introductions to the changing church, along with the work already mentioned of David Barrett, Lamin Sanneh, Andrew Walls, and others cited throughout this chapter, see Donald M. Lewis, *Christianity Reborn: The Global Expansion of Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004); Hugh McLeod, ed., *Cambridge History of Christianity, Volume 9, World Christianities c. 1914-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Dana Robert, “Shifting Southward: Global Christianity Since 1945,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 24: (April

Christianity, “boundary-free” among the continents, not a derivative western global product.¹⁹ Philip Jenkins’ widely discussed book *The Next Christendom*²⁰ surveys these major changes. Reaching across every segment of these changes is Pentecostalism, growing at a whirlwind pace in Africa and around the globe. Allan Anderson demonstrates this quite well.²¹ Of course, not all of “world Christianity” is Pentecostal, but much is and its influence is pervasive. In the twenty-first century, Jesus is the Spirit-anointed Christ.

While not always transparent to Western-conditioned eyes, in remarkable ways New York City offers a replication in microcosm of the post-Western Christianity that Walls and others have described. Along with churches from Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean, the African churches of New York belong to the most dynamic aspect of Christianity in New York City. At one level, religious change and innovation is a recurring pattern throughout the city’s history; in New York at times have been the Irish, the Italian, and the German among an endless list of those who have reshaped church life. But different this time is the non-Western character of this development, its massive scale, complexity of operations, and strategic sense. Transnational migration is a major factor here, as Peggy Levitt’s aptly titled *God Needs No Passport* describes.²²

2000): 50-58; Lamin Sanneh and Joel Carpenter, eds., *The Changing Face of Christianity: Africa, the West, and the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹⁹ Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 75. For much greater elaboration of his arguments, see Lamin Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations*.

²⁰ Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Jenkins’ article “The Next Christianity” in the *Atlantic Monthly* 290:3 (October 2002), 53-55, 58-62, 64-68, also garnered public attention.

²¹ Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). See also David Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002); Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, “Spirit and Power: A 10-Country Survey of Pentecostals,” October 2006; Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

²² Peggy Levitt, *God Needs No Passport: Immigrants and the Changing American Religious Landscape* (New York: The New Press, 2007). See also Karen I. Leonard, Alex Stepick, Manuel A. Vázquez, and Jennifer Holdaway, eds. *Immigrant Faiths*.

Beginning with Gerrie ter Haar's pioneering work on Ghanaian churches in Amsterdam, *Halfway to Paradise: African Christians in Europe*, African Christianity in Europe has been explored by a number of scholars that include Afe Adogame, Hermione Harris, Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, Roswith Gerloff, and T. Jack Thompson.²³ Other multi-author studies of Africans in non-African settings exist²⁴ and there have been issues of the *International Review of Mission* and *Journal of Religion in Africa* dedicated to the topic.²⁵ There is also a growing body of literature by scholars such as Allan Anderson, Kwame Bediako, Ruth Marshall-Fratini, David Martin, David Maxwell, and Joel Robbins that describes African Christianity and its connections to Pentecostalism, globalization and transnational networks.²⁶ But in

²³ Gerrie ter Haar, *Halfway to Paradise: African Christians in Europe* (Cardiff: Cardiff Academic Press, 1998); cf. ter Haar, "Strangers in the Promised Land: African Christians in Europe," *Exchange* 24:1 (1995): 1-33; Afe Adogame, "The Quest for Space in the Global Spiritual Marketplace: African Religions in Europe," *International Review of Mission*, 89: 354 (2000): 400-409; "To Be or Not to Be? Politics of Belonging and African Christian Communities in Germany," in *Religion in the Context of African Migration*, 95-112; "Betwixt Identity and Security: African New Religious Movements and the Politics of Religious Networking in Europe," *Nova Religion: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 7:2 (November 2003): 21-41; "Engaging the Rhetoric of Spiritual Warfare: The Public Face of Aladura in Diaspora," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 34:4 (2004): 493-522; Hermione Harris, *Yoruba in Diaspora: An African Church in London* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); "Continuity or Change? Aladura and Born Again Yoruba Christianity in London," in *Christianity and Social Change in Africa: Essays in Honor of J.D.Y Peel*, ed. Toyin Falola (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2005), 307-334; J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "An African Pentecostal on Mission in Eastern Europe: The Church of the 'Embassy of God' in the Ukraine," *Pneuma* 27:2 (2005): 297-321; Roswith Gerloff, "Africa as Laboratory of the World': The African Christian Diaspora in Europe as Challenge to Mission and Ecumenical Relations," in *Mission Is Crossing Frontiers: Essays in Honour of Bongani A. Mazibuko*, ed Roswith Gerloff (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2003), 343-381; Roy Kerridge, *The Storm is Passing Over: A Look at Black Churches in Britain* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995); T. Jack Thompson, "African Independent Churches in Britain: An Introductory Survey," in *New Religions and the New Europe* ed. Robert Towler (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1995), 224-231.

²⁴ Afe Adogame and Cordula Weissköppel, eds., *Religion in the Context of African Migration* (Bayreuth: Bayreuth African Studies, 2005).

²⁵ Notably, *The International Review of Mission* 89:354 (2000) and *The Journal of Religion in Africa* 34:4 (2004).

²⁶ Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*; Kwame Bediako, "Africa and Christianity on the Threshold of the Third Millennium: The Religious Dimension," *African Affairs* 99:395 (2000): 303-323, André Corten and Ruth Marshall-Fratani, eds., *Between Babel and Pentecost: Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa and Latin America* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2001); Joel Robbins, "The Globalization of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33 (2004): 117-143; Simon Coleman, *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity: Spreading the Gospel of Prosperity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); David Martin,

North America, studies of both African immigration²⁷ and new immigrant African church life, while increasing over the past five years, are considerably more limited, with less than a handful of scholars actively publishing in the latter area.²⁸ At the same time, the growing diversity of immigrant religious life in America is gaining some traction in academic and public discussions.²⁹ Overall, the field is very much open and in need of further research.

RELIGION, GLOBALIZATION, AND THE CITY

It is significant that the stories of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in Manhattan, the Church of the Lord (Aladura), and the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel all take place in New York City. This is distinctively a New York story, connected to a very specific urban history, which I will characterize in chapter 3.³⁰ But it also combined with a particular urban moment. Over half the world's population now lives in cities, and with a population of more than 8.2 million people, New York City is America's largest city. Yet size gets only partially at New York City's dynamic and its meaning for religion. Historically, theologians, writers, and urban citizens alike have found in the city a transcendent and sacred

Pentecostalism; David Maxwell, *African Gifts of the Spirit: Pentecostalism and the Rise of a Zimbabwean Transnational Religious Movement* (Oxford: James Currey, 2006).

²⁷ A major exception that I will discuss later in this chapter is Paul Stoller, *Money Has No Smell: The Africanization of New York* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). See also Jacqueline Copeland-Carson, *Creating Africa in America: Translocal Identity in an Emerging World City* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004) and JoAnn D'Alisera, *An Imagined Geography: Sierra Leonean Muslims in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

²⁸ Two conferences that I am aware of in the United States have brought together researchers in the field. The first was "African Immigrants, Religion and Cultural Pluralism in the United States," convened by Jacob Olupona and held at the University of California, Davis, December 2-5, 2004. Much of the proceedings were published in Jacob Olupona and Regina Gemignani eds., *African Immigrant Religions in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2007). The second was "African Christianity and the Neo-Diaspora," convened by Frieder Ludwig and held at Luther Seminary, Minnesota, March 23-25, 2007. In addition, see Dianna J. Shandy, "Nuer Christians in America," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 15:2 (2002): 213-221.

²⁹ R. Stephen Warner and Judith W. Wittner, eds., *Gatherings in Diaspora: Religious Communities and the New Immigration* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998) and Diana L. Eck, *A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001).

³⁰ Jon Butler, "Theory and God in Gotham," *History and Theory* 45 (2006): 47-61.

experience.³¹ But there is much more to describing how cities and religion can be understood.

A comprehensive argument concerning the present urban form of New York and its relationship to immigration, power, and capitalism is found in the work of Saskia Sassen, foundationally in *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*.³² While Sassen touches only incidentally on religion, her focus on global cities holds numerous applications for understanding faith in the city. In chapter 3 I will provide a fuller explanation of her arguments and their implications, but a brief introduction here will help explain why her arguments are threaded throughout this thesis.

Sassen proposes the analytical construct “global city” to capture what is today a new urban form characteristic of a relatively select group of cities.³³ This new urban form is based on an emergent set of economic arrangements, the intensity of connections between cities, rising complexity in the financial world, and the concentration of certain industries in urban centres. For Sassen, this construct is the lens for understanding immigration, the global dynamic of New York drawing together both Third-World and First-World workers. Sassen’s portrayal makes cities crucial to the processes of globalization.³⁴

³¹ This is discussed by Philip Sheldrake, “Placing the Sacred: Transcendence and the City,” *Literature and Theology* 21:3 (2007): 243-258. For a similar interest, see Graham Ward, *Cities of God* (London: Routledge, 2000).

³² Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

³³ While not the originator of the term “global city,” it is closely associated with Sassen and in the literature most often starts with her particular take. See also Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *New York, Chicago, Los Angeles: America’s Global Cities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999). Abu-Lughod cites John Friedmann and Goetz Wolff, “World City Formation: An Agenda for Research and Action,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 6 (1982): 309-344 as the “earliest statement of what became ‘global city’ literature” (427).

³⁴ See Saskia Sassen, *Globalization and Its Discontents: Essays on the New Mobility of People and Money* (New York: The New Press, 1998), and “Global Cities and Diasporic Networks: Microsites in Global Civil Society,” in *Global Civil Society 200*, ed., Marlies Glasius, Mary Kaldor, and Helmut Anheier (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002): 217-238.

Just as New York City serves as a connection point for the global economy, so it goes for African Christianity. African immigrants come for work and new beginnings, and, like Mother Cooper, many bring not simply their faith, but also its institutions, practices, experiences, and hopes. So instead of leaving one world behind, through the networks of globalization they maintain an active faith that moves continuously across borders. African churches in New York City operate as nodes in a global world, with faithful bodies and bodies of faith circulating within global urban networks. So instead of speaking of the relationship between cities, globalization, and African Christianity as if they were discrete components, I want to speak of the globalization of African Christianity through cities.

To make such a case requires “grounded” or ethnographic accounts of the city.³⁵ “Rather than viewing global cities as central expressions of the global accumulation of capital,” Michael Peter Smith finds that “all cities can...be viewed in the fullness of their particular linkages with the worlds outside their boundaries.”³⁶ Chantal Saint-Blancat clarifies the research task by stating, “The challenge posed for any analysis of the new modalities of migration - and the cultural and religious consequences they entail - is methodological in nature: how to decode the complexity of relationships interwoven between the global level of the phenomenon and its involvement in the local.”³⁷ African churches become a way of deciphering such linkages. Taking up the metaphor of motion, the global city is in motion, always moving with connections, crossings, dwellings, intersections, and relationships that must be kept in mind. New York City can be viewed as a site of intersections for faith, not simply a place.

³⁵ On the “anchored” study of globalization, see Vásquez and Marquardt, *Globalizing the Sacred*, 3; Peter Beyer and Lori Berman, eds. *Religion, Globalization, and Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

³⁶ Michael Peter Smith, *Transnational Urbanism: Locating Globalization* (Malden: Blackwell, 2001), 71.

³⁷ Chantal Saint-Blancat, “Islam in Diaspora: Reterritorialization and Extraterritoriality,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 26, no. 1 (2002): 138; cf. Harri Englund, “Ethnography after Globalism: Migration and Emplacement in Malawi,” *American Ethnologist* 29:2 (2002): 261-286.

An exemplar of a globally situated ethnographic study is anthropologist Paul Stoller's *Money Has No Smell: The Africanization of New York City*,³⁸ an exploration of West African street vendors primarily located in Harlem. Stoller drew research implications from his initial fieldwork.

Soon after my initial confrontation with street traders in Harlem in 1992, I realized that I would grasp little of the traders ethnographic present if I didn't understand the global forces that had compelled them to leave West Africa. I also needed to understand more fully the political, economic, and racial contexts in which they found themselves. I no longer had the luxury of focusing on one narrowly defined cultural element, but had to embrace sociocultural complexity. This shift meant that I needed to be more thoroughly grounded in urban and immigration studies – economics, geography, law, political science, and urban sociology.³⁹

Importantly, Stoller adds, “The breadth of this abstract subject matter, however, should not prevent us from telling the compelling stories of those we attempt to represent.”⁴⁰

My argument is that starting with the presence of African Christianity in New York City provides a way of reading the city and the global world. Mother Cooper's story and the ethnographies of African Christianity, the agents of globalization and the communities of faith represent and anchor the study of the global city. This line of argument requires further reflection on the position of the researcher and factors involved with interpretation.

THE ITINERARIES OF RESEARCH

A common practice at the outset of research is identifying the author's point of view. In *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* Thomas Tweed⁴¹ argues that

³⁸ Stoller, *Money Has No Smell: The Africanization of New York*.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 179.

⁴¹ Thomas A. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

religion is concerned with location in a place, but they are also about motion. For Tweed, religion involves spatial practices of crossing and dwelling.⁴² In this respect, Tweed's proposal resembles the centerpiece of Walls' thought that Christianity involves the ongoing translation of the gospel. Migration, which obviously is about crossing, is also about dwelling. As religion is practiced "en route," the practices of homemaking and movement of religious flows are twinned.⁴³ So the study of African Christianity in New York City, with its flows of people, beliefs, practices, and experiences, also should attend to its new location.

Tweed goes on to suggest that just as religion is characterized by itineraries in a global age, so a researcher should also locate their position within an itinerary.⁴⁴ No single place finalizes the position or sight of the researcher, Tweed reasons. Therefore all interpretations are positioned sightings.⁴⁵ Such "positioned locations," whether professional, epistemological, or cultural, situates the researcher in multiple webs of interpretative frameworks.

Post-modern, liberationist, and feminist voices remind us that the process of seeing, experiencing, and interpreting the world always involves a point of view or position. Just as culture, economic status, and gender are foundational ways of encountering and interpreting the world, so also is religious faith and commitment. In the Reformed tradition, for example, knowledge is always considered positional, situated in a prior religious commitment. Elsewhere, for Deidre Crumbley, Linda Thomas, and Benetta Jules-Rosette their Christian faith is a recognizable and integral part of

⁴² Ibid., 79-85, 123.

⁴³ Ibid., 54-79.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 20-25.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 20-28, 165.

their approach to ethnographic study among independent churches.⁴⁶ The recent study of African American women by Marla Frederick is similar.⁴⁷

In the recent doctoral thesis of Rose Mary Amenga-Etego, she expands the “insider/outsider” terminology to describe herself as an insider-outsider. That is, she is first an insider but also an outsider.⁴⁸ I would classify myself as an outsider-insider to my research topic. As one formed in the cosmology and epistemology of the West, formally trained in the Reformed theological tradition, and placed by the privileges of my whiteness, I was very much an outsider. Yet as a Christian, ordained minister, and New Yorker, I could be something of an insider. Before moving to New York, for more than a decade I had been a minister in an inner city African American community in Baltimore. These are factors that position me as a researcher. Over the course of several years, the three focus churches became my “home,” and whenever it was offered that I was home, such words were received as a gift. Understandably, of course, I was also given the space of a researcher, and therefore I never was formally a member. The outcome was that I was an outsider-insider.

Afe Adogame and Ezra Chitando regard as essential both theoretical reflection and grounded research in fieldwork within the “African religious Diaspora.”⁴⁹ A number of basic research issues within African Christianity are raised in Harold W. Turner’s essay “Problems in the Study of African Independent Churches.”⁵⁰ Turner, an early

⁴⁶ Deidre Helen Crumbley, “Indigenous Institution Building in an Afro-Christian Movement: The Aladura as Case Study” (PhD diss., Northeastern University, 1989); Benetta Jules-Rosette, *African Apostles: Ritual and Conversion in the Church of John Maranke* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975); Linda Elaine Thomas, *Under the Canopy: Ritual Process and Spiritual Resilience in South Africa* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999).

⁴⁷ Marla F. Frederick, *Between Sundays: Black Women and the Everyday Struggles of Faith* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

⁴⁸ Rose Mary Amenga-Etego, “Mending the Broken Pieces: Religion and Sustainable Rural Development Among the Nankani of Norther Ghana” (PhD Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2007), 221-248.

⁴⁹ Afe Adogame and Ezra Chitando, “Moving Among Those Moved by the Spirit: Conducting Fieldwork within the New African Religious Diaspora,” *Fieldwork in Religion* 1:3 (2005): 253-270.

⁵⁰ H.W. Turner, “Problems in the Study of African Independent Churches,” *Numeen* 13:1 (1966): 26-42. For other research challenges, see Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, “Theological Interest in AICs and

student in the study of new religious movements and author of a seminal study on the Church of the Lord (Aladura), begins with issues related to participatory research.

Turner first argues that the study of religion should not be displaced by anthropology or sociology. Religion, he states, involves “inner spiritual life,”⁵¹ an “inner reality”⁵² or an “inner religious reality,”⁵³ and therefore cannot mean only its exterior “expressions or manifestations,”⁵⁴ such as rituals and traditions. Turner’s division between “inner” and “outer” forms of religion and experience is neither possible nor even desirable, as scholars of religion such as Talal Asad have shown,⁵⁵ but his concern to take what might be called the life of the Spirit seriously is important. As the sociologist Christian Smith has noted, human beings have a unique religious dimension that the social sciences should not neglect.⁵⁶ This recognition should constructively move research toward the “anthropology of Christianity.”⁵⁷

A second challenge that Turner names concerns how “the student of the Christian church...[who] is a member of some Christian communion, and makes this explicit in his relationship with the group he is investigating.”⁵⁸ One should assume, Turner proposes in more than an ecumenical gesture, “that God is at work there through the

Other Grass-Root Communities in South Africa: A Review of Methodologies,” in *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* 10, no. 1 (1996): 18-48.

⁵¹ Ibid., 28.

⁵² Ibid., 31.

⁵³ Ibid., 32.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 31.

⁵⁵ Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

⁵⁶ Christian Smith, *Moral, Believing Animals: Human Personhood and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁵⁷ Fanella Cannell, ed., *The Anthropology of Christianity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Joel Robbins, “Anthropology and Theology: An Awkward Relationship?,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 79:2 (2006): 285-292, and Joel Robbins, “Continuity Thinking and the Problem of Christian Culture: Belief, Time, and the Anthropology of Christianity,” *Current Anthropology* 48:1 (2007): 5-38, with comments.

⁵⁸ Turner, “Problems in the Study of African Independent Churches,” 27.

Holy Spirit.”⁵⁹ If one starts with the Spirit, then the welcome of a researcher can be an act of pneumatic hospitality. In our time even more than Turner’s, the ethnographic encounter will be in a world of Pentecostalism. Most African churches would want to also add, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer offers in *Sanctorum Communio*, that to see Christ one must see the church in its social form, and in the church as social form one should be able to view Christ.⁶⁰

Turner identifies four problems in participatory research. First is the problem of *participation*, the requirement of not being a “tourist who will try anything quaint once.”⁶¹ Positively, one should participate in the liturgy and activities of the church when called to do so and learn with openness.⁶² “The academic enquiry becomes inevitably also a personal discovery.”⁶³ A second problem is in the area of *commitment*, which emerges because “the investigator who participates in the life of an African independent church becomes personally involved... Here one is involved with other people and with their expectations and needs, and at the deepest level of all, and under a divine constraint.”⁶⁴ Farewells and departures are not predetermined, for “the situation is completely different from that of the entomologist who concludes his studies of beetles and decides he will turn to spiders, and it is very different from that of the sociologist who lives a while in a mining village to study its social structure and attitudes, presents his report, and moves to another task.”⁶⁵ Indeed, the “report” produced by the researcher becomes a bond of “deep and permanent commitment”⁶⁶ and requires various levels of interaction.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 36.

⁶⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, trans. Reihhard Krauss and Nancy Lukens (Minneapolis: Fortress, Press, 1998), 190.

⁶¹ Turner, “Problems in the Study of African Independent Churches,” 35.

⁶² Ibid., 34.

⁶³ Ibid..

⁶⁴ Ibid., 35.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 36.

Having established such a research approach, it follows for Turner that *objectivity* is the third problem to be confronted, especially as one has bonded with a church. Objectivity is in itself impossible, but how this encumbers research requires clarification. Researchers, Turner explains, can impose their views of ecclesial practice, such as the sacraments, on the church. Still, “at a deeper level the observer will tend to analyse, classify, and interpret African religious existence in terms and forms developed in the West and built into the very structure of his thinking - the rational, critical, conceptualized systems of Western Christian thought which may not be adequate to embrace all Christian existence, and may falsify the understanding of African religious movements if they are imposed. The result may be an impasse where only African-type answers are answered to Western-type questions.”⁶⁷ “Objectivity” is best understood as seeking to understand a church on its own terms, and therefore requires self-reflection on one’s ecclesiology.⁶⁸

As a related concern, the fourth and final problem Tuner names is forming a responsible *detachment* to the church in question, thus enabling the researcher to render an academic form of analysis. Such evaluation requires “considerable skill...if the investigator is to speak the truth in love and retain the confidence of those about whom he writes.”⁶⁹ This tells us something of a major goal of Turner’s research: the determination for a wider world that an independent church such as the Church of the Lord (Aladura) was really a Christian church.⁷⁰ Yet at least implicitly, this could be construed as assuming a Western-based test.

In summary, Turner urges a certain form of participatory research, one marked by mutuality, open-endedness, learning in community, and yet also serious analysis. Not incidentally, for Turner friendship stands as a guide for relationships,⁷¹ which in principle renders an exotic “Other” untenable. Turner also correctly emphasizes the

⁶⁷ Ibid., 38.

⁶⁸ T. Jack Thompson, “A Place to Feel at Home,” *Studies in World Christianity* 10:2 (2004): 156.

⁶⁹ Turner, “Problems in the Study of African Independent Churches,” 41.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

human encounter with God as central for the congregations and their lived narratives. Participant research, as Turner suggests and other scholars such as Vasquez and Tweed concur, can bring about a level of understanding that a textual reading experience could never provide.

From this discussion, I draw a further conclusion: there is no single way to describe my point of view, even more so as I found myself changing through the process and period of research. Initially I wanted to understand the global circulations of prayer, yet increasingly I also found myself in need of prayer and called to prayer in ways that were different than where I began. The closer I came to becoming a part of a praying community, the more ways my ethnographic experience pressed my Western-shaped presuppositions about God and faith. Over the course of my study, I frequently moved from personal interest to personal implications.⁷² This did not set aside critical reflection and evaluation, but I believe enriched it and required it to be more reflexive.

THEOLOGY AND ETHNOGRAPHY

Christian faith is neither unchanging nor static, but living and breathing. Therefore if we are to understand African Christianity in New York City, its language, values, and practices, I agree with Michael Scott “that the anthropology of Christianity must begin on the ground with the ethnography of the unpredictable ways in which Christians continuously select and reinterpret the content of Christianity.”⁷³ This requires attending to church life and theology as it is lived and emphasized on the ground. Scott describes the challenge this way:

⁷¹ Ibid., 31.

⁷² As Benetta Jules-Rosette wrote in *African Apostles*: “The critical transition for me was that from an outsider observer looking for general descriptions of the church and its worship to that of a full member for whom all descriptions had their own personal implications and sense of urgency” (96).

⁷³ Michael W. Scott, “‘I Was Like Abraham’: Notes on the Anthropology of Christianity from the Solomon Islands,” *Ethnos* 70:1 (March 2005): 118.

We need to master complex foundational doctrines so that our understandings of Christian thought are accurate and enable us to discern variations in ethnographic contexts. But in order not to essentialise Christianity, we should avoid analyses that appeal to Christian teachings or tendencies unless we can locate them in denominational emphases, missiologies, biblical narratives, and indigenous Christian discourses that have been important in the contexts we study. Even then, we must recognise that Christians attend selectively to their authorities and privilege portions of the Bible that, in culturally meaningful ways, become imbricated with their material, social, and philosophical undertakings.⁷⁴

To write about a church's history, story, and the people who make it alive is to be entrusted to tell it as much as possible on their terms.

Because there are limits to viewing African Christianity abstractly through its numerical growth or meta-themes, in this study I provide close study of ecclesiological narratives. Such analysis is foremost in what is called an "ecclesiology from below," the reflection on what is actually occurring in church life in the city. Camilo José Vergara's *How the Other Half Worships* is an inspiring document in this regard.⁷⁵ In contrast, ecclesiology from above is a theology applied from the top down. Noted Catholic theologian Roger Haight argues for an ecclesiology that includes both angles of vision, but he begins historically or from below.⁷⁶ On both theoretical and practical grounds I think a dialogical approach is called for in terms of wider theological reflection. But it is close attention to theology in a lived mode that can facilitate theological renewal "from above" by introducing new ways of being church. Christian Scharen's appeal for drawing

⁷⁴ Ibid., 106.

⁷⁵ Camilo José Vergara, *How the Other Half Worships* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005).

⁷⁶ Roger Haight, *Christian Community in History*, volume 1, *Historical Ecclesiology* (New York: Continuum, 2004) and *Christian Community in History*, Volume 2, *Comparative Ecclesiology* (New York: Continuum, 2005).

ecclesiology and ethnography together creates room for such a concrete approach to the church within the academy.⁷⁷

For the Ugandan theologian and Catholic priest Emmanuel Katongole, the church as local community is the “methodological starting point” for theological reflection.⁷⁸ “African theological reflection,” he offers, “must be grounded in, and seek to shape, the life and practice of concrete church communities. In this way, theological reflection will reflect the concerns, anxieties, aspirations, hopes, and frustrations of the ordinary African Christians in their everyday struggle in the world.”⁷⁹ Similarly, theologian and scholar Isabel Mukonyora voices the concern that “a great deal of time has...been spent setting up an agenda for the development of an authentic African theology rather than in carrying out in-depth theological enquiries of the various ways in which Africans have interpreted Christianity.”⁸⁰ Scharen, Katongole and Mukonyora’s emphases on local appropriations and concrete communities offer constructive directions for the theological enterprise.

In order to gain such an understanding of congregations in their material, spiritual, and social forms, their “lived reality,” as Katongole puts it, then what Nicholas Healy calls an “ecclesiological ethnography” is required.⁸¹ An ethnographic approach of this kind takes seriously the ways in which theology is practiced in everyday life and community, thereby adding to understanding the ways by which concrete Christian

⁷⁷ Christian Batalden Scharen, “‘Judicious Narratives,’ or Ethnography as Ecclesiology,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58:2 (2005): 125-142.

⁷⁸ Emmanuel M. Katongole, “A Different World Right Here, A World Being Gestated in the Deeds of the Everyday: The Church Within African Theological Imagination,” *Missionalia* 30:2 (2002): 207.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 206-207.

⁸⁰ Isabel Mukonyora, “The Dramatisation of Life and Death by Johane Masowe,” *Swedish Missiological Themes*, 88:3 (2000) 410.

⁸¹ Nicholas Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

communities and their cultures are created. It doesn't begin with answers but is open to learning and seeing in new ways.⁸²

While religious narratives and practices are closely linked to communities of belief, experience and practice, basing a study largely in congregational forms of African Christianity requires some justification and methodological elaboration. Vásquez and Marquardt emphasize the varied lived experience of religion that exists extra-congregationally.⁸³ Among the extra-congregational modes that African Christianity operates in New York are the radio, Internet, music, revivals, prayer bands, and faith instilled into everyday life and activities. And the importance of practices such as prayer that occur outside of a church community will be evident in numerous ways throughout my thesis.

Rather than think of ethnographies as limited to “thick descriptions,” finely tuned accounts of social life and practice that contribute to a body of knowledge,⁸⁴ Paul Stoller, the anthropologist whose work on West African traders in New York is discussed above, introduces the category of “witness.” A personal experience with cancer led him to this reconsideration of his craft. “I now believe that the anthropologist’s fundamental obligation is to use her or his repertoire of skills to bear witness. In so doing we are compelled to tell stories about kinship as well as cancer that shed light on social realities.”⁸⁵ There is for Stoller nearly a revelatory dimension to ethnography, a witness to a greater reality. “In the end this turn may take us to that elusive and oft forgotten end of scholarship: wisdom, the knowledge that enables us to live well in the world.”⁸⁶

⁸² Harri Englund and James Leach, “Ethnography and the Meta-Narratives of Modernity,” *Current Anthropology* 41:2 (2000): 225-239.

⁸³ Vásquez and Marquardt, *Globalizing the Sacred*.

⁸⁴ Stoller, *Money Has No Smell*, 200.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Paul Stoller, *Stranger in the Village of the Sick: A Memoir of Cancer, Sorcery, and Healing* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), 200.

Witness is also a key concern of the New Testament material, with Acts 15 as an important text in this regard. Acts 15 relates the account of the Jerusalem council and the appropriation of faith by Gentile converts. The questions they confronted include: What does it mean to be Christian? Would the past or present dominate the future of the church? By deciding to withdraw the imposition of Jewish cultural standards on Gentiles, chief among them circumcision, Walls believes the council released the church for cross-cultural expansion.⁸⁷ As Stephen Fowl points out in his study on Acts 10-15, this change came to depend on the witness of Peter to the Spirit's work among the Gentiles.⁸⁸ Fowl observes, "Christians must not only become and learn from people of the Spirit, we must also become practiced at testifying about what the Spirit is doing in the lives of others."⁸⁹

I would not claim that Stoller and Fowl are saying the same thing, but they both urge us to see how certain stories commend witness. Arguably, God is the witness for the church, but as Acts conveys, other sorts of witness are possible. Let me put it this way: attending to stories can be a witness. I am not arguing for the full import of the line of thought, but simply present for consideration that an ethnographic study of African churches in New York City might offer witness to work of the Spirit.

In summary, in this thesis the social life, experiences, and practices of concrete communities rather than written texts by the churches provide the primary material for research. Theology is performed and enacted in service of life. For this reason, I do not place adjectives such as "informal," "folk," and "oral" before the theology of churches in this study. To do so would diminish the gatherings and beliefs of believers.

⁸⁷ Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History*, 75-78.

⁸⁸ Stephen E. Fowl, *Engaging Scripture: A Model for Theological Interpretation* (Malden: Blackwell, 1998), 97-127. See here Acts 15:8.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 117.

PRACTICES OF FIELDWORK

Fieldwork involves a way of being present, of listening, hearing, sensing and most of all being open to what is taking place. Because African Christianity is very much a faith that involves the body, it is important for a research to be present not just in mind but also body. In short, fieldwork amidst mobile African Christian churches involves a “bodily craft.”⁹⁰ Being present is also about being open to apprehending the world in a new way.⁹¹

The fieldwork informing this study took place between July 2003 and December 2007, with periods of intensive participation and other times when I simply maintained contacts, attended important services, confirmed details, and on occasion conducted an interview. During this process I attended a total of over 230 worship services, Bible studies, prayer meetings, healing services, seminars, community meals, harvest festivals, and other events, recording copious field notes and observations. In addition to focusing on Church of the Lord (Aladura), Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York, and Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn, I also surveyed a larger religious field of African churches in New York City, visiting and worshipping with an additional 35 churches in New York City, again taking copious notes. This overall process provided not only rich material for ecclesial ethnographies, but also a relational network for subsequent interviews.⁹² I also collected a wide range of Sunday school manuals, bulletins, newsletters, calendars, tracts, and church booklets.

Over the course of my research, I conducted more than 100 interviews, not including the countless informal conversations I had during a typical week. Factors involved in

⁹⁰ Loïc Wacquant, *Body and Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 3-11. Compare Robert A. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

⁹¹ Valentina Napolitano, “Of Migrant Revelations and Anthropological Awakenings,” *Social Anthropology* 15 (2007): 71-87.

⁹² Roger Sanjek “Keeping Ethnography Alive in an Urbanizing World,” *Human Organization* 59:3 (2000): 280-288.

choice of people interviewed included age, gender, and a mix of leadership and non-leadership women and men. I also interviewed different generations of church members. At various times and events I was able to interview regional, national and international leadership within each congregation's wider ministry or movement. I was also provided with access to a variety of written materials unavailable elsewhere that enabled me to trace their history.

Because I am offering case studies of particular congregations, unless otherwise noted I have the permission of the interviewees to use their names. For interviews, I used semi-structured interviews; the initial protocol is found as Appendix 2. Originally I envisioned a more structured interview format, but quickly concluded that open-ended conversations about life stories and faith journeys provided far more insightful responses. In practice, not every question was always directly asked, but the answers typically covered the desired range. But as my work proceeded, I found myself in agreement with Roger Sanjek, who favors "participant observation over interviews with seated informants, and naturally occurring speech in action over questionnaires or an instrument-mediated quest for culture 'in people's heads.'"⁹³ This approach is ultimately more reflective, I learned.

Photographic documentation is an additional component of this thesis. Initially I approached this hesitantly, concerned about intruding on deeply personal and spiritual moments, objectification, and the further filtering of perspectives. Eventually I came to the conclusion that the benefits of photographs for telling stories were substantial, and they became part of the project. Over the course of my research, I took more than two thousand digital photographs. People, special events, practices of faith, and the physical world of African church life in New York City were important interests in my visual selections. As I use them in this thesis, the goal is for the photographs to share in telling stories of the life of faith in the city. With all

⁹³ Ibid., 281. Roger Sanjek, *The Future of Us All: Race and Neighborhood Politics in New York City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 9.

of their limitation, I came to believe that they have the potential to tell us very important things about life and performance of faith.⁹⁴

A few words about the limits of this study are in order. By African churches I do not have in mind African American or West Indian churches. This focus on African churches does not mean other religious beliefs and institutions, such as Islam, have not also travelled to New York City. They certainly have, but that presents another series of studies. Finally, unless otherwise noted, by New York City I mean the city inclusive of its five boroughs, and not simply Manhattan or the wider metropolitan region.

OVERVIEW OF THESIS

This thesis is organized into three primary parts – Formations, Encounters, and Directions. In each part I assemble my arguments based on a close study of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, the Church of the Lord (Aladura), and the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn.

The first part is concerned with the formation of African churches in New York City, the stories that tell of beginnings, diversities, and practices. I begin with the church pastors, move to the churches themselves, and then cast a wider net of the larger citywide presence of African churches in New York. Chapter 1 introduces the three pastors or spiritual leaders of the Church of the Lord (Aladura), the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, and the Redeemed Christian Church of God. It is on their shoulders that so much of the work of building community falls. Chapter 2 then delves into the history, people, and ecclesiology of my three focus churches. Here I draw attention to their relationship to globalization. Chapter 3 is an introduction to

⁹⁴ In addition to the work of Camilo José Vega, I found Colleen McDannell, *Picturing Faith: Photography and the Great Depression* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004) to be a source of inspiration and insight. T. Jack Thompson is instructive on the complex issues surrounding photography and religion. In this regard, see *Capturing the Image: African Missionary Photography as Enslavement and Liberation* (New Haven: Yale Divinity School Library, 2007)

even wider mosaic of African churches in New York and their relationship to the logic of the global city.

The second part explores the encounter of African Christianity with the global city, points of “friction” where faith and city meet for the three focus churches.⁹⁵ African congregations in New York are formations of belonging, but they are also ways of encountering a global world. Chapter 4 discusses prayer and fasting, focusing on how they are key points of interaction with the global city. Chapter 5 explores the use of the Bible. Chapter 6 focuses on the mission of African churches to New York. To this end I examine the missionary aspirations, structures, agents, theology, and dynamics found in the churches.

The third part addresses the future direction of African Christianity in New York. To this end, chapter 7 documents how African Christian movements are creating reverse pilgrimages, globalized events that enable the leadership and membership to stay closely connected. In chapter 8, I examine how faith is being passed on between generations in New York.

In the Conclusion I give an account of the themes, ideas and conclusions that have been critical to this thesis. Based on the material developed throughout the course of this project, I then offer an incursion into ecclesiology by bringing the illuminating work of Andrew Walls and Emmanuel Katongole into conversation. Taking their lead, I depart from a subculture or stratified approach to Christianity, arguing instead for an articulation of catholicity from below. Finally, having followed the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, the Church of the Lord (Aladura), and the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn for four years, I end with an Afterword that brings their stories up to date.

⁹⁵ For this language, I follow Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

I began this study in order to understand African Christianity in New York as a global movement. Along the way I became more deeply engaged in its challenge as a theological movement, its convictions about God, faith, and the world, and its performance of Christian faith. In the pages that follow, I still aspire to tell a story of the globalization of faith. But a feature that found its way into this project is an engagement with the experiences, beliefs, and practices that mark African Christianity in New York City. There is no necessary rivalry between these twin concerns of the global and the theological. One of my conclusions is that both are necessary research areas precisely because we cannot understand one without the other. As this story unfolds, I hope what will emerge is some sense of why I became a student afresh of both Christianity and the city.

PART I

FORMATIONS

CHAPTER 1

PASTORS AT WORK: BUILDING COMMUNITY ACROSS BORDERS

INTRODUCTION

If the job of being a pastor of an African church in New York was to be advertised, it might look something like:

Wanted: Spiritual leader who is called by God to build a community of faith across borders that will lead members into a relationship of abundant life with God. She or he must know the worldview and pastoral challenges facing African men, women, and families far from home. Needs to be available at all hours of the day, and expected to help church members with housing, health care, finances, and extended families. Must be able to take ways of thinking and worshipping God in one world and re-fabricate in a new cultural and geographical place. Will be answerable to pastoral oversight in Africa and directly to God. Applications are accepted only from persons who have a transformational relationship with God; it is expected that she or he is a person of prayer and fasting, and anointed with the Holy Ghost. Should be very excited about God's mission, expect to be a vehicle for divine signs and wonders, and adept at recruiting new members. Compensation for the first five years or longer is limited to the blessing of God and the joy of service; pension strictly eternal. All applicants must have at least one paying job to cover start-up costs for the church.

This description will not equally fit a typical North American pastor,¹ but it is a vocation of great aspiration for scores of African men and women across New York City.

¹ For the idea of composing a "job description," I am drawing on L. Gregory Jones, "Job Description," *Christian Century*, January 10, 2006, 35. I find a striking contrast between African immigrant pastors and what Jones provides as an ideal job description of a typical mainline minister in America. For questions that help situate pastoral leadership as well as providing additional contrast, see Jackson W. Carroll's *God's Potters: Pastoral Leadership and the Shaping of Congregations* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006). While practices, worldviews, and structures will differ among pastors serving different communities, in whatever setting they serve there is a shared conviction that they are called to help guide people into a deeper relationship with God.

I begin with a chapter on pastors because their identities, spiritual journeys, and leadership styles profoundly set the course for the congregations of the Church of the Lord (Aladura) in the Bronx, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York, and the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn. This is not an attempt to frame my broad arguments with elite or authoritative positions, but to distinguish the roles of pastoral leaders in establishing and maintaining communities and religious activities across borders.

No single appellation captures what church leaders are called - Archdeaconess, Pastor, Branch Pastor, Minister, Apostle, Prophet, and Prophetess are just some of the titles of African church leaders one finds in New York City - so I employ the generic terms of pastor or spiritual leader.² As pastors of African churches in New York they are involved in building communities of faith across borders. Because African pastors lead new immigrant churches, they must typically excel in what Mary McClintock Fulkerson calls "*formation practices*, that is, the practice of starting and defining a new church."³ Their job is to build communities of spiritual and social belonging where human flourishing can occur. In so doing they are key catalysts in globalizing the gospel, mediating a vision of Christian faith and life.⁴ Pastors shape the outlook and direction of their congregations.⁵ While in the academic literature attention is often given to the role of non-Christian religious leaders in the diaspora,⁶ it is rare to find similar studies of Christian counterparts.

² An excellent discussion on urban church leaders is found in Camilo José Vergara, *How the Other Worships* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 123-158.

³ Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 52. The italics are in the original.

⁴ Nayan Chandra, *Bound Together: How Traders, Preachers, Adventurers, and Warriors Shaped Globalization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), see especially chapter 4. However, the very forces he profiles belie Chandra's rather benign view of globalization. On the importance of human agency and leadership for the globalization of faith, see Sarah Busse Spencer, "Becoming Global? Evangelism and Transnational Practices in Russian Society," in *Deciphering the Global: Its Scales, Spaces and Subjects*, ed., Saskia Sassen (New York: Routledge, 2007), 79-96.

⁵ Michael W. Foley and Dean R. Hoge, *Religion and the New Immigrants: How Faith Communities Form our Newest Citizens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁶ See, for example, Karen McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001) and Paul Christopher Johnson, *Black Carib Religion and the Recovery of Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007). I adapted the title of this chapter from Johnson. In the next chapter I will define my use of "diaspora."

First I will tell the distinctive stories of each pastoral leader: how Mother Cooper came to lead the Church of the Lord (Aladura), Yaw Asiedu the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, and Nimi Wariboko the Redeemed Christian Church of God; what shaped them, and how they learned what they do. Life histories are crucial because they shed light on the path to pastoral ministry and ultimately provide reasons for pastoral effectiveness. Second, I describe the paradigm or model of salvation that shapes their pastoral work. Third, I describe three domains of pastoral practice: spiritual direction, ministry development, and cultural bridge building. Fourth, I discuss how ministry is distributed among members of the three churches. Finally, I conclude with a personal story that illustrates the paradigm of ministry found in the three African churches. The source of my data includes years of observation, interviews with pastors about their vocation and parishioners about their views of leadership, and scores of informal conversations on the subject.

RELIGIOUS BIOGRAPHY AND FORMATION

Biographies of religious development among pastors not only record preparation for ministry but also reveal expectations that congregants have for their leaders. The activities of ministry are a piece of an integrated trajectory of ministry that may be described as a pastoral *habitus*, to pick up on Pierre Bourdieu's terminology.⁷ A pastoral habitus may be thought of as bodily competence or ability. We might say that pastors are their ministries, not just something they do. Body and spirituality meet in the ability to lead, heal, preach, pray, counsel, and develop church life. Traditions, relationships, and networks shape and form the body in such practices. These internalized and durable abilities of knowing, doing, and seeing are appropriated into the systems and persons involved in pastoral ministry. Production and reproduction is involved in pastoral formation. A pastoral habitus is also wisdom that serves the ends of human flourishing while also forming others in ministry. The process is one of attainment within an historical narrative and improvisation. On this basis, to understand and assess the pastoral ministries of Rev. Yaw Asiedu, Mother

⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 78-87.

Marie Cooper, and Pastor Nimi Wariboko, we must first locate each leader within the story that shaped them and out of which they continue to operate.⁸

Rev. Yaw Asiedu

A third generation member of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana and a New Yorker for over thirty years, in 2003 Yaw Asiedu became the second pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in Harlem.⁹ For someone growing up in Akropong-Akuwupim, a stronghold for the Basel missionaries that founded the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, few callings were more important than becoming a pastor, and it became Yaw Asiedu's aspiration from an early age. "The call came in secondary school"; it was "to do God's work." Family and community shaped Rev. Asiedu's "call" to ministry. When it came time to enter the ministry he reflects, "It's something I wanted to do. I respected working for the Lord."¹⁰

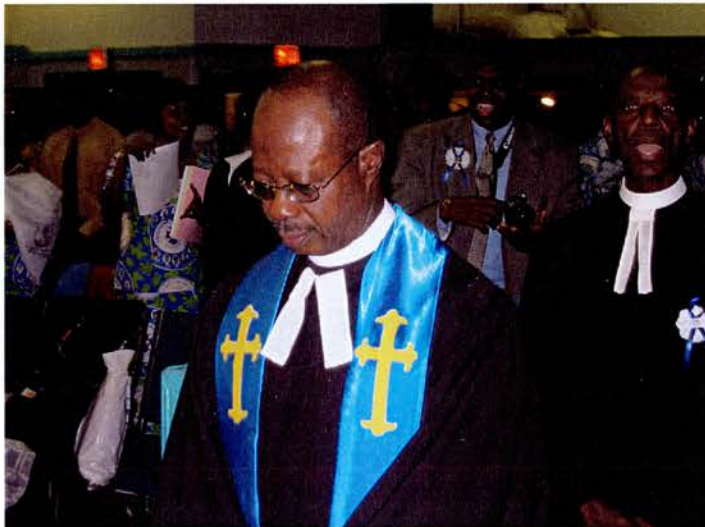


Fig. 1.1 Rev. Yaw Asiedu at his ordination service. Note in the background the first pastor of the church, Rev. Dr. Francis Kumi Dwamena. 2004

⁸ The potential of Bourdieu for understanding pastoral formation and my reading of his work comes from Manuel Vásquez. See also Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption*, 48-51, and Manuel Vásquez and Marie Friedmann Marquardt, *Globalizing the Sacred: Religion Across the Americas* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 23-24.

⁹ Yaw Asiedu, Interview, December 6, 2006.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Moving to New York City in 1975, Asiedu first worked as a bookkeeper and then for over twenty years as a senior planner and production planner for major New York corporations. But over time, a pastoral calling emerged. A founding member of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York, Asiedu took on key church responsibilities and roles over the years - Senior Presbyter, Lay Preacher, Bible Study teacher, and Treasurer. He was encouraged in this process by Rev. Dr. Francis Kumi Dwamena, the pastor of the church.

When the position of Minister-in-Charge opened, Asiedu was naturally in place, having acquired skills on the job. But it would take a multi-year sequence of formal services and training in Ghana before Asiedu would formally assume the office. On December 8, 2002, Asiedu received his Pastoral Commissioning at Emmanuel Presbyterian Church, Nsawam, Ghana, followed by an induction service in Harlem on June 15, 2003. On September 1, 2003, he officially became the Pastor-in-Charge of the Manhattan congregation. Once Rev. Asiedu's selection as pastor was set, at various times between 2002 and 2004 he travelled to Ghana to take courses in church doctrine and liturgics at Trinity Theological Seminary in Legon and the Ramseyer Training Center in Abetifi. Rev. Asiedu's ordination took place on October 24, 2004, in a service held at the First Ghana Seventh Day Adventist Church in the Bronx, chosen because it offered a much larger venue. Here Asiedu received his ministerial charge from Rev. Dr. Samuel Prempeh, then moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana.

Because Rev. Asiedu's pastorate followed the lengthy term of Rev. Dwamena, who had been ordained to lead the church at its inception in 1988, it began in a situation of transition and tension. A dinner and special church service in 2003 attended by denominational leaders from Ghana both honored Dwamena's years of service but also clarified his changing status in the congregation. Dwamena's retirement was reluctant, and it appeared that way in public settings. In Ghana, I was told, Dwamena's retirement would have been regarded much more perfunctorily, but in New York his entrepreneurial efforts required more responsibility and therefore

allowed more flexibility. But the nature of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana is order and process, and this held.¹¹

Asiedu's style is low-key and soft-spoken, and seems to lead by gentle persuasion and persistence, calling people to "come to Christ" and be "reconciled" to each other. He is affectionately and respectfully called "Osofo," which in the Twi language means pastor.

Mother Marie Cooper

Mother Cooper describes herself as a missionary with a call to preach the gospel. On the basis of this calling she places herself within the New Testament story. "Two by two" the "Holy Spirit" took the disciples to "different places and they started to establish" churches, she explains. Just like the Apostle Paul who went "place to place," so Mother Cooper interprets her coming to New York City and the establishment of the Church of the Lord (Aladura).¹²



Fig. 1.2 Mother Marie Cooper, Founder of the Church of the Lord (Aladura) in the Bronx. Note the cross in her hand and the crucifix on the wall behind her. 2005

¹¹ Moses Ohene Biney, "Singing the Lord's Song in a Foreign Land: A Socio-Ethical Study of a Ghanaian Immigrant Church in New York" (PhD Diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2005), 89-91.

¹² Marie Cooper, Interview, October 17, 2004.

Marie Cooper was born on June 15, 1938 in Monrovia, Liberia.¹³ Her ties to the Church of the Lord (Aladura) began in 1953 when she met Oduwole, a Nigerian missionary sent to establish the church in Liberia. When her mother, who was Pentecostal, died in 1955, the wife of Oduwole, known as Mother Delitia, became her “play mother.” This drew her closer to the Church of the Lord (Aladura), and in 1955 she formally joined. As her involvement in its activities and programs grew, she “started to develop in the Spirit.” The “Spirit started to use me” and the “love of God filled my heart.” But as Mother Cooper emphasizes in telling her story, the “Aladura did not draw me to God, I was just meant to serve God.” As part of her formation process, in 1965 she lived for three months in Ogere where the Church of the Lord (Aladura) is based. Here she had contact with the founder of the church, Primate Josiah Ositelu.

Visions and dreams were a part of Mother Cooper’s call. In Liberia, a youthful Marie Cooper had a dream that would be important for her calling.¹⁴ “I saw one eye, a single eye, just in the sky, looking down. I saw someone like the Lord, in the sky, and moving toward the east. I said in my dream, that’s Jesus, that’s Jesus.” After she woke up, she felt that it was “incredible the Lord would speak to me.” On hearing of the dream, Oduwole assessed, “The eye of the Lord is upon you. He wants to use you.”¹⁵ This dream would help establish Mother Cooper on course to a lifetime of ministry in the Church of the Lord (Aladura).¹⁶

¹³ Marie Cooper, Interview, March 11, 2005.

¹⁴ Dreams have played an important role in ministerial calling in African ministry, and elsewhere. See Bengt Sundkler, *The Christian Ministry in Africa* (Uppsala: Swedish Institute of Missionary Research, 1960), 26, 30.

¹⁵ Marie Cooper, Interview, March 13, 2005.

¹⁶ On dreams and the call to ministry in the Church of the Lord (Aladura), see Harold W. Turner, *African Independent Church, volume II - The Life and Faith of the Church of the Lord (Aladura)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 30. For more background see Sundkler, *The Christian Ministry in Africa*, 5-31. For another view of understanding dreams see David Chidester, “Dreaming in the Contact Zone: Zulu Dreams, Visions, and Religion in Nineteenth-Century South Africa,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 76:1 (2008): 27-53.

Offices and titles are highly structured and regulated in the Church of the Lord (Aladura), with an emphasis in promotion of ministers based not on seniority but on ministerial development.¹⁷ Mother Cooper explains the criteria as a “commitment to the church, the way you serve, and way you carry yourself...[being] Christ like.” A person is promoted “when people see that in you...seeing the Spirit of the Lord in you.”¹⁸

The novice office of the Church of the Lord (Aladura) is Cross-Bearer, which Mother Cooper entered in 1965. A Cross-Bearer carries a small wooden cross, and the training process in Monrovia involved praying over seven people a day. “You had to do that to develop spiritually,” Mother Cooper remembered during a prayer meeting.¹⁹ When you were really formed, that number increased to twenty-one. In 1989 she became a deaconess²⁰ and then a Senior Prophetess in 1993, all thus far in the Liberian See. In 2000, she was named an Archdeaconess, and this time the ordination took place in the Bronx by the Primate, the head of the Church of the Lord (Aladura). This ordination leaves two offices yet to be attained by Mother Cooper, that of Reverend Mother and Rev. Mother Superior.²¹ Pioneering a new branch, as Mother Cooper has done, is one element of advancing in the Church of the Lord (Aladura) hierarchy.²²

Following a number of visits to the United States to see her daughter Joy, who was a student in college, in 1984 Mother Cooper decided to stay, although she continued to

¹⁷ For an earlier review of the process, see Harold W. Turner, *African Independent Church, volume II*, 36-41.

¹⁸ Mother Cooper, Interview, March 13, 2005. Ritva H. Williams, *Stewards, Prophets, Keepers of the Word: Leadership in the Early Church* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2006) sees the early church leadership structures evolving out of the work of the Spirit, leading to creative developments. Ecclesiastical roles were rooted in everyday life needs. Something similar may be at work in the Church of the Lord (Aladura).

¹⁹ Church of the Lord (Aladura) Service, November 2, 2007.

²⁰ Marie Cooper, Interview, March 13, 2005.

²¹ Rufus Okikiolaolu Olubiyi Ositelu, *African Instituted Churches: Diversities, Growth, Gifts, Spirituality and Ecumenical Understanding of African Initiated Churches* (Munster: LIT Verlag, 2002), 175.

²² Harold W. Turner, *African Independent Church, volume II*, 34.

go back and forth to Liberia. Residing in New York City, at first she attended two largely African American churches, Epworth United Methodist and then St. Matthew's A.M.E. But feeling that the beliefs and spirituality of the Church of the Lord (Aladura) were missing, within a year Mother Cooper began a prayer group in River Park Towers in the Bronx.²³ The newly formed prayer group met on Wednesdays and Friday evenings, and moved around between different apartments. Within a short period of time, Mother Cooper led the prayer group into becoming the first branch of the Church of the Lord (Aladura) in North America. The church receives no financial assistance from the Church of the Lord (Aladura) headquarters or the Liberian See, and as a consequence, Mother Cooper has had to build the church by her own grit and initiative, for example redoing the church bathroom only when funds were gathered.



Fig. 1.3. "House of Prayers." 2004

In 1993, Mother Cooper was able to purchase the house on Monroe Street in the Mount Eden neighborhood of the Bronx, and it became officially known as a "faith home." In Liberia, a faith home is where ministers live and pray for people, and can also include a school and church.²⁴ Faith homes in Liberia are also sites for midwives and deliveries. Mother Cooper's daughter Joy was born in one in Liberia. Mother Cooper explains the purpose of the faith home in New York City as a place where "people in need, [the] sick, the unfortunate get help. And also where we do a

²³ Marie Cooper, Interview, October 17, 2004.

²⁴ For further background on the faith home and its prevalence in Liberia, see Samuel Irving Britt, "The Children of Salvation: Struggle and Cosmology in Liberian Prophet Churches" (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 1992), 172-277.

lot of praying.”²⁵ As Samuel Britt explains in his doctoral dissertation, the faith home is captured by the images of clinic, refuge, and household.²⁶ Because the faith home is where prayers are answered, Mother Cooper also refers to it as a House of Prayer.²⁷

Mother Cooper’s ministerial authority is rooted in her spiritual leadership and prophetic gifts, the use of prophecy and dreams in leading the church. Prophetic authority can become a major factor in conflict over power in the church and how it is used. This is pointed out in Laura Nasrallah’s study of early Christian prophecy.²⁸ However, to my knowledge, this was not a factor in Mother Cooper’s leadership during the time of my fieldwork. Very much relevant are her efforts to form the community, the length of her involvement in the church, and a deep respect for her work of prayer and healing.

Mother Cooper’s story indicates the important role women play in the Church of the Lord (Aladura)²⁹ and are recognized to play in African independent churches.³⁰ That it is women who share most prominently in the leadership with her may also say something of how women leaders pave the way for women’s empowerment in the church.³¹

²⁵ Marie Cooper, Interview, June 23, 2005.

²⁶ Britt, “The Children of Salvation,” 266-277.

²⁷ Marie Cooper, Interview, May 12, 2005.

²⁸ Laura Nasrallah, *An Ecstasy of Folly: Prophecy and Authority in Early Christianity* (Cambridge: Harvard Theological Studies, 2003).

²⁹ For background and analysis see Deidre Helen Crumbley, “Power in the Blood”: Menstrual Taboos and Women’s Power in an African Instituted Church,” in *Women and Religion in the African Diaspora: Knowledge, Power, and Performance* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 81-97, and “Patriarchies, Prophets, and Procreation: Sources of Gender Practices in Three African Churches,” *Africa* 73:4 (2003): 587-588.

³⁰ Philomena N. Mwaura, “Unsung Bearers of Good News: AIC Women and the Transformation of Society in Africa,” *Journal of African Christian Thought* 7:1 (2004): 38-44.

³¹ Bolaj Olukemi Bateye, “Forging Identities: Women as Participants and Leaders in the Church among the Yoruba,” *Studies in World Christianity* 13:1 (2007): 1-12.

Pastor Nimi Wariboko

As the cliché goes, if you can make it in New York City, you can make it anywhere. Nimi Wariboko “made it” in New York City.³² Nimi Wariboko was born on April 4, 1962 in Rivers State, Nigeria, and born again on September 26, 1993 in a Pentecostal Church in Lagos. Raised and baptized in the Anglican Church, it was his born again experience at one of the parishes of Zoe Ministries Worldwide in Lagos that formed him in the ways of Pentecostal Christianity, especially the practice of reading the Bible teaching, night vigil, and prayer. At Zoe Ministries Worldwide, Wariboko embarked on an intensive course of Bible study. At his request, the pastor or his assistant would teach him; he would take notes and produce a summary by the next day, repeating the process until he had mastered nearly the entire content of the Bible.³³



Fig. 1.4 Pastor Nimi Wariboko and Assistant Wapemi Wariboko during the consecration of a worker. 2005

Wariboko first came to New York City as a Columbia University graduate student in 1991, receiving a M.B.A. in Finance and Accounting.³⁴ After briefly returning to Nigeria, he moved back to New York and worked as a strategy consultant for investment bankers. Out of concern for his safety following the annulment of the 1993 Nigerian election, one of Wariboko’s Columbia professors worked to get him

³² Nimi Wariboko, Interview, November 15, 2006.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

to return to the United States.³⁵ Successful in this goal, Wariboko was able to return to New York City in 1994, when he took up work in corporate finance. This began a career that led to the kind of deals that produce large salaries and year-end bonuses.

For church life, he attended the Good Shepherd Episcopal Church on Roosevelt Island, serving as treasurer for the vestry. During his search for a church, Wariboko tried Times Square Church, a large multi-ethnic Charismatic church, but did not feel at home. In 1995, Wariboko received a telephone call from his cousin in Lagos telling him that there was a Redeemed Christian Church of God congregation on Roosevelt Island. From October 1995 on, he attended the Roosevelt Island branch of Redeemed Christian Church of God “like a visitor.” But after completing his final treasury report at Good Shepherd Episcopal in January 1996, Wariboko made a permanent transition to the Redeemed Christian Church of God, pastored by Elsie and Olu Obed. At this time, he was baptised by immersion, essential for his Pentecostal identity.

Under the influence of the Obeds, Waribioko continued to be formed in ministry, particularly what he calls “the original Redeemed way” and its emphasis on holiness.³⁶ As Wariboko explains,

They emphasized the importance of faith, holiness, prayers, and fasting, and sound understanding of biblical teachings. Being right with the Lord at all times is more important than personal fame and glory. I was told a pastor must never put his or her focus on money, fund raising, or on gaining personal wealth through the ministry. But [the pastor] should develop industries and talents that will yield income to support the work of God and take care of one's needs. He or she should put emphasis on giving more to God's work and God's people than receiving from the people. The believer must believe that God will always come through. Christianity is easy, not hard!³⁷

By March 1998, in good Redeemed fashion, Wariboko had moved on from the church and left the corporate world to begin the first Redeemed Christian Church of

³⁵ Nimi Wariboko, E-mail Correspondence with Author, June 1, 2007.

³⁶ On this, see Asonzeh Franklin-Kennedy Ukah, “The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Nigeria. Local Identities and Global Processes in African Pentecostalism” (PhD diss., Bayreuth, 2003), 130-131.

³⁷ Nimi Wariboko, E-mail Correspondence, June 1, 2007.

God branch in Brooklyn, which with over two and half million people is the largest of New York City's five boroughs.

“Nimi does everything as if his life depends on it,” his wife, Wapemi Wariboko, remarks.³⁸ This was evident in how he built the church: selling his car, spending much of his retirement savings, and working a series of part-time jobs to support his family. This drive was also evident in how quickly Wariboko moved successively through the pastoral offices of the Redeemed Christian Church of God. In the Redeemed Christian Church of God, the “offices” are workers, ministers, deacons/deaconesses, assistant pastors, and then finally pastor, the highest position one can attain. Pastor Nimi attained the office of pastor within four years, an achievement that typically requires eight years moving through positions. In addition, while still pastor, Wariboko took on significant academic challenges. He obtained his Master of Divinity Degree from Oral Roberts University in 2003 and then a PhD in Social Ethics from Princeton Theological Seminary in 2007. All this while maintaining a daily spiritual regiment that includes waking at 5:00 a.m. to pray, sing, and devote his mind to the Bible. Wariboko's narrative of success and spiritual discipline in many ways is his ministry.

Wapemi Wariboko is Assistant Pastor of the church, a title that recognizes her ministry in the Redeemed Christian Church of God. A public school teacher, she and Nimi have three children. She is not the co-Pastor and, as I recall, was never referred to publicly as the “first lady” of the church. In this instance, husband and wife are seen as having their own calls to ministry and distinctive roles. There is a juxtaposition of Pentecostal egalitarianism and the traditional gender roles.³⁹ As the wife of the pastor in Redeemed, there is a clear expectation that she will be in charge of the children's ministry.⁴⁰ However, Sister Wapemi's work in the church is not limited to this area. Instead, week after week, she can be seen providing pastoral

³⁸ Wapemi Wariboko, Interview, May 29, 2005.

³⁹ Jane E. Soothill's *Gender, Social Change and Spiritual Power: Charismatic Christianity in Ghana* (Leiden: Brill, 2007) is an important study on the Pentecostal discourse and practice surrounding women in ministry in Ghana that also resonates more widely.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

care as she prays with people, preaches, and especially counsels women in the church. When you look at who sits on the platform each Sunday, it is men and women, a powerful image of gender equality. Overall, we see what appears to be equality in ministry between men and women at the Brooklyn parish, with no distinction between what they can do in the church.⁴¹

ROUTES TO MINISTRY

These three accounts of pastoral formation indicate that while there is more than a single route for ministerial formation and call, the overall trajectory involves a certain kind of experience and practice being reproduced in each person. For Rev. Asiedu, it is a story that took place over a lifetime, being raised in an institutional tradition and then being further directed in it while in New York. It also required formal training in Ghana. For Mother Cooper, the role of dreams and God's direct involvement in establishing a call to ministry are crucial. Her religious authority is derived from her Spiritual connection to God, with visions, dreams and revelations, but also her singular focus on the disciplines of prayer and no-nonsense convictions of faith. As a Pentecostal minister, the stress for Wariboko falls on being anointed or filled with the Spirit. He is a "man of God," common language in the Pentecostal tradition that may also be a move away from its egalitarian aspirations. I cannot recall hearing the phrase "woman of God," although it is a description that is surely affirmed.

Although formal seminary training was required of Rev. Asiedu, the internal process of formation, the gifting of the Spirit, and the willingness to do the work are the predominant factors in ministerial development. Once into their vocations, further training often followed. For Mother Cooper and Pastor Wariboko, what is most fundamental is the bodily character of the Spirit, evidenced in dreams, visions, being born again, and an anointing. Charismatic gifting for pastoral work is all defining.

⁴¹ For an account that reaches similar conclusions, see Regina Gemignani, "Gender, Identity, and Power in African Immigrant Evangelical Churches," in *African Immigrant Religions in America*, ed. Jacob K. Olupona and Regina Gemignani (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 133-157. This equality appears, however, to stop at the level of the hierarchy of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, which seems to be all male.

For Rev. Asiedeu what is at stake in pastoral vocation requires recognition, formation, and approval on an institutional level. However, in different ways, this is also true for Mother Cooper and Pastor Wariboko. What comes first and has the priority differs.

IMAGINING SALVATION

Each pastor approaches ministry with theological nuance and emphasis, but the task they share is the same: to care for the members of their congregation in a manner that speaks to their spiritual and social needs.⁴² This begins with an understanding of how God saves,⁴³ and takes into account culture, worldview, and the immediate needs of New York City. In summary, the underpinning of pastoral ministry in African churches in New York is a holistic theology or paradigm of salvation.⁴⁴

In his book *Imagining Redemption*, David Kelsey provides a careful discussion that begins by asking basic questions about what God's work in Christ means for a pastoral situation.⁴⁵ To put "salvation" in the form of a series of questions relevant for the context at hand: What does it mean that Jesus saves? What did Christ's death accomplish? How does the cross deliver? What are the conditions God saves

⁴² For reflections on salvation that affirm my argument, see Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 6, 64-83.

⁴³ For a significant argument that emphasizes context in the development of a doctrine of salvation across traditions, see Abraham Akrong, "Salvation in African Christianity," *Legon Journal of the Humanities* 12 (1991-2001): 1-29. For a historical approach that, like Akrong, places salvation at the front of Christian theology, see Mark A. McIntosh, *Divine Teaching: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Malden: Blackwell, 2008), 57-110.

⁴⁴ Waldo César suggests Pentecostalism may represent a new paradigm of salvation in "From Babel to Pentecost: A Socio-Historical-Theological Study of the Growth of Pentecostalism," in André Corten and Ruth Marshall-Fratani, eds., *Between Babel and Pentecost: Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa and Latin America* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2001), 38. See also Harvey Cox, *Fire From Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1995).

⁴⁵ David H. Kelsey, *Imagining Redemption* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).

from?⁴⁶ African Christians offer decisive and distinct answers that relate to life in New York City.

J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, in *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana*, draws attention to the salient features of salvation in Ghanaian neo-Pentecostalism, which arguably has both antecedents in earlier independent church movements and is increasingly commonplace within broader contemporary African Christian settings.⁴⁷ In summaries that are intended to be descriptive, Asamoah-Gyadu selects three main themes to describe salvation. First, salvation means transformation and empowerment linked through a Pentecostal new birth.⁴⁸ The horizon within which a new birth is seen is a “salvific process that is conceived primarily in terms of a cosmic battle between God and the forces of evil.”⁴⁹ Because Christ has defeated the powers, salvation empowers and can be expressed through “redemptive uplift.”⁵⁰ Christ’s rule also brings anointing and restoration of spiritual gifts. Second, salvation also involves healing and deliverance, a fundamental experience of being born again.⁵¹ Third, salvation constructively leads the believer to prosperity and fruitfulness.⁵²

To be “born again,” terminology pervasive in Pentecostal churches, and increasingly the language of choice in many African church traditions, is to have the Spirit infill the body, not simply an interior spiritual space. Salvation is bodily, material, social,

⁴⁶ For a statement of such questions, see Gerald O’Collins, *Jesus our Redeemer: A Christian Approach to Salvation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁴⁷ J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 132-163.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 137-141.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 142, 143-144.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 152-154.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 164-200.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 201-232.

spiritual, and cosmic. We are our bodies, and bodies have desires.⁵³ For African believers, God in Christ liberates bodies from the powers, bringing new life in its fullness, reshaping the body by the indwelling power of the Spirit. Spirit possession is bodily possession; to be redeemed is to have a body filled with the Holy Spirit.

In African churches, the saving relation between God and humanity is tied together by a highly charged cosmology to an epistemology that does not require portals for crossings between God and humanity; the unseen world where evil powers and God engage the earth is dynamic, fluid, and open. Healing and deliverance fit this construction of reality and frames the redemption of bodies.⁵⁴ Ogbu Kalu underscores the importance of “African maps of the universe” or “worldview” in forming a holistic view of salvation.⁵⁵

Transnational migration has not erased African maps of the universe,⁵⁶ and in fact as Vasudha Narayanan suggests, the maintenance of cosmologies may well be a key feature of religion in a global and mobile age.⁵⁷ In New York City, with its new structures and relationships, the encounter with malevolent forces just grows more complex, still requiring that the same spiritual resources be deployed. Christology is cosmic in scope.

⁵³ On the importance of the body, see Katrien Pype, “Dancing for God or the Devil: Pentecostal Discourse on Popular Dance in Kinshasa,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 36:3-4 (2006): 296-318; R. Marie Griffith, *Born Again Bodies: Flesh and Spirit in American Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Thomas J. Csordas, *Body/Meaning/Healing* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

⁵⁴ Allan Anderson, “Stretching the Definitions? Pneumatology and ‘Syncretism’ in African Pentecostalism,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 10:1 (2001): 98-119.

⁵⁵ Ogbu U. Kalu, “Preserving a Worldview: Pentecostalism in the African Maps of the Universe” *Pneuma* 24:2 (2002): 110-137. See also Abbebe Kileyesus, “Cosmologies in Collision: Pentecostal Conversion and Christian Cults in Asmara,” *African Studies Review* 49:1 (2006): 75-92.

⁵⁶ Afe Adogame, “Engaging the Rhetoric of Spiritual Warfare: The Public Face of Aladura in Diaspora,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 34:4 (2004): 493-522.

⁵⁷ Vasudha Narayanan, “Embodied Cosmologies: Sights of Piety, Sites of Power,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 71:3 (2003): 495-520.

Pastoral effectiveness in African churches in New York depends on an approach to ministry grounded in a shared cosmology, epistemology, and doctrine of salvation.⁵⁸ Reality is what is seen and unseen; the two are interwoven.⁵⁹ Christ's saving death, the victory of the "blood," continues to overcome generational curses, witchcraft, evil people, and all obstacles to a life of flourishing. Pastors seek to guide their congregants to place their stories and problems in the script of salvation, the work of Jesus. By the "stripes" or blood of Jesus there is redemption from the past, all powers and obstacles can be overcome, and God is continually able to do something new in life. Testimonies, a staple of worship services and prayer meetings, do not recount sins or moral failings, but the present power of God in healing, protection, blessing, and abundance. Christianity in Africa is not driven by the intellectual questions and problems of the West; instead it faces matters of life and death, and must answer these credibly or Christian faith is meaningless. Doubts are not intellectual ones about the existence of God, but will God save me here and now.

Each African church in New York City places their stories within a story of redemption as we have been describing it. For each of the three focus churches, the script of salvation is given slightly different emphases: for Mother Cooper and the Church of the Lord (Aladura) it is the cross that most fully expresses God's saving work and the struggle that exists; for Pastor Wariboko at Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn it is the Victorious and Risen Christ that gives abundant life in the Spirit; for Rev. Asiedu of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York it is simply Jesus who personally saves by faith plus the embellishments of the Charismatic life. But a thread running through each church is salvation as a way of seeing, living, and acting,⁶⁰ premised on an embodied transaction between the Redeemer and the redeemed. Healing of the body, restoring relationships across

⁵⁸ Britt, "The Children of Salvation," 64-170; Thomas F. Torrance, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology* (Belfast: Christian Journals Limited, 1980), 146-149.

⁵⁹ See Stephen Ellis and Gerrie ter Haar, *Worlds of Power: Religious Thought and Political Practice in Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 49-69, 97, on the importance of the "spirit world" and its continuing importance in migration.

⁶⁰ Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 165.

generations and borders, protection from all that can go wrong, and the gifts of sustenance are integral. A Spirit-filled passion or pneumatological emphasis stands at the heart of this picture of salvation.

Salvation in African churches in New York City is not just about deliverance from malevolent spiritual powers, but comprehensive. The vocabulary associated with salvation is “healed,” “blessed,” transformed,” “changed,” “born again,” and “anointed.” Few passages better capture the everyday conception of human flourishing than Psalm 23:6 which reads, “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

Pastors translate this vision of salvation into an effective framework for ministry that can be termed a “pastoral imagination.” I adopt the term “pastoral imagination” from Craig Dykstra, a leading expert in clergy education. According to Dykstra:

It is beautiful to see a good pastor at work. Somehow, pastors who really get what the Christian ministry is all about and who do it well are able to enter many diverse situations, whether joyous or full of misery and conflict, and see what is going on there through the eyes of faith. This way of seeing and interpreting shapes what the pastor thinks and does and how he or she responds to people in gestures, words, and actions. It functions as a kind of internal gyroscope, guiding pastors in and through every crevice of pastoral life and work. This way of seeing and interpreting is what I mean by pastoral imagination.⁶¹

When a good pastor is at work, the end result, Dykstra reflects, is that the community of faith “comes increasingly to share the knowledge of God and to live a way of abundant life - not only in church but also in the many contexts where they live their daily lives.”⁶²

⁶¹ Craig Dykstra, “Pastoral and Ecclesial Imagination: What Practical Theology Seeks to Nourish,” in *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry*, eds. Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra (Eerdmans, forthcoming 2008).

⁶² Ibid.

It is an African pastoral imagination that guides the ministries of Rev. Asiedu, Mother Cooper, and Pastor Wariboko. In the African Christian context, a pastoral imagination enables pastors make connections between God, the unseen but real world of spiritual forces, the diaspora journey, and the material and social dimensions of everyday life. It constitutes a particular way of seeing the urgencies of life through the eyes of faith.

DOMAINS OF PASTORAL PRACTICE

Throughout the course of their regular pastoral duties, Rev. Asiedu, Mother Cooper and Pastor Wariboko preach sermons, perform “baby naming” and dedication ceremonies, counsel members, and otherwise lead their congregations. Formed in a way of life and oriented to seeing the world through the eyes of faith, pastors are able to imagine and build communities through four primary and overlapping domains of activity. First, pastors are *spiritual directors*. Second, they are *agents of healing*, directing ministries of healing that lead members into outcomes of liberation and empowerment. Third, pastors are *institution builders*, which means that they must take the idea of a church and execute it so it is sustainable. Fourth, pastors are *cultural intermediaries*, helping their members succeed in a new cultural setting. While pastoral work in New York mediates a way of understanding God, the world, and redemption, it is a not simple recipe but a process adapted and calibrated to new settings. The overall effect is a richly woven pastoral ministry.

Spiritual Directors

First, the pastor is a spiritual director or problem solver, a type of ministry that is illustrated by the following story. A Christian woman was experiencing recurring dreams of a “spirit husband.” A spirit husband joins a woman in her dreams, and this spirit husband was trying to destroy the woman’s life and possibility of a future husband. No “western” church or theology in New York was able to appreciate and therefore address this problem, even a prominent American Pentecostal church. But with diagnosis and counselling from an African minister in New York City, the woman travelled back home to attend a prayer camp where she experienced an

explanation and deliverance of her problem. Today she enjoys a healthy marriage, and is no longer visited by the spirit husband. In many respects, this is not an unusual sort of story because it illustrates the close connection between spiritual forces, family systems, and personal wholeness.

In *Patterns of Thought in Africa and the West*⁶³ Robin Horton considers the role of religion the “world over,” but then turns his observations to elements most salient in Africa. One of the key conclusions for Horton is that religion can provide “explanation, prediction, and control of this worldly events.”⁶⁴ Indeed, this is what religion necessarily must do for many people, Horton argues. “On the basis of massive evidence as to the contexts in which religious thought and action are evoked in everyday social life, we can confidently say that the vast majorities of religions, both past and present, are above all else bodies of theory regarding the underlying character of the world, from which flow repertoires of action aimed at practical control of the vicissitudes of life.”⁶⁵ That this is not true of “the religious life of the educated classes in the modern West” is “an exception that proves the rule.”⁶⁶ Applied to African church life, Horton observes that religion must effect change or life is lost.⁶⁷

Horton has been criticized for being too rationalistic,⁶⁸ but Pastor Nimi Wariboko believes Horton “gets” the essential dynamics of African pastoral ministry.

For traditional Africans, explanation is based on the use of the idea of unobservable underlying realities of gods to make sense of the contingencies of every day existence. Failures, sickness, fortunes and misfortunes are causally linked to a wide range of social conditions via gods. Africans use the interpretive scheme of the spiritual forces to transcend the limited vision of cause and effect relationship provided by common sense. I think this view

⁶³ Robin Horton, *Patterns of Thought in Africa and the West: Essays on Magic, Religion and Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 119; cf. 372-373; also, Robin Horton, “African Conversion,” *Africa* 41:2 (1971): 85-108.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 119-120.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 156-157. See further, “Conversion.”

⁶⁸ Birgit Meyer, “Christianity in Africa: From African Independent to Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33 (2004): 458.

or definition of religion is correct. He [Horton] got it right. Pentecostalism in Africa, or in Nigeria that I know so well, views the import of Christianity or spiritual gifts in this light...“Explanation, prediction and control” is now done through the power of the Holy Spirit.⁶⁹

For Wariboko, the features of “explanation, prediction and control” found in African religion must be addressed by Christian and Pentecostal pastors, but in their own ways. The aims and horizons that animate this approach is not intellectual assent, but life. Pastoral ministry in African Christianity is concerned with life, its fullness and hopes, from birth to death.

Good ministry in African churches in New York City must have what is sometimes called “cultural intelligence”; pastoral ministry must be able to faithfully account for the frameworks that their parishioners bring with them in new social and cultural context. As bodies exist in global transit, the pastoral imagination must continue to be adaptive to guide in new and complex settings. Malevolent forces can be found in sick bodies, bad dreams, and careers ground to a halt. Spiritual direction helps people see the source of their problems and discern how God redeems and directs them into paths of abundant life. Each pastor engages in this sort of problem solving by way of counselling. I illustrate here this by attention to Mother Cooper’s ministry.

Mother Cooper provides spiritual direction by identifying the “enemy” as Satan.⁷⁰ “We pray every day that the Lord will help us.” Satan’s angels and messengers are invisible. “Witchcraft [is the] same as Satan’s angels. Satan can really possess....Demons are led by Satan.” Water is a “cleansing” for “any kind of forces,” “protection” from “witches and wizards.” Water represents God’s creative Spirit that provides protection. “Satan is fighting you to take you away from the Lord.” However, the “Lord gave us will power.” Hence pastoral ministry involves a “struggle”⁷¹ to overcome and live in the protection of Jesus.

⁶⁹ Nimi Wariboko, E-mail Correspondence, July 29, 2004.

⁷⁰ This paragraph draws on Marie Cooper, Interview, February 13, 2005.

⁷¹ I came to a similar conclusion here as Britt, “The Children of Salvation.”

Much of Mother Cooper's pastoral ministry takes place outside the church with much larger communities that seek her out. Whenever I visited with Mother Cooper, her telephone would ring with news from Liberia or someone seeking pastoral assistance. During one of our conversations at the House of Prayer, she receives a telephone call from a woman seeking her counsel.⁷² Referencing the Old Testament figure Job, Mother Cooper explains, "God gives us tests, anytime, anywhere." Mother Cooper urges her "to keep going...can't give up, no matter how hard it is." Offering a reminder that "you are not living for anyone. You're living for God and yourself," Mother Cooper then quotes from Proverbs: "You know the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom." During the conversation, Mother Cooper is often silent, listening. She asks, "Do you still go to church? Do you still have faith in God?" Unfortunately for the caller, Mother Cooper is leaving the next day for Liberia, so the call must be brief.

At the end of the conversation, Mother Cooper says that she intends to "keep" her in prayers, and proceeds to do just that on the telephone. Mother Cooper asks that God would "strengthen her," and "wipe her tears...heal her body." She reminds the woman that "at times the doctor gave up," but God did not. Mother Cooper then asks God to "touch her from the crown of her head to the soles of her feet...bless her, heal her." The prayer stresses and repeats an interest in the woman as body and soul, and also emphasizes God's involvement in her everyday life. This encounter exemplifies the centrality of prayer to Mother Cooper's pastoral ministry, and the perception people have of her as a woman of prayer. As the "spiritual leader of the church...I do a lot of praying. People bring me their problems and we pray about it."

Agents of Healing

The domain of spiritual direction overlaps with healing. As an integral part of their ministries, Yaw Asiedu, Mother Cooper, and Nimi Wariboko are agents of healing. Healing is not limited to the discrete reversal of illness but much more inclusively to encompass all problems, family situations, challenges at work, and a vast array of

⁷² Marie Cooper, Interview, March 15, 2005.

demonic influences, spiritual beings, and witchcraft.⁷³ Healing can take place by the touch of hands, prayers, words of knowledge, revelations, water that has been prayed over, visions, and preachments. Causation is a complex matter, with spiritual forces seen as a common source.⁷⁴ In practice, each church and pastor recognizes a difference between something like “executive possession” (when a whole identity is controlled) and a “pathogenic possession” (possessing spirits of illness).⁷⁵ This conceptual structure impacts diagnosis and the healing process. A Christian can still face powerful spirits and yet not lose their central identity in Christ. It also explains why some situations continually require healing and divine intervention.



Fig. 1.5 “Healing Team” of Rev. Yaw Asiedu, Samuel Asare from Grace Presbyterian Church in Ghana, and Angelena Akiwumi. Note the open Bible on the desk. 2006

While such acts of healing can take place any time and at any liturgical celebration, pastors have especially focused on creating systems of healing in their churches. In the New Testament, James 5:14 provides a description of healing practices within the early church. “Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord.”⁷⁶ In African churches in New York City, healing arises out of the same

⁷³ René Devisch, “‘Pillaging Jesus’: Healing Churches and the Villagisation of Kinshasa,” *Africa* 66:4 (1996): 565.

⁷⁴ David Westerlund, *African Indigenous Religions and Disease Causation: From Spiritual Beings to Living Human Beings* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

⁷⁵ I am adapting the distinctions presented by Emma Cohen, “What is Spirit Possession?: Defining, Comparing, and Explaining Two Possession Forms,” *Ethnos* 73:1 (2008): 101-126.

⁷⁶ NRSV; See further Martin C. Abbl, “‘Are Any Among You Sick?’” The Health Care System in the Letter of James,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 121:1 (2002): 123-143.

worldview concerning illness, dependence on God, and a frequent lack of access to medical care. It belongs to a story with a number of integral components: God's goodness in creation, the power of Jesus over evil forces embedded in the world seen and unseen, and most notably, the Spirit's work in seeing that "saved" persons experience the wholeness, joy, and development that is characteristic of God's intentions for them.⁷⁷ While the focus is on healing individuals, the mechanisms are communal.⁷⁸ Although all members are expected to tithe and make offerings of thanksgiving to their church, there is no fee charged for this ministry.⁷⁹

As a denomination founded by Western missionaries that originally downplayed spiritual powers and healing, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana has relatively recently moved formally into ministries of healing. But healing is now vitally important to the church. The systems of healing at the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York City are grounded in transnational networks, linking religious leaders with special skills in healing between Ghana and New York City.⁸⁰ Here the key network for healing at the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York involves the travelling healing team from Grace Presbyterian Church in Ghana, led by Catechist E.A. Abboa-Offei, who is referred to simply as "The Catechist." Along with members of his team from Grace Presbyterian Church, they travel at least yearly to New York, with not less than ninety percent of the church membership regularly cycling through their care.⁸¹ The ministry of the healing team consists of consultations, diagnosis of problems, healing prayers, and preaching for renewal and mission.

⁷⁷ Wayne A. Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality: The First Two Centuries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 101, 112-114.


⁷⁸ Hansjörg Dilger, "Healing the Wounds of Modernity: Salvation, Community and Care in a Neo-Pentecostal Church in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 37:1 (2007): 59-83.

⁷⁹ James Pfeiffer, "Commodity *Fetichismo*, The Holy Spirit, and the Turn to Pentecostal and African Independent Churches in Central Mozambique," *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 29 (2005): 255-283.

⁸⁰ They are also called "therapy networks." See Kristine Krause, "Transnational Therapy Networks among Ghanaians in London," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 34:2 (2008): 235-241.

⁸¹ Yaw Asiedu, Interview, November 8, 2005.

Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York, U.S.A.
 Reverend Yaw Asirdu, BA, D.P., Th.
 Pastor



MISSION 2005

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Fig.1.6 Program for healing service with Catechist Abboa-Offei. 2005

I provide the following example from one of their frequent visits to the church in Harlem.⁸² On Monday, the first day that Catechist Abboa-Offei and Mr. Samuel Asare from the Deliverance Team are available for consultations at the church offices during their October Mission 2005 to New York, the room is filled with people waiting for an appointment. Abboa-Offei is regarded as one of the most important leaders of Charismatic renewal within the Presbyterian Church in Ghana, and with his travels to North America, his ministry has been extended and has grown in stature. Abboa-Offei and Asare came from the Akuapem Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in Ghana, which at first sent them “as a means of bringing God’s blessings” and to help raise funds for the Presbyterian University College Akuapem Campus.⁸³ The team had been in the states for seven weeks, holding services and consultations in a number of churches with only a single day of rest, reported Mr. Asare.

⁸² During the week of October 24, 2005.

⁸³ Correspondence from Rev. C. B. Ahwireng to Rev. Moses Biney, April 13, 2005.

A few days later as people await their appointment an evangelist is preaching from the pulpit. She is proclaiming God's love and power to heal. In the back of the room, a group of women are singing. Samuel Asare describes their mission to New York with the acronym "PHD" - Preaching, Healing, Deliverance.⁸⁴ All three components mark the team's time with the church in Harlem. There is preaching at night vigils, and healing during the night services and in consultations, along with deliverance. Given the prominence of the visit and the high level of participation, there is evidence of the "charismatic spirituality"⁸⁵ that marks the life of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in Harlem.

Consultations for healing are compared to a meeting with a physician or doctor. Before the appointment, individuals fill out a multi-page, confidential form that covers everything from their relationship with God to whether or not they were born as twins, the later to identify if any rituals were used at birth that might maintain a spiritual hold on their life.⁸⁶ In the counselling (or consultation) session, the team leader "scrutinizes a person's life." Perhaps they need to go to a medical doctor, regularly take their "tablets," or are in need of prayer and deliverance. Discerning causation is the first step. That is why the one-on-one sessions with Abboa-Offei are so crucial. To emphasize that medicine can be important, Mr. Asare shows me the medicine tablets that he takes.

Church members present a range of needs or complaints to the team. Mr. Asare leafs through the thick packet of sheets that ask for prayer and healing, requests that include "to grow in Christ," "family needs," "son," "green card," "debt," and "bad habits."

⁸⁴ Samuel Asare, Interview, October 27, 2005.

⁸⁵ Cephas N. Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism: A Study of the Development of Charismatic Renewal in the Mainline Churches in Ghana* (Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 2002), 201.

⁸⁶ Interview with Samuel Asare, December 13, 2006.

The healing team addresses such problems through prayer, reading lines of Scripture, and the repetition of theological beliefs. The different papers, what we could call prescriptions or cures, address a range of issues, among them deliverance, demonic foundations, healing, death, and fetishes. Speaking about the team's role, Mr. Asare comments, "We don't believe [we're] special people. God will heal him." Still, many people look to the Catechist and the team for healing. The healing context is both God and the Catechist working through God.

At the Church of the Lord (Aladura) the whole orientation is directed toward healing. As Mother Cooper describes healing, it is "prayer [that] holds you up and keeps you going...brings comfort where [there is] sorrow."⁸⁷ Healing is carried out each week at the Church of the Lord (Aladura), animated by prayer and anointed with oil. Near the end of each service, people come forward and kneel for God's anointing. Blessed water may also be offered. For example, if a person is not feeling well, water that is blessed or consecrated may be suggested for use in a "spiritual bath."⁸⁸ And as noted above, Mother Cooper began with the development of the faith home, a place of healing.

Healing is integral to the ministry and outlook of the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn. One of the weekly ministries of the church is the "Expect a Miracle" service held on Wednesday mornings. By definition, people have come because they have a need and require a miracle or divine intervention.

The service I describe here took place in August 2004.⁸⁹ Beginning at 10:00 a.m., Sister Catherine Oboh Idusuti, a minister in the church, leads the small group of mostly women but also men in song and prayer. This goes for more than one and half hours, and which time Pastor Wariboko begins to speak in the service, starting with the exclamation, "Let somebody shout Hallelujah!" "Praise to God - Prince of

⁸⁷ Mother Cooper, Interview, May 12, 2005

⁸⁸ For more background, see Britt, "The Children of Salvation," 600-647.

⁸⁹ August 25, 2004.

Peace, El Shaddai, Mighty God, Alpha and Omega...may the Holy Ghost come and take control,” he prays. The singing continues, with choruses such as “You are so excellent in my every day” and “He [Jesus] is high and lifted up.” Wariboko challenges the church to “be bold and tell him what you need” but then follows quickly with a call to thank God for “saving you.” He assures people with words, “It is not over for you. The Lord Almighty is here” and reminds them that Lazarus was brought back to life. With expectations building, Wariboko now takes “prayer points” and “testimonies.”

The first prayer point comes from a member trying to obtain a “promotion” at work, and a salary increase. Wariboko recalls Mordecai, who “could not sleep until promoted.” The pastor says we “we will pray for this sister” and asks everyone present to “begin to raise up your voices and pray” that “God will not allow injustice to reign.” The second “prayer point” is from a woman in need of a “visa.” The third prayer point is that the “Lord be manifested” in this building, a recurrent theme, especially in light of the church’s vulnerability to the landlord. A fourth person speaks and offers a testimony for God’s “faithfulness...for bringing me here to America...the opportunity to study.” Wariboko comments, “God gives grace to study and excel.” The fifth prayer point involves a problem with a husband, and is discussed longer than the other issues that have been raised. This woman voices confidence in God’s provision, believing that she should pray and “relax and give everything to God,” yet shows emotion as she tells of being in a difficult place, of wondering how her husband feels toward her. In response, Wariboko states that by marrying her “he [the husband] made a good catch,” which draws laughter. Second, he reassures her that “no matter how bad it is, God can turn it around.” Turning to the potentially positive, he adds, “Keep praying for your spouse...maybe [he will] become a great man of God.”

Next, a woman in the church tells of an unexplainable noise in her apartment, at which point Wariboko declares: “All is well with you. You will not hear any voice but God...The way the lions were silenced to save Daniel, you will not hear any contrary voice.” Seventh, a woman recounts a dream in which “someone died. [I was] told to touch him.” This is seen as a demonic influence and manipulation, for

the dead are not to be embraced. So the group prays that the “blood of Jesus will surround [this] sister.” “A pillar of fire will stand over the house as she sleeps” and “any means of satanic [influence], cut off in the name of Jesus.” Pastor Wariboko holds her hands and prays while the congregation lifts their hands in prayer toward her. Deliverance is taking place. Finally, one of the participants asks for prayer for her co-worker in the hospital. What started at 10:00 a.m. ends at 1:00 p.m., and people now return to work, home, and the streets of Brooklyn.

These examples from the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York, the Church of the Lord (Aladura), and the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn illustrate the liturgical setting of ministry, the corporate dimension to accessing the power of Christ and Spirit for healing, and the attention paid to everyday religious experiences of dreams, events, and family relationships.⁹⁰ The church is an open space for healing and community, a site for the “anointing of the Spirit.” In communal settings, not only is the spiritual dimension of healing addressed, but also the burdens are shared with a larger group that will pray and be supportive. Systems of healing empower people for an abundant life through spiritual activities such as prayer, deliverance, and communal support.⁹¹ African pastors in New York City are agents of healing.

Institution Builders

African pastors do not just provide spiritual direction and oversight to their congregations; they also comprehensively establish, build, and maintain the institutional life of the church in a global context. For immigrant religious life,

⁹⁰ An assessment is Wilhelmina J. Kalu, “Soul Care in Nigeria: Constructing Pentecostal Models of Pastoral Care and Counseling,” in *Religion, History, and Politics in Nigeria: Essays in Honor of Ogbu U. Kalu*, eds. Chima J. Korieh and G. Ugo Nwokeji (Lanham: University Press in America, 2005), 202-215.

⁹¹ Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori draw attention to the importance of communal power in *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 146.

Peggy Levitt formulates the helpful model of a “transnational religious corporation.”⁹²

Increasingly, religious organizations are taking their place alongside...global corporate and political actors. Worldwide production and distribution networks also manufacture religious goods. The local mosque or church is just one brick in this extensive global religious architecture. Some structures simply connect immigrants with people in their homelands. Others link them to fellow believers around the world. As a result, like politics and economics, domestic religion is both transnationally and nationally produced.⁹³

Levitt’s approach leads me to a series of reflective comments on the activities taken by African pastors in New York City.

As leaders of their churches, Rev. Asiedu, Mother Cooper, and Pastor Wariboko maintain contact with leaders of the Church of the Lord (Aladura), the Redeemed Christian Church of God, and the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in both national and international contexts. Pastor Wariboko travels in the United States for ministers’ meetings, and Rev. Asiedu returns to Ghana for denominational business. Each builds the church, from its programs to its patterns of leadership, on the parent model. In interviews and conversations at the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York, people sometimes played down the role of the pastor in their spiritual lives. Members turn to Rev. Asiedu for leadership, prayer, and counsel, but they did not join the church because he is the pastor. They are active in the church because it is the Presbyterian of Ghana, not because of its leader.

The financial responsibility for the church also lies with them, not elsewhere. Mother Cooper and Pastor Wariboko founded their churches and birthed them through their hard work, the infusion of their own assets, and constant creativity. To make ends meet, he took a series of teaching jobs. Mother Cooper worked as a seamstress to pay the bills.

⁹² Peggy Levitt, *God Needs No Passport: Immigrants and the Changing American Religious Landscape* (New York: The New Press, 2007), 113-135. In addition, Peggy Levitt, “Redefining the Boundaries of Belonging: The Institutional Character of Transnational Religious Life,” *Sociology of Religion* 65:1 (2004): 1-18.

⁹³ Levitt, *God Needs No Passport*, 117.

A potential crisis area for most immigrant churches in New York City is real estate, and this is true for the churches in this study. Mother Cooper purchased the House of Prayer, where the congregation worships in the basement, and then faced down the bank as they tried to foreclose in a dispute over payments. She eventually won her case in court. Pastor Wariboko had to negotiate with a landlord who sought their eviction while he kept raising the rent. After many years of rented space, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York has been able to purchase a building. Global New York, predicated on flexible capitalism and marked by a predatory influx of capital in transitional communities, results in conflict over real estate and presents multiple challenges for institutional survival, both spiritually and practically. God is leading them, working matters out, they believe.

Cultural Intermediaries

The fourth and final feature of pastoral ministry that I highlight is the role pastors play in helping church members bridge the gap between the social and cultural milieu found in Africa and New York City.⁹⁴ I invoke the analogy of a bridge builder because it illustrates an important pastoral role in the borderland between two worlds. In his discussion of West African traders in New York, Paul Stoller contends that “variable adaptability” rests on the notion of “cultural competence.”⁹⁵ This can include a grasp of linguistic and social rules so that people are more socially confident and able to achieve success.⁹⁶ Broadly speaking, African pastors perform a role of cultural adaptability, a key activity that can enable their congregants to succeed in a new city.

⁹⁴ A similar suggestion is made by Rijk A. van Dijk, “From Camp to Encompassment: Discourses of Transsubjectivity in the Ghanaian Pentecostal Diaspora,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 27:2 (1997): 149.

⁹⁵ Paul Stoller, *Money Has No Smell: The Africanization of New York City* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2002), 169.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 171.

With his corporate background, Pastor Wariboko models for members the tools required for success in New York. He encourages people to study for exams, work hard for promotions, and take opportunities for advancement at work. He projects confidence and efficiency, stressing time management. In a number of sermons, he urged members to start their own small businesses, and as a result, two members, Segun and Bola Oyesanya, started a financial services group called Spring Forth Associates LLC. A good pastor, parish member Ossai Chegwe believes, is “not about anointing or raising holy hands.” Rather, what is important is the manner of spirituality and pastoral interaction. What stands out for him, and so many others that I spoke with, is that Pastor Wariboko is a role model, “a mentor.”⁹⁷

Practical advice on family, marriage and work is very much part of spiritual direction, but for African immigrants in New York it has the additional component of cultural complexity. As pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York, Yaw Asiedu regularly responds to a range of concerns presented to him by parishioners and the larger Ghanaian community in New York. Four are most common, he reports: marriage difficulties, family problems, people needing a place to stay, and financial needs.⁹⁸ In addressing such problems, pastors are engaged in an analysis of two - and often more - cultures.

As an example, Rev. Asiedu helps parents and children bridge divergent notions of respect and parenting. Marriages can feel the strain of a new country and the pressures of work; many spouses and families face separation of great length due to immigration factors; family life is conducted in a new culture with different view of parenting; the church is a first stop for many new arrivals to New York; and the financial strains of living in New York are omnipresent. These matters can be urgent, and congregation members have access to Rev. Asiedu by telephone or can come by the office. When people come for help, “they don’t go [away] empty-handed.”⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Ossai Chegwe, Interview, May 1, 2005.

⁹⁸ Yaw Asiedu, Interview, December 6, 2006.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

Mother Cooper cites four types of problems she commonly addresses in her ministry in New York; the first two are similar to those of Rev. Asiedu. First is what she calls “husband and wife problems,” second is “fiancé problems” for women, third is “sickness,” and fourth is “job problems.” She also adds “childbearing problems” to the list. Regarding marital issues, she counsels the husband and wife individually, then brings them together. “During the time we pray that God should intercede.” With sickness, “I fast” and “I tell them to fast too, if they can.”¹⁰⁰ Fasting, as I will show in chapter 4, is a key spiritual practice. Here fasting addresses underlying issues that Mother Cooper is able to diagnose.

THE WORKERS ARE MANY

One of the most distinguishing features of the three churches is the way leadership in the congregation is participatory and shared among a wide group of people. Having looked at what the pastors do, we are in a better position to see how they seek to develop a pastoral *habitus* among their leaders, both by involving them in networks and by personal example.

There are no bystanders in the Church of the Lord (Aladura); everyone has a responsibility, whether it is preaching, praying, counting the offering, passing out the Bibles, or anointing with oil. Mother Cooper is not in the regular preaching rotation, with Minister Joy Cooper Chenoweth and Evangelists Eleanor Campbell and Sarah Richards (Kerkulah) typically alternating weeks. The point is that they “get experience,” as Mother Cooper puts it. “I have a lot of work to do, [so] I assign people,” she states.¹⁰¹ Hierarchy and titles matter in the Church of the Lord (Aladura), but responding to the Spirit plays an undeniable role in determining who prays, preaches, and leads Bible studies.

The Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn operates a comprehensive and demanding system of lay pastoral leadership known as

¹⁰⁰ Marie Cooper, Interview, January 12, 2006.

¹⁰¹ Marie Cooper, Interview, March 13, 2005.

“workers.” To become a worker, one must be first a born-again Christian, a person who has Jesus as their Saviour. Once becoming a worker, it is approximately four years before a person is eligible to go to the next level of minister. As noted earlier, this is followed by the positions of deacon/deaconess, assistant pastor, and then pastor. With typically no less than forty workers at any given time, this works out to be between every 1 in 5 or 1 in 6 church members.¹⁰²

Workers are just what the word suggests, people who work and work hard. Supported by 1 Chronicles 24, which describes “officers of the sanctuary and officers of God” (verse 5) who were appointed for duties, workers are required to do whatever the pastor requires for the operation of the church. It is safe to say Pastor Wariboko asks much of his workers and is strict in his requirements, but this only seems to enhance the workers’ respect for his leadership. When called for by the broader Redeemed Christian Church of God leadership, workers can be moved around parishes where needed, although in practice this appears based on calling. Meetings are held weekly before church, frequently after church, and a workers night vigil is held monthly.

At weekly workers’ meetings leadership is developed, operations are reviewed, and directions meted out. Pastor Wariboko understands the church to be a dynamic community of the Spirit but also operates it with a high or near absolute degree of authority in all matters of church life. This authority is also seen as the Spirit’s work, the equipping of the “man of God.” Asamoah-Gyadu highlights the distributional aspect within Pentecostalism: “The democratisation of charisma...has made the style of ministry in the CMs [charismatic ministries] a task-oriented one. This style of ministry is one in which, instead of relying on hierarchies of ministers or on so-called gifts of the Spirit, the laity have been mobilised on the basis of their spiritual gifts and talents to minister in the power of the Spirit in leading worship, personal

¹⁰² An argument can be made that in the New Testament, the language of “deacon/deaconess” may be pastoral than typically recognized. For the discussion, see John N. Collins, “Ordained and Other Ministries: Making a Difference,” *Ecclesiology* 3:1 (2006): 11-32. This would be in accord with the functional practice of Redeemed.

evangelism, healing, deliverance and others.”¹⁰³ The association of the Spirit with the individual believer means everyone has a gift, and every *charism* is for the advancement of the ecclesial body. Responsibilities are so formally distributed that instead of every decision relying on the pastor, the church could “run on auto-pilot,”¹⁰⁴ as one member put it.

A ministers’ meeting on October 10, 2004 in the pastor’s office begins with a Bible study on 2 Corinthians 3 and Psalm 17:3. Pastor Wariboko identifies the qualities of a worker and minister.¹⁰⁵ First off, they “are to be led by integrity of heart” and “holiness.” He stresses that “people read you,” and that ministers are “living epistles” and a “living text.” Quoting St. Francis, he says that Christians are to “preach and if necessary use words.” Pastor Wariboko adds that being a “Spirit-filled” Pentecostal church does not mean training is not required in holiness and ministry, and because there are limits to man’s power, workers must “keep praying.” This smaller gathering of roughly ten ministers then moves to the adjacent larger “workers’ room” as the arriving workers triple the size of the group. Here the workers sing about the “resurrection power of God” and reflect on Matthew 13 and the story of workers in the vineyard of God. The emphasis of the earlier meeting is reinforced: “for every twenty-four hours God gives us, he looks to take an account.” After prayer, the meeting is dismissed and the workers and ministers head to their Sunday responsibilities.

The Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York is organized around a Presbyterian form of church governance whereby congregationally elected women and men lead the church along with the pastor. During my time at the church a new session of elders was elected and Rev. Asiedu was installed, replacing the first pastor. The session meets twice a month and reviews all matters related to the church. From another viewpoint, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York operates through its committees and membership, broadly distributing responsibility to groups

¹⁰³ J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 130.

¹⁰⁴ Bola Oyesanya, Interview, June 1, 2007.

¹⁰⁵ Redeemed Christian Church of God, Field Notes, October 10, 2004.

throughout the church. Still, in a sermon at the church on July 20, 2007, Catechist Obofa-Offei argued that crucial to the growth of Pentecostal churches in Ghana is their emphasis on lay leadership, an observation likely to have been intended as a challenge to both the church in New York City and the denomination.

In summary, while pastors play a pivotal role in developing and leading congregations, they do not work alone. While the pastor sets the tone or direction of the church, the work of many people is essential to the sustainability, growth and function of church life.

CONCLUSION: BUILDING VISIONS

At the beginning of this chapter, I presented a job description for African pastors in New York City that accords with Donald Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori's observation on global Pentecostalism: "No committee would dream up many of the visions that these pastors proclaim to their congregations; there would be too many naysayers pointing to the difficulties of implementation."¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, the ministries of Rev. Asiedu, Mother Cooper, and Pastor Wariboko are thriving because of the dedication, vision, and sacrifice they and their families make each day. In many respects, churches are mirrors of their pastors. Exploring more of the vision and life of each particular community is the subject of the next chapter.

¹⁰⁶ Miller and Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism*, 186.

CHAPTER 2

WHERE LITURGY AND LIFE MEET: THREE CHURCHES IN TWO WORLDS

INTRODUCTION

On a Sunday afternoon, in a dimly lit corner of the foyer of the sanctuary where the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York worships, I notice a man change from his work clothes to a suit. From the brief glance that I catch, I see that underneath his work uniform are pressed trousers and a dress shirt to which he adds a tie and jacket. He then stuffs the work clothes into a paper bag and steps quickly into the sanctuary to worship God. As I reflect on this small detail, I am struck by how it communicates something that goes to the heart of African Christianity in New York City. A weekly rest for immigrant workers can be hard to find in a global economy. But this man found something about the worship of God to be so important that he made it a priority above all else, forgoing physical rest and a meal at home after a long day of work and perhaps even an added night shift. Nor did he leave his everyday life outside the doors of the church, but carried it right into the sanctuary with him. Instead of church being an escape or refuge, it is the very place where life happens, and it is connected to life.

In this chapter I examine the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York, the Church of the Lord (Aladura) in the Bronx, and the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn. The details that will help us understand the three churches will take us through their histories, convictions, voices, and achievements, but will also bring us to journeys of personal religious faith and the worship of God that flows across borders. As I have tried to say with the opening vignette, religious

experience for African Christians in New York is characteristically about life, ordinary daily life, but also the essential rhythms of human meaning and existence - from birth until death with everything in between. So my approach to the churches is in the context of their life together reflected in their relationships, life transitions, hopes, and in God who travels with them as powerful Saviour. But I also seek to place their experience in the complex of global flows and networks that are at the heart of religious place making.

The three churches conduct their religious lives in two worlds - Africa and New York City. In the language of the social sciences, the churches are transnational communities that make sense only when viewed as part of multiple settings at once.¹ In the context of globalization, with its meshing of mobility and multiple identities, people do not sever ties with home, assimilate, or simply blend into the diverse mix that is New York, but maintain commitments of finance, family, and religion with their country of origin.² Nina Glick Schiller summarizes, "Transnational migration is a pattern of migration in which persons, although they move across international borders and settle and establish social relations in a new state, maintain social connections within the polity from which they originated. In transnational migration, persons literally live their lives across international borders."³ As a result, through relational and organizational processes referred to as networks,⁴ new social fields or

¹ For a thorough review of issues and the literature, see Peggy Levitt and B. Nadya Jaworsky, "Transnational Migration Studies: Past Developments and Future Trends," *Annual Review of Sociology* 33 (2007): 129-156. For a comprehensive source that takes religion into account, see Sanjeev Khagram and Peggy Levitt, eds., *The Transnational Studies Reader: Intersections and Innovations* (New York: Routledge, 2008). Additionally, see Peggy Levitt, "Transnational Migration: Taking Stock and Future Directions," *Global Networks* 1, no. 3 (2001): 195-216. Levitt elaborates on the religious dimension in *God Needs No Passport: Immigrants and the Changing American Religious Landscape* (New York: The New Press, 2007). See also Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

² Manuel A. Vásquez, "Studying Mobile Religion via Networks," unpublished paper, 11.

³ Nina Glick Schiller, "Transmigrants and Nation-States: Something Old and Something New in the U.S. Immigrant Experience," in *The Handbook of International Migration: The American Experience*, eds., Charles Hirschman, Philip Kasinitz, Josh DeWind (New York: Russell Sage, 1999), 96.

⁴ Vásquez, "Studying Mobile Religion via Networks."

worlds are also created.⁵ Congregations are where networks connect and ecclesial life is formed, and therefore a source of power in the global world.

African churches in New York City are not inert and closed communities, but fluid and dynamic bodies of faith that are actively part of much larger global movements. This takes place because the churches are embedded in diffuse and constantly evolving informal and institutional religious networks that move across boundaries.⁶ Networks move religious leaders, symbols, practices, and experiences - the entire spectrum of lived religion. Religious networks distribute the transcendent in a globalized world.⁷ A related term in this discussion is "diaspora."⁸ Diaspora can have a singular or combination of biblical, cultural, and political meanings. But while contested uses exist and lead to concerns,⁹ in context-specific ways diaspora can helpfully refer to the imaginative and ongoing relationship of African migrants to a distinct homeland community.¹⁰ But if the churches are global in history and life, they are also intensely local. Each adapts and serves in a new context.

Worship is the focal point of each week and an expression of each community's most basic beliefs, hopes, and experiences.¹¹ Faith can be cultural and instrumental; this

⁵ Glick Schiller, "Transmigrants and Nation-States," 97-98; Nina Glick Schiller, "Transnational Social Fields and Imperialism: Bringing a Theory of Power to Transnational Studies," *Anthropological Theory* 5:4 (2005): 439-461.

⁶ Vásquez, "Studying Mobile Religion via Networks," 27-29.

⁷ Thomas J. Csordas, "Introduction: Modalities of Transnational Transcendence," *Anthropological Theory* 7:4 (2007): 259-272.

⁸ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 188-189. For a good discussion, see Manuel A Vásquez, "Studying Mobile Religion via Networks."

⁹ For a review of the issues and concerns, see Gerrie ter Haar, *Halfway to Paradise: African Christians in Europe* (Cardiff: Cardiff Academic Press, 1998), 71-88, and Martin Baumann, "Diaspora: Genealogies of Semantics and Transcultural Comparison," *Numen* 47 (2000): 313-337.

¹⁰ ter Haar, *Halfway to Paradise*, 189.

¹¹ As background to the importance of worship in analyzing church structures, see Charles E. Farhadian, ed., *Christian Worship Worldwide: Expanding Horizons, Deepening Practices* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007). Bernhard Lang in *Sacred Games: A History of Christian Worship* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997) argues that the practice of worship across traditions includes six elements: praise, prayer, sermon, sacrifice, sacrament, and spiritual ecstasy. This is a good way of

should not be surprising. But in the three focus churches, the primary draw is God as the center of faith. The focus on worship underscores that African Christians start their common life with God, belief in God, and God as the purpose of their lives.¹²

Each church has a unique approach to worship that has persisted across global borders. Therefore, as an entry point into each church and their formation in the global, I begin with a description of a single worship service. The three services I describe are accounts from early in my research: August, September and October 2004. While other services would reveal differences and similarities, these three services represent well each congregation.

For each church I provide an introduction to its history, membership, and organizational structure, then relate its development to the globalization of religion. My study shows that the religious practices, beliefs, and experiences of the three churches can be understood only when read as occupying two worlds, reconceptualizing the meaning of both the local and the global. Because each church is seen filtered through words and field notes and lacking in full multi-sensory encounter, perhaps Walter Benjamin's sceptical remark should be remembered, here and elsewhere: "In even the most perfect reproduction, *one* thing is lacking: the here

describing what takes place in the three churches. For a powerful account of liturgy as an entry point to African Christianity, see Bennetta Jules-Rosette, *African Apostles: Ritual and Conversion in the Church of John Maranke* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975). Deidre Helen Crumbley returns over and over again to the theme of life in the midst of worship in her important "Indigenous Institution Building in an Afro-Christian Movement: The Aladura as a Case Study" (PhD Diss., Northwestern University, 1989).

¹² On God as primary point of theology, see David F. Ford, *Theology: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 33-48. In his brief of theological constants across history and cultures, Andrew Walls lists the "worship of the God of Israel" first. See *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* and *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002), 23-24. The other three categories that Walls introduces are the ultimate significance of Jesus, a belief that God is active where believers are, and an understanding that the people of God transcend time and space.

and now of the work of art - its unique existence in a particular place.”¹³ Even so, I yet hope something of the vitality of each church comes across.

MEMBERSHIP HAS ITS PRIVILEGES:

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF GHANA IN NEW YORK

Solemnly and slowly the leaders and choir of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in Harlem process down the aisle.¹⁴ First in line is the Church Choir, dressed in its pressed white and black uniforms, followed by Rev. Asiedeu and a presiding elder. After a selection of hymns and liturgical prayers in Twi from the Presbyterian Church of Ghana - from hymnals that each member brings with them - the service dramatically shifts gears. The Church Band has the congregation out of the pews and in the aisles, dancing, marching, and waving white handkerchiefs to the High Life infected rhythms and choruses of Ghanaian gospel music with its propelling bass lines, multiple drums and percussive sounds, and cool saxophone notes. Grace Mensah leads the dance song “Trust and Obey” in English, and the second, sung in Twi, is “Ebenezer,” which in a summary translation declares, “We thank God for everything is okay.”



Fig. 2.1 Members of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York after Sunday worship at Mount Morris Church in Harlem. 2005

¹³ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version” in *Selected Writings, Volume 3 1935-1938*. Trans. Edmund Jephcott, Howard Eiland, and others, eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 103.

¹⁴ Service of September 26, 2004.

By now the sanctuary has filled with over two hundred worshipers, many in the bright fabrics of Ghana. In their usual corner dressed in distinctive white and blue uniforms is the Women's Fellowship. Scripture readings from both testaments are provided in Twi, Ga, and English, more hymns are sung from the hymnal, and the Apostles Creed is recited in Twi. Thelma Annan delivers the sermon in English and Twi on the topic of "You Cannot Serve God and Money." Money, she observes, "is the root of all evil." The life of Solomon suggests that it "can lead to temptation," and referring to the life of John D. Rockefeller, she emphasizes that money does not save. Yet money is also "blessed by God."

Immediately following the sermon, the Singing Band performs its selection to time kept by an ododombo, a two-piece, metal finger instrument whose distinctive click jumps out. After visitors are introduced and announcements made, the special offerings that people have made this week are announced to the congregation. These announcements are testimonies to God's provision for safe travel, health, and family safety. Today is also a mini-harvest for "Kwame's and Amma's," men and women born on a Saturday. Equal parts cultural celebration, worship, and fundraiser, the harvest services raises over \$10,000 for the church. Afternoon has now turned to evening, and the service ends with a recessional hymn, the choir and clergy recessing back up the aisle. As the remaining people leave, spiritually renewed but perhaps also physically expended, they find bottles of water are being distributed in the narthex. Like every Sunday, it has been a time of seeing friends, hearing the Word, and experiencing enormous joy.

When the always sharply dressed Alfred Kissiedo states he was "born Presbyterian and will die Presbyterian,"¹⁵ he speaks for many in his church. Born in Ghana, Alfred is part of many generations who have been members of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. A New Yorker for some forty years, Alfred lives in the sprawling

¹⁵ Alfred Kissiedo, Interview July 31, 2005.

Co-Op City in the Bronx. His son is a New York Police Department officer, his daughter a doctoral student in Philadelphia. Kissiedo knows his church polity, sits in the same pew in the back each week where he can take everything in, and cheerily greets everyone who walks by him with a handshake and smile, conducting short, knowing conversations. He is a New Yorker, a Ghanaian, and a Presbyterian.

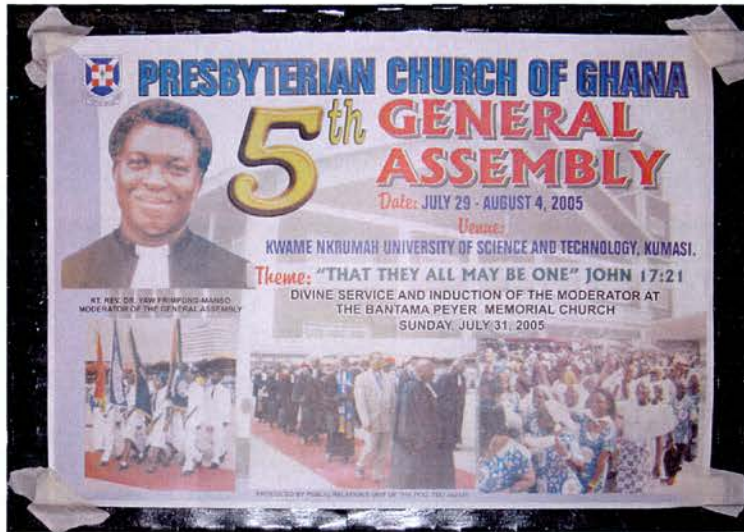


Fig. 2.2 Announcement for General Assembly meeting in Ghana posted in Harlem. 2005

Denominational affiliation is a point of identity and pride for the congregants of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York. With its more than 250 members, the congregation is a real and active part of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana denomination, which is headquartered in Accra.¹⁶ One of Ghana's major Protestant denominations, it is some 2,183 churches strong in Ghana with a small selection of international branches, including one in London.¹⁷ According to Moses Biney, among the membership, "about 85% are of the Akan linguistic group; about 13% are Ga-speaking and 1% Ewe-speaking."¹⁸ The New York congregation gathers in

¹⁶ For another study on this congregation, see Moses Ohene Biney, "Singing the Lord's Song in a Foreign Land: A Socio-Ethical Study of a Ghanaian Immigrant Church in New York" (PhD Diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2005) and "Singing the Lord's Song in a Foreign Land: Spirituality, Communality, and Identity in a Ghanaian Immigrant Church," in *African Immigrant Religions in America*, ed. Jacob K. Olupona and Regina Gemignani (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 259-278.

¹⁷ "History of the Presbyterian Church in Ghana," <http://www.pc-ghana.org/detail.htm#beginning>, accessed August 28, 2007.

¹⁸ Biney, "Singing the Lord's Song in a Foreign Land," 78-79.

Harlem but draws its membership largely from people who reside in the Bronx, but also as far away as Connecticut and New Jersey. Visitors to the church are primarily Ghanaian.

Church members are employed in the city as taxi drivers, waiters, health-care workers, store clerks, and in an array of public and professional positions. A good example is Amma Amponsah, who came to New York from Ghana over twenty years ago, is a social worker and works for the Department of Social Services.¹⁹ High housing costs forced her quest to purchase a home across the river in New Jersey, but she lives much of her life in New York City. At church she sits in a front pew, the better to dance from and encourage others to join her.



Fig. 2.3 Amma Amponsah, displaying Presbyterian Church of Ghana Membership Card. 2005

Three influences are important for understanding the life and practice of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, both in Ghana and now in New York: the work of the Basel Evangelical Missionary Society, the Scottish Presbyterians, and the modern African Charismatic movement. I will describe each in turn and then show their relevance.

¹⁹ Amma Amponsah, Interview, August 14, 2005.

The first major influence goes back to the European missionary movement in Africa in the nineteenth century, when the Basel Evangelical Missionary Society began the work that would become the Presbyterian Church of Ghana.²⁰ In 1828, the first Basel missionaries arrived in the then Gold Coast,²¹ a date that the Presbyterian Church of Ghana marks as the starting point of their history. Like other European mission endeavours in Africa, the human cost on the Basel missionaries was significant: three of the first four missionaries died from tropical disease just “weeks or months” after posting, and the remaining missionary died after two years.²² For a time, in 1843 the Baslers enlisted a contingent of Jamaican missionaries from the Moravian Church,²³ believing that their African descent rendered them immune from tropical disease. While initially there was little obvious evangelistic success and great cost in terms of early personnel, by mid-century there was enough “success” to represent a turning point in establishing the mission. In addition to the Baslers’ traditional evangelistic work, they engaged in building primary educational institutions and creating residential communities known as “salems,” village settlements for new converts. Important themes include an emphasis on the Bible and a devoted Christian life. In sum, this phase established the church and introduced pietism into church life.²⁴

A second major historical influence comes from Scottish Presbyterian missionaries. Because of the presence of German missionaries among the Baslers, in 1917, the mission was expelled by the British authorities²⁵ and was not to return until 1926.²⁶ In the interim, the work of the Basel missionaries was “turned over” to the United

²⁰ Noel Smith, *The Presbyterian Church of Ghana, 1835-1960: A Younger Church in a Changing Society* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1966).

²¹ “History of the Presbyterian Church in Ghana,” <http://www.pc-ghana.org/detail.htm#beginning>, accessed August 28, 2007.

²² Jon Miller, *Missionary Zeal and Institutional Control: Organizational Contradictions in the Basel Mission on the Gold Coast, 1828-1917* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 21.

²³ Biney, “Singing the Lord’s Song in a Foreign Land,” 51.

²⁴ Smith, *The Presbyterian Church of Ghana*, 19-45; Samuel Prempeh, “The Basel Mission and their Successors in the Gold Coast and Togoland, 1914-1926: A Study in Protestant Missions and the First World War” (Phd. Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1977).

²⁵ Smith, *The Presbyterian Church of Ghana*, 148-152.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 161.

Free Church of Scotland, a Presbyterian body.²⁷ Among the Scottish contributions to the mission was the introduction of secondary schools, and perhaps not unexpectedly, the Baslers' relatively ecumenical and Pietist ecclesiology was supplemented by a Presbyterian polity. Reflecting the new role of Presbyterian polity and the need for a new phase in the life of the church upon the return of the Basel Mission in 1926, the mission adopted as a name the Presbyterian Church of Gold Coast, later becoming the Presbyterian Church of Ghana at the point of national independence in 1957.

A third influence comes from the Presbyterian Church of Ghana's encounter with the independent and Pentecostal/Charismatic churches in Ghana. The title of Ghanaian scholar Cephas Omenyo's book *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism* captures the impact of Pentecostalism on the Presbyterian Church of Ghana and other missionary founded churches in Ghana.²⁸ During the 1960s, many people were leaving the Presbyterian Church of Ghana for independent churches, the so-called Sunsum Sore (Spiritual Churches) and also new Charismatic churches.²⁹ As these movements drew members from the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, the church responded by incorporating Charismatic elements into its practices, including vibrant music, dancing, deliverance services, and all-night prayer meetings. Changing became a matter of denominational survival, but also liturgical and ecclesiastical reform.³⁰

²⁷ On the transfer from the Scottish viewpoint, see A. W. Wikie, "An Attempt to Conserve the Work of the Basel Mission to the Gold Coast," *International Review of Mission* (1920): 86-94. Generally on the Scottish role, see Charles Gyang-Duah, "The Scottish Mission Factor in the Development of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana: 1917-1957" (Phd. Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1996).

²⁸ Cephas N. Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism: A Study of the Development of Charismatic Renewal in the Mainline Churches in Ghana* (Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 2002), 127-153; "From the Fringes to the Centre: Pentecostalization of the Mainline Churches in Ghana," in *Exchange* 34:1 (2005): 39-60.

²⁹ J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 18-32.

³⁰ Livingstone Buama, "The Worship Experience of the Reformed Family in Ghana/West Africa: The Cry and Quest for Liturgical Reform," in *Christian Worship in Reformed Churches Past and Present*, ed. Lukas Vischer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 216-223.

Each of these influences - the pietism of the Baslers, the polity of the Scottish Presbyterians, and the new Charismatic emphasis - moved to New York City, and is potentially evident in any given worship service and in different parts of the church's life.³¹ Recalling its pietistic heritage there is a strong emphasis in preaching on the heart turning to Christ and little in the way of a creedal or doctrinal system; from the Scottish chapter, comes the Presbyterian form of polity, pastoral garb, and offices; and there is certainly a Charismatic dynamic in much of the music, prayer, and entries into healing and deliverance. These influences show up in any given worship service: exhortations to come to Jesus with all-night prayer services, the solemnity of the hymns alternating with the jubilant Church Band that sends members dancing into the isles. Each layer of the history and worship of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana seems to find its way into the ongoing life of the church. Indeed, they meld together, providing the church its uniqueness.

The Harlem-based church traces its beginnings to the early 1980s. As the church tells the story, it appeared to many Ghanaian Christians in New York City (and the larger metropolitan area) that they were becoming sick and dying at an alarming rate. The crisis, explained in spiritual terms, could only be resolved or controlled with a response that focused on God. To this end, Margaret "Mama" Ohemeng convened a group of Ghanaian men and women together for prayer, to seek "divine intervention."³² Mama Ohemeng, a Ghanaian who made her home in New York City in the early 1960s along with her husband, set in motion what would eventually lead in 1985 to the formation of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York City.³³ The future pastor, the Rev. Dr. Francis Kumi Dwamena, organized prayer meetings.³⁴ Eventually the group would be the first Presbyterian Church of Ghana

³¹ On the connections between Pietism and charismatic renewal, see Lamin Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations: Pillars of World Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 163-183. David Martin also identifies a broad pattern of lineage between Pietism and Pentecostalism in *On Secularization: Towards a Revised General Theory* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 144.

³² Yaw Asiedu, Interview, March 9, 2004.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Biney, "Singing the Lord's Song in a Foreign Land," 74-75.

congregation in the United States, even the first outside of Ghana,³⁵ and appears to be one of the earliest African immigrant churches in New York City.

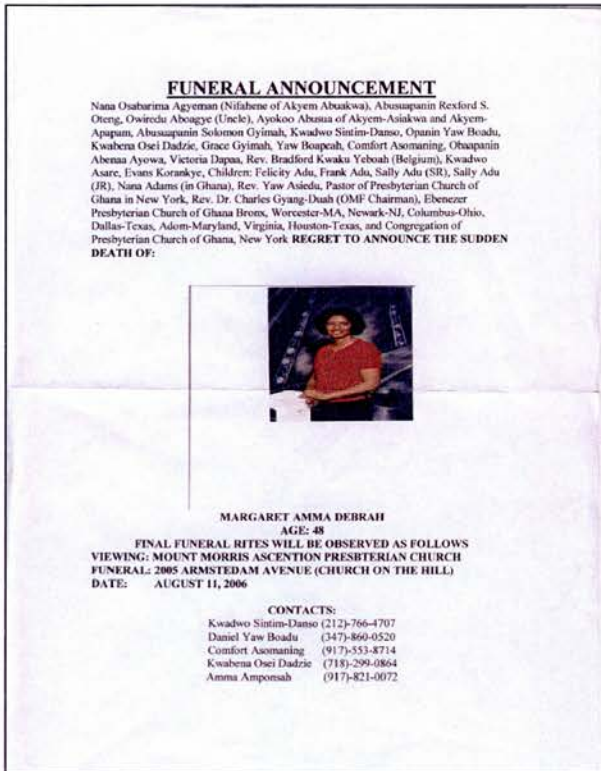


Fig. 2.4 Funeral Announcement for Margaret Amma Debrah, distributed during church service. 2006

If an immediate struggle for life led the church into its formation, a longer story of Ghanaian communal life in New York offers the larger context. For more than a decade, Ghanaian immigrants in the metropolitan areas had gathered for “Naming ceremonies, Birthday Parties, Infant Baptisms, and Funerals. Presbyterians from Ghana who were present at some of these gatherings sang Church Hymns and Songs.”³⁶ When in 1982 Mama Ohemeng put out her call for prayer, she knew whom to call. During the months that followed, prayer meetings continued, and concerns coalesced around a commitment to form a Presbyterian Church of Ghana congregation in New York City.

³⁵ Yaw Asiedu, Interview, March 9, 2004.

Events and aspirations culminated “in the summer of 1985” when “a meeting was held at 310 Convent Avenue New York City to discuss the possibilities of starting a Presbyterian church. Rev. S.K. Aboa a former Ecumenical Secretary of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana who attended the meeting, advised the meeting to form a branch of the mother church in New York.”³⁷ This was considered the founding meeting, and those in attendance - Margaret Ohemeng, Bediako Yirenkyi, E. Adum Kwapong, Yaw Asideu, Thelma Annan, Frank Sakyamah, Kumi and Mrs. Dwamena, Joseph and Mrs. Boateng with their son Calvert, and Seth Osseo-Asare - are publicly recognized as the founding members of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York.³⁸ Rev. Dr. Kumi Dwamena, a member of this core group, became the first pastor. Many other individuals were involved in the church from virtually the beginning, so the circle of people with a historical stake in the New York work is much larger than just the founders. Lay leadership, especially that of women, was crucial to the church’s genesis.

The new church’s first official worship service was held on Sunday, November 24, 1985 at Broadway Presbyterian Church, located near Columbia University. Here they worshipped for five years, meeting three times a month, until moving to Mount Morris Ascension Presbyterian Church (PCUSA), on the western side of Marcus Garvey Park at 122nd street in central Harlem. “Mount Morris,” as the elegant church is known, Harlem’s “last Romanesque Revival church,” was built in 1905.³⁹ In 2001, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York acquired the old Police Athletic League building on 123rd Street, using it for offices and meetings while maintaining Mount Morris Ascension Presbyterian Church as their primary worship location.

³⁶ *Okristoni (The Christian) Pictorial Journal of Ghana Presbyterian Church, U.S.A Tenth Anniversary Celebration, 1995.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

As choir member Nana Afwireng explains, “Whatever we do here, we do it this way when we worship at home.”⁴⁰ With but the slightest of adaptations, taken, I was assured, only after consultation with denominational headquarters, the structures and polity of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana are reproduced in their entirety in New York City.⁴¹ Organizational life is based on the *Presbyterian Church of Ghana Constitution*, and the committees and operations follow the *Presbyterian Church of Ghana Manual of Order*. As noted in the previous chapter, leadership is based in the elders or session, which has a Senior Presbyter, and the pastor who is also part of the session. Just as in Ghana, nearly everyone belongs to a committee, group, or choir: the Men’s Fellowship, Women’s Fellowship, Bible Study and Prayer group, Young People’s Guild (Y.P.G), Singing Band, Church Band, and Church Choir.

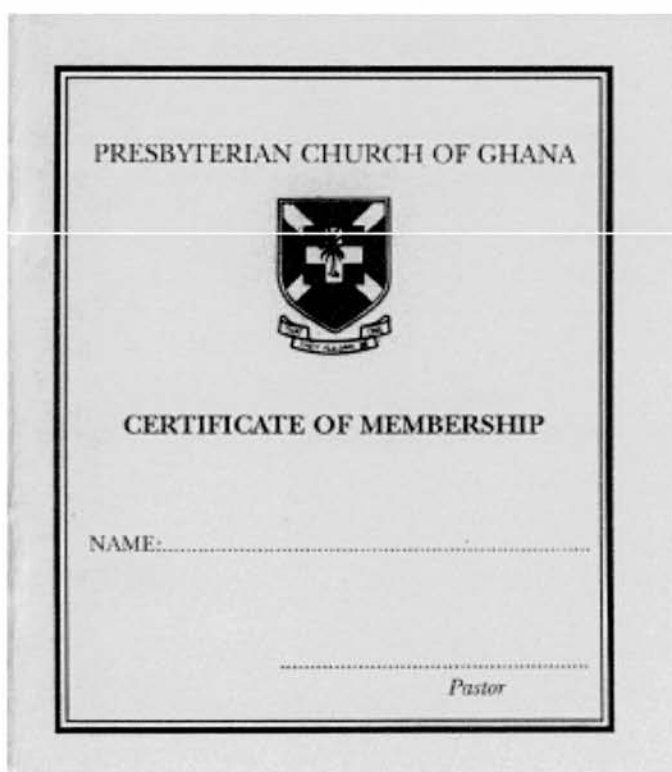


Fig. 2.5 Presbyterian Church of Ghana Certificate of Membership

³⁹ Michael Henry Adams, *Harlem Lost and Found: An Architectural and Social History, 1765-1915* (New York: The Monacelli, 2002), 192.

⁴⁰ Nana Afwireng, Interview, August 13, 2006.

⁴¹ Yaw Asiedu, Interview, September 13, 2007.

Each member has a Presbyterian Church of Ghana Certificate of Membership booklet. It looks like a smaller yellow passport, and is equally indispensable for church members. Wherever they go around the world, this membership book moves with them.⁴² On the first page is a place for a photograph, while the next page records personal information such as birth, baptism, confirmation, and marriage. Immediately following then are page after page with two columns - one column is for "Communion" with a place for the date and the pastor's signature, and the other column is for "Payments" with a place for the date, tithe, and signature. Communion Sunday attracts the largest numbers, and members either sign a registry book when they arrive or leave their cards with the clerk. The cards are then kept together in the church office, where Rev. Asiedu signs them after each communion service. Each member therefore has a record of their church activity that is portable to any Presbyterian Church in Ghana congregation, whether in New York or Ghana. Tithes paid in Harlem count as tithes made in Ghana.⁴³ When a member dies and is sent back home to Ghana, "the [membership] card is referred to the family" so they can receive a church funeral.⁴⁴

Perhaps the most important committee of the church in New York City is the "Welfare Committee." Established to provide assistance for members in good standing, a written document spells out in great detail pastoral services and financial commitments when it comes to births, outdoorings (baby naming ceremonies), children, adults, hospitalization, and funerals.⁴⁵ In this way, members share a common economic commitment to one another.

⁴² Moses Biney, Interview, June 10, 2005.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Yaw Asiedu, Interview, July 16, 2005.

⁴⁵ Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York, "Welfare By-Laws," 2007.

Funerals, like that of church member Margaret Amma Debrah, provide a vivid picture of the transnational life of the church.⁴⁶ When in early July 2006 Margaret Amma Debrah passed from this earthly life to the next at the young age of forty-six, it is up to her church to plan and conduct and pay for her funeral, hold an all-night vigil, raise money from each member to pay for the funeral and return her body home to Ghana. Rev. Asiedu will be in Ghana to share in the final burial rites. A committee of fellow “Saturday Borns” - Kwames and Ammas - is formed to make the necessary arrangements, and when the funeral date in New York is finalized, a flyer is produced and distributed inviting church members and Ghanaians in New York. The women in the church purchase a dress for her, and on the day of the funeral, prepare Margaret Deborah’s body for viewing.⁴⁷

The Sunday before the funeral rites, the pastor Rev. Yaw Asiedu makes a short speech to the entire congregation.⁴⁸ Margaret Amma Debrah was a church member he reminded them, and the church was her only family in New York City. “This is our problem. Let us all join hands and support ourselves,” he explained. “We would do it for you.” To emphasize this, Rev. Asiedu offers an analogy with an insurance company. “Allstate has a motto. ‘Help us to help you.’ You are in very good hands if you play your part well.” He is making the point that for the interdependence of church members to work, everyone must do their part.

The funeral begins on the afternoon of August 11, 2006, with a viewing at Mount Morris Ascension Presbyterian Church. Led by Rev. Asiedu and Rev. Dr. Charles Guang-Duah, a formal church service is conducted at 7:00 p.m. After a break of several hours, the final funeral rites held in New York move uptown to Cocoa House in the Bronx, a hall next to an all-night laundry and a billiard hall, outside which the lively tempos of merengue music pulsate on the night streets. Inside Cocoa House,

⁴⁶ Church Services of July 30, 2006 and August 6, 2006.

⁴⁷ Amma Amaponsah, Interview, August 14, 2005.

⁴⁸ Church Service, August 6, 2006.

the church elders sit at the far end of the room; the chief mourners sit at a slightly raised table on the far side; general mourners fill in the rest of the room. In the corner, a deejay backed by a stack of loud speakers plays music at a volume that makes conversation unlikely, but dancing required. Women carry around baskets with bottles of water and Snapple drinks. As the night grows, the room fills with church members and fellow Ghanaians.

After 3:00 a.m., all the Saturday Borns gather in a circle and then face the video camera, which has been recording what is now two days of mourning. With a framed picture of Margaret Debrah lifted high in the front to commemorate her life and Issac Akrah leading the way, a line dances around the room. With the morning sun soon to rise, people return home. But this is not the end of the story. A few weeks later in Accra, Ghana, Rev. Asiedu meets the family and the body at the airport. There is another funeral and then a burial, presided over by Rev. Asiedu. Margaret Debrah is now home.

A few days after the service, Nana Afwireng conveyed to me the importance of the funeral process: “When somebody dies, everybody contributes...we do it for each other so you do not suffer alone.” For this reason, the wider Ghanaian community in New York City joins in, including extended family members and hometown associations.⁴⁹ More than congeniality is at work.⁵⁰ Jimmy Ado, who is President of the church choir emphasized, “We always associate ourselves with a group so you know a group of people.” Otherwise, “you are on your own...we have to help ourselves.”⁵¹

⁴⁹ Ayse Caglar, “Hometown Associations, the Rescaling of State Spatiality and Migrant Grassroots Transnationalism,” *Global Networks* 6:1 (2006): 1-22.

⁵⁰ Nana Afwireng, Interview, August 13, 2006.

⁵¹ Jimmy Ado, Interview, August 13, 2006.

For the members of the Harlem congregation, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana accompanies them on their journey to New York City and “home” again to Ghana. Being “Presby,” the shorthand reference that they often use to describe themselves, is part of who they are as New Yorkers, Ghanaians, and Christians. Traditions of word and sacrament are merged with Charismatic forms of Ghanaian Christianity. The faith that has moved with church is not as a denominational or historical artifact, but as a living faith expressed in a community that knows how to care for the living and bury the dead.

A HOUSE OF PRAYER: THE CHURCH OF THE LORD (ALADURA)

As worshippers arrive, they remove their shoes and pile them up in the hallway; women are sure to cover their heads; most men and women will be wearing flowing white robes.⁵² These are signs of entering a holy place. With the ringing of a hand bell that announces the start of worship, Deacon David Rquarm begins the service at noon. The church sings a Thanksgiving hymn, known by its chorus, “For his mercies eye endure, Ever faithful, ever sure,” taken from the Church of the Lord (Aladura) hymnal.⁵³ Three white candles burn on the altar. The worshipping community moves into a confession of sin, followed by a recitation of Psalm 51. Thanksgiving is offered to the “God of our founding fathers” including Josiah Ositelu and E.O.A Adejobi.

Mother Cooper has arrived from upstairs where she lives and enters the altar area, a scared space within a sacred space, and she immediately kneels and begins to pray. Following a set liturgical pattern, it is time for the Victory Hymns, beginning with “And why should the saints be afraid.” Deacon David plays the congas, Mother Cooper swirls the calabash, another member pushes the shakers, and tambourines

⁵² Service of August 29, 2004.

⁵³ Unless otherwise noted, because the CLA hymns lack titles, I use the first lines for identification purposes, which is the manner used in *The Church of the Lord (Aladura) Worldwide English Hymn Book* (1993 edition). “Eye” is the correct spelling.

echo throughout the room. Singing “Oh my comrades! See the signal,” the church is expected to stand up for Jesus, and all are doing just that. Then the singing moves into the “Shouts,” choruses sung to rapid percussive movement. There are ten people in the service, but the effect is more like the voices and sounds of a multitude. Bodies sway to choruses that conclude with repetitions of “Thank you, Jehovah God.”



Fig. 2.6 Exterior of the House of Prayer, Church of the Lord (Aladura) in the Bronx. 2004

After an hour of singing and praying, the service breaks for a lengthy Bible lesson. More prayers and Bible readings follow along with a vision from Mother Cooper. The sermon, preached by Minister Joy Cooper-Chenoweth, a daughter of Mother Cooper, is titled “The Reason for Salvation,” and the lead biblical text is Matthew 7:7-8. “You must be born again,” Minister Joy emphasizes in her message. At her closing words, the congregation begins singing, “Who is on the Lord’s side/I am on the Lord’s side/The Lord is on my side.” Prayers are followed by the sung invitation to “Come and pay your tithes,” for which white offering envelopes are distributed. “Thank you for your protection....Thank you for your provision....Thank you for our breathing....Thank you for provision,” is the sung response. “Children of the Lord shall come,” everyone now sings and the children present come forward to be anointed with oil. Following a closing hymn and benediction, all face the altar and every voice in the room offers seven “Hallelujahs,” seven “Hosannas,” seven “Uhrahs,” and seven “laughters.” Nearly four hours after beginning, the service now

ends, visitors are greeted, and members begin to catch up on the week. The candles have burned down to their base.

The Church of the Lord (Aladura) in the Bronx is a branch of the Church of the Lord (Aladura) Worldwide, headquartered in Ogere, Nigeria. “Aladura” refers to “prayer churches,”⁵⁴ a term specific to the Church of the Lord but also a more general frame of religious reference for a family of Yoruba independent churches in Nigeria. A Yoruba word, “aladura” is variously translated as “people of prayer” and “praying people.” In 2007, the church identified 2,124 branches worldwide, with 1,000 branches in Nigeria numerically followed by 500 branches in Liberia.⁵⁵ Our focus church in the Bronx is also the first North American branch of this worldwide movement.

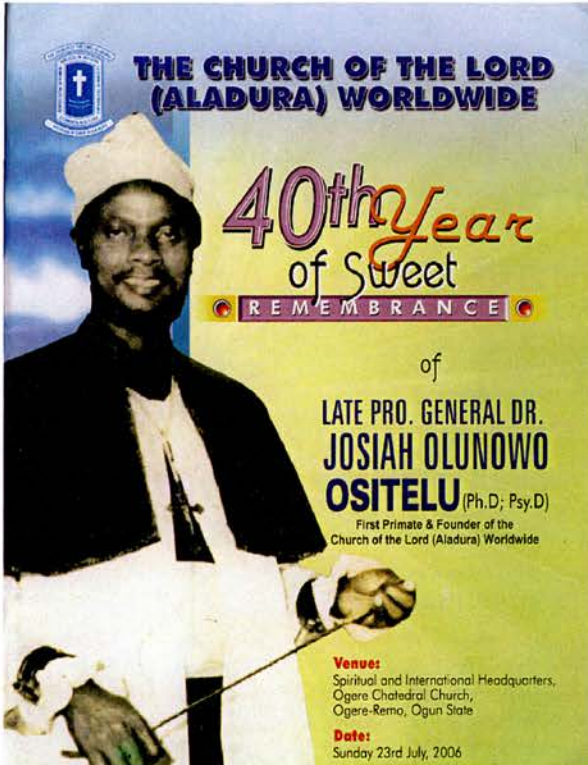


Fig. 2.7 Church of the Lord (Aladura) 40th Year Remembrance. 2006

⁵⁴ Robin Horton, “African Conversion,” *Africa* 41:2 (1971): 85.

⁵⁵ E-mail correspondence with Primate Rufus Ositelu, May 3, 2007. Within the U.S. there are between three and six branches directly under the Church of the Lord (Aladura), including Philadelphia, Rhode Island, Worcester, and Washington, D. C. (*Church Man’s Calendar 2004*, 24th issue, Church of the Lord (Aladura) World-Wide). There is, however, apparently flux with some churches and their relationship to church leadership.

The story of the Church of the Lord (Aladura) begins in Nigeria in the 1920s with its founder Josiah Olunowo Ositelu (1902-1966).⁵⁶ As Harold Turner recounts in his seminal study on the Church of the Lord (Aladura), during the time Josiah Ositelu was in training for the Anglican ministry,⁵⁷ he underwent a series of visions and dreams that revealed his life was in conflict with evil forces, but also that God's call and power would surpass them.⁵⁸ He turned away from charms to what Turner calls a "simple gospel of faith in God alone, with prayer and fasting." This formula "became the working basis of the church that Oshitelu subsequently founded."⁵⁹ Having found spiritual affirmation and authority outside institutional boundaries brought Ositelu into conflict with the Anglican Church. When it led to his dismissal, he joined an emerging group of Aladura Christian prophets and leaders including Joseph Babalola and Moses Orimolade, who were also creating new religious societies.⁶⁰ Continuing with prayer, fasting, and all the while receiving visions, Ositelu formally inaugurated the Church of the Lord (Aladura) in Ogere, Nigera in July 1930.⁶¹ At the time, Ositelu was just twenty-eight years old.

In 1947 Ositelu sent Apostle S. O. Odulowe (d. 1965), one of his most trusted apostles in Nigeria, to Liberia to establish the work of the church, arriving in Monrovia on April 3, 1947.⁶² The Barclays, a prominent Liberian family, played a

⁵⁶ Throughout this thesis, unless quoting a published source, Ositelu will be spelt thus. In both official church literature and secondary sources, the spelling varies between "Oshitelu" and "Ositelu."

⁵⁷ Harold W. Turner, *African Independent Church, volume I, History of an African Independent Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 52-53.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ For early background as well as additional introduction to Aladura Christianity, see Turner, *History of an African Independent Church*, 1-34; Rufus Okikiolaolu Olubiyi Ositelu, *African Instituted Churches: Diversities, Growth, Gifts, Spirituality and Ecumenical Understanding of African Initiated Churches* (Munster: LIT Verlag, 2002); J. D. Y. Peel, *Aladura: A Religious Movement Among the Yoruba* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), Benjamin C. Ray, "Aladura Christianity: A Yourba Religion," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 23:3 (1993): 266-291; and Horton, "African Conversion."

⁶¹ Ositelu, *African Instituted Churches*, 127, and Turner *African Independent Church, volume I*, 53, 55 dates the inception at 1931.

⁶² For an account of the history, see Turner, *African Independent Church, Volume I*, 133-147.

formative role in providing the invitation to Ositelu that would lead to the establishment of the church in Liberia. While they eventually had differences with Oduwole, including the use of their home for worship, and would part ways, the Barclay family saw to the church's beginning.⁶³ For even when their house was no longer available, the Barclay's provided land on which Oduwole could build a new church structure.⁶⁴

Through organizing, preaching, and healing, Oduwole built the Church of the Lord (Aladura) in Liberia.⁶⁵ Samuel Britt assesses that Oduwole's efforts helped to make the Church of the Lord (Aladura) "the most successful new African church in Liberia."⁶⁶ Respect for Oduwole's work by Liberians remains high, and despite his murder in Liberia,⁶⁷ the work of the Church of the Lord (Aladura) continues quite strong, as I noted above, with a reported 500 branches.⁶⁸ While the Church of the Lord (Aladura) would continue to grow in Nigeria and expand not only to Liberia but elsewhere in Africa, including Ghana and Sierra Leone, and eventually reach outside of Africa to London in 1964⁶⁹ (making it one of the first African Independent Churches in Europe), the church was unable to establish a presence in North America. This was to begin to change in 1984.

It was planned for Oduwole to eventually go to the United States, but he was never able to do so.⁷⁰ However, a member of his Liberian province, Marie Cooper,

⁶³ Ibid., 136-143.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 143.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 137-157.

⁶⁶ Samuel Irving Britt, "The Children of Salvation: Struggle and Cosmology in Liberian Prophet Churches" (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 1992), 19.

⁶⁷ His murder by a "deranged" man seeking healing is seen by some as martyrdom. For an account of his death see Britt, "The Children of Salvation," 57-58.

⁶⁸ Email correspondence with Primate Ositelu, May 3, 2007

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Turner, *African Independent Church, volume I*, 150. From oral histories, there appear to have been a number of early attempts, including one by the second Primate Adejobi, to establish a branch in the United States.

eventually went in 1984, and with her came the Church of the Lord (Aladura). The nucleus of what would become the Bronx congregation was present as regular participants in the prayer group, which included David Quarm, Joy Markine Cooper (Chenoweth), Eleanor Campbell, Sarah Richards, Edwin Flowers, and Esther Mulbah. Mother Cooper and Sarah Kerulah became acquainted with one another in Liberia through the Gates of Heaven, a women's prayer group.⁷¹

As the prayer group continued meeting in New York, Mother Cooper wrote to the Apostle Thomas, then head of the Liberian see. That Mother Cooper is Liberian, as are most of the other members of the Bronx group, directly connects the church to the early expansion of the Church of the Lord (Aladura) from Nigeria to Liberia, where today the church appears to remain quite strong. References are regularly made in the Bronx parish to the "Cathedral on Centre Street" or even just "Centre Street," both identifications of the Church of the Lord (Aladura) cathedral located in the capital city Monrovia. Centre Street is also the location of the provincial headquarters of the church in Liberia. Responding to the news of the Bronx prayer group, Apostle Thomas encouraged them to move toward becoming a church. During a visit in 1994 to New York by the then Primate Gabriel Oshitelu, a son of the founder, the prayer group became a church.⁷²

For the Apostle Thomas, the founding of the Bronx branch was the fulfilment of the vision that Apostle Oduwole and Liberia would play a role in the church's expansion to North America. Writing to Mother Cooper in 1995, he observed, "For your kindness and concern we will continue to pray for the growth, development and success of your activities in the United States in fulfilment of the desire of the late

⁷¹ Organized prayer groups are considered a significant form of Christian activity in Liberia and have followed into the Liberian Christian community in New York. They may offer an alternative form of church life, especially for women.

⁷² Marie Cooper, Interview, May 12, 2005.

Apostle S.O. Oduwole which Providence has designated you to perform in his place.”⁷³

The Bronx parish faithfully reproduces broader Church of the Lord (Aladura) patterns of worship, leadership, and spiritual life.⁷⁴ Week after week, a complex of twenty-two worship components is performed in the Bronx.⁷⁵ But the fixed liturgical range is combined with spontaneity of testimony, healing, prayer, prophecy, and sermon, all ultimately conducted, it is stated, under the direction of the Holy Spirit. The organizational structure in New York follows established Church of the Lord (Aladura) patterns, reflecting its hierarchical approach to formal leadership and importance of titles. The Church of the Lord (Aladura) in New York City maintains the church’s practices, including the Taborrar, a distinctive season of spiritual focus and renewal. Members consistently reflect on the biblical foundations, traditions of their church that have shaped them, and the Liberian Christian milieu. In relationship to the Nigerian foundations of the church, members view themselves very positively as part of a larger body of faith.

We may be “a little place, but we have gifts here,” Mother Cooper is wont to comment. One of the gifts given by God to the church is the voice of God. God speaks through visions, dreams, and holy words. This stands in contrast to the wider church and urban world. “You know people [are] thinking God [is] not speaking anymore...which means God [is] not existing anymore,” Mother Cooper reasoned.⁷⁶

⁷³ Correspondence from Cathedral Headquarters in Monrovia to Marie Cooper, December 26, 1995.

⁷⁴ For an internal benchmark, see Rufus Ositelu, *African Instituted Churches*.

⁷⁵ Church of the Lord (Aladura), *The Handbook of Liturgy* (Lagos: The Publication Committee, n.d.).

⁷⁶ Marie Cooper, Interview, August 29, 2004.

More than half of the core membership is female, and women provide the primary leadership.⁷⁷ The people who attend services are predominately Liberian and many are family members. Minister Joy, the daughter of Mother Cooper, was birthed in a Church of the Lord (Aladura) faith home in Liberia, so she has been a member her entire life. Yet there is also diversity to the congregation, with one member from Ghana, one African American woman, and until recently, a Nigerian. There are no great financial means among the members, and many depend on healing received at church to survive.



Fig. 2.8 Eleanor Campbell and Edwin Flowers, Church of the Lord (Aladura). 2004

Sarah Richards came to New York City from Liberia in 1987, having lived in Houston first for a year. For Sarah, the Church of the Lord (Aladura) has been an enduring part of her life. Born in Liberia, she spent part of her childhood living with the Barclays, the same family who were responsible for introducing the Church of the Lord (Aladura) to Liberia. Her parents were Lutheran, and the Barclays were Baptist. Sarah's sister, a minister at the Centre Street Cathedral of the Church of the Lord (Aladura) brought about her involvement in the church. Faced with "a problem only God could solve," her sister pressed, "What will Jesus do for you?" In

⁷⁷ For a discussion of gender in the Church of the Lord (Aladura), see Deidre Helen Crumbley, "'Power in the Blood': Menstrual Taboos and Women's Power in an African Instituted Church," in *Women and Religion in the African Diaspora: Knowledge, Power, and Performance* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 81-97, and "Patriarchies, Prophets, and Procreation: Sources of Gender Practices in Three African Churches," *Africa* 73:4 (2003): 587-588.

other words, the Church of the Lord (Aladura) helped her solve her problems. Upon moving to New York, Sarah came to the Bronx church after learning about Mother Cooper. I “want to go where the Spirit will be free,” she offers. Today Sarah is an active participant in all aspects of the Bronx church.⁷⁸

David Rquarm is the first person you are likely to meet and hear at the Church of the Lord (Aladura). That is because David is always there before the service, setting the room up, and because he plays the conga drums. He also serves as a deacon in the church and is apt to take up the offering and distribute hymnals. A quiet man in his forties, David is originally from Ghana but has lived in New York more than ten years. The Church of the Lord (Aladura) is not only his church home, but often his physical home. When he needed a place to live, Mother Cooper provided him with a room in the House of Prayer, and he has lived there for over five years. David sees God providing for him through the church.⁷⁹



Fig. 2.9 Primate Rufus Ositelu and Mother Cooper during a visit to the church. 2006

The current Primate of the Church of the Lord (Aladura), Rufus Ositelu, maintains personal contact with Mother Cooper by telephone and usually visits the church in

⁷⁸ Sarah Richards, Interview, December 12, 2004.

⁷⁹ David Rquarm, Interview, December 19, 2004.

New York on a yearly basis. During his New York visits, the Primate meets with church leaders and may also conduct installations to church office. Rufus Ositelu is the fourth Church of the Lord (Aladura) Primate and third Primate from the Ositelu family. Amiable and respected for his pastoral life, he brings to the role a background in computer science. Perhaps because of this background, Primate Rufus Ositelu is perceived to be developing the church for the challenges of the 21st century.

A broad sense of being part of a much larger church is displayed through the weekly recitation of the Apostles Creed, perhaps the most universal of Christian statements of faith; prayers for Christians around the city and world and not just for the Church of the Lord (Aladura); and the display of pictures of Christ that reflect Catholic and Protestant portraiture. More globally, the Church of the Lord (Aladura) is a member of the World Council of Churches.

A theology of the cross pervades the Bronx church, visually and in their teaching. Crosses are visible everywhere in the sanctuary and the worship service - a gold processional cross stands next to the pulpit, a cross is built into the wooden pulpit, a picture of Jesus bleeding on the cross is posted over the altar, and a cross is embroidered into the cloth that covers the altar table. Moreover, Mother Cooper and other leaders each grasp in hand a simple brown wooden cross during prayer. Symbolized in these crosses is a life that combats the forces of Satan through the cross of Jesus. For the Church of the Lord (Aladura), the cross fights off the spiritual forces of oppression and creates space for the healing salve of God.

The Church of the Lord (Aladura) in New York City is fulfilling a historic vision of expansion while attending to the spiritual needs of people. When people gather, they do so in the routines that have been established as an independent African Christian movement. Their faith is a source of guidance and strength for the journey of life and faith.

DO SOMETHING NEW IN MY LIFE: REDEEMED CHRISTIAN CHURCH OF GOD INTERNATIONAL CHAPEL, BROOKLYN



Fig 2.10 “Celebrate Jesus” Sunday at the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn. 2006

Like clockwork, at 10:30 a.m., song leader Omo Obogbaimhe steps to the front of the sanctuary of the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn.⁸⁰ The choir moves into place behind her as well as a band comprised of an electronic keyboard player and several drummers. The Sunday school classes that have been meeting in the sanctuary quickly wrap up. The room, once an abandoned warehouse, now carpeted and brightly painted, soon fills with over 200 worshippers who come dressed in an array of western and Nigerian attire; most of the women have their heads covered with wide brimmed hats or wraps. A PowerPoint projector displays the lyrics onto a large screen, and with hands lifted high, the room is soon swaying joyously to the music. Strung together as continuous song loops that put Jesus in the fore, the church sings: “Blessed be the name of the Lord,” “Jesus is my firm foundation,” “I am here for the Lord,” and “Jesus is the Mighty God.” A pause to offer a clap offering for the Lord is followed by more songs that offer adoration to Jesus.

⁸⁰ Service of October 10, 2004.

After thirty minutes of singing, Bola Oyesanya, a minister in the church, announces that it is “testimony time, blessing time.” Today is the annual “Fruit of the Womb” Sunday and to frame the occasion, Bola reads Psalm 127:3, which says, “Sons are indeed a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward.” All of the parents with children under twelve months are told to gather in the back of the room, thirteen parents in all, and then together dance down the center aisle, singing the chorus “I have a reason to praise the Lord.” Next, all expectant women are invited to join them, and three do so as “Come and see what the Lord has done” is sung spontaneously.

Pastor Nimi Wariboko now steps forward and commands the service, calling forward those seeking “fruit of the womb.” He recalls the difficulties his Nigerian mother faced in having children, and how after listening to the directives of a Pentecostal minister who commanded her and his father to dance, the result nine months later was his birth. “You can do it for us...you did it for my mother...you did it for others...let the miracle of pregnancy” occur, Pastor Nimi prays. When finished, he shakes hands with the many who had crowded up in the front seeking the fruit of the womb.

As people return to their seats, Pastor Wariboko begins his sermon, titled “The Power of the Spirit.” “When the Spirit of God sets in...he will just [make changes] happen.” In the “world you live in the world of facts,” but God can transcend this world of doctors and create a new womb, even overrule a coroner’s determination of death. Because of the Spirit, there is a new power inside of you, Wariboko proclaims. “If Paul and Peter can do it, I can do it.” As the sermon nears its ending, the pastor calls upon everyone to pray, and church becomes filled with multiple voices at once, with English and tongues audible. Speaking over hundreds of people loudly praying to God, Pastor Nimi continually repeats, “He will do it again” and statements such as “Our God is glorious and powerful.” He then sings, “Holy Spirit come...Holy Ghost do it again in my life,” words that draw in the congregation as they reaffirm the heart of his sermon.

More prayers, announcements, and the offering follow, and then everyone who is celebrating a birthday, a “born again birthday,” or an anniversary is invited to come forward. Person by person, Pastor Nimi asks each individual what they are celebrating, then prays for the group. This Sunday, because of the special “fruit of the womb” occasion, a large array of fruits has been placed in settings in front of the church, and the pastor invites the celebrants to take some. Visitors are now asked to stand, and after being welcomed, are ushered to a room for an evangelistic orientation to the church. As the ministers file off the platform to the pastor’s office and workers’ room, the congregation shares together in pronouncing the benediction. Everyone is then invited to take home with them pieces of sugar cane, bananas, oranges, and other fruits that fill the bowls. Though it is now early afternoon, few leave. As children play, people are providing counsel on a job search, offering a word of prayer for a problem, and catching up on life.

Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn is a branch of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), a global ministry founded in Nigeria in 1951.⁸¹ Redeemed refers to itself as a “ministry,” conveying a more dynamic sensibility than “denomination.” Today the Redeemed Christian Church of God is considered the fastest growing Pentecostal church in Nigeria and Africa. No two answers are the same on the total number of RCCG parishes worldwide, but according to their Web site, there are now “over four million members in about 3,000

⁸¹ Asonzeh Franklin-Kennedy Ukah, “The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Nigeria. Local Identities and Global Processes in African Pentecostalism” (PhD diss., Bayreuth, 2003), and “Mobilities, Migration and Multiplication: The Expansion of the Religious Field of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Nigeria,” in *Religion in the Context of African Migration*, eds. Afe Adogame and Cordula Weissköppel (Bayreuth: Eckhard Breitingner, 2005), 317-341; Ruth Marshall, “God is Not a Democrat’: Pentecostalism and Democratisation in Nigeria,” in *The Christian Churches and the Democratisation of Africa*, ed. Paul Gifford (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 254-256; Stephen Hunt and Nicola Lightly, “The British Black Pentecostal ‘Revival’: Identity and Belief in the ‘New’ Nigerian Churches,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 24:1 (2001): 104-124; Stephen Hunt, “‘A Church for All Nations’”: The Redeemed Christian Church of God,” *Pneuma* 24, no. 2 (2002): 185-204; Afe Adogame, “Contesting the Ambivalences of Modernity in a Global Context: The Redeemed Christian Church of God, North America,” *Studies in World Christianity* 10:1 (2004): 25-48; Olufunke Adeboye, “‘Arrowhead’ of Nigerian Pentecostalism: The Redeemed Christian Church of God, 1952-2005,” *Pneuma* 29 (2007): 24-58.

parishes all over the world.”⁸² The *World Christian Encyclopedia* cites 2,220 Redeemed parishes in Nigeria,⁸³ while leaders within the church indicate problems in tracking growth and believe the number of parishes to be closer to 5,000 in Nigeria alone, with more branches in other parts of Africa, Europe, and the United States.⁸⁴ By 2008 there were more than 300 branches in North America.⁸⁵

The founder of the Redeemed Christian Church of God is Reverend Josiah (“Papa” or “Pa” in the church’s literature) Akindayomi (1909-1980). Baptized by the Church Missionary Society in 1927, Akindayomi joined the Cherubim and Seraphim movement, an Aladura church, in 1931. Fostered by discontent with Cherubim and Seraphim and following a “vision” and “call” from God, Papa Akindayomi held the first Redeemed service in Lagos in 1952. At the time of his death in 1980, there were thirty-nine branches in Nigeria, and at that time the church identified itself as an African Independent Church (AIC).⁸⁶

Enoch Adejare Adeboye, a mathematics professor at the time, was Akindayomi’s chosen successor to lead the Redeemed Christian Church of God after his death. Adeboye has not merely continued the founder’s legacy but built the Redeemed Christian Church of God into a major force in Nigeria and a global movement.⁸⁷ Referred to by his position as the Redeemed Christian Church of God General Overseer, Adeboye is also called the G.O. and Daddy G.O; his wife is referred to as Mummy or Mummy G.O. Asonzeh Ukah takes up Max Weber’s language to suggest that Adeboye did not simply bring a process of “routinisation” after the passing of the founding charismatic leader, but rather “refounded” the ministry in a manner

⁸² Redeemed Christian Church of God Website, <http://www.rccg.org/>.

⁸³ David B. Barrett, George T. Kurian, and Todd M. Johnson, *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 554

⁸⁴ James Fadele, Interview, March 21, 2004

⁸⁵ Redeemed Christian Church of God website, <http://www.rccgna.org/>.

⁸⁶ Ukah, “The Redeemed Christian Church of God,” 1.

more like “recharismatisation,” represented in the emergence of a new formative figure.⁸⁸ The “G.O.” is not physically present in Brooklyn, but he has a presence, and not just through his picture, which hangs prominently in the pastor’s office. He is listed on the front of each week’s bulletin as the General Overseer of the ministry and parish and his signature refrain “Let Somebody Shout Hallelujah!” is one of Pastor Wariboko’s stock phrases as he speaks from the pulpit.

The first service of the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn in March 1998 took place in a rented space on Flatbush and Avenue D, with thirteen people in attendance. Later the same year they relocated to another location on Flatbush, this one between Avenues I and J.⁸⁹ Flatbush Avenue is a major hub of social and commercial life in the densely populated African American, West Indian, and African community of Flatbush and the surrounding section of Brooklyn. Beginning in 2000, the church began renting an abandoned warehouse at 672 Parkside Avenue, between Rogers and Nostrand Avenues, and soon the congregation grew to some 200 people. The first time I visited the church it was winter and kerosene heaters were placed throughout the room. Renovations to the building came about over time, and the presence of the church visibly contributed to the physical and economic redevelopment of the immediate inner city neighbourhood.⁹⁰

Pastors Olu and Elsie Obed established the Redeemed Christian Church of God in New York City in 1995. Believing that God had called him and his wife, Elsie, to start a Redeemed church in New York City, Pastor Olu Obed rented a conference room of the Pennsylvania Hotel, on Seventh Avenue across the street from Madison Square Garden and transported the sound system on the subway to the first service.

⁸⁷ Ibid. See also Ruth Marshall-Fratani, “Mediating the Global and Local in Nigerian Pentecostalism” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28:3 (1998): 278-315.

⁸⁸ Ukah, “The Redeemed Christian Church of God,” 104-107.

⁸⁹ Wapemi Wariboko, Interview, May 29, 2005.

⁹⁰ Here I reach a potentially different conclusion on the economic role of churches in inner city neighborhoods than Omar M. McRobert’s important study, *Streets of Glory: Church and Community in a Black Urban Neighborhood* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

In order to attract a new demographic of young Christian converts in the Nigerian universities who would go on to be a future professional class,⁹¹ the Redeemed Christian Church of God added a new type of parish called the “model parish” to go along with the “classical” parish.⁹² “Classical” parishes, following the original style of worship that goes back to Akindayomi, employ the Yoruba language for services and are considered very traditional style within the Redeemed Christian Church of God. Taking a different tack, the “model” parish, which got its start in the 1980s, embraces English and has adopted more contemporary music and worship practices that appeal to a younger, more formally educated, and aspiring population.



Fig. 2.11 Michel Onyeri and Ossai Chegwe, workers in the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn, 2007

From the beginning, the Brooklyn congregation has developed in the form of a model parish, using only English and oriented to new immigrants trying to succeed in New York.⁹³ At the same time, the Brooklyn parish church is steeped in the strong moral order of holiness associated with the Redeemed Christian Church of God, which ranges from modest dress, an eschewal of wedding bands, and strict personal, ethical conduct.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Matthews A. Ojo, “The Charismatic Movement in Nigeria Today,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 19:3 (1995): 114-118.

⁹² For a description, see Ukah, “The Redeemed Christian Church of God,” 129-137.

⁹³ Olu Obed, Interview, February 18, 2004.

⁹⁴ As noted by Matthews Ojo, this holiness theme is prominent in Nigerian Pentecostalism. See Matthews Ojo, “African Charismatics” in *Encyclopedia of African and African-American Religion*, ed. Stephen Glazier (Great Barrington: Routledge, 2001), 2-6. At the same time, holiness is considered

Holiness, sanctification, and a new identity in Christ anchor the church’s identity, not “prosperity.” This is reflected in the church’s motto. Each Redeemed parish appears to have a motto, and the motto selected by the Brooklyn church is “Holiness, Excellence and Creativity.” The thematic biblical text for the church is Ephesians 3:20: “Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us.” In recognition of the motto’s prominence for the church, the Ephesians text and motto are printed on the cover of each week’s Sunday bulletin. Together, the motto and text lay out Pastor’s Nimi’s conviction that the church is there to “enable people to step into their God-given destiny.”⁹⁵

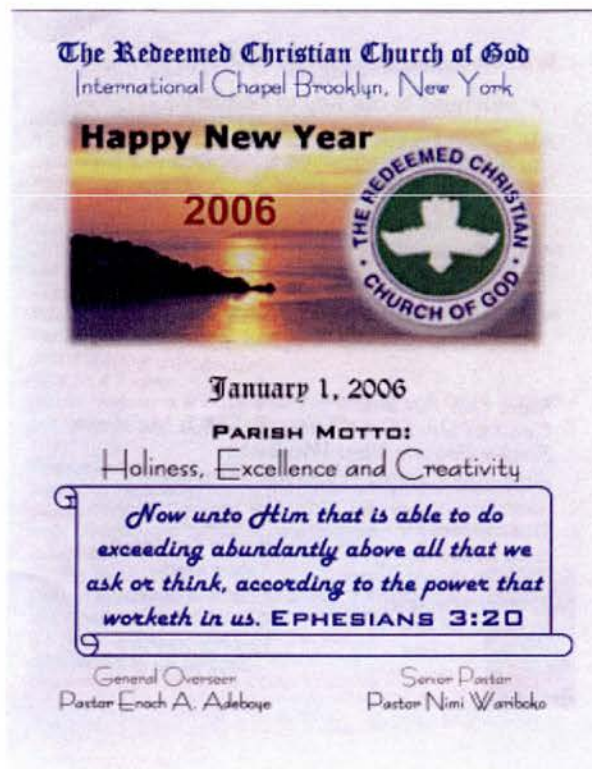


Fig. 2.12 Church Bulletin, Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn. 2006

by Ukah to be distinctive of the classical parish. Within the Brooklyn parish, there is the influence of more than one stream of Redeemed.

⁹⁵ Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn, Field Notes, June 1, 2007.

The Brooklyn parish is given flexibility in operations and decision making while also lining up with the structures and commitments of Redeemed churches everywhere. There are weekly Bible studies called Digging Deep, numerous monthly all-night vigils, and once a month the Sunday worship is a special Anointing service where God is expected to do particular wonders. Various church departments include the children's ministry, deliverance ministry, building committee, and hospitality. During the week, there are prayer vigils, home fellowship groups, Bible studies, "Expect a Miracle," and for a period a "Deliverance Workshop," all components of the Redeemed Christian Church of God that originated in Nigeria. The workers' program remains the backbone of the church.



Fig. 2.13 Sister West Erhaber, worker, Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn, in front of the church. 2007

Attendance at Sunday worship averages between 200 and 250, a number that declines periodically when members are sent to start a new congregation. But driven by a constant influx of new members and a core group that holds steady, the church always feels as if it is growing and not declining. It is often critically observed that women numerically outnumber men in African churches, but in the case of the Brooklyn parish, the gender mix is evenly split. Church members are almost exclusively Nigerian and predominately Yoruba, but there are also Hausa and Igbo members, including for the later, Pastor Wariboko. The church community appears to be young in age.

The word “international” at the end of its name and a collection of international flags posted at the front of the sanctuary reflect a desire to reach beyond Nigerians to the rest of New York City, as well as the immediate geographical community in Brooklyn, which is largely African American and West Indian.

Many of the reasons people give for coming to the Brooklyn parish are expressed by Emmanuel and Omo Obogbaimhe, who have been living in New York City for seven years.⁹⁶ Emmanuel can be found each week in the back of the sanctuary operating the sound system, and when she is not working, Omo sings in the choir and serves as leader. Emmanuel is in the corporate world, and in a public testimony, rare for his quiet nature, shares how his knowledge of German was a key in getting a major job. The church claps in response to his good news. When asked why he comes to the church, Emmanuel replies, “I know the power of God is here.” At first, Omo attended Times Square Church, a well-known Charismatic church in mid-town Manhattan. But “looking for family, home away from home,” she made her way to the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn. Here she worships God and church members help her and Emmanuel raise their children.

Members of the Brooklyn parish are not affluent, but striving to achieve an economic foothold in the city. A simple car test works - there are no Bentley’s or Mercedes’ parked at church on Sunday, just the usual New York City weathered family cars and vans; most appear to have been purchased used. Pastor Nimi aims all of the resources of the church in helping people achieve success in the city. Yet the “destiny” and “success” toward which believers strive is the use of their skills and gifts for advancement, leading to a better life and the praise of God. This is reinforced at the monthly Anointing service, where the sermon usually culminates with Pastor Nimi personally praying for and laying hands on much of the congregation. Under the power mediated by the touch and breath of the pastor,

⁹⁶ Emmanuel Obogbaimhe, Interview, April 10, 2005, and Omo Obogbaimhe, Interview, May 22, 2005.

people sway and fall. Workers stand behind them to break the fall and to cover the legs of women on the floor with a cloth. If someone is intensely under the power of the Spirit, they may be carried into an adjoining room.

A sense of impossible always on the cusp of possibility suffuses both the worship and ordinary life of the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn. This is due to a belief that Jesus' resurrection is powerfully operative in all areas of life, a result that comes from being "born again." Church members see themselves enfolded into the story of Pentecost. The Redeemed Christian Church of God logo or brand is instructive in the regard. Set on the wall behind the pulpit, it is a dove descending, symbolizing the Spirit that came upon Christ at his baptism.⁹⁷ At the church, the focus of the Spirit is a comprehensive redemption for the born again believer. Monthly anointing services emphasize the empowerment of the Spirit for life in the city.

Speaking in tongues, a practice closely associated with Pentecostalism, can be present at any service, but is not a primary characteristic of worship services. In descriptions of Pentecostalism, it is the Holy Spirit who is given the greatest theological and cultural emphasis. At the Brooklyn church, the Spirit is described as opening the heavens and making life anew in the church, and the fire of the Spirit is invoked as a basis for worship. Yet linguistically, Jesus is most central and pervades the singing, testifying, and praying of the church. People sing to Jesus, pray to Jesus, exult in Jesus' victory, turn to Jesus' power, hope in Jesus, and talk to Jesus.⁹⁸ The theme verse of the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel comes from Hebrews and is highly instructive in this regard: "Jesus is the same yesterday,

⁹⁷ For a thorough interpretation of the "brand," see Ukah, "The Redeemed Christian Church of God," 204-207. The biblical image comes from Luke 3:22.

⁹⁸ This stress on worshipping Jesus resonates with New Testament patterns. See here the important work of Larry Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003). Although not focused on Pentecostal churches, for relevant insights see the work of Diane B. Stinton, "Jesus-Immanuel, Image of the Invisible God: Aspects of Popular Christology in Sub-Saharan Africa," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 1 (2007): 6-40, and *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christology* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004).

today, and tomorrow.”⁹⁹ “Today” brings the immanence of Jesus strongly into the present. Because Jesus spans all of time, his earthly life and work bear directly on present circumstances. There is no liturgical calendar, but instead a strong sense that the beginning of a new year brings afresh the possibility of attaining a “new level” in life.¹⁰⁰ As we will see in chapter 4, this is part of the reason why February is a month of fasting across Redeemed churches worldwide.

Contrary to another common perception concerning Pentecostalism but in symmetry with an emphasis on here and now, on the congregational level millennial expectations are recessed in the background. Christ will return, and perhaps soon, but this expectation is not a prevalent theme in the church. Heaven, hell, and eternal life are considered very real and incorporated into conversations and public statements, but little is said about a future hope of believers as a motive for the Christian life; apocalyptic pronouncements are absent. One reason may be because so much of the future is already realized in the present and active power of Jesus of Nazareth and the pervasive reach of the resurrection. The Spirit vivifies the resurrected Jesus in the present and earthly day to day for church members, resulting in healing, promotions, deliverance, and success.

Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn is a community in the heart of Brooklyn where people are empowered by God to move forward in their new lives in New York City. They are followers of Jesus who find their lives in the worship and life-giving power of Jesus.

⁹⁹ Hebrews 13:8 plays a role in Pentecostal theology. See, for example, Matthew Avery Sutton, *Aimee Semple McPherson and the Resurrection of Christian America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 38.

GLOBALIZING FAITH

Globalization is not an abstraction, but involves people and communities. It is about life in a world that is webbed together. As such, the novel and film rather than statistical studies or policy papers are among the best ways to capture its meaning. The film and cultural critic A. O. Scott speaks of “stories of a world in motion.”¹⁰¹ For example, in the novel *The Inheritance of Loss*, Kiran Desai tells a story that moves back and forth between the Himalayas of Nepal, the restaurants of Queens, and the basements of Harlem.¹⁰² Desai writes of distance covered, borders crossed, jobs worked, desires tempered, love gained and lost. Similarly, Stephen Frears’ film “Dirty Pretty Things” tells the story of a man from Nigeria and a woman from Turkey working to survive in global London.¹⁰³ It portrays trauma and treachery, aspiration and hope as seen through the eyes of largely invisible hotel workers in the global economy. Globalization becomes a personal and particular story.

Close readings of African churches in New York City are also a way of telling the stories of globalization. Each church is a story of faith in global motion. Religion need not be a fundamentalist reaction to globalization,¹⁰⁴ but can be a way of engaging the world. “Religion’s role in globalization,” as Manuel Vásquez and Marie Marquardt acutely observe, “is at once more widespread, concrete, and vital. What interacts with globalization is lived religion - specific religious practices, discourses, and institutions which constitute the fabric of social life for large segments of the population around the world.”¹⁰⁵ So at some points we will see

¹⁰⁰ This is confirmed by Ukah, “The Redeemed Christian Church of God,” 235-238.

¹⁰¹ A. O. Scott, “Stories from a World in Motion,” *New York Times*, March 16, 2008, AR-1, 16.

¹⁰² Kiran Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2006).

¹⁰³ The film was released in 2002.

¹⁰⁴ Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 5-27.

¹⁰⁵ Manuel A. Vásquez and Marie Friedmann Marquardt, *Globalizing the Sacred: Religion Across the Americas* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 51. See also Manuel A. Vásquez, “Tracking Global Evangelical Christianity,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 71:1 (2003): 157-173.

African churches as resisting globalization,¹⁰⁶ and at others times churches will be active participants in globalization.

The globalization of religion is hardly new, as Webb Keane shows regarding missionary movements.¹⁰⁷ Vásquez and Marquardt find in the present time but an episode in a long history of globalizations.¹⁰⁸ In the present episode there is a redefining of belonging and movement that takes in and moves beyond older patterns of movement. In this section, I describe how the re-fabrication of faith across borders represents a central activity of globalization.

It is often assumed that globalization is confined strictly to the economic, the linking of financial markets and institutions. Globalization is also seen as a way of packaging together neo-liberalism, market capitalism, and American consumerism.¹⁰⁹ Globalization is then either something very good for the world's poor because it is equated with opportunity or very bad because it produces new patterns of exclusion while enriching an elite.¹¹⁰ I share the conviction of many that globalization in its present economic form too often maps stark new divisions onto the world and contributes to environmental degradation. At this point in 2008, the global economy is in crisis, as structural failures cascade across financial networks.¹¹¹ Of course, in many ways, the present capital, real estate, and banking crisis is not new, but a recurrent feature of global capitalism over the past three decades. But despite the prominence of the economic factor and very real

¹⁰⁶ For an important study in this regard, see Timothy John Padwick, "Spirit, Desire and the World: Roho Churches of Western Kenya in the Era of Globalization" (PhD diss., University of Birmingham, 2003).

¹⁰⁷ Webb Keane, *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 41-47.

¹⁰⁸ Vásquez and Marquardt, *Globalizing the Sacred*.

¹⁰⁹ Cliff Marris, "Globalization: A Short Introduction to a New World Religion," *Political Theology* 4:1 (2001): 91-116; Neil Smith, *The Endgame of Globalization* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

¹¹⁰ Jagdish Bhagwati, *In Defense of Globalization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹¹¹ On the cultural and religious dimensions, see Mark C. Taylor, *Confidence Games: Money and Markets in a World Without Redemption* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

distributional issues that lead to great suffering and dislocation,¹¹² a purely materialist analysis is too analytically constrictive. I think it is better to speak of “economic globalization” as but one form of globalization.

A more expansive view of globalization will better enable us to see the realities of church life across borders. For David Held and co-authors, globalization involves three dimensions: extensity, intensity, and velocity. Globalization is measured by the degree and depth of political, social, and economic interconnectedness in the world, and the speed at which these exchanges occur.¹¹³ Within this broader framework, cultures move across borders.¹¹⁴ Put another way, this current episode of globalization is marked by a world more deeply connected in diverse ways and at greater speed than ever before. In a globally connected world, nearly everyone and everything is impacted with divergent and often contradictory outcomes.

David Harvey explains globalization as the “time-space compression.”¹¹⁵ Harvey’s identification of acceleration in production, capital movement, and culture along with flexibility indicate how space and time have become nearly simultaneous on a planetary level. Manuel Vásquez refines Harvey’s proposal: “Although globalization is a complex cluster of economic, socio-political, and cultural phenomena, we can heuristically characterize it as a tensile interplay between time-space compression and distancing.”¹¹⁶

¹¹² Teresa Okure, “Africa: Globalization and the Loss of Cultural Identity,” *Concilium* 5 (2001): 67-74.

¹¹³ David Held, Anthony McGrew, David Goldblatt, and Jonathan Perraton, *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 2, 15.

¹¹⁴ Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*.

¹¹⁵ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1990), 284-307. Conversely, one might think of globalization as the reverse, from the *compression* of space and time to the *expansion* of space and time. See Kiran Mirchandani, “Practices of Global Capital: Gaps, Cracks and Ironies in Transnational Call Centres in India,” *Global Networks: A Journal of Transnational Affairs* 4:4 (October 2004): 365.

¹¹⁶ Vásquez, “Studying Mobile Religion via Networks,” 1.

In his elucidation Vásquez continues, “At a minimum, the dialectic of time-space compression and distancing challenges the modernist assumptions that equated territory, culture, and polity. Widespread flows of people, capital, goods, and ideas make it increasingly untenable to map the world according to the tidy logic of one nation, one culture, one language, one religion, one history, and one self-contained social formation.”¹¹⁷ Therefore a greater awareness of fluid identities, international movements, overlapping identities, and continually shifting borders is very important for understanding religion in a global world.¹¹⁸ So by globalization I mean something much more than economic in its limits.

This discussion leads to questions concerning the state in a global age. In many approaches, one hears of the state’s declining role in a global world, almost a prophecy of an end to the nation-state paradigm in the future. In another set of arguments, the state has a developing role that actually facilitates globalization.¹¹⁹ It is obvious that I cannot thoroughly elaborate on this discussion here, but from my study can say that national identities appear retained for African Christians yet remain in negotiation as a new form of social life across borders. In other words, the nation state has not been fully transcended in globalization.

A key element of globalization for the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, the Church of the Lord (Aladura), and the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel is that they have reproduced their religious life, its institutions, groups, events, rituals, and practices in New York. Scholars explain this process as the deterritorialization and reterritorialization of faith, the “*breaking down and*

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 2.

¹¹⁸ See further, José Casanova, “Religion, the New Millennium, and Globalization,” *Sociology of Religion* 62:4 (2001): 415-441.

¹¹⁹ Saskia Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

reconstitution of spatial scales” across space and time.¹²⁰ “Religion,” Manuel Vásquez and Marie Marquardt underscore, “is one of the main protagonists in...[the] unbinding of culture from its traditional referents and boundaries and in its reattachment in new space-time configurations.”¹²¹ The reorganization of space and time across borders also involves the transfer of religious institutions, experiences, practices, and beliefs.

There is much more to globalization, religion and African Christianity in New York City than I have discussed. Particularly, I have neglected to fully discuss the massive displacements and hardships that are present in the globalization. But what I have highlighted is that globalization does not necessarily absorb local expressions of Christianity, but creates a heterogeneous space for African Christianity to flourish. Percolating up from below, globalization can provide a conduit for the circulation and preservation of African Christianity. Memory, culture, and history in the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, the Church of the Lord (Aladura), and the Redeemed Christian Church of God are not erased by globalization, but maintained in new ecclesial communities. It is in such communities that people find a way to navigate the globalized world, to construct new personal narratives and pursue dreams, no matter how potentially seductive and contradictory is the New York experience.

CONCLUSION: IMAGES OF THE CHURCH IN THE CITY

In this chapter I have provided introductions to the history, theological concerns and common life of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York, the Church of the Lord (Aladura) in the Bronx, and the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn. The churches are not defensive sanctuaries or enclaves, but a reference point in an often confusing and complex global world: the

¹²⁰ Vásquez and Marquardt, *Globalizing the Sacred*, 51. For further theoretical reflections see Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

¹²¹ Vásquez and Marquardt, *Globalizing the Sacred*, 35.

church is a community where God is present, saving and delivering. While globally related, each church is also locally inspired, calibrated to its context. Arguably, the church is the most important social institution in the lives of African immigrants in New York City. A trio of images enables us to see how the churches make a difference for the people who attend.¹²²

A Family of Faith. The church is first an extended family, a community across borders that shares in a journey of life from birth to death. During a conversation, Rev. Asiedu remarked of Angelena Akiwumi, an elder in the church, “You know she’s my sister.” I didn’t know that, and it turns out, as far as I can tell, they are family members only “in Christ.” Members of the three churches have found, in Afe Adogame’s words, “places to feel at home” and a “home away from home.”¹²³ To be “home away from home” is also a theological function, as Inus Daneel has stressed.¹²⁴ But more practically, church in New York City is about a family that will care for your children, help with a job lead, praise God for your success, and carry burdens that no one else can.¹²⁵

A Fellowship of the Spirit. People come to church on Sunday to be transformed, to encounter the Spirit and Jesus. Congregants bring the needs of daily life in a global economy to liturgical encounters with God and the Spirit. The community of faith provides a guide for spiritual, moral, and economic life in the city. In this regard,

¹²² For further reflections on this subject, see Cephas N. Omenyo, “Essential Aspects of African Ecclesiology: The Case of the African Independent Churches,” *Pneuma* 22:2 (2000): 231-248.

¹²³ Afe Adogame, “The Quest for Space in the Global Spiritual Marketplace: African Religions in Europe,” *International Review of Mission* 89:354 (2000): 407.

¹²⁴ M.L. Daneel, *Quest for Belonging: Introduction to a Study of African Independent Churches* (Zimbabwe: Mambo Press, 1987), and F. B. Welbourn and B. A. Ogot, *A Place to Feel at Home: A Study of Two Independent Churches in Western Kenya* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966). Both talk about the African independent church life as a place to feel at home, socially and theologically.

¹²⁵ Gerrie ter Haar, *Halfway to Paradise: African Christians in Europe* (Cardiff: Cardiff Academic Press, 1998), 43, 107.

church members encourage, help, and support one another.¹²⁶ There is a deep spirituality to community.

A Community of Praise and Worship. African churches enable people to live in light of a power greater than any global force. Churches fulfil many institutional and social functions,¹²⁷ but it is the festive celebration of God at the start of the week, bodies and the body of Christ offering praise to God and pleading for blessing, that most fully captures the different meanings found in each church. The festiveness that one finds in each church draws its energy from God, the giver of salvation.

In this chapter and the previous, I highlighted the importance of African churches for everyday life. In the next chapter, I will survey the astonishing array of African churches in New York City and their relationship with the global city.

¹²⁶ Overall, I think the category of “social networks” is far more fitting than “social capital” for understanding the social role of African churches in New York City.

¹²⁷ Nancy Tatom Ammerman describes key sociological aspects of church life in *Pillars of Faith: American Congregations and Their Partners* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

CHAPTER 3

CITY OF THE FAITHFUL: AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY AND THE GLOBAL CITY

INTRODUCTION

Madison Square Garden is known as the “World’s Most Famous Arena.” Located in the heart of midtown Manhattan, amidst squealing cabs, business deals, hot dog vendors, and the massive Macy’s department store, it regularly holds a who’s who of rock stars, sports stars, even the circus. But on June 15, 2005, the arena was filled not with crowds going to a concert or a basketball game, but with thousands of members of the Redeemed Christian Church of God meeting for the 9th North American Convention, their most important event of the year. Whatever else this event at the Garden meant, its signature impression was that African Christianity had arrived in New York City and the United States.

New York City is a global crossroads for the circuits of African Christianity. From Times Square to the Bronx, from the far ends of Brooklyn to the edges of Staten Island and the heart of Queens, the churches of Africa are reproduced in New York City, and with them the momentum and energy of urban faith. Come Sundays, in venues that span from rented storefronts to retrofitted warehouses, from converted basements to borrowed sanctuaries, New York City is home to over 125 African churches of diverse sizes and types, each singing the gospel in the accents and languages of Africa. The city also serves as the North American headquarters of many African church movements. Due to migration patterns, the churches are largely of West African origin, but I will say more about this as the chapter proceeds.

In this chapter I describe the proliferation of African churches in New York City and emphasize the global city as a key explanatory factor. Overall, I hope to construct something close to a single narrative of African Christian faith in New York City, displaying connections between history, globalization, and the city. This provides a

look into how the shift in ecclesiastical axis from the north to the south is making an imprint on New York City. The analytical framework I adopt emphasizes the city as a key component in the global architecture of religion, supporting the distribution of African Christianity across borders. My approach begins with the experience of the streets, the study of the city from the ground up.¹

The transboundary formation of African Christianity in New York City is firmly related to migration.² Migration, driven by combinations of choice and crisis, is a global phenomenon and pattern, bringing people, cultures, and beliefs into contact.³ It is also, of course, the quintessential New York story.⁴ In late February 2005 a *New York Times* story announced, “More Africans Enter U.S. Than in the Days of Slavery.”⁵ While proportionally small in comparison to New York’s other immigrant groups, comprising just three percent of New York’s foreign-born population, African immigrants are among the fastest growing community in the city.⁶ According to the most recent demographic data from 2000, 92,435 African immigrants call New York home,⁷ with the largest influx coming from Ghana and Nigeria.⁸ These numbers are generally considered by experts to be low by 5 to 15 percent, although the number may well be much greater. Among African immigrants to the United States, the West African community is one of the most substantial.⁹

¹ Gyan Prakash and Kevin M. Kruse eds., *The Spaces of the Modern City: Imaginaries, Politics, and Everyday Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

² Jehu J. Hanciles, “God’s Mission through Migration: African Initiatives in Globalizing Mission,” in *Evangelical, Ecumenical, and Anabaptist Missiologies in Conversation: Essays in Honor of Wilbert R. Shenk*, ed., James R. Krabill, Walter Sawatsky, and Charles E. Van Engen (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2006), 58-66.

³ Dirk Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact: World Migrations in the Second Millennium* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

⁴ Frederick M. Binder and David M. Reimers, *All the Nations Under Heaven: An Ethnic and Racial History of New York City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

⁵ Sam Roberts, “More Africans Enter U.S. Than in Days of Slavery,” *New York Times*, February 21, 2005, A-1, B-4.

⁶ Arun Peter Lobo and Joseph L. Salvo, *The Newest New Yorkers 2000: Immigrant New York in the New Millennium* (New York City: New York City Department of Planning, 2004), 11.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁹ Marilyn Halter, “Africa: West,” in *The New Americans: A Guide to Immigration Since 1965*, ed. Mary C. Waters and Reed Ueda (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2007), 283-294.

Africans have a longstanding relationship to New York City, part of the so-called Black Atlantic. A reminder of this was the discovery in 1991 of the “African Burial Ground” in lower Manhattan where the remains of some 400 Africans (out of an estimated 12,000) from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were found.¹⁰ It was in 1626 that eight African slaves from Angola arrived in New Amsterdam, possibly the first African slaves in New York. Slavery was legal in New York City until the Abolition Act of 1817 but emancipation itself was not completed until 1827.¹¹ Brought against their will as part of the slave trade connecting the New World to Africa and the West Indies, African laborers would build the protective wall that came to be known as Wall Street. In the words of historian Leslie Harris, “Black New Yorkers built the city, sustained its daily existence, and gave their lives - willingly or not - for its continued prosperity. Subject to physical, cultural, and spiritual violence, black New Yorkers manifested an audacious capacity to survive, to resist repression, and to sustain a diverse community.”¹² This history has indelibly shaped American culture and urban life.

The agglomeration of African churches in New York City points directly to Christian expansion in Africa. According to the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, in 1900, there were nine million Christians in Africa, or 9.2 percent of the population. In 1965, there were an estimated 75 million African Christians. By 2000, the number grew to over 360 million Christians in Africa, 45.6 percent of the population.¹³ In Ghana the Christian population is estimated at over 60 percent, and in Nigeria, some half the population is identified as Christian. For this reason, as I will show below, the majority of the African churches in New York City are from Ghana and Nigeria. As

¹⁰ For information on the African Burial Ground in Manhattan, see <http://africanburialground.gov/>.

¹¹ Produced in conjunction with the New York Historical Society’s exhibit “It Happened Here” is Ira Berlin and Leslie M. Harris, ed., *Slavery in New York* (New York: The New Press, 2005).

¹² Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 288.

¹³ David B. Barrett, George T. Kurian, and Todd M. Johnson, *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 13.

people travel, their faith is adhesive.¹⁴ Along with other new immigrants to New York City and America, many new residents are not just religious, but Christian.¹⁵

Against this background, I focus on the city as enabling the globalization of African Christianity. The diversity of African churches in New York City is an important line of inquiry in itself. “There is much to be said for concentration on one particular town in order to obtain a detailed and factual study,”¹⁶ Geoffrey Parrinder asserts in the preface to his account of religion in Ibadan, Nigeria. Rosalind Hackett’s *Religion in Calabar*,¹⁷ which takes Parrinder’s words as an epigraph, is also a testimony to the value of single city studies. Due to the fluid nature of African churches, the sheer scale of New York City - with its 8 million plus residents, more than 700 miles of subway lines, and approximately 500 neighborhoods, along with the constraints of the present study - it is possible only to deal briefly with the subject. However, even a brief overview of African Christianity in New York carries larger significance for understanding the three focus churches, trends in African Christianity, and the urban dynamics of faith. Before I attend to the primary aims of this chapter, I offer a discussion of terminology, typology, and models of transnational organization.

TYPES, TERMS, AND MODELS

Most commentators work with a common typology or breakdown of types of African churches that includes ancient, Catholic, Independent, Protestant, Pentecostal/Charismatic, and autonomous.¹⁸ While such traditional typologies retain historical

¹⁴ Wendy Cage and Elaine Howard Ecklund, “Immigration and Religion,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 33 (2007): 359-379.

¹⁵ Cage and Ecklund cite recent data that “two-thirds of post-1965 immigrants are Christian,” 361.

¹⁶ Geoffrey Parrinder, *Religion in an African City* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), 4.

¹⁷ Rosalind I. J. Hackett, *Religion in Calabar: The Religious Life and History of a Nigerian Town* (Berlin: Mouton D Gruyter, 1989).

¹⁸ These categories and others are extensively covered in scholarly accounts. For some of the literature, see Allan H. Anderson, *African Reformation: African Initiated Christianity in the 20th Century* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2001), 3-22. Jacob Olupona, “African Religion” in *Global Religions: An Introduction* ed Mark Juergensmeyer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 81-83. For an example of the general presumption toward these types, see Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, “Half a Century of African Christian Theologies: Elements of the Emerging Agenda for the Twenty-first Century,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 99 (November 1997): 17-20. For more detail and

salience, and I will describe each accordingly later in this chapter, they frequently break down as new fluid and hybrid forms of church life emerge.¹⁹ As Ogbu Kalu observes, distinctions between the church strands will be bound up with prior theological beliefs.²⁰ Yet it remains possible at one level to view churches as historically constructed, then finding ways of organizing different ones together, without reducing them to an “essence.”

Different institutional models are found among African churches in New York. Afe Adogame and Gerrie ter Haar offer typologies of African churches in Europe, marking off some as branches of churches with the mother church headquartered in Africa, others as within existing church structures, and still others are newly established.²¹ In a paradigm I introduced in chapter 1, Peggy Levitt proposes the model of a transnational religious corporation.²² She breaks this out in greater detail, classifying three types of transnational religious corporations. First there is the “extended transnational religious organization” oriented to the Catholic Church. This enables the church to integrate migrants into existing structures where they can contribute while retaining a sense of belonging to home.²³ Second, there is the “negotiated transnational organization,” whereby notably Protestant churches find ways to “negotiate power, sharing, leadership, and financial management.”²⁴ Third, there are “recreated transnational religious organizations,” which operates like “franchises or chapters of sending country religious organizations.”²⁵ While the first

an analysis, see Birgit Meyer, “Christianity in Africa: From Independent to Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33 (2004): 447-474.

¹⁹ This is an argument for seeing African Christianity as ultimately one story.

²⁰ Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 65-83.

²¹ Here I am combining the typologies of Afe Adogame in the “The Quest for Space in the Global Spiritual Marketplace,” 400-401,” and Gerrie ter Haar, “Strangers in the Promised Land: African Christians in Europe,” *Exchange* 24:1 (1995): 7.

²² Peggy Levitt, *God Needs No Passport: Immigrants and the Changing American Religious Landscape* (New York: The New Press, 2007), 113-135. In addition, see Peggy Levitt, “Redefining the Boundaries of Belonging: The Institutional Character of Transnational Religious Life,” *Sociology of Religion* 65:1 (2004): 1-18.

²³ Levitt, “Redefining the Boundaries of Belonging,” 2.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

model reflects the Catholic situation in New York, most African immigrant congregations in New York reflect Levitt's third pattern, and generally use the term "branch" to describe their relationship.

With the increased prominence of African Christianity, it is common to hear it described as belonging to "Evangelical Christianity."²⁶ On behalf of this argument, history is supportive. A mission initiative to Sierra Leone by former slaves who had been relocated to Nova Scotia by the British played an influential role in bringing a message of new birth to Africa, a message that still today resonates for so many believers.²⁷ Proclaiming that Christianity is "good news," African churches are certainly evangelical in the root meaning of the word. But in my analysis, it is misleading to place African Christianity in the British and American Evangelical orbits. David Bebbington's four characteristics of evangelicalism as conversionism, activism, Biblicism, and crucicentrism do not describe the driving concerns of African churches.²⁸ For example, there is nothing in Bebbington's definition on the resurrection, the Holy Spirit, or power. As James Cox alerts, a typology may tell more about the West than Africa.²⁹

Use of the term "African" churches in New York City is itself filled with difficulties. The heart of this problem is sharply observed in the following ethnographic analysis: "Although the research contains clear indications that many worshippers emphasize a community in Christ without an ethnic suffix, scholars persist in categorizing the worshippers by their ethnicity. The result is a contradictory narrative in which those

²⁶ For example, Paul Freston, *Evangelicals and Politics in Asia, Africa and Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). For a varied perspective, see Tite Tiénou, "Evangelical Theology in African Contexts," in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*, ed., Timothy Larsen and Daniel J. Treier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 213-224.

²⁷ J. D. Y. Peel suggests as much in "Comment" on "Continuity Thinking and Christian Culture," *Current Anthropology* 48:1 (2007): 26-27. On this story and its possibilities, see Lamin Sanneh, *Abolitionists Abroad: American Blacks and the Making of Modern West Africa* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

²⁸ Freston, *Evangelicals and Politics in Asia, Africa and Latin America*, 2. Conversion would be an exception, but I think it is filled with different meaning.

²⁹ James L. Cox, "African Identities as the Projection of Western Alterity," in *Uniquely African? African Christian Identity from Cultural and Historical Perspectives*, ed., James L. Cox and Gerrie ter Haar (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2003), 25-37.

studied speak of their community in Christ and “their identity as primarily Christian,” whereas the researchers characterize the believers as African, Nigerian, Ghanaian, or Salvadorian.”³⁰ Personal interviews and conversations confirmed this. Self-descriptions almost always emphasized “Christian” more than any other appellation. “Pentecostal,” “Presby,” and “Church of the Lord (Aladura)” were also frequent ways of weighing in on religious identity.

Gerrie ter Haar underscores similar concerns but with an added emphasis on the international character of African churches.³¹ If they are reduced to the “Other,” ter Haar believes that Africans will be more easily marginalized in the polity.³² Along these lines, ter Haar identifies a new type of African church - *African International Churches*.³³ “To refer to them this way takes account of their African origin while at the same time recognising the continuity of these churches with the universal Christian tradition.”³⁴ I concur with this proposal. Another description of the most basic kind is perhaps also called for - New York City churches.

While I am well aware of the problematic features of my use of African churches, other factors may counterbalance and make African identity a partial but not exclusive factor of identification in New York. Among those factors: New York is an immigrant city where identity is always fluid, Africa serves as a reference point for immigrants including Pentecostals, the faith of conversion is owed to Africa, and traditions are mobile. And in the case of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana and other similarly nationalized churches, the ethnic suffix is a public component of their identity. One final important point is that the churches are founded by Africans and have this community as a primary point of service. In brief, the use of “African” need not reproduce marginalizing discourse, but rather can affirm the positive identity and

³⁰ Nina Glick Schiller, Ayse Caglar, and Thaddeus C. Guldbrandsen, “Beyond the Ethnic Lens: Locality, Globality, and Born-Again Incorporation,” *American Ethnologist* 33:4 (2006): 614-615.

³¹ Gerrie ter Haar, *Halfway to Paradise: African Christians in Europe* (Cardiff: Cardiff Academic Press, 1998), 21-26.

³² *Ibid.*, 22.

³³ *Ibid.*, 24.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

agency on the part of African Christians. This is not to minimize political concerns, but simply to note the multiple ways that identity formation takes place. In the concluding chapter of this thesis, I will argue that the notion of catholicity serves the church in recovering justice in mutuality, but for now I proceed with cautions affirmed.

AFRICAN CHURCHES IN NEW YORK CITY

There is no overarching association or council of African churches in New York like those found in Europe. In New York City, African church associations are limited to a particular network, denomination, and occasionally on an informal basis a country of origin. This is a result of three factors: (1) the geographical scale of the five boroughs, (2) the entrepreneurial rather than collaborative dynamic of New York City, and (3) the relative newness of African churches in the city. In the United States, census and other related public data does not ask questions on religion.

With no prior research available, by necessity my survey depended on footwork and networks to connect with itineraries of faith. It also included the use of local African newspapers such as *African Abroad USA*, *West African News*, and *Light of the World*, which in addition to advertising money transfer services like Western Union and travel agencies, are filled with paid notices of African churches. A resource that grew considerably in importance over the course of my research was church Web sites, which have become more sophisticated, comprehensive, and informative.³⁵ While I made good strides in connecting with many of the African church movements in New York City, incompleteness marks this effort. This must be the case, for no other reason that the city and church are ever changing. But I found that at this time new churches are being started in every part of the city. Based on my research, Appendix 1 provides a list of African churches in New York City.

³⁵ J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "'Get on the Internet!' Says the Lord': Religion, Cyberspace and Christianity in Contemporary Africa," *Studies in World Christianity* 13:3 (2007): 225-242.

Ethiopian Orthodox and Pente Churches

Christianity has been part of Africa for nearly two thousand years. The Coptic Church of Alexandria tells its story by recounting the journey of the “Holy Family” as refugees, uprooted from Bethlehem and given shelter in Egypt.³⁶ And there is the tradition of St. Mark’s role in the founding of the church in Alexandria. Ethiopia’s place in the story of Christianity begins with what Andrew Walls calls a “hint” found in the Acts of the Apostles, with the story of the Ethiopian eunuch, considered by most scholars to be Meroe in modern Sudan.³⁷ And the church of Ethiopia, then the church of Aksum, holds a singular place in the Christian story, both in its continuous history and theological memory.³⁸



Fig. 3.1 Ethiopian Orthodox Church Tewahedo Church of Our Savior, Worship, Manhattan. 2006

³⁶ Bengt Sundkler and Christopher Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 7. See also Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa 1450-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 1-45.

³⁷ Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002), 86-87. See Acts 8:27-39.

³⁸ Kwame Bediako, “African and Christian: Recovering an Ancient Story,” *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 25:2 (2004): 153-161; Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History*, 86-91.

Since 1984, Ethiopians have been gathering at Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church of Our Savior, worshiping in a chapel tucked away within the famous Riverside Church in Manhattan.³⁹ One of the services I attend is Epiphany in 2006,⁴⁰ an event that imparts an experience of being transposed to another time and world. Iconic tapestries adorn the front, incense smoking throughout the room, the priestly sprinkling of water over the congregation. Because it is Epiphany, it is a time for baptisms and an infant is brought forth. Invited to take photographs, I was stopped during the communion service so not to intrude on the angels who were watching over this sacred moment. There is a remembrance of sacred past, and participation in sacred present and future. Near the end of the service, all eyes turn to the middle aisle as a large drum is carried into the room, its size tilting its bearer backwards. Two rows of mostly women covered in gauzy white garments and shawls, some with white crosses sewn into the sleeves of red garments, clap and chant as the drummer moves back and forth between them. There are smiles from the elders as the young people clap and sing; the congregation overflows out into the hallway.

At least one more Ethiopian Orthodox church is in New York City, St. Mary's in the Bronx. However, just as Pentecostal churches are a growing presence in Ethiopia, where they are known as "Pente," so also in New York City. The first Ethiopian Pentecostal church in New York is the Emmanuel Worship Center International, first known as the Ethiopian Evangelical Church. Founded by Pastor Mulugeta Abate in 1989, the now renovated church meets in a former nightclub located in the Bronx. Historically, the church leadership has a link with the Mennonites. Bethel Ethiopian Church, founded in 1994 and linked to the Christian Missionary Alliance, meets Sunday afternoons in the rented Assembly Hall of the First Presbyterian Church in Chelsea.

³⁹ A. L. Pitchers, "Facing the Reality of the Ethiopian Encounter," in *Study of Religion in Southern Africa*, ed., Johannes A. Smith and P. Pratap Kumar (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 191-203.

⁴⁰ Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church of Our Savior, Field Notes, January 22, 2006.

Catholic Communities

The Catholic Church maintains the largest number of adherents in Africa of any church,⁴¹ and African Catholics are a thriving part of the Catholic Church in New York City. Because of the Catholic Church's ecclesiology and global organization, they should be considered distinct from Protestant missionary churches. It is also important to tell their story while being attentive to a much longer past that stretches to Augustine and other North African church leaders, the 1995 document *Ecclesia in Africa*, a growth in African vocations, the rise of international priests, and initiatives of both evangelization and inculturation.⁴² However, taking up these important matters will require future research.

Responding to the voices and needs of Catholic African immigrants, New York City's two Roman Catholic dioceses - the Archdiocese of New York that covers the Bronx, Manhattan, and Staten Island, and the Diocese of Brooklyn that incorporates Queens - operate a vibrant network of congregations, communities or apostolates that serve African Catholics in their language and culture. They are more like congregations within local parishes, defined less by a geographic paradigm than by religious needs. Since the 1990s, a number of Catholic communities have been formed to serve African Catholics. In the Bronx, there is the Ghanaian Catholic Community of Christ the King founded in 1995. In 1999 another Ghanaian congregation was started at St. Margaret Mary Parish, also in the Bronx. A single congregation serves the Nigerian community in the New York Archdiocese, St. Angela Merici Parish, again in the Bronx.⁴³

The Ghanaian Catholic Community of Christ the King was started by and for "Ghanaians who were nostalgic for the liturgy as is celebrated in Africa and wished

⁴¹ Bryan T. Froehle and Mary L. Gautier, *Global Catholicism: Portrait of a World Church* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2003), 45-65.

⁴² For critical reflections, see Emmanuel Katongole, "Prospects of Ecclesia in Africa in the Twenty-First Century," *Logos* 4:1 (2001): 178-195.

⁴³ Congregational data from the Office of Black Ministries, New York Archdiocese, August 3, 2006.

for a celebratory atmosphere which felt like home away from home.’⁴⁴ To celebrate their tenth anniversary, Peter Cardinal Kodwo Appiah Turkson, Archbishop of Cape Coast, Ghana, joined the congregation along with representatives of the New York Archdiocese. Christ the King parish serves a Latino community, but the Ghanaian Catholic Community also has a home with them to hold services on Sunday. When the Cardinal from Ghana was in New York City to celebrate the diaspora Catholic community, the procession starts on the Grand Concourse, the Bronx version of Paris’ Champs Elysee. Censor swinging, Ghanaian, Catholic, and American flags flying, and drummers playing, priests and worship leaders marched in to the service marking the tenth anniversary of the Ghanaian Community of Christ the King Roman Catholic Church. A homily and Eucharistic celebration were important, but the most vibrant worship took place during the offering. Perhaps more than 400 people attended the late afternoon service, and a banquet afterwards went into the evening.



Fig. 3.2 A visit from the Cardinal Turkson, Ghanaian Catholic Community, the Bronx. Note the presence of Latino and African American clergy at the front of the procession. 2005

The Diocese of Brooklyn, which with Queens serves an area of more than five million people, may well be the most culturally diverse Catholic diocese in the world.⁴⁵ Ministry to African Catholics is coordinated through the Migration Office, headed by Msgr. Ronald Marino. According to its Web site, “The Migration Office

⁴⁴ *Ghanaian Catholic Community of the Christ the King Church 2005 Parish Family Album, 4.*

⁴⁵ Dave Francis Ali, Interview, August 4, 2006.

was the first of its kind in the world and offers legal, educational, and pastoral services to immigrants - Catholics and non-Catholics alike.”⁴⁶ To serve immigrant groups, the diocese has created Apostolates, which direct pastoral services and coordinate a roster of priests to conduct Mass. Both a Ghanaian and Nigerian Apostolate have been developed, with a coordinator for each apostolate, and priests from Ghana and Nigeria who rotate saying Mass at the different parishes. The growing Ghanaian Apostolate has a congregation that meets for each Sunday afternoon for mass at St. Catherine of Genoa Church in Brooklyn. Because of the growth of the community at St. Catherine of Genoa, a site was added at St. Benedict the Moor. Mass is held for Nigerian Catholics on rotating Sundays at five parishes including St. Stanislaus Bishop and Martyr in Queens, St. Paul, St. Fortunata, and St. Xavier in Brooklyn.

Protestant Churches

Protestant churches were generally established in Africa in the late eighteenth century and into the second half of the nineteenth century at the impetus of western churches and mission societies.⁴⁷ “Missionary,” “mission founded” or “historical” is the terminology used to describe such churches in this period, and it suggests implication in the Western colonial enterprise. However, during this period there is interplay between missionary imposition and local agency, with selected appropriation and even resistance. Entering the post-colonial period, it was generally presumed that the historic churches would decline. But instead of fading away in the post-Independence period, so-called historical churches grew substantially.⁴⁸ Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Lutheran churches not only held their own, but often grew.

⁴⁶ See <http://www.dioceseofbrooklyn.org/ministries/migration/index.html> (accessed August 4, 2006).

⁴⁷ Hastings, *The Church in Africa 1450-1950*, 242-305.

⁴⁸ David Maxwell, “Post-Colonial Christianity in Africa,” in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. 9, *World Christianities c. 1914-2000*, ed., Hugh McLeod (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 401-403.

In New York City, the Protestant churches play an important role for their members, and appear to be institutionally strong and aiming for increased growth. The historical Protestant churches from Ghana represented in New York City include the Presbyterian Church of Ghana and the Methodist Church of Ghana. Ghana Wesley United Methodist Church in Brooklyn and the United Methodist Church Ghana in the Bronx represent the Methodist church. In addition to the Presbyterian Church of Ghana congregation in Harlem, more recently established is the Ebenezer congregation in the Bronx. Originally part of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, but now affiliated with two American denominations, the Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA) and the Reformed Church in America (RCA) is the Ghanaian Presbyterian Reformed Church of Brooklyn, started in 1993. Also in the Bronx, the Ghanaian Seventh Day Adventist Church holds worship in a large sanctuary. Just as in Ghana, vibrant charismatic liturgy, theology, and experience is an integral part of church life in Ghanaian mainline churches.⁴⁹ The Calvary First Nigerian Seventh Day Adventist Church sits next to a vacant lot in Brooklyn.

From 2006 to 2007, the St. James Fordham Road Episcopal Church in the Bronx provided an Igbo language worship service. However, when the priest was offered a full-time salaried position in New Jersey, he left his job driving a taxi in New York City and changed parishes. The service is no longer in operation, and the Igbo speaking families now attend the English service and remain active in the church.⁵⁰ The Convocation of Anglicans in North America (CANA), “a mission of the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion)” does not appear to have an established congregation in the city.

⁴⁹ Elom Dovlo, “African Culture and Emergent Church Forms in Ghana,” *Exchange* 33:1 (2004): 28-53; Cephas N. Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism: A Study of the Development of Charismatic Renewal in the Mainline Churches in Ghana* (Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 2002); “From the Fringes to the Centre: Pentecostalization of the Mainline Churches in Ghana,” *Exchange* 34:1 (2005): 39-60.

African Independent Churches

Jolting the mission-founded churches in Africa in the early twentieth century was a new movement known as the African Independent Churches or AICs; alternative “I” words that stand in for “independent” include *indigenous*, *initiated* and *instituted*. By Harold Turner’s succinct definition of the AICs, “founded in Africa by Africans primarily for Africans,”⁵¹ cultural intelligibility is an implied goal, indigenous leadership is an explicit factor, and ecclesial particularity is an outcome. Stan Nussbaum identifies the religious practice and theology of the African Independent Churches from the mainline or missionary model the following way:

Western missionaries brought a message of some things the God of Israel had done through Jesus many generations ago in a place unimaginably far away and some other things he will do for us in a future world after we die. By contrast, the founders of the AICs announced some good news – that same God of Israel is doing some things right here in Africa. He is sending visions, calling prophets, empowering healers, thundering out to Africans, ‘Here I am! Here I am!’⁵²

Nussbaum’s point is that the African Independent Churches are not inferior to the mission-founded churches, but offer significant and responsive forms of church life and mission. As Inus Daneel maintains, the independent churches are a constructive reinterpretation of Christianity on African terms, not simply a break with the establishment or a protest movement.⁵³

⁵⁰ Tobias Haller, Interview, March 14, 2008.

⁵¹ Bengt Sundkler’s famous statement of what he then called the “Bantu Independent Churches” in South Africa described what for the West was a view that “in these churches, one would be able to see what the African Christian, *when left to himself*, regarded as important and relevant in Christian faith and in the Christian church.” Bengt G. M. Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1948), 17.

⁵² Stan W. Nussbaum, “African Initiated Churches,” in *Dictionary of Mission Theology: Evangelical Foundations*, ed. John Corrie (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2007), 5.

⁵³ M.L. Daneel, *Quest for Belonging: Introduction to a Study of African Independent Churches* (Zimbabwe: Mambo Press, 1987), and “African Initiated Churches in South Africa” in *Christianity Reborn: The Global Expansion of Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Donald M. Lewis (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 181-218.

There is an extraordinary variety of African Independent Churches holding diverse theologies and ecclesiologies.⁵⁴ Overall, the African Independent Churches emphasize the experience of the Spirit, healing, personal testimony, and a rejection of Western modes of worship as imported by the missionaries.⁵⁵ Their origins can be traced to leaders, both men and women,⁵⁶ with “direct communication with God and/or the saints through revelation, prophecy, possession, and dreams.”⁵⁷ Still, Afe Adogame is certainly correct when he points out that with reference to the Aladura independent churches, “they share many features, the reason for their common typology, but each Aladura has its own religious dynamic. There are also significant differences, especially in specific doctrines and details of ritual acts and performance, the charismatic personality of the founders, their organizational policies and foundation histories.”⁵⁸

Andrew Walls and Lamin Sanneh have underscored that in contrast to a static version of faith, over time Christian faith becomes “translated” through interaction with local culture, giving rise to a distinctively indigenous character.⁵⁹ As Walls explains, translation is more than a linguistic activity of placing the words of the Bible in a vernacular; it is the *experience* of Christ in a new language and cultural form. Translation is the full experience of the church as it encounters the gospel, and is differentiated from contextualization, a process of adaptively transferring a theology more associated with what a missionary might do.⁶⁰ Following this line of

⁵⁴ Hastings, *The Church in Africa 1450-1950*, 493-539.

⁵⁵ John S. Pobee and Gabriel Ositelu II, *African Initiatives in Christianity: The Growth, Gifts and Diversities of Indigenous African Churches - A Challenge to the Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1998), 40-42.

⁵⁶ Cynthia Hoehler-Fatton, “Christianity: Independent and Charismatic Churches in Africa,” in *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African American Experience*, ed. Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 1999), 428.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Afe Adogame, “Engaging the Rhetoric of Spiritual Warfare: The Public Face of Aladura in Diaspora,” *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 34:4 (2004): p. 494. (493-522)

⁵⁹ Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996) and *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002); Lamin O. Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1989).

⁶⁰ Andrew F. Walls, “Inculturation,” in *Encyclopedia of Protestantism*, vol. 2, ed., Hans J. Hillerbrand (New York: Routledge, 2004), 932-935.

thought on translation, African Christianity can be interpreted as a story or series of stories whereby faith seeks understanding on African terms and in response to African questions and needs, with the African Independent Churches at the forefront of this process.

Nigeria's classically recognized African Independent Churches of the Aladura type are widely distributed in New York.⁶¹ As we have seen, the Church of the Lord (Aladura) is located in the Bronx, and a new branch was started in Brooklyn in 2007. The Cherubim and Seraphim church, founded in 1925 in Nigeria by Moses Orimolade Tunolase, is present in New York City.⁶² At least two Cherubim and Seraphim churches operate in New York City. One group is called the Holy Order of Cherubim and Seraphim Movement, and they have five branches in New York City.⁶³ With the first of five branches launched in 1975, they represent one of the first African churches in New York City.⁶⁴ Also in New York City is the Cherubim and Seraphim Church Organization, based in the Bronx.

At the Holy Order Cherubim and Seraphim Movement Church located at Radde Place in Brooklyn, large Peavey speakers mark each corner of the tight space, and given the rhythms of the band, that's how it should be. Electric guitars, drum sets, talking hand drums, and a choir fill the right front of the room. At times more people are in the band and choir than the people who fill the chairs. On my visits, the sermon is in Yoruba, members wear white robes, and the liturgy is joyful.

The Celestial Church of Christ is very active in the five boroughs of New York City. According to senior Evangelist Solomon Adelaja of Celestial Church of Christ, New York Branch, Ibukun Olu and Mysterious parishes are located in the Bronx, Coney

⁶¹ Hastings, *The Church in Africa 1450-1950*, 513-518.

⁶² Matthews Ojo, "Cherubim and Seraphim Movement," in *The Encyclopedia of African and African-American Religion*, ed., Stephen D. Glazier (New York: Routledge, 2001), 82.

⁶³ See <http://csmovementchurchusa.org/index.htm>.

Island has the Faith parish, while Ileri Oluwa, New York and Thy Will be Done are parishes located in Brooklyn. Calvary, Queens, and Winners are parish names in Queens, and one parish simply called Staten Island on Staten Island.⁶⁵ What is called the New York parish was established in 1977, thus making it one of the earliest African immigrant churches in New York. Christ Apostolic Church is represented in at least three forms in New York. First, there is Christ Apostolic (Agbala-Itura) International Miracle Center in Brooklyn. Second, there is Christ Apostolic Church (First in the Americas) and based in Brooklyn. Third, there is Christ Apostolic of America W.O.S.E.M, associated with Prophet Obadare, based in Brooklyn with other branches in the city.



Fig. 3.3 Celestial Church of Christ, Offering, Brooklyn. 2006

Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches

Over the past three decades, a great diversity of Pentecostal and Charismatic movements has exploded in Africa.⁶⁶ Such movements, as David Martin describes

⁶⁴ Solomon Adelaja, Interview, March 12, 2006.

⁶⁵ See also <http://www.celestialchurch.com/parishes/us/nyparish/default/htm> (accessed on March 24, 2004).

⁶⁶ Matthews A. Ojo, "African Charismatics," in *Encyclopedia of African and African-American Religions*, ed., Stephen D. Glazier (New York: Routledge 2001), 2-6; Allan H. Anderson, "The Newer Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches," *Pneuma* 24:2 (2002): 167-184.

them, corresponding to original eighteenth century Methodist principles, emphasize the Holy Spirit, voluntary association, grassroots readings of the Bible, a heightened sense of personal virtue and discipline, and the reach of a global parish.⁶⁷ Allan Anderson speaks of global Pentecostalism, a movement across cultures that is also at home in them.⁶⁸ In Africa, there is a “range” of locally defined “Pentecostals,”⁶⁹ while scholars such as Martin also see Pentecostal/Charismatic affinities coalescing to comprise an overall “culture.”⁷⁰

Rowan Williams makes an intriguing theological observation about the Spirit and translation. “The Son is manifest in a single, paradigmatic figure, the Spirit is manifest in the ‘translatability’ of that into the contingent diversity of history.”⁷¹ Allan Anderson provides a similar observation: “Pentecostalism with its flexibility (or ‘freedom’) in the Spirit has an innate ability to make itself at home in almost any context.”⁷² In so doing, it can take local cultures seriously. Williams’ and Anderson’s points help explain why Pentecostalism appears to be so globally adaptable.⁷³

As Ogbu Kalu stresses, the context and period in which each African Pentecostal church developed is important.⁷⁴ Matthew Ojo’s significant study *The End-Time Army: Charismatic Movements in Modern Nigeria*⁷⁵ describes a movement that at

⁶⁷ David Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

⁶⁸ Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 10, 15, 103-122.

⁷⁰ Martin, *Pentecostalism*, 1-27.

⁷¹ Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 125-126.

⁷² Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 282.

⁷³ See further Paul Brodwin, “Pentecostalism in Translation: Religion and the Production of Community in the Haitian Diaspora,” *American Ethnologist* 30:1 (2003): 85-101.

⁷⁴ Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*, 8,88.

⁷⁵ Matthews A. Ojo, *The End-Time Army: Charismatic Movements in Modern Nigeria* (Trenton: African World Press, 2006). See also Sunday Babajide Komolafe, “The Changing Face of Christianity: Revisiting African Christianity,” *Missiology: An International Review* 32:3 (2004): 217-238.

first attracted the young and university students, and that grew against a backdrop of political and economic distress and aspirations for global connections to encompass all ages. In Ojo's analysis, two distinctive themes of Pentecostalism in Nigeria are "piety and power."⁷⁶ Turning to Ghana, Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu's *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana* describes the prevalence of a holistic spirituality across church life.⁷⁷ Newer "neo-Pentecostal" churches designate deliverance and divine blessing as core elements.⁷⁸ I would also stress the importance of celebration, festiveness, joy, and possibility. In short, African Pentecostalism is a multi-faceted movement characterized by the experience of God in the context of everyday life.

There are two interpretative schools of thought on the origins of Pentecostal churches in Africa, with implications for understanding their theology. One school of thought, represented by Paul Gifford, sees African Pentecostal churches as a replication or derivative product of western Pentecostalism. More precisely, the sort of Pentecostalism associated with American television evangelists and conservative/fundamentalist Christianity.⁷⁹ A second interpretation finds in the African Pentecostal churches a new chapter in the African re-imagining of Christianity, addressing concerns on African terms in a manner similar to the AICs. Ogbu Kalu offers the view that the Pentecostal churches are part of a continuing and indigenous effort that follows on the failure of the missionary churches.⁸⁰ A third alternative is possible, one that sees both interpretive models at play. Like the process of "sampling" in music, every church draws from multiple sources in building its essential identity. Given the diversity of Pentecostal churches in Africa, each with their own history, this argument has much in its favor.

⁷⁶ For elaboration, see Ojo, *God's End-Time Army*, 191-229.

⁷⁷ J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Leiden: Brill, 2005); See also Emmanuel Kingsley Larbi, *Pentecostalism: The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity* (Accra: CPCS, 2001).

⁷⁸ Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalizing African Economy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Ogbu U. Kalu, "The Third Response: Pentecostalism and the Reconstruction of Christian Experience in Africa, 1970-1995," *Journal of African Christian Thought* 1:2 (1998): 3-16; cf. Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*, 68-71.

Kalu's sentiment, which I am in overall agreement with, may also lead to a different way of looking at the relationship between the African Independent Churches and Pentecostal churches. Emphasizing differences in approach to culture and theology, Pentecostalism is known for stressing the incommensurability of its beliefs and practices with independent churches. However, Rufus Ositelu, Primate of the Church of the Lord (Aladura), claims the label "Pentecostal" is a "misnomer."⁸¹ It is the independent churches, he argues, who first recovered an emphasis on the Spirit in African Christianity, and changed the style of music to a more dynamic and joyful form while also encouraging divine healing.⁸² Because African Pentecostals retain cultural contexts and commitments, perhaps it comes down to a matter of proportion. Going in a different direction, Anderson folds the independent churches into the Pentecostal story.⁸³ So what is expressed both theologically and culturally is some form of dynamic interaction between the two streams. And in the mix, in a historical question we cannot pursue here, is the role of the "Azusa Street" revival that began in 1906. However, in brief, I do not see a lineage between the churches in this study and Azusa Street.

New York has a wide range of African Pentecostal churches, largely from Ghana and Nigeria. Ghana's more classical Charismatic churches and newer neo-Pentecostal churches are both found in substantial number in New York.⁸⁴ The Church of Pentecost, Ghana's largest Charismatic denomination, has established a major U.S. operation. In New York City, they have one branch each in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, and Manhattan. The Apostolic Church International has three branches in New York, two in the Bronx and one in Brooklyn. Lighthouse Chapel, founded by Bishop Dag Heward-Mills, is one of the newer Ghanaian churches established in

⁸¹ Rufus Ositelu, Interview, October 8, 2006.

⁸² Rufus Okikiolaolu Olubiyi Ositelu, *African Instituted Churches: Diversities, Growth, Gifts, Spirituality and Ecumenical Understanding of African Initiated Churches* (Munster: LIT Verlag, 2002), 38-39, 192, 201. Interview, Rufus Ositelu, October 8, 2006.

⁸³ Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 103-106.

⁸⁴ For extensive studies, see Larbi, Gifford, and Asamoah-Gyadu.

New York. Five branches of Lighthouse Chapel are found in New York City, one in Manhattan, two in the Bronx (one English speaking, one Akan speaking), and a branch each in Queens and Brooklyn.⁸⁵ The Manhattan branch of Lighthouse Chapel was started in 1995, and was the first branch in the United States.⁸⁶ Located just off of Times Square on West 43rd Street, the church meets in the gymnasium of Holy Cross School on West 43rd Street, and holds two Sunday morning services.

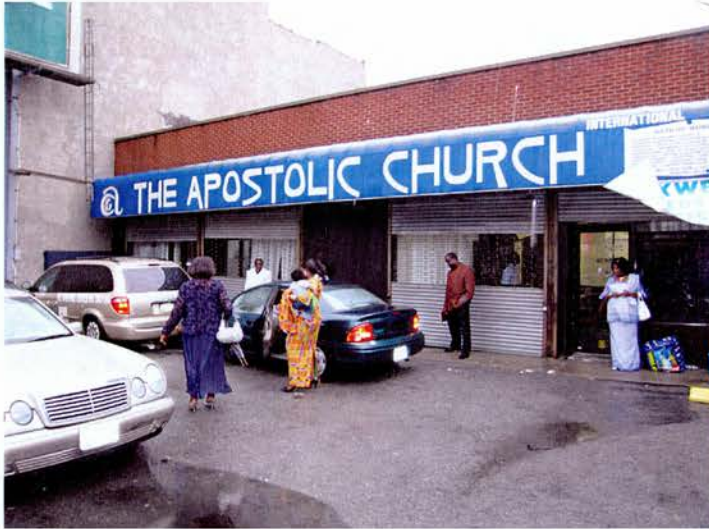


Fig. 3.4 Apostolic Church, the Bronx. 2006

Nigerian Pentecostalism is strongly felt in New York.⁸⁷ In 1995, the first Redeemed Christian Church of God service in New York City was held on Seventh Avenue in a rented conference room of the Pennsylvania Hotel, across the street from Madison Square Garden. Believing that God had called him and his wife Eloise to start a Redeemed Church in New York City, Olu Obed carried the sound system on the subway to the first service. Because Eloise had not yet moved to New York, when he began to pray, sing, and worship God, he did so in a room where he was the only person present. Egbefun Adizede, the only other person to join in the service, arrived late.⁸⁸ Since that first service in 1995, Redeemed Christian Church of God has expanded rapidly in New York, resulting in twenty branches in the city throughout the five boroughs.

⁸⁵ According to the Sunday service Bulletin, Sunday, June 25, 2006, there are twenty-five branches in the United States, and New York City is the only city with multiple branches.

⁸⁶ Kwaku Owuse, Interview, June 25, 2006.

⁸⁷ For historical background in Nigeria, the major study here is Ojo, *The End-time Army*.

⁸⁸ Olu Obed, Interview, February 18, 2004; Egbefun Adieze, Interview, July 16, 2005.

Deeper Life Bible Church, founded in Nigeria by W. F. Kumuyi in 1982, occupies a large former industrial building in the Bronx, just across the street from a large African Market. Its first branch in New York was founded in the Bronx, and it has one branch in each of the boroughs. Nigeria’s neo-Pentecostal churches, admittedly hard to distinguish from Pentecostal churches, seem to be set apart by a strong emphasis on deliverance and prosperity. Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries can be considered a neo-Pentecostal church. In New York, this Nigerian-based movement has put down roots, evidenced in a finely renovated building in Brooklyn, and with additional branches in the Bronx and Queens. Living Faith Church Worldwide, better known as Winners Chapel, and founded by Bishop David Oyedepo, was started in New York in June 2004.⁸⁹ This congregation of about one hundred meets in a multi-storied building on Jamaica Avenue in Queens that houses a cluster of Asian and West Indian congregations. While not the largest congregation in the building, it has posted the grandest sign. Advertisements for the church announce events in Nigeria.⁹⁰ Central Gospel Church began holding services in 2000, and officially opened a branch on a former industrial building on Park Avenue in the Bronx in 2001.⁹¹



Fig. 3.5 Mountain of Fire and Miracles. Queens. 2006

⁸⁹ Olakunle Onaleye, Interview, December 31, 2006.

⁹⁰ This is common in the *Light of the World* newspaper.

⁹¹ Prince Nyrako, Interview, January 14, 2006.

As befits such an effusive movement, not all of New York's African Pentecostal churches are part of an Africa-based ministry or denomination, and have instead been independently started. Christ Life Ministries Worldwide in Brooklyn advertises itself as the seat of the Presiding Bishop, where it is also a branch known as "Uncommon Champions Cathedral." Praise Assembly is a branch in Far Rockaway Queens, and Overcomers' Assembly is located in the Bronx.⁹² Abundant Life Christian Center Church meets at Winner's House in Brooklyn. Dayspring Church on Roosevelt Island was started by Pastor Olu Obed, and intentionally seeks to move beyond a Nigerian focus. His wife, Elsie Obed founded and directs Lillies International, a radio ministry with offices in New York, Lagos, and River State. To keep in touch with her listeners in New York City, Obed conducts monthly praise and preaching services in venues such as the Hotel Pennsylvania and Waldorf Astoria, attracting a large and diverse mix of people.⁹³

Francophone Churches

A number of French-speaking African churches are established in New York City. The French Christian Ministry of New York, started by Daniel Diakanwa in 1994, ministers to the Congolese community. The church, now named Eglise Evangelique "Amour Du Christ," meets at Lexington Avenue United Methodist Church on Manhattan's Upper East Side on Sunday afternoons. When Diakanwa left the church to continue his training in the Salvation Army, it became associated with the Christian and Missionary Alliance.⁹⁴ A related congregation meets in a Presbyterian church on 42nd street. The Pentecostal-oriented Frank Allechi Ministries serves the Ivory Coast community in New York. While at one time they conducted services in Harlem, they now meet on White Plains Road in the Bronx, with services advertised in French and English. I am often asked about the Kimbanguist's. They do not have a branch in New York City, but they do, however, operate a small fellowship in the Atlanta area.⁹⁵

⁹² See www.christlife.tv (accessed on September 28, 2006).

⁹³ See <http://www.liliesinternational.org/home.htm>.

⁹⁴ Daniel Diakanwa, Interview, February 15, 2008.

⁹⁵ This is confirmed by Daniel Diakanwa.



Fig. 3.6 Sign for French African Outreach, Manhattan. 2008

Liberian Churches on Staten Island

While most of New York's African congregations gather where they can find a place to worship, Staten Island's Liberian Christians are different in their residential cluster. As Liberia collapsed into civil war in the 1990s, a small number of refugees found their way to the United States and resettled in the Stapleton community of Staten Island. Here Bethel Outreach, Christ Assembly Lutheran Church, Christ Memorial Christian Church, First United Christian Church, and Trinity Baptist serve Liberian residents on Staten Island. The community is also a site for interviews for Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Headquarter Operations

Along with the concentration of African churches in New York there is also a large number of overseas operational or administrative headquarters. The Church of the Lord (Aladura) in the Bronx is the North American see and the office of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana Overseas Mission Field (OMF) is located in Harlem.



Fig. 3.7 Church of Pentecost Branch and Headquarters, the Bronx. 2006

The Bronx is the headquarters for two Ghanaian Pentecostal churches, The Apostolic Church International on White Plains Road and the nearby Church of Pentecost. Also in the Bronx are the North American headquarters of Deeper Life Bible Church, the Cherubim and Seraphim, Christ Apostolic Church (First in the Americas) and Christ Apostolic (Agbala-Itura). In Queens, Living Faith Church Worldwide (Winners' Chapel USA) has planted its first church and headquarters for North America.



Fig. 3.8 Holy Order of Cherubim and Seraphim Movement Church and Headquarters, Brooklyn. 2006

As examples, the Church of Pentecost headquarters shares space with its flagship New York City branch. The exterior signage on the large building features a picture of a dove in flight over a map of the world. Deeper Life headquarters is also an

office within their flagship parish. No other city in the United States of which I am aware of has a similar concentration of international headquarters of African churches.

The One and the Many

Although Pentecostal Christianity is growing in New York City, Catholic, historically Protestant, and independent expressions are also very active.⁹⁶ In these churches we find diverse histories, leaders, and directions, and yet there is also the very real possibility that we are ultimately reading one story, for there is a shared set of concerns and theological emphasis. In this regard, we will want to speak of both “African Christianity” and “African Christianities.” Behind these developments I have surveyed is the question to which we now turn: how did all of these churches come to be in New York City?

GLOBAL CITY/GLOBAL FAITH

“If you get New York, you are getting the world,” asserts Olu Obed,⁹⁷ the Nigerian pastor who along with his wife, Elsie Obed, were responsible for establishing the Redeemed Christian Church of God in the New York area. Obed’s comment reveals something about how New York inspires people, but equally, it emanates from an understanding of how the city does not confine the Christian message, but serves as a connection point for the diffusion of the gospel from Africa to New York, and from here to the United States and beyond.

⁹⁶ My results appear to differ from J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu “An African Pentecostal Mission in Eastern Europe: The Church of the ‘Embassy of God’ in the Ukraine,” *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 27:2 (2005): 299 who emphasizes the dominance of the Pentecostal dimension, and Jehu Hanciles, “Migration and Mission: Some Implications for the Twenty-first-Century Church,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 27:4 (October 2003): 152, stresses the numerical primacy of individual or autonomous churches.

⁹⁷ Olusegun Obed, Interview, February 18, 2004.

Having a church and headquarter for operations in New York City can lend prestige to an African church.⁹⁸ But there is more to an African church presence in New York City than profile. Obed is imagining the city as having a strategic role in the spread of the Christian gospel. The language of New York City as stage, platform, node, and strategic site indicates something of its extraordinary role in the diffusion of African Christianity.

Before explaining what it means that New York is today a global city, I'd like to briefly mention the importance of the city's history for religion and pluralism. From its days as New Amsterdam, a Dutch West India trading outpost, New York City was built on making money.⁹⁹ "Its destiny was to be the city of capital," as Edwin Burrows and Mike Wallace put it in their monumental *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898*.¹⁰⁰ When the Calvinist governor Peter Stuyvesant attempted to suppress Quakers, Catholics, and Jews, he would be met in 1657 with the historic Flushing Remonstrance, a declaration of religious liberty from what is now Queens.¹⁰¹ As a result, write Kenneth Jackson and David Dunbar, "Although New Yorkers may not be more tolerant than citizens of other cities, the tradition in Gotham is of religious freedom."¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Opoku Onyinah, "Pentecostalism and the African Diaspora: An Examination of the Missions Activities of the Church of Pentecost," *Pneuma* 26:2 (Fall 2004): 229-230.

⁹⁹ On background, see Russell Shorto, *The Island at the Center of the World: The Epic Story of Dutch Manhattan and the Forgotten Colony that Shaped America* (New York: Doubleday, 2004).

¹⁰⁰ Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 306.

¹⁰¹ Kenneth T. Jackson and David S. Dunbar, eds., *Empire City: New York Through the Centuries* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

¹⁰² Jackson and Dunbar, *Empire City*, 33. See also Kenneth T. Jackson, "A Colony with a Conscience," *The New York Times*, December 27, 2007, A-29.

The mix of capitalism and religious pluralism opened - and continue to open - New York City to evangelical ferment and new religious developments, setting the stage for African Christianity.¹⁰³

New York City is what Saskia Sassen calls a “global city”: not simply a place, but a process and a relationship to other cities,¹⁰⁴ constituted not only by physical geography, but cross-border networks, connections, linkages, flows, and relationships. Place takes on a new importance as a site for global circuits. The intensity of these cross-border relationships can be deciphered in geographies of both place and Spirit.

Global New York City constellates economic and cultural networks; it is a connection or nodal point for cross-border movements of people and goods. According to Sassen’s multi-faceted analysis in *The Global City*, cities such as New York function in four particular ways: “first, as highly concentrated command points in the organization of the world economy; second, as key locations for finance and for specialized service firms, which have replaced manufacturing as the leading economic sectors; third, as sites of production, including the production of innovations, in those leading industries; and fourth, as markets for the products and innovations produced.”¹⁰⁵

New York City has therefore become a critical staging site for the globalization of financial markets. Sassen proposes: “We may be able to understand the global order

¹⁰³ Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 157, 208-209, 396, 529, 933, 1157, 1170. See also Jon Butler, “Religion in New York City: Faith that Could Not Be,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 22:2 (2002): 51-61. This history is still being unearthed. For an indirect case study, see Burkhard Bilger, “Mystery on Pearl Street,” *The New Yorker*, January 7, 2008, 56-65.

¹⁰⁴ Saskia Sassen, “Introduction: Locating Cities on Global Circuits,” in *Global Networks, Linked Cities*, ed. Saskia Sassen (New York: Routledge, 2002), 1-36; Peter J. Taylor, *World City Network: A Global Urban Analysis* (London: Routledge, 2004).

¹⁰⁵ Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 3-4.

only by analyzing why key structures of the world economy are *necessarily* situated in cities.”¹⁰⁶ In a post-industrial economy when forms of production are dispersed, there remains a need for some form of central coordination and supporting technical infrastructure.¹⁰⁷ Another element of New York City’s economy is its cultural industries, but these also mass in New York City for similar reasons of density of contact and creativity in a global world.¹⁰⁸

While not determinedly in contrast to the state,¹⁰⁹ the global city reflects a more “city-centric”¹¹⁰ view of the world. It is such a world that suggests why New York City may more closely connect to cities at a great distance than to those in its local region.¹¹¹ An average New Yorker may relate more closely to Lagos than Hartford. The world is no longer a global village, but a global city.

One way of beginning to understand the international movement to New York City is immigration policy. In 1965, President Lyndon Johnson went to Ellis Island, the famous entry point for immigrants to New York City, and signed into law the *Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965*. The law is well known for emphasizing non-European diversity and family reunification.¹¹² As Nancy Foner points out in her excellent study *From Ellis Island to JFK: New York’s Two Great Waves of Immigration*, there have been two great periods of immigration in New York. The first wave occurred between 1880 and 1920, and during this time, “close to a million

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 4.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 4, 84. See also Phred Dvorak, “Why Multiple Headquarters Multiply,” *Wall Street Journal*, Monday, November 19, 2007, B-1, 3; Patrick McGeehan, “Top Executives Return Offices to Manhattan,” *New York Times*, July 3, 2006, A-1, B-4.

¹⁰⁸ Elizabeth Currid, *The Warhol Economy: How Fashion, Art, and Music Drive New York City* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

¹⁰⁹ Saskia Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

¹¹⁰ Taylor, *World City Network*, 27.

¹¹¹ Sassen, “Introduction: Locating Cities on Global Circuits,” 15.

¹¹² Arun Peter Lobo, Joseph L. Salvo, and Vicky Virgin, *The Newest New Yorkers 1990-1994: An Analysis of Immigration to NYC in the Early 1990s* (New York City: New York City Department of Planning, 1996), 33.

and a half immigrants arrived and settled in the city - so that by 1910 fully 41 percent of all New Yorkers were foreign born.”¹¹³ In this first great wave of immigration, the new arrivals were mostly eastern European Jews and southern Italians.¹¹⁴ Whereas the first wave involved primarily European immigrants, the second and current wave is characterized by non-European diversity.

Expanding the changes begun in 1965 even further was the *1990 Immigration Act*, considered “the biggest change in immigration law since 1965.”¹¹⁵ The 1990 Act “maintained the priority given to family reunification, but placed an increased premium on skills. It also permanently put into place a program to diversify the source countries of immigrants to the United States.”¹¹⁶ Since 1990, over one million new international immigrants have entered New York, and today almost sixty percent of New Yorkers are foreign born or children of foreign-born parents.¹¹⁷

But while the 1965 Immigration Act, and its revisions in 1990, is often presented as a standard explanation for immigration to New York City, Sassen believes that legislation is not a sufficient explanation for the global city. Instead immigration is located within the operations of globalization and the city and can be one means of evaluating global connectivity.¹¹⁸ “Global cities,” Sassen argues, “are a key site for the incorporation of large numbers of immigrants in activities that service the strategic sector.”¹¹⁹ In her reading of the data, “immigration can be seen as providing

¹¹³ Nancy Foner, *From Ellis Island to JFK: New York's Two Great Waves of Immigration*, (New Haven: Yale University Press and New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2000), 1.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Lobo, Salvo and Virgin, *The Newest New Yorkers 1990-1994*, 33.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Rae D Rosen, Susan Wieler, and Joseph Pereira, “New York City Immigrants: The 1990s Wave,” *Current Issues in Economics and Finance* 11: 6 (June 2005): 1-7. Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=760926>.

¹¹⁸ For further elaboration, see Lisa Benton-Short, Marie D. Price, and Samantha Friedman, “Globalization from Below: The Ranking of Global Immigrant Cities,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 29:4 (2005): 945-959, and Michael Samers, “Immigration and the Global City Hypothesis: Towards an Alternative Research Agenda,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 26:2 (2002): 389-402.

¹¹⁹ Sassen, *The Global City*, 322.

labor for the low-wage service and manufacturing jobs that service both the expanding, highly specialized service sector and the high-income lifestyles of those employed in the specialized, expanding service sector.”¹²⁰ People come to New York for work, with the labor market driving its growth.

As Sassen describes the global city, two types of workers are required for it to succeed: high-end professionals and a low-wage labor force. “New York’s producer service sector caters to a world market and is heavily internationalized, servicing or making transactions at the axis between a firm and the international market.”¹²¹ Low-wage workers are demanded for conducting New York’s service economy, leading to increased population growth, and the generation of cross-border urban zones.¹²² As a result, in New York City there has been an “institutionalization of the casual labor market.”¹²³ While a taxi driver or a banker operate on different global circuits, both belong to the same global moment, embedded in and related to the financial dynamics of New York City and the global economy.¹²⁴ The global city becomes ordered around a polarization between “corporate capital” and a new low-wage immigrant workforce, a space of contestation for goods and claims.¹²⁵

In spite of this polarization in the workforce, New York City is still experienced as “a land of opportunity. I’ve come to explore that opportunity,” said Ebenezer Asare of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana.¹²⁶ Education and family are also motivating factors in immigration to New York City, but work overwhelmingly predominates. New York City’s global image and rough and tumble economy meet in the commentary of Justin Emineke, a member of the Redeemed Christian Church of God

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid., 155.

¹²² Ibid., 324.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights*, 385-386.

¹²⁵ Saskia Sassen, “The Many Scales of the Global: Implications for Theory and for Politics,” in *The Postcolonial and the Global*, ed., Revathi Krishnaswamy and John C. Hawley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 86-87.

¹²⁶ Ebenezer Asare, Interview, August 25, 2005.

in Brooklyn: “New York City is glamorous, a wonderland, God’s kingdom on earth.” Nevertheless, if the imagination of New York City is “God’s kingdom on earth,” the reality felt on the streets is much different. As Justin elaborated, the experience of New York includes “working sixteen hour days, exhausted” and as an immigrant in the middle of America’s racial politics, “even more degraded...looked down on.”¹²⁷ This new immigrant experience reveals the ambiguities and contradictions of the global city.

From this description of the global city, I draw three implications for comprehending African Christianity in New York City, its formation, and operations on multiple scales. Urban transformation, I believe, is a key aspect of the global expansion of African Christianity.

First, the global city is at the heart of the emergence of African Christianity as a transnational religious movement. This potential comes about because the global city is a new space, a place for emergent subjectivities. People move to New York City for work and bring their faith, all the while embedded in a wide range of religious circuits. Operating at different scales, territorial boundaries are negotiated, and African Christians build community life as a way of responding to and living within the global city. Faith is an everyday practice, and churches are spaces of identification within the global flow.

Second, global New York City serves as a hub for the worldwide operations of African church movements. Here the global city provides the infrastructure for the reorganization of African Christian formations and their ongoing connection to larger religious networks. New York City is a hub for African Christianity not just because it has a large concentration of African immigrants, but because it is a connection point for a networked world. The global city is a place where distance is closed and resources are concentrated. This is why so many African churches have based their North American operations in the city. Both scale and intensity are concurrent elements in mission and expansion.

¹²⁷ Justin Eminike, Interview, October 10, 2004.

Third, African Christianity in New York City illuminates a new urban geography, one that features connections to African cities.¹²⁸ New York City should no longer be viewed in relationship only to cities such as Frankfurt, Tokyo, and London but should also be viewed in an expanded global urban zone that includes Accra, Lagos, and Monrovia. A focus on global cities should include a focus on religion in African cities.¹²⁹ Correspondingly, as Jennifer Robinson urges, seeing such a new urban zone can help to alter Western provincialism in conceptual frameworks for the city.¹³⁰

Taken together, these features show the importance of New York City for African Christianity. Just as New York City is a hub for the flow of global capital, so it is for the flow of African Christianity. Indeed, the two are both distinct and overlapping circuits. The city is essential to how African Christianity is formed, operates, and expands. Olu Obed, whom I quoted at the beginning of this chapter, has it right: “If you get New York, you are getting the world.”

CONCLUSION: BORN AGAIN NEW YORK CITY

This chapter has been an exercise in mapping African Christianity in a global urban world. The energies of faith and the dynamism of the global city meet in New York, where percolating up from below is a growing population of “born again” Christians, who, like the city are also making a break with the past.¹³¹ Today, by one estimate nearly one of every ten New Yorkers belongs to a Pentecostal congregation.¹³² And New York City itself, a city perpetually breaking with its own past for the new,¹³³

¹²⁸ Explorations in this area can be found in Saskia Sassen, ed., *Global Networks, Linked Cities* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

¹²⁹ On the African city, see AbdouMaliq Simone, *For the City Yet to Come: Changing African Life in Four Cities* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

¹³⁰ Jennifer Robinson, “Global and World Cities: A View From Off the Map,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 26:3 (2002): 531-554, and *Ordinary Cities: Between Modernity and Development* (Routledge: London, 2006).

¹³¹ Birgit Meyer, “‘Make a Complete Break with the Past’: Memory and Post-Colonial Modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostalist Discourse,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28:3 (1998): 316-346.

¹³² David Gonzalez, “A Sliver of a Storefront, A Faith on the Rise,” *New York Times*, January 14, 2007, A-1, 32-33.

¹³³ Max Page, *The Creative Destruction of New York: 1900-1940* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999).

can be described as a place to be “born again.”¹³⁴ With this shared, fundamental impulse toward reinvention and renewal, African Christianity meshes its identity with New York while marking itself by the ways it breaks from the city. African Christianity really is a New York story.

In these first three chapters, I have looked at the development of African Christianity in global New York City. Equally important is the encounter of faith with the global city. I turn in the next part to the practices most central to this encounter.

¹³⁴ Cal Snyder, “Reflections on September 11: Lives Lost and Lives Changed,” Public Lecture at New York Historical Society, September 26, 2007.

PART 2

ENCOUNTERS

CHAPTER 4

PRAISING BODIES: GOD, POWER, AND EVERYDAY LIFE

INTRODUCTION

After my first few weeks at the Church of the Lord (Aladura), I was invited to offer some of the prayers that are a part of the regular Sunday liturgy. Kneeling down, as directed, I offered prayers for “the city, the world, for Christian ministers around the world, and for the leaders of the Church of the Lord (Aladura).” This invitation to pray was an act of hospitality, but also intended as formation in the practices of the church. Following the service, Sister Sarah remarked that after my time at the church, “Your wife will ask, how did you learn how to pray like that?” She laughed but what was underneath her comment was a belief that by being part of the Church of the Lord (Aladura) I would learn to pray differently. What I would be taught was more than vocal styles and speech patterns, but the heart of the church’s understanding of Christian faith.

What do I know without ambiguity after my years of research? African Christians pray. They pray standing up, they pray kneeling down, they pray in loud voices, they pray all night. African Christians believe in the efficacy of prayer, and go hungry to ensure God hears and acts. Without fear of contradiction, they pray to God unbound and free and believe God active in responding to prayer. Life is about prayer, and prayer is life. Prayer is theology lived, embodied, and enacted in daily life, not merely its end. Prayer is taken to be a liberating gift of the Spirit for life in the world.

This chapter concerns prayer in African churches in New York, the way it is practiced and interacts with everyday life in the global city. Prayer, I argue in this chapter, is the most important religious experience and practice in African churches in New York because it places everyday life within the script of God’s salvation. We

are often told that prayer is theology, for it concerns God, and that is very much what we find in African churches. But prayer (and theology) is at least as much a bodily practice¹ as it is a discursive one.² African Christians use their voices *and* bodies in communication with God, to the end of praising God and experiencing human flourishing.

Drawing perhaps a surprising contrast with Bible study, Bola Oyesanya of the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel remarked in passing, “Tell them [there is] a prayer meeting, and the whole place will be filled.” David Maxwell’s study of Zimbabwean Pentecostals offers a concurring observation: “More important still is the power of prayer.”³ Bible reading may be essential, and its words carry power, but because prayer is direct communication with the divine,⁴ it can be a form of immediate power. “It is in the experience of vernacular prayer,” Adrian Hastings observed, “both public and private, both formal and informal, and in the spirituality which grows up from such experience that the true roots for an authentic African Christianity will most surely be found.”⁵ Afe Adogame calls prayer the “nerve-centre of Aladura spirituality,”⁶ an observation that might be extended more broadly within African Christianity. Bengt Sundkler and Christopher Steed call prayer “the very heart-beat of religion.”⁷

¹ Jürgen Moltmann, “Praying with Eyes Open,” in *Loving God with Our Minds: The Pastor as Theologian*, ed. Michael Welker and Cynthia A. Jarvis (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 195-201.

² Akesha Baron, “‘I’m a Woman but I Know God Leads My Way’”: Agency and Tzotzil Evangelical Discourse,” *Language in Society* 33 (2004): 249-283.

³ David Maxwell, *African Gifts of the Spirit: Pentecostalism and the Rise of a Zimbabwean Transnational Religious Movement* (Oxford: James Currey, 2006), 197. For another concurring observation, see Cephas N. Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism: A Study of the Development of Charismatic Renewal in the Mainline Churches in Ghana* (Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 2002), 202.

⁴ This is basic to religious belief, as shown in Bruce Ellis Benson and Norman Wirzba, eds., *The Phenomenology of Prayer* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005).

⁵ Adrian Hastings, *African Christianity* (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), 49.

⁶ Afeosemimo Adogame, “Prayer as Action and Instrument in the Aladura Churches,” in *Opfer und Gebet in den Religionen*, ed. Ulrich Berner, Christopher Bochinger, and Rainer Flasche (Gutersloh: Bertelsmann, 2005), 118.

⁷ Bengt Sundkler and Christopher Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 94.

Amid the torsions of urban powers and at the intersections of the global city's contradictions, African Christians at prayer represent a distinctive and empowering ways of making claims on the global city. As I reviewed in the previous chapter, in her work on the global city, Saskia Sassen emphasizes its contradictory form: "The global city is a strategic site for disempowered actors because it enables them to gain presence, to emerge as subjects, even when they do not gain direct power."⁸ That is, if Sassen believes the global city is a limiting social form, it nonetheless can be a "strategic space"⁹ for non-state actors, transnational movements, women, and immigrants to emerge as political subjects. This is the other side of Sassen's scholarship on the global city, a compelling recognition that the city is potentially a site where inequality can be challenged and compelling claims for social and political rights put forward.¹⁰ But for Sassen, presence is not coterminous with power.

"Anyone who wishes to make sense of the revival of religion in the world must think of spiritual power as real power," observe Stephen Ellis and Gerrie ter Haar.¹¹ In African Christianity, spiritual power is "enabling power," as Allan Anderson puts it.¹² Prayer is a primary form of spiritual power in African Christianity, for it is power derived from God. Afe Adogame cites the Aladura "maxim" that "a prayerless Christian is a powerless Christian, while a prayerful Christian is a very

⁸ Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), xxi.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 319.

¹⁰ Saskia Sassen, "The Many Scales of the Global: Implications for Theory and for Politics," in *The Postcolonial and the Global*, ed. Revathi Krishnaswamy and John C. Hawley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 82-93.

¹¹ Stephen Ellis and Gerrie ter Haar, *Worlds of Power: Religious Thought and Political Practice in Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 189; cf. 97-99.

¹² Allan H. Anderson, "Pentecostal Pneumatology and African Power Concepts: Continuity or Change?" *Missionalia* 19:1 (1990): 68, and "African Pentecostal Churches and Concepts of Power," unpublished paper, http://artsweb.bham.ac.uk/aanderson/Publications/apcs_and_concepts_of_power.htm. Here I am following a lead suggested by Ellis and ter Haar, *Worlds of Power*, 97.

powerful Christian.”¹³ Put another way, as Jane Soothill observes, prayer is “more than a comfort or a refuge.”¹⁴

In the global city, prayer connects the church and the streets, presence with power, faith with mountains to be moved. Hermione Harris’s *Yoruba in Diaspora: An African Church in London* links prayer and spiritual power together within a diaspora context.¹⁵ Spiritual power provides for human flourishing because it overcomes circumstances, illnesses, negative spiritual forces, and anything that inhibits and diminishes life. African Christians in New York City believe, as Pentecostal church members say, “that my God has all the power, in Jesus name.” To be sure, the gift of the Spirit is about empowerment for African Christians. Yet for the churches in New York City, the source of spiritual power as it is described in song, word, and testimony is Trinitarian: God the ruler of the universe, Jesus the Saviour, Lord and victor, and the Holy Spirit as the divine life force.

This chapter begins the second part of this thesis, focused on three primary ways that African Christians and churches encounter global New York: prayer, reading Scripture, and mission. African Christianity is much more than the sum of its ecclesiastical institutions; it is an embodied constellation of concerns, beliefs, practices, and experiences.¹⁶ Prayer, reading Scripture, and mission are each distinctive Christian practices, but at the level of the local church, they are hard to disentangle and are better bundled together as a single expression of Christian life and community.¹⁷ To formally extricate practices one from another may not be entirely possible, but in any case they call for attention and what each may individually show us will help to see the whole.

¹³ Adogame, “Prayer as Action and Instrument,” 118.

¹⁴ Jane E. Soothill. *Gender, Social Change and Spiritual Power: Charismatic Christianity in Ghana* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 217.

¹⁵ Hermione Harris, *Yoruba in Diaspora: An African Church in London* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 5-11, 171-238.

¹⁶ Derek R. Peterson, Review of “*African Christianity: An African Story*,” ed. Ogbu U. Kalu, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 57:1 (2006): 87-89.

¹⁷ Justin J. Meggitt, “The First Churches: Religious Practice,” in *The Biblical World*, vol. 2, ed. John Barton (London: Routledge, 2002), 158-159.

Within the field of theology, “practices” has come generally to refer to something an ecclesial community does with regularity across space and time, and does so grounded in Christian beliefs.¹⁸ In this sense, religious cultures are built through the repeated practices of a community.¹⁹ One of the findings to emerge from my ethnographic research is that for African churches of all types, theology and practice are closely bound up with experience. More precisely, prior to practice and belief is the experience of God the Creator, Jesus the Redeemer, and the Spirit of life, which in turn shapes practice and belief.²⁰ Theology in African churches is communal reflection on God’s presence and power in the world and creation. It does not follow the “ivory tower” academic model. But such theology is not a strictly local activity, for religious experience in African churches reflects both universal and historical-contextual narratives.²¹

The study of experience in early Christianity is undergoing something of a re-examination. New Testament scholars Luke Timothy Johnson²² and Larry Hurtado²³ are drawing attention to the importance of the experience of Jesus in the early Christian story. It is outside of the scope of this thesis to pursue this further, but it is important to note that assertions concerning religious experience in the early church are internally tied to theological accounts of Jesus. At the very least, this discussion indicates the need for a more complex appreciation for how experience, belief and practice function together in Christian communities. It also suggests a dialogical role

¹⁸ See Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass, eds., *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

¹⁹ This is featured in the argument of Alasdair McIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 187-188.

²⁰ Another way of putting it is that for Christian theology the Spirit is privileged over practices. See here Nicholas M. Healy, “Practices and the New Ecclesiology: Misplaced Concreteness?” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 5:3 (2003): 287-308.

²¹ For theoretical reflections on the general topic, see Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

²² Luke Timothy Johnson, *Religious Experience in Earliest Christianity: A Missing Dimension in New Testament Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998).

²³ L. W. Hurtado, “Religious Experience and Religious Innovation in the New Testament,” *Journal of Religion* 80:2 (2000): 183-205.

for ethnography in relationship to theology: reading lived practices as a means to explore more deeply Scripture and theological reflection. What is clear is that for African Christians, claims about God's work relate to the testimony of experience.

In this chapter I first provide a general description of the place of prayer in each of the three churches. Then I narrate the all-night prayer meeting, which helps to fix prayer as a defining religious practice. I next situate prayer in relationship to fasting, and show how the two practices work together. With this presentation as background, I describe how prayer helps African Christians place their lives in the script of God's salvation as a means of empowerment. Even though prayer is clearly a bodily practice, it is an experience of God that introduces a complex and highly theological encounter with the global city.

PRAYING COMMUNITIES

At the beginning of his *Confessions*, Augustine asks: "How shall I call upon my God, my God and my Lord?"²⁴ For the Church of the Lord (Aladura), the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn, and the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York, the answer begins with community. African churches are communities of prayer that distinctively raise their voices to God.

Strong Prayers

The community of the Church of the Lord (Aladura) - Minister Joy, Evangelists Sarah and Eleanor, Brother David, and Mother Cooper - pray at all hours of the day and for everything. For "all children of God" in the Church of the Lord (Aladura) and not just leaders, prayer is expected to occur five times each day: at 6:00 a.m. when they awake, at 9:00 a.m. before work, at 12:00 p.m., at 3:00 p.m., and then around 9:00 p.m. before going to sleep.²⁵ Kneeling is not required at each point of the day, and the spirit of this program is for each member to prayer without ceasing.

²⁴ Augustine, *The Confessions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 3.

²⁵ Marie Cooper, Interview, October 21, 2007.

Prayer is not simply something one does at the Church of the Lord (Aladura), it is what it means to be the church.

This is to be expected, for “Aladura,” a Yoruba word, means “the praying people” or “owners of prayer.”²⁶ J. D. Y. Peel identifies an underlying theological narrative: “Aladura churches are well-named; *adura*, prayer, is the focal point of all their doctrines and practices.”²⁷ In the world of the Aladura, God is engaged in the world, particularly as a respondent to the prayers of the church. Peel captures the dynamic relationship between God and prayer. “Prayer may be the supplication to God to fulfil the individual’s wishes and desires, or else a way of getting guidance from God, or, in religious terms, knowing His Will.”²⁸ Robin Horton concludes similarly, “They believe that prayer to God, properly conducted, brings definite and predictable results in the world of space-time events. It cures disease, brings financial success, secures promotion, and so on.”²⁹

Prayer for the Church of the Lord (Aladura) in the Bronx involves the whole body, not merely the vocal cords. Prayers of great length are offered while laying prostrate on the ground, kneeling, or sometimes standing. Prayer can also be loud. As the visiting Archdeacon Lachana commented, we are “not here for meditation.... Let us pray... open your mouths. If you want a ‘quiet time,’ then go outside,” he announced.³⁰ No one went outside to meditate. In addition to the formulaic prayers, there is a certain cadence and vocabulary to the prayers of the Church of the Lord (Aladura) in the Bronx that appear to have more than one source, including traditions learned in Liberia and the Church of the Lord (Aladura) traditions. The charismatic, spontaneous, and ecstatic prayers have recognizable patterns and word combinations such as “Thank you, Jesus.”

²⁶ Adogame, “Engaging the Rhetoric of Spiritual Warfare,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 34:4 (2004): 493.

²⁷ J.D.Y Peel, *Aladura: A Religious Movement Among the Yoruba* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 119.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Robin Horton, “African Conversion,” *Africa* 41:2 (1971): 88.

³⁰ Church of the Lord (Aladura), Field Notes, August 22, 2004.



Fig. 4.1 Prayer at the Church of the Lord (Aladura), Facing the Altar. 2005

Few of the prayers follow a text and are instead spontaneous. Yet “spontaneous” prayers in the Church of the Lord (Aladura) very much reflect repetitive linguistic and rhythmic patterns.³¹ The point is to pray. In each Sunday service, prayers of adoration, prayers of thanksgiving to God, prayers of victory, prayers for the church are offered. Prayer as praise, intercession, and adoration is the emphasis throughout the service. There is an emphasis on confession of sin in prayer. Each service will include a recitation of the Lord’s Prayer.

Two particular types of prayers identified by Mother Cooper are “spiritual prayers” and “strong prayers.”³² Explained Mother Cooper, “spiritual prayers” are a “shield” against malevolent forces. Strong prayers are those you “can feel within [the] self.” Spiritual prayers and strong prayers are spiritual power for whatever need is presented to God.

Sermons with God

“Redeemed is very, very prayerful,” Wale Adebo, a member of the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn tells me. He attends the

³¹ This observation applies to each of the three churches. Robin A. Shoaps, “‘Pray Earnestly’: The Textual Construction of Personal Involvement in Pentecostal Prayer and Song,” *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 12:1 (2002): 34-71.

³² Marie Cooper, Interview, February 13, 2005.

church with his wife and young children. The practical effects of his ties to the local church are significant. “I find out that when I come to church, I have this belief and my prayers get answered.” Or as he also put it, “When you pray...things get done.”³³ My finding is that there is wide belief among members that this is true.



Fig. 4.2 Redeemed Christian Church of God Workers' Prayer. 2004

Prayer at the Brooklyn church is not silent, such as found in early Christian³⁴ and contemplative traditions; it is far more about engaging God in the way of world-shaping religions. When the church prays, it is typically not one person speaking on behalf of the community to God. Instead every member prays vocally at once along with vigorous bodily gestures such as hands waving, feet stomping, and movement around the room. In my field notes, I came to characterize this highly kinetic and emotionally charged form of prayer as “preaching prayer.” The reason I call it “preaching prayer” is because it looks and sounds like a person vigorously preaching, but multiplied to every adult person in the room. Because prayer is like a sermon addressed to God, and God is expected to answer, it appears to be a dialogical sermon with God.

³³ Wale Adebo, Interview, April 10, 2005.

³⁴ Pieter W. van der Horst, “Silent Prayer in Antiquity,” *Numen* 41 (1994): 1-25.

In a common example, the congregation is told to pray and everyone begins to speak in voices and kinetic movements to God. The woman praying aloud next to me speaks to God in the following way:³⁵

Father God speak. Father do something! God Father. Once you have said it I believe it. O Lord may it come to pass. Glorify yourself. Let your Spirit lead me. Let him lead me to my destiny.

She then speaks in tongues and adds concise lines of praise in English. Simultaneously, Pastor Nimi quotes John 3 to the congregation about the living waters of God and then declares, “It will flow to you and other people.” The woman begins to pray aloud, “Let it flow.” The session continues with more Bible verses and more prayers that relate to these themes. Prayer is gathered up into the event of God’s presence in worship.

Another illustration comes just after Pastor Nimi delivers a sermon about the seed of Jesus and the power of God.³⁶ More precisely, there is no firm line between sermon and congregation-wide prayer; the two are really one activity. But at the “end” of his sermon, Pastor Nimi calls on the church to pray. The man next to me starts loudly repeating the words, “Let your power remain in me,” as he raises his hands up and down and snaps his fingers. The words vary a bit, but he continues to speak in a loud voice, “Let the seed of life, let it stream over me. Letting your power, let your power shine in me.” This continues for over five minutes, with more than 150 people in the room engaged in similar preaching prayer. The prayer eventually ends with the words, “In the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.”

Pray Without Ceasing

The prayer life of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York provides another indication of the influence of both solemn and formal Protestant prayer styles and the

³⁵ Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn, Field Notes, June 22, 2005.

³⁶ Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn, Field Notes, October 14, 2007.

Charismatic movement in Ghana.³⁷ Corporate prayer during Sunday worship service is in a solemn and formal style. Typically prayer is led by a single person and is not a vocally communal experience. For example, on Easter Sunday in 2005, a prayer was offered for (1) visitors, (2) the sick and (3) “PCG Departmental Directors” in Ghana. For the sick the church was called to pray that the “Lord would strengthen and heal them” and for “Departmental heads in Ghana” the prayer was “Lord guide them.”

One of the most important groups in the church, the Bible Study and Prayer Group of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana meets on Friday evenings from 7:00-9:00 p.m. at the church’s building on 123rd Street. Most of the women wear scarves on the heads with the words “Presbyterian Church Bible Study and Prayer Group” on the back and “Pray without Ceasing” on the front. Cephas Omenyo identifies the Bible Study and Prayer Group as “the main charismatic renewal group in the PCG, which has spread through the church.”³⁸

A typical meeting of the Bible Study and Prayer Group, held in August 2004, begins as the group gathers around a table, singing and clapping their hands.³⁹ If the first song is in Twi, the next is the familiar “Do something new in my life/something new in my life” sung in English. Eric directs the group to be attentive to God’s involvement in their lives, “to pray and thank God for what he has done” this past week. At once, voices in English and Twi thank God. “Thank you father/say hallelujah/hallelujah/hallelujah be unto you,” prays Eric. Then we are instructed to praise God working in our lives and ask for forgiveness of sins, and more vocal praying goes on. “In Jesus name we pray” is how this time ends. And then we sing, “Let the power of the Lord come down/Let the Spirit of the Lord come down.” A Bible study follows, an offering, and closing song.

³⁷ Cephas N. Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism*, 127-153; J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyda, ““Christ is the Answer: What is the Question?” A Ghana Airways Prayer Vigil and Its Implications for Religion, Evil and Public Space,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 35:1 (2005): 93-117.

³⁸ Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism*, 140.

³⁹ Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York, Field Notes, August 20, 2004.

“Prayers are the weapons of Christians,” Kwabena Gyasi of the Bible Study and Prayer Group explains.⁴⁰ In this, they combat Satan’s power. Prayer also has to do with the “self,” showing that “more depends on you” to pray. To emphasize, he repeats that the “most important work is you.” That is, he ascribes responsibility to the individual. As a basis for this claim, he points out that Jesus “had to pray...otherwise he could not do it,” the “it” referring to the cross. The need is great, Kwabena emphasizes, for “Satan will test you - a Christian - not those on the street.”

The rhythms of a life of prayer at Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York are represented in Diana Owusu.⁴¹ Diana works the night shift at a nursing care facility of the elderly. After a night of hard work, she returns home and sleeps briefly, waking up at 8:00 a.m. for morning prayers. But instead of travelling to the church, she dials a telephone number that switches her into a prayer meeting with between four and nine fellow members. Over the telephone, they pray for everyday needs.



Fig. 4.3 “Pray Without Ceasing” Uniform. 2007

“Pray without ceasing” are not just words on Diana’s headscarf; they indicate a way of life, indeed life itself. She offers a theological and practical set of reason for her life of prayer:

⁴⁰ Kwabena Gyasi, Interview, August 19, 2005.

⁴¹ Diana Owusu, Interview, July 20, 2007.

God is our father. Every time you wake up you know he has taken care of you. You pray to him and thank him for the day. You ask God for help, to give you good health. Everyday something happens, anything can happen. In the subway, on the street, a stray bullet [could kill you]. Every time I go out, I pray. When I come back, I thank him. It's good for me [to pray]. He listens to me and helps me.⁴²

Along with other members of the Bible Study and Prayer Group, Diana sometimes goes and visits the sick to pray with them. "That's how we help we each other," Diana asserts.⁴³

PRAYING UNTIL THE MORNING

In the city that more or less never sleeps, every first Friday of the month, African Christians can be found awake at an "night-vigil," an all-night fusion of prayer, singing, preaching, and healing usually served up with fasting. Redeemed Christian Church of God in Brooklyn calls it a "Night Vigil" or "Holy Ghost Service," Church of the Lord (Aladura) in the Bronx a "Tarry," and the Presbyterian Church of Ghana often labels it a "Revival."

All-night prayer meetings face up to the fullness of intense spiritual struggles in the universe. Adebisi Oyasile, a member of the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn who became a church planter, a story I tell in chapter 6, describes why prayer during the night is considered so crucial:

Before anything happens in life, [it] happened in the spiritual real. The principalities and powers of darkness work at night, between midnight and 4 am. If the enemy wants to attack it will be at night.⁴⁴

Night vigil is important for being a sustained period of prayer and praise, but also as a means of confronting the powers. For this, Adebisi reports that many times he arises to pray during the hours of 3 and 4 in the morning. Dreams and "night visions" are equally part of the struggle and opportunity of these key hours.⁴⁵ I don't

⁴² Diana Owusu, Interview, March 4, 2008.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Adebisi Oyasile, Interview, January 19, 2008.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

think of “warfare prayer” as fully defining what takes place during a night vigil,⁴⁶ but it is an underlying concern.

All-night prayer meetings are events where God does something powerful. While a differentiated account of each type of vigil is required, at a basic level of analysis they are venues where African immigrants praise God and bring their everyday needs to God and expect God to work “breakthroughs” in health, work, family, immigration status, fertility, and circumstances back home. They are physical acts of discipline interpreted theologically as an event where and when something from God above occurs.

Tarry

The “Tarry” is the all-night service of the Church of the Lord (Aladura) held on the first Friday of each month. “Vigil night,” Mother Cooper summarizes, involves “praying, preaching, all night singing...praise to the Lord.”⁴⁷ The act of “tarrying” recalls the Gospel story and belongs to the Pentecostal tradition. “In Pentecostal worship, tarrying implies travelling, waiting, prostrating, and submitting oneself before the presence of God in hopes that God’s presence might break forth in the mundane and profane circumstances of life.”⁴⁸ To tarry is to embrace the coming of God’s new world.

I arrive at the November 2007 Tarry a little after 9:00 p.m., take off my shoes in the entrance area, and then join Flower and a friend who has accompanied him to the service.⁴⁹ Soon Minister Joy comes down from the upstairs apartment and begins a time of praise worship. “Glory be to God in the highest, Hallelujah,” the church sings. Shortly thereafter, Mother Cooper arrives and rings the hand bell that formally

⁴⁶ Neela Banerjee, “A Midnight Service Helps African Immigrants Combat Demons,” *New York Times*, Tuesday, December 18, 2007, A-24.

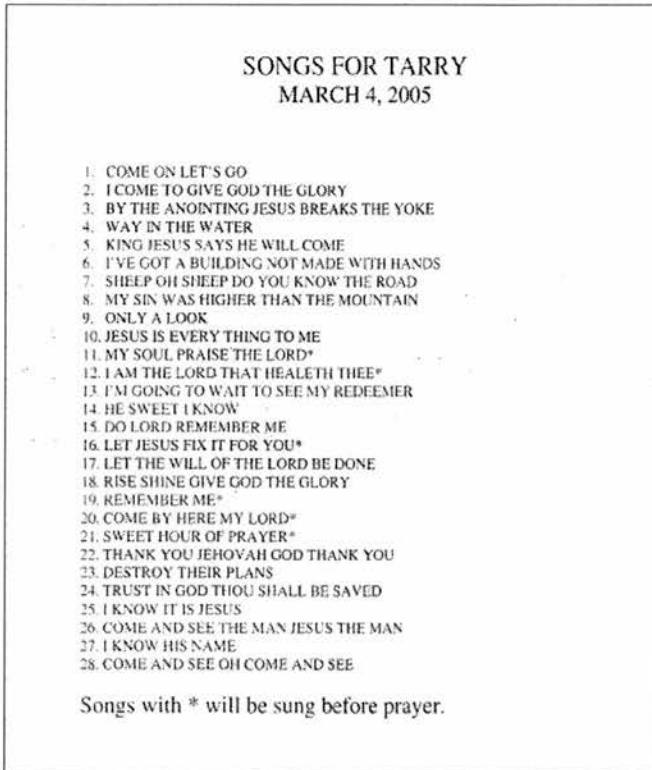
⁴⁷ Marie Cooper, Church of the Lord (Aladura), August 29, 2004.

⁴⁸ Daniel Costelo, “Tarrying on the Lord: Affections, Virtues and Theological Ethics in Pentecostal Perspective,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 13:1 (2004): 50.

⁴⁹ Church of the Lord (Aladura), Field Notes, November 2 and 3, 2007.

gets things going. Appropriately, the next hymn begins, “Abide with me/Fast falls the eventide/The darkness deepen/Lord with me abide.”⁵⁰ The slowly filling room turns to God on its knees, then the “Introit” hymn of “holy words” is sung. “Saffudda Missa Bullal/Ottass Yemi na hu/Waddarrar mi yo sulla/Wen, wen, wen, Rojjabb Ell” are the words of the first stanza.⁵¹ “The year is coming to an end and the Lord wants us to greet him from our hearts,” Mother Cooper asserts. This leads to a “three minute secret confession of sin” that is concluded with a “prayer for cleansing.”

Fig. 4.4 Songs for Tarry, Church of the Lord (Aladura). 2005



For a stretch of over fifteen minutes, Mother Cooper recites names and descriptions of God. “Jehovah,” she states, and the church responds back, “Holy, Holy, Holy.” She goes on, “One in three and three in one,” the Church’s common frequent reference to the Trinity. “What a God we have!” Then a new member is assigned to pray on behalf of the nations, all churches, all ministers, doctors and nurses, and prisoners. “No one knows what prayer you answer,” Mother Cooper explains. There is much more singing, including “Victory Hymns” and a rousing version of

⁵⁰ *The Church of the Lord (Aladura) Worldwide English Hymn Book*, no. 49.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, no.18.

“Onward Christian Soldiers.” At 10:30 p.m., the singing turns to “Shouts,” including “He’s a miracle-working God.” Minister Joy continues the theme of asking God to be present. “We have come for tarry. Lord, look down from your throne on high and grant us your presence.”

As the midnight hour approaches and more people are arriving, Sister Sarah delivers the first sermon. Her text is Mark 12:28, and she emphasizes the need for each member “to lend a helping hand to one another.” At the midnight hour, Mother Cooper announces now is the time for prayer. “Shout House of Prayer!” Mother Cooper exhorts. There are many prayers, and a song just for the moment: “Sweet hour of prayer!/Sweet hour of Prayer!/That calls me from a world of care.”

After midnight, Brother Clark preaches the second sermon from Acts 10. “Are you hungry?” he asks from the text. “Have you saved a soul?” He goes on to convey the conviction that there is “no way you can stop the Word of God,” following with the need “to take the church to the people.” In response to the preaching and praying of Brother Clark’s sermon, the church begins to sing a finely grooved version of “Trust and Obey.”

Preaching becomes prayer as Mother Cooper firmly states, “Pray to the Lord.” The hour between 2:00 a.m. and 3:00 a.m. is largely devoted just to prayer, with members kneeling or laying prostrate before the altar. “When you pray, let it come from within.” Collating the experience of the Garden of Gethsemane with the physical demands of the Tarry and the tiring bodies, in her most serious voice Mother Cooper commands, “Pray, pray, pray!” When Sister Lou prays during the hour, she offers, “I present barren women to you, jobless to you, the homeless to you.” At 3:00 a.m., there is a rousing version of “Glory, Glory Hallelujah.”

Mother Cooper provides the third sermon the Tarry, and for well over one hour she rolls through stories of the Bible, prayer in Monrovia, and the challenges of New York. It is not easy for the people in the room to stay awake, but they persist against exhaustion; the church must reach the morning hour, and Mother Cooper is winding

out the stories, verses, and exhortations to get there. Prayer requires struggle, and physical denial is understood to facilitate communication with God. Following Mother Cooper's sermon are more prayers and singing, then a session of testimonies. David Grigsby testifies about his daughter's recent wedding in Texas, Flower reports in gratitude "no sickness this week. I can walk."

With the clock reaching to the 6:00 a.m. hour, Mother Cooper delivers the benediction. Seven "Hallelujahs," "Hosannas," "Urahs," and "laughters" follow, and then we file on to the Bronx streets where the day is just beginning.

A Tarry marks the body with a different purpose. Remarks Daniel Costelo, "Tarrying is an embodiment and demonstration of human desire in search of being ordered by God's very presence."⁵² A Tarry also inscribes the body with a different time, the time that awaits Christ's return yet filled with divine presence. Tarry time, to coin a phrase, is the time of the gospel of deliverance from the evil powers, the incursion of Jesus as victor.

Holy Ghost/Night Vigil

It is late on a Friday night on the first day of June 2007 at the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn.⁵³ The first Friday of each month is Holy Ghost Night, the third Friday of each month is Workers Vigil, and both begin at 10:00 p.m. and run into the morning.

"Lord over every spirit, hold them bound," prays Omo Obogbaimhe. Microphone in hand she continues, "You would be Lord...let every tongue confess. Pray the blood of Jesus over this sanctuary."⁵⁴ As Omo is praying, others in the room are also

⁵² Costelo, "Tarrying on the Lord," 50.

⁵³ Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn, Field Notes, June 1, 2007.

⁵⁴ The image and power of the blood of Jesus in African Christianity and Pentecostalism is widespread and deserves further exploration and definition. In brief, the cross brings salvation that is comprehensive healing.

praying aloud: “Father, you would prevail in the name of Jesus. In the mighty name of Jesus.” The vocal effect is call and response; the spiritual effect is to sanctify the room as the presence of God. Here is a good point to identify once again the signature emphasis given to Jesus in the beliefs and practices of Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn. Prayer is focused on Jesus and draws on his power.⁵⁵

Minus the usual keyboard player and drummer, singing takes place to hand clapping and galloping tambourines. Omo leads the church in a series of choruses: “You are worthy, Lord,” “You’ve been faithful, Lord,” “How excellent is your name, O Lord,” and the crescendo, “I lift my hands in praise to your name.” As the 11:00 hour nears, Pastor Nimi comes from his office onto the platform, kneeling down in prayer beside his chair. When he comes forward to speak, he proclaims, “Your power, your presence, it would be healing, it would energize us.”

It is at such night vigils that “Holy Communion” is celebrated, not during the morning service. Pastor Nimi points out he always “dresses his best” for communion because he is “meeting with the King of kings and Lord of lords, the table of the Lord Almighty.” He talks about love, forgiveness, and reconciliation. As the elements are taken, Pastor Nimi stresses that they are for “healing in your life, healing in your situation. If anyone is sick, let there be healing.” Communion takes on an eschatological dimension, the future in the present. After everyone is served, the church kneels in prayer. A Thanksgiving offering is taken. Around the room chairs have been pressed into makeshift beds for children, others are curled up on the floor near their parents.

“Come see what the Lord has done” are the words of the familiar song that begins testimony time. But before people can speak, one more song, this one about success in Jesus, “Are you a winner? I am a winner.” Bola Oyesanya now leads the session of testimonies. The first testimony celebrates God for preventing an accident and for

⁵⁵ The pattern is an early and distinctive one. Larry Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 140-144, 613-615.

vindication concerning a conflict at work. A second testimony thanks God for healing. The third testimony gives thanks to God for a family member's success back in Nigeria. Next, a woman praises God for her ministry and "God for what he is." Another woman follows with a testimony in song, "In my life I see what you are doing," followed by a statement that God has "blessed and favored." A man provides the next testimony, telling about a change of heart by his employer that led to an increase in pay. Encouraged by the church, he spoke up and asked for a raise. "Thank God for favour with my boss." In the final testimony, a story is told about a new business. "Shall we rise," Bola directs, as she thanks God for "provision."

Sister Egbefun Adieze delivers the first sermon, based on Exodus 15:1-17, the song of Moses. "God bringing salvation" is Sister Egbefun's theme as she moves through the text verse by verse. Whether demons or enemies in our life today - "Drown it!" she declares to God. "The Lord needs to plant you for his dwelling, in his sanctuary, in his inheritance." It is now after midnight, and Sister Omo declares, "Spirit of sleep and slumber [be] banished." More singing and Bible reading follow, but soon Sister Catherine awakens any who might be tempted to slumber with a rousing "Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!" Sister Omo leads the congregation in singing, "You are worthy, Lord."

Pastor Nimi steps to the pulpit and proclaims, "I have a mighty Father. The Lord Almighty is here! God is bigger than your problems." He recalls prophecies from last year, most prominently that God's "power will change us." In the present time, "Doors will open," a reference to opportunities. "The time of the Lord's harvest has come unto you." With emphasis he declares, "You will not remain the same, a change is coming to you." "The time has come, talk to the Lord Almighty. Be bold, stand on the Lord Jesus Christ." Such prophetic speech is seen as granting empowerment in the city, a message of God in the context of Pentecostal worship for life in the world.

At this point Pastor Nimi begins interweaving tongues with prayer lines in English "rho bu baghettii...God will begin to bless you...re bo bo shetti... ra ma ma shetkekie...for you alone [are] God." Such language is especially familiar in times

of intense prayer at the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn. In the New Testament, 1 Corinthians 14 describes different forms of speech that flow from the presence of the Spirit. A summary is found in 1 Corinthians 14:26, which reads, “When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation.”⁵⁶

Anthony Thiselton surveys five scholarly proposals on the denotation tongues or *glossolalia* in 1 Corinthians: (1) angelic speech, (2) power to speak other languages, (3) liturgical rhythms, (4) ecstatic speech, and (5) release of “preconscious” or unconscious welling up.⁵⁷ Thiselton selects the last option of “release” for what occurs 1 Corinthians 14. His conclusion is similar to a recent sociological description of tongues in global Pentecostalism as “forms of expression that bubble up out of the inner depths.”⁵⁸ This may also be true of such energetic prayer generally in African churches, as David Maxwell finds.⁵⁹

But leaving aside a theological or exegetical interpretation of 1 Corinthians, as I have observed the phenomenon of *glossolalia* in New York City during African church worship services, it appears to first reflect liturgical rhythms. Pentecostal prayer can certainly also be cathartic. However, I note that at the church level, types of “ecstatic speech” are not of one kind only. Dynamic and expressive prayer that is ecstatic in nature is also a very common form of prayer in African church life, but not formally limited to speaking in tongues. Such activity does appear to reflect powerfully upon the person who is praying. So I suggest that the speech and prayer patterns in African Christianity, as well as their relationship to the biblical texts, should not be over determined.

⁵⁶ NRSV.

⁵⁷ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 970-989, and *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 444-450.

⁵⁸ Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 147.

⁵⁹ Maxwell, *African Gifts of the Spirit*, 199.

Returning back to my discussion of the prayer service, Pastor Nimi begins to wind down this intense time of prayer that is taking place among all the church members. To change the activity, he proclaims in call and response form, “Let somebody shout Hallelujah!” the signature phrase of the General Overseer of the Redeemed Christian Church of God. Pastor Nimi’s sermon is from 1 Samuel 3 on the life of Samuel, and he tells it as a story of personal “destiny.” Pastoral application is enfolded in the story of Samuel and Eli, “to enable people [to] come to their destiny.” The same God is involved in the same way today, just the names have changed. God will “give you anointing to go the next stage.” Pastor Nimi moves from Samuel to Brooklyn: “This year God will use your ministry. I will say you will not fail!” Space and time are merged as the theological dimensions of the biblical text support everyday life in New York City.

As the offering is taken, the church sings of “the sacrifice of praise.” There is a final announcement reminding people that they should fast in preparation for the upcoming Redeemed Christian Church of God annual convention to be held in Dallas. It is a new day yet still dark on the streets of Brooklyn as people scatter home for some hours of sleep before work and family duties beckon.

All Night Prayer Service

Many of the all night prayer services at the Presbyterian Church of Ghana are connected with designated periods of “revival.” Sometimes the prayer meetings are called revivals; in other instances simply “All Night Prayer Services.” Of both, a number are held throughout the year.

By 8:00 p.m. on Friday, June 24, 2005, the second floor meeting room of the church building on 123rd Street begins to fill up, but it is closer to 9:00 p.m. when things start. Most of the women have their heads covered with cloth that reads simply “Pray.” Worship leader Yaw Amaning begins by inviting people to prayer with him: “Ask God for the Holy Spirit to descend on everyone so we can do God’s work with all our heart and strength.”

A mixture of singing and praying precede the sermon. With her strong vocals, Edith Sarpong leads in praise and worship. For prayer, people stand and pray out loud. “Jesu Christou, You are Worthy” are the words that flow from the person next to me. Brother Samuel Boadu delivers the message on 1 Corinthians 4:7 and Luke 13:6-9 on the topic of “exercise your spiritual gifts to serve the church.” There “are different gifts, one demand,” he proclaims in a description of the work of God in believers. Overall, spiritual gifts “glorify God and serve needs of mankind” and “God judges according to our faithfulness.” The sermon, delivered in an encouraging tone, ends just after 10:00 p.m.

More praise, worship, prayer, and reading Scripture follows; three men sing a special song. Testimony time follows. The first testimony concerns a man’s success in finding a job, followed by a testimony that begins with “God has done a wonderful miracle in my life” and urges the church to keep praying. A male leader in the church begins by relating a story of a son being attacked while at college. He had a dream warning it could happen, but the violence took place anyway, leaving his son with a broken jaw. In response to God beginning the work of healing his son, he gives thanks. “Only God, God, God.”

“Pray, pray, pray. Yes, yes, yes...In the name of Jesus. In the name of Jesus, pray, pray, pray, pray.” With the distinctive cadence of a Pentecostal Christian, Kwasi Agyare of the Bible Study and Prayer Group leads a time of prayer for healing. As he says these words, the fifty people present in the room each raise their voices to God, speaking passionately to God with their bodies and words. A song breaks forth with the words. “Prayer is the master key.” A declaration is given: “My problem will be solved tonight. In the name of Jesus. The Lord will bless you, touch you. Yes, yes, keep praying.” The meaning of prayer for everyday life goes on: “Tell God if any part of your body [needs healing] and he will heal it.”

Soon the white handkerchiefs are waving to shouts of “Jesu Christou.” “God is at hand, so if you believe it, clap your hands for Jesus.” The church sings, “Let the power of the anointing fall on me, anointing fall on me.” With prayer, the service concludes after 1:00 a.m.

PRAYER WITH FASTING

Closely related to prayer is the practice of fasting; one repeatedly hears “prayer and fasting” paired as if a single activity. Harold Turner comments that for the Church of the Lord (Aladura), “‘prayer and fasting’ are [considered] important marks of the true church.”⁶⁰ Religious fasting, “abstinence from certain food for a period of time,”⁶¹ along with water and nourishment, is woven deeply into the spirituality of the three African churches. Like prayer, fasting is a language of the body, of desire directed to God. Informed by a holistic theology of salvation, the self-denial of fasting is not intended to turn believers away from the world as much as turn believers to God, thereby turning all of the needs of this world to God.

Through fasting, African Christians express themselves as being shaped for life with God. Just as extended periods of prayer are an exercise in discipline and physical endurance, fasting contains an ascetic element. The inspired body goes without food to deepen participation in God’s redemption. In Teresa Shaw’s study of early Christian fasting, she observes the view that “fasting makes the body more obedient and controllable while it makes the soul lighter, quiets the restless mind, and aids in prayer and penitence.”⁶² There is an interaction with prayer in this observation, but also a close connection to spiritual ends.

Two primary types of fasting can be identified. The first type of fasting is associated with individual need and determination to address a particular problem or advance in faith. Clarence, a member of the Church of the Lord (Aladura), was going through an “individual problem,” and received a revelation that he should fast for seven days. He felt that fasting could bring him peace. Mother Cooper describes his solitary fast as coming from the teaching of Jesus.

⁶⁰ Harold W. Turner, *African Independent Church*, vol. II, *The Life and Faith of the Church of the Lord (Aladura)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 79.

⁶¹ Teresa M. Shaw, *The Burden of the Flesh: Fasting and Sexuality in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 1.

⁶² Shaw, *The Burden of the Flesh*, 9.

We take fasting from the Bible. When Christ sent the disciples to pray for a certain problem and they could not heal a particular person in the name of Jesus...Jesus told them fasting and prayer, not only prayer...Fasting makes prayer stronger.⁶³

The command for prayer and fasting, she holds, comes from the “Gospel Story.”⁶⁴ The purpose of fasting is “to be strong in the spirit.” Because the spirit controls the body when the spirit is weak, the flesh moves in. “Fasting gives the spirit strength.”⁶⁵ Fasting among the Church of the Lord (Aladura), as Samuel Britt observed in Liberia, has the character of struggle.⁶⁶ It is “doctrine...realized through a kind of ‘bodily praxis.’”⁶⁷

The conviction that fasting relates to problem solving is explicitly made by Mother Cooper. “If you want something to be done, if in need of deep meditation, I will take a fast and approach God on this issue.” An example is the Faith Home that faced foreclosure by the bank; for this purpose Mother Cooper fasted. While the motive for fasting can be to address an individual desire for change, it is accomplished as a member of a community that holds both the person and practice to be important.

Michael Onyeri arrived in New York City four years ago and works delivering dry cleaning on the Manhattan’s Upper East Side.⁶⁸ A quiet and impressive young man in his twenties, he goes after work to night school where he is studying for a college degree in accounting. Michael is a worker at the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, and fasting is a regular part of his Christian life.

I believe when you fast you...are focused to pray more. When you pray and fast is when you open up to God what to pray about. When I pray I speak in tongues. I have more prayer points. I pray about my job and family. God helps me to grow in His work.⁶⁹

⁶³ Marie Cooper, Interview, October 21, 2007.

⁶⁴ Marie Cooper, Interview, February 13, 2005.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Samuel Irving Britt, “The Children of Salvation: Struggle and Cosmology in Liberian Prophet Churches” (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 1992), 648-667.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 649.

⁶⁸ Michael Onyeri, Interviews, October 15, 2003 and October 14, 2007.

⁶⁹ Michael Onyeri, Interview, October 14, 2007.

Like other workers in the church, Michael fasts three days every month as the anointing service approaches. During periods of fasting, he eats only once a day, after returning from work and school, which is between 11:00 p.m. and 12:00 a.m.

A second type of fasting relates to the church calendar.⁷⁰ At the Church of the Lord (Aladura), the two primary church seasons are Lent and the Taborrar, which I will document in chapter 7. During the thirteen days of the Taborrar season in August, members are urged to join in what is called a “white fast.” A white fast includes abstaining from food with salt and sugar, and no meat, fish, oil, or peppers. The Lenten season is one set apart for forty days of fasting, typically from 6:00 a.m. until a set evening hour such as 3:00 p.m. or 6:00 p.m. Given the difficulty, Mother Cooper stresses participation at whatever level is possible, “so long as you serve the Lord with a pure heart.”⁷¹ Lessons for fasting are drawn from the Lenten season. “I want to believe why Jesus went, to prepare himself for ministry,” Mother Cooper remarks. This entails that one “deny [the] body of certain things, a sacrifice” analogy with “Christ a sacrifice.” For “if you want to get close with God in a special way, you have to deny the flesh.”⁷² Approaching the monthly Tarry, three days of fasting are required, broken with a shared meal of fruit.

The last Friday of each month is designated and encouraged as a day of fasting at the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York. Fasting is another example of the role played by the Bible Study and Prayer Group in the spiritual life of the church. Its members can be asked to take the lead in this area for the church. Diana Owusu explains the church practice this way: “We fast, but not regularly. [We fast] when someone asks us to fast...something is in our life, or for somebody. We pray for no tragedy or sickness.”⁷³ As an example, beginning with Lent and leading up to Easter in 2008, the pastor’s wife asked the prayer group that “meets” each morning on the telephone to fast for six weeks. The hours could vary, but if possible fasting should

⁷⁰ Shaw, *The Burden of the Flesh*, 4-5.

⁷¹ Church of the Lord (Aladura), Field Notes, February 6, 2005.

⁷² Marie Cooper, Interview, October 21, 2007.

⁷³ Diana Owusu, Interview, March 4, 2008.

take place between 6:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. There were no conditions on what foods could be eaten outside of the fast.

Across all churches of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, February is annually a month of fasting. Each year a special theme is declared for all branches of the Redeemed Christian Church of God worldwide. The year 2006 was declared by the General Overseer to be a “Year of Increase,” and this is embraced at the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn. February 2006 was set apart as a month of prayer and fasting around the theme of “Year of Increase.” In 2008, it is a year of “Greatness” and “Promotion.” Ministers are to fast from February 1, 2008 to March 9, 2008.⁷⁴

Like most members of the Redeemed parish in Brooklyn, Oghogho West-Erhabor, known as Sister West, was “born again” in Nigeria.⁷⁵ In her case it was through the Household of God led by Pastor Chris Okotie in Benin City. Her mother was Catholic, making Sister West’s move to a Pentecostal church difficult and representative of a born-again conversion experience. Sister West lives within walking distance to the Brooklyn parish, and moves about the neighborhood with a pastoral attentiveness. She is a worker at the church, deeply committed to its life and witness.

Sister West is fasting for the entire month of February, each year. This means if she eats breakfast it will be before 6:00 a.m. and she will go without food or water until the evening. I ask Sister West, what “increase” means. Her answer was comprehensive: “spiritually, physically...health, wealth, everything is included around you [do] to do better.”⁷⁶ As a testimony of what God has done in her life, Sister West reveals that she had just received her Green Card.

⁷⁴ Adebisi Oyesile, Interview, March 13, 2008.

⁷⁵ Oghogho West-Erhabor, Interview, December 7, 2005.

⁷⁶ Oghogho West-Erhabor, Interview, February 16, 2006. See Asonzeh Franklin-Kennedy Ukah, “The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Nigeria. Local Identities and Global Processes in African Pentecostalism” (PhD diss, Bayreuth, 2003), 184.

Adebisi Oyasile not only does the February fast, but engages quarterly in 21 days of fasting every March, June, September, and December. This means he abstains from food between 6:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. for at least 140 days per year.⁷⁷ When he faces a significant case or problem that “ordinary prayer” cannot solve, he adds an additional fast. Fasting brings “complete concentration,” the discipline to “pay more attention.” The end result, he believes, is that “your course can be different,” a good summary of the intent of fasting.

PRAYER AND THE SCRIPT OF SALVATION

In this section I will consider how prayer in the three African churches is considered a means of placing one’s physical, social, and spiritual needs within the “script” of divine redemption. Manuel Vásquez suggests that one of the resources that religion provides in a global age is its “mapping” or “wayfaring” function.⁷⁸ Here I suggest that salvation is a “script” participated in through prayer. Prayer becomes a way of placing oneself in the care of a “mighty God.” As I explored in chapter 1, salvation shapes the imagination of the churches. While prayer directly engages the world through a way of seeing how God saves. In a neo-liberal economy, prayer is understood to generate sustenance and even social mobility. David Maxwell makes this point in *African Gifts of the Spirit*.⁷⁹ The status of such claims for African believers is related to the doctrine of God. Recognizing what they believe to be the power and authority of God in the world, the self-understanding of prayer by African Christians in New York stands in contrast to a reading of prayer as “wish fulfilment”⁸⁰ or a “charm.”

To take a brief excursion into the Western academic discourse on God, Thomas Torrance suggests, “Where we operate within a context of epistemological and

⁷⁷ Adebisi Oyasile, Interview, January 19, 2008.

⁷⁸ Manuel A. Vásquez and Marie Friedmann Marquardt, *Globalizing the Sacred: Religion Across the Americas* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 53-54.

⁷⁹ Maxwell, *African Gifts of the Spirit*.

⁸⁰ Camilo José Vergara, *How the Other Worships* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), x.

cosmological dualism...this involves a doctrine of the immutability and impassability of God, and what I call a deistic disjunction between God and the universe.”⁸¹ African Christianity in New York lacks such dualism, and God is very much dynamic, relational, and responsive; there is no operational disjunction between God and the universe. In this respect, Webb Keane’s ethnography of Calvinist missionaries in what is now Indonesia provides a revealing contrast: “For strict Calvinists, prayer should express thanks to or even petition to God, but it should not undertake to direct consequences in the world.”⁸²

Behind African Christian convictions concerning the efficacy of prayer stand beliefs about God and how God acts. As Peel explains, “The simple claim of the Aladuras is that *God answers all prayers*; this is, of course, official Christian teaching, for it is asserted unequivocally in the Gospels, and can hardly be said to be a doctrinal assertion in itself. But when asserted with such fervour, and linked with special methods, it is a radical and liberating belief.”⁸³ Hermione Harris provides an evaluation from her study of the Cherubim and Seraphim church in London: “Aladura prayers are more than communication; they are offered to God in the expectation of an exchange; they aim to initiate the mobilization of power on the supplicant’s behalf, giving them the edge in social and spiritual relationships, and so to get what you need.”⁸⁴ Prayer becomes a way to access power.⁸⁵

I would not say that prayer in the three churches I focus on names God in such a way, as almost without freedom. A supplicant does not approach God on the basis of an “exchange.” A reverence appears to be more at work in both voice and posture. But as Peel indicates, God is characterized as responding to prayer in profound ways. It is not impertinent to ask God and to believe God to perform interventions. The

⁸¹ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology* (Belfast: Christian Journals, 1980), 146.

⁸² Webb Keane, *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 54.

⁸³ Peel, *Aladura*, 119.

⁸⁴ Harris, *Yoruba in Diaspora*, 192.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 193.

prayers of African Christians are illocutionary - acts of speech given in expectation of their efficacy.⁸⁶ I discuss this further in the next chapter as related to the words of Scripture.

African Christians at prayer in New York City have a highly personal, relational, and expectant view of God. It is here that a hermeneutics of the Psalms is prominent in the churches. The no-holds-barred language of the Psalms offers a dynamic and relational view of God in response to prayers. A similar emphasis on “results” may come from a closer reading of the New Testament materials, especially the Catholic Epistle James. James puts forward a God who is “giving” in relationship to prayers rendered in “trust.”⁸⁷ Neither in the Old Testament is God taken to be unresponsive to the prayers and actions of individuals and nations. These materials should not go unnoticed as a theological and worldview underpinning for African churches at prayer.

My observation is that if we enhance “special methods” (Peel’s term) to include lengthy prayer sessions, vocalized participatory communication with God, and fasting, then there may not be sharp differences in the prayer practices between the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York, the Church of the Lord (Aladura), and the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn. Together they pray in a kinship of trust, expectation, and devotion. There are most certainly differences. For the Church of the Lord (Aladura) and the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn, more than the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, prayer is not only communion with God, but is what Horton expresses as a religion of “explanation, predication, and control.”⁸⁸ Yet overwhelmingly there

⁸⁶ See B. Keith Putt, “‘Too Deep for Words’: The Conspiracy of a Divine ‘Soliloquy,’” in *The Phenomenology of Prayer*, ed. Bruce Ellis Benson and Norman Wirzba (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 142-153.

⁸⁷ On James 1:5-8, 4:1-3, and 5:13-20 see David R. Nienhuis, *Not by Paul Alone: The Formation of the Catholic Epistle Collection and the Christian Canon* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007), 199-201. See also Richard Bauckham, *James: Wisdom of James, Disciple of Jesus the Sage* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 205-208.

⁸⁸ Horton, “African Conversion,” 94.

appears to be a common grammar and syntax to the practice of prayer. By this I mean there is a shared set of rules governing the deep meanings of prayer.



Fig. 4.5 Bible Study and Prayer Group at prayer. 2005

Why do African Christians pray in loud voices? Because loud, multi-vocal prayer is a universal phenomenon within African churches (and elsewhere), I have been looking for reasons that might apply across churches. I have come to think that the answer to this question helps explain the way prayer is understood to operate. Cephas Omenyo reports the results of a survey in Ghana that found keeping one from falling asleep is the number one reason for loud prayer followed by biblical precedent.⁸⁹ Biblical precedent is also what David Maxwell's research found.⁹⁰ I posit three reasons.

The first reason is that prayer is a tradition that forms Christians. I go back to my opening story of what Evangelist Sarah told me. By praying with the Church of the Lord (Aladura), I would learn how to pray in a new way. Marie Cooper indicates as much when she says it is "a habit we have formed."⁹¹ Prayer is a tradition that members are immersed in and pass on to others.

⁸⁹ Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism*, 204-206.

⁹⁰ Maxwell, *African Gifts of the Spirit*, 198-199.

⁹¹ Marie Cooper, Interview, February 13, 2008.



Fig. 4.6 Evangelist Sarah Richards, Church of the Lord (Aladura). 2005

The second reason for loud vocal prayer relates to the intimate relationship with God that believers have and are expressing. God is not “out there” but involved in everyday life. Adebisi Oyesile explains his view of vocal prayer this way:

Whatever you want you ask in his name. He is my father. I will be bold enough to ask my father. If silent, cannot ask confidently and don't have the faith. If have strong faith he will do it for you. When Jacob wrestled with God, so I am wrestling with you Daddy. I am being obedient to you. By my stripes you are healed. He died for us. It is finished. Poverty is finished and I believe you. Sickness is gone and I believe you.⁹²

For this reason, as people pray to God they call out different names for God such as “Father,” “Daddy,” and “Jehovah Jirah.” God is the primary object of African Christian devotion. From his study of urban churches and their loud prayers and clapping, Camilo José Vergara provides an astute observation: “Persistent thanking is perhaps a form of prayer that intensifies the anointing, makes people feel the power of God, and invites the Lord to come and saturate them. Expressing gratitude...becomes a ritual to achieve a mystical union between the Creator and His creature.”⁹³

⁹² Adebisi Oyesile, Interview, February 11, 2008.

⁹³ Vergara, *How the Other Worships*, 182.

The third reason for loud prayer is what is understood to be the biblical precedent. For Oyesile, the biblical image is Jacob wrestling with God. “Open your mouth and ask.” It is also Pentecost.

In the days of Pentecost people were not praying silently. The Holy spirit will not come down when you pray quietly. When you’re praising him...the Holy Spirit will descend on you. When we praise and worship our Father, heaven rejoices.⁹⁴

For Mother Cooper, it is Joshua and the walls of Jericho.⁹⁵

From the prayers and testimonies conveyed in public worship settings, we can see that African Christians can be faced with nearly overwhelming challenges in areas of employment, health, and immigration matters, to name some of the most recurring items.⁹⁶ To a large degree, prayer is understood to lead to change in these basic life areas. “In prayer,” David Maxwell writes of Zimbabwean Pentecostals, “their struggle for betterment is acted out both through and on the body.”⁹⁷ Such bodily practice is part of the charismatic experience of God, a groaning in faith that represents the vitality in the Spirit. The energy source of prayer is the Spirit, the intensifying power of life. Faith expressed through prayer brings God, the Spirit, believer, and ecclesial body into a form of community. As people pray in the Spirit, they experience God with their whole body, which is their whole life.⁹⁸

Jesus is Saviour from the powers and forces of Satan; the blood of the cross is relevant for a redemption that addresses life in its totality. Accordingly, prayer brings the whole body, personal and communal, to a point of anticipation in God, believing that God has a passion for life and is able to overcome all obstacles that prevent human flourishing.⁹⁹ The bodily and kinetic modes of African Christians at prayer -

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Marie Cooper, Interview, February 13, 2008.

⁹⁶ Gerrie ter Haar, *Halfway to Paradise: African Christians in Europe* (Cardiff: Cardiff Academic Press, 1998), 44.

⁹⁷ Maxwell, *African Gifts of the Spirit*, 197.

⁹⁸ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 267.

⁹⁹ Here I am drawing on the imagery of Moltmann, “Praying with Eyes Open,” 178.

kneeling, shouting, clapping, raising arms, moving around, and fasting - physically and spiritually situate their stories in the script of salvation.¹⁰⁰ God is engaged in the church and world, it is assumed, and prayer is praise for the wonders of the divine and expectation that God still speaks, acts, and redeems. The individual self becomes able to overcome obstacles and achieve new things because it is placed within the life of God who is able to accomplish anything, interfere with any blockage.

Consider the story of David Grigsby, a clerical worker in New York State government, to understand of the connection between salvation, prayers of petition, and life circumstances. David credits the prayers of Mother Cooper for bringing him to the church four years ago. He also attributes to prayer success at work and the reshaping of his moral life. David first made contact with the church because he was in need of help; at the suggestion an acquaintance, he called on Mother Cooper “to pray for me.”¹⁰¹ The way that David’s “problem” was addressed was instrumental in his joining the church. In a work-related situation, David faced a conflict with a fellow employee. Mother Cooper perceived that God was testing him. Ultimately, David did not get in trouble on the job. Instead “the man got fired. The new guy is very nice.” For David, “The peace of God alone makes me think he answers my prayers.”¹⁰² Prayer is also responsible for reshaping his moral life, enabling him to avoid the use of alcohol and other temptations. David knows friends who have died or are in the hospital from alcohol abuse, and he recognizes the importance of lifestyle changes. “I’m telling you, brother, God has really been good to me these past few years. I have my mind under control.”

You can see a lot of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York story in Kwame Adom. As I got into a yellow cab on Broadway and 112th Street in early fall 2004, the driver turned out to be Kwame Adom. As fellow Kwame’s, “Saturday borns,” we had just celebrated “our day” together at the recent mini-harvest. Leaning back to

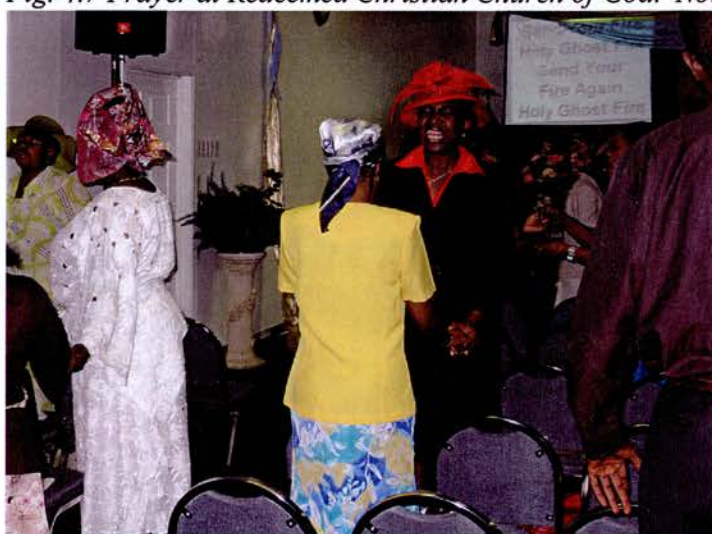
¹⁰⁰ Vásquez and Marquardt, *Globalizing the Sacred*, 54; Maxwell, *African Gifts of the Spirit*, 197.

¹⁰¹ David Grigsby, Interview, March 13, 2005 and October 21, 2007.

¹⁰² David Grigsby, Interview, October 21, 2007,

speaking through the security divider, he said, “I’m driving a taxi now, but I have a life plan to accomplish.”¹⁰³ As Kwame later recalled saying, “Now I might be driving a taxi, but in a few years I will be calling the shots on Wall Street.” He goes to school at night to become an accountant and drives a taxi during the day to earn income. A year later, at an all-night prayer vigil described previously in this chapter, Kwame announced that he had landed a new job with KPMG, an international accounting firm.¹⁰⁴ By fall 2007, he had resigned from KPMG to join a private Wall Street banking firm. What makes it all work? Kwame summarizes, “Focus, determination, and knowing where source of inspiration is coming from - from above, from God, the bottom line.”

Fig. 4.7 Prayer at Redeemed Christian Church of God. Note in the background, “Holy Ghost Fire, Send Your Fire Again.” 2007



At Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn, prayer is believed to directly change circumstances. For example, during a testimony a child and her mother come forward. A routine trip to the doctor turned up a condition of hyperthyroidism in the little girl. The family immediately began to pray, and people in the church joined in. A few days later, the doctor called and said it must have been an error in the lab work and she did not have hyperthyroidism. For the mother, this change in diagnosis was the result of God’s intervention in response to her prayers and those of the church, not merely a mistake in the lab work.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Kwame Adom, Interview, September 1, 2007. This quote is from a recollection we both shared.

¹⁰⁴ All-Night Prayer Service, Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Field Notes, June 24, 2005.

¹⁰⁵ Redeemed Christian Church of God, International Chapel, Field Notes, May 1, 2005.

Additional illustrations could be marshalled from any worship service or interview, but they would all show the same result; African Christians expect that communication with God through prayer is responsible for life itself. To return to Sassen's language, African Christians have a presence in the global city and through prayer seek to establish power. In Robert Orsi's words, "Prayer is a switching point between the social world and the imagination."¹⁰⁶ Because prayer is a form of participation in the life and purposes of God who is seen as Lord over the world, it is a form of empowerment. Power from prayer can come through the act of "submitting" to God in prayer.¹⁰⁷ For example, as Jane Soothill observes of Ghanaian Pentecostal women, prayer is seen as mediating changes in gender relations.¹⁰⁸ Husbands and power dynamics can change. Prayer is also a voice that impacts the personal and public spheres because it is the divine voice.¹⁰⁹ God saves in everyday life, and the activity of prayer is the driving force on the human side.

"Abraham's blessings are mine," states the popular song in many African churches. In the Old Testament, blessings had a decidedly material component. Increasingly it is commonplace to hear that African Christianity, especially the Pentecostal type, maintains a strong if not direct link between faith and material blessings and success. Labels include the "prosperity," "faith" or "health and wealth" gospel. Paul Gifford's *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalizing African Economy* focuses in on this concern.¹¹⁰ In July 2007, the *Christian Century* featured a cover story by Gifford with the words "Spreading the (Prosperity) Gospel" composed over

¹⁰⁶ Robert A. Orsi, "Is the Study of Lived Religion Irrelevant to the World We Live In?" *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 42:2 (2003): 173.

¹⁰⁷ While there are significant differences in conceptions of gender and power, the principle is also related to prayer in R. Marie Griffith, *God's Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 218.

¹⁰⁹ This language is from Andrea Hollingsworth, "Spirit and Voice: Toward a Feminist Pentecostal Pneumatology," *Pneuma* 29 (2007): 189-213.

¹¹⁰ Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalizing African Economy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004). I am, however, sympathetic to elements of Gifford's argument.

an image of Africa.¹¹¹ At the same time, *Christianity Today* ran a 2007 cover story with the headline, “Health and Wealth in Africa: How the Prosperity Gospel is Taking a Continent by Storm,”¹¹² a concurrence that indicates interest in the topic. Redeemed Christian Church of God is commonly considered a prosperity church.¹¹³

Prayer patterns are illustrative of this matter. Along these lines, Birgit Meyer identifies a consumeristic element in African Pentecostal prayer, linking commodities, conversion, and connection to the global economy.¹¹⁴ The Comaroffs present neo-Protestant religious movements as harnessing faith to global capitalism through the manipulation of God.¹¹⁵ This view is also called the faith gospel or victory/success message of Christianity.¹¹⁶

My research in New York reaches a different conclusion, for this context at least. I did not recall hearing a prayer that suggested God would materially reward faith or prayers. Not once did I hear a sermon on getting rich or a reference to an American prosperity preacher. Yet clearly there is an integral relationship between God, prayer, and everyday material life.

But what appears in the three focus churches in New York City is not a replication of the new prosperity churches that bind the ways of modernity to hopes in the sky. Instead the churches are perhaps better seen as overriding the secular narrative and promoting a dependence on God. Talk of “promotion and provision,”

¹¹¹ Paul Gifford, “Expecting Miracles: The Prosperity Gospel in Africa,” *Christian Century*, June 10, 2007, 20-24.

¹¹² Isaac Phiri and Joe Maxwell, “Gospel Riches” *Christianity Today*, July 2007, 20-29.

¹¹³ Asonzeh F-K Ukah, “‘Those Who Trade with God Never Lose’: The Economics of Pentecostal Activism in Nigeria,” in *Christianity and Social Change in Africa: Essays in Honor of J.D.Y. Peel*, ed. Toyin Falola (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2005), 253-274.

¹¹⁴ Birgit Meyer, “Commodities and the Power of Prayer: Pentecostalist Attitudes Towards Consumption in Contemporary Ghana,” *Development and Change* 29 (1998): 751-776.

¹¹⁵ Jean and John Comaroff, “Privatizing the Millenium: New Protestant Ethics and the Spirits of Capitalism in Africa, and Elsewhere,” *Afrika Spectrum* 35 (2000): 293-312.

¹¹⁶ This combination term comes from Paul Gifford, “The Nature and Effects of Mission Today: A Case Study from Kenya,” *Social Sciences and Mission* 20 (2007): 140.

“breakthroughs,” and “blessing” are commonplace, but framed within divine salvation, the work of prayer and fasting, and the urgency of work. Instead of depending on global capitalism, the most mysterious of financial systems, for what Mark Taylor argues is an illusion of redemption,¹¹⁷ African Christians trust in God. It is God who saves, they believe, not the economy. In a neo-liberal city, African Christians in New York City trust in the certainty of God.

The rituals of prayer and fasting do not ultimately presume to redeem, but rather place the believer’s story within a larger divine story of God who redeems. God works in communities of the Spirit, so the individual cannot expect to be part of this transforming world apart from a particular body of faith. African Christianity offers a counter narrative to secular achievement. It is God who freely provides “breakthroughs,” “blesses,” and carries them to the “next level.” The types of prayer that take this narrative seriously require time, commitment, discipline, and struggle.

Eduardo Hoornaert’s historical account *The Memory of the Christian People* shows that for the poor and marginalized, signs and wonders have not been viewed as something finished or located in the past but as an ongoing part of ordinary experience.¹¹⁸ For the New Testament church, as Luke Johnson identifies, Christianity was a religion of power.¹¹⁹ So the sense of a Christian faith marked by the regular involvement of God in meeting daily life needs was unmistakable.

African churches consistently make sense of their faith this way as well. Here I simply offer a prayer from the Church of the Lord (Aladura) to emphasize how central is the conviction that God is the source of blessing and life. As Evangelist Sarah prays during a service on September 10, 2006:

¹¹⁷ Mark C. Taylor, *Confidence Games: Money and Markets in a World Without Redemption* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

¹¹⁸ Eduardo Hoornaert, *The Memory of the Christian People*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988), 207-208.

¹¹⁹ See the thematic attention to power throughout Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 102.

Father God we say bless us indeed. Bless us spiritually. Bless us financially. Bless us physically. My God and my Lord you are in the blessing business. [You are] a miracle working Jesus....Remember us this day.¹²⁰

While Evangelist Sarah is praying, Mother Cooper begins shouting, “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. Heal, heal, heal. Spread out your healing.” Evangelist Sarah continues, “Everybody who has a problem we bring it to you today.” Blessing is not collected riches or even the American dream, but the gift of life in the fullness of God.

Each of the three churches has a unique social emphasis and theological voice in the way they express the relationship between prayer and human flourishing: for the Church of the Lord (Aladura) prayer is a tool in conflict with spiritual forces that ultimately leads to sustenance while also questioning the economic order; for the Presbyterian Church of Ghana prayer and religious faith are touchstones for all success; for the Redeemed Christian Church of God prayer is an outward looking and assertive engagement with the world that leads to “breakthroughs”. Respectively, the themes are resilience, trust, and empowerment. Each church encourages the pursuit not as much of worldly success as of the basics of life, and this not from earthly authorities or powers, but God. The Church of the Lord (Aladura) also provides a prophetic critique of the economic order, as I discuss in chapter 5.

For African Christians in New York City, prayer situates the body in God and provides power for life in the global city. Prayer is about being alive in Christ and being liberated from the powers of death. The experience of God creates communities and spaces of power and a vision of the fullness of life in the city.

In the future, a comparison between prayer and fasting in pre-Reformation Christianity and African Christianity may well be worth pursuing.¹²¹ But for now, a phrase from Eamon Duffy’s *Marking the Hours: English People and Their Prayers*

¹²⁰ Church of the Lord (Aladura), Field Notes, September 10, 2006.

¹²¹ In this regard, I would revisit Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Routledge, 2002 [1930]). Under the growing influence of African Pentecostalism in particular, the ascetic work pattern and expectation of heaven that Weber finds dividing Catholic and Protestant is being closed and remade into something new.

1240-1570 provides the best summary I know of the prayers of African believers in New York City: “highly supernatural, but in no sense otherworldly.”¹²² African prayers in New York City are highly supernatural, trusting only in God, but in no sense otherworldly as they are focused on this life. As they inhabit the global city, for African believers there is “power from on high.”¹²³

¹²² Eamon Duffy, *Marking the Hours: English People and Their Prayers 1240-1570* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 96.

¹²³ Luke 24:29.

CHAPTER 5

READING IN MOTION: SCRIPTURE AND THE PERFORMANCE OF FAITH

INTRODUCTION

The New York City subway system is the life of the city, carrying the world, or at least more than five million people on an average day. Standing next to a Wall Street stockbroker reading the *Financial Times* will be a homeless man singing “This Little Light of Mine” and holding out a rumpled paper bag for change. Mothers squeeze in with young children asleep in strollers, construction workers haul their bags of tools, and students shift under backpacks loaded with books. Squeezed into every nook and cranny are people of every ethnicity, from every neighborhood, and every country in the world. While riding the subway, I devised “the subway test.” Look around a subway car and I can almost always see a man or a woman reading a well-thumbed Bible. Most often he or she will have been born in Africa, Asia, the West Indies or Latin America. And on Sundays, especially in the outer boroughs, cars are filled with people dressed for church with Bibles firmly in hand. The subway moves the city, and a church near a subway stop can be strategic for growth.¹ What the “subway test” provides is a window on the globalization of Christianity and a trope for recognizing the importance of the Bible for everyday life in the city.

In the previous chapter I began with a characterization of prayer as being seemingly more important for African Christians than reading the Bible. But this does not mean that reading the Bible is unimportant. For the way that African Christians understand God is analogous to the way they read and hear the Bible.² Just as God is powerful

¹ Concerning the subway system as the essence of New York City, I am indebted to the insights of Kenneth Jackson. For a history of the subway system, see Clifton Hood, *722 Miles: The Building of the Subways and How They Transformed New York* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004). A captivating look is Camilo José Vergara, *Subway Memories* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 2004).

² I owe this way of putting matters to Claire Davis.

and involved in all of life, the Bible is able to powerfully address all of life. As Andrew Walls has emphasized, for African Christians the Bible has functioned for building community and theological development.³ Theology is based on the Bible, the source of reflection on lived experience.⁴ In turn, this theology forms community.

The three focus churches share a common conviction that the Bible is Scripture, and is the source for shaping their beliefs, practices, and identities.⁵ The Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York stands in the tradition of the Basel Mission, which “had a firm belief in the centrality and authority of the Bible. Its commitment to the Bible is symbolically demonstrated by the large Bible, which is carried in a procession at key functions of the Church.”⁶ At the Church of the Lord (Aladura), Mother Cooper commented on the Bible, “Everything is in it.” This remark was made during a discussion of debt regulations in the Old Testament books of Deuteronomy and Leviticus.⁷ Such views are in accord with the beliefs and practices of the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn, where belief and practice is saturated with biblical texts and the use of the Bible permeates every aspect of church life. For the three churches, belief in the Bible as God’s Word is not justified with an epistemological theory or elaborate theology. Believing in God and seeing God work is all the justification that is required.

In this chapter I examine the practice of reading the Bible in the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York, the Church of the Lord (Aladura), and the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn. By reading I also mean hearing and discussing. For the three churches, the Bible is not only God’s word, but

³ Andrew Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002), 131, cf. 133.

⁴ Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 268.

⁵ Stephen E. Fowl, *Engaging Scripture: A Model for Theological Interpretation* (Malden: Blackwell, 1998), 2.

⁶ Cephas N. Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism: A Study of the Development of Charismatic Renewal in the Mainline Churches in Ghana* (Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 2002), 127.

⁷ Church of the Lord (Aladura), Field Notes, August 22, 2007.

also a “book,” a material object marked by the colonial encounter with the gospel.⁸ Both dimensions, reading as a practice and the ongoing material encounter, help form the culture of each church.

For all the importance ascribed to African approaches to Scripture, amply displayed in the recent publication of major works such as the evangelical *Africa Bible Commentary*,⁹ Philip Jenkins *The New Faces of Christianity*,¹⁰ and Gerald West and Musa Dube’s edited volume *The Bible in Africa*,¹¹ Paul Gifford’s remark in a review of *The Bible in Africa* carries a ring of truth: “There is obviously a serious dearth of research on (lack of interest in?) how the Bible is actually received or understood or used on the ground.”¹² Matthew Engelke concurs, “Few have turned their attention to practices of reading *per se*.”¹³ Descriptions of how the Bible is read in local African Christian communities are largely absent in the scholarly literature, where instead professional readings of Scripture are privileged. Peter Nyende stresses the vital point in his important essay, “Institutional and Popular Interpretations of the Bible in Africa: Towards an Integration,” that African scholarly readings of the biblical text are closely connected to and determined by local concerns.¹⁴ Still this remains different than grassroots or popular readings and uses. Ironically, Matthew Engelke’s ethnographic study *A Problem of Presence: Beyond Scripture in an*

⁸ See further R. S. Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World: Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁹ Tokunboh Adeyemo, ed., *Africa Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006). Paul Gifford in “The Nature and Effects of Mission Today: A Case Study from Kenya,” *Social Sciences and Mission* 20 (2007): 119-120, remarks that the commentary was financially made possible with support from the West. It is worth noting that in the U.S. edition, the cover features an endorsement from American mega-church leader Rick Warren, who calls it “A monumental work...”

¹⁰ Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

¹¹ Gerald O. West and Musa Dube, eds., *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends* (Boston: Brill, 2001).

¹² Paul Gifford, Review of *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends*, *Journal of Religion in Africa* 34:3 (2004): 399.

¹³ Matthew Engelke, “The Book, the Church and the ‘Incomprehensible Paradox’: Christianity in African History,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 29:1 (March 2003): 302.

¹⁴ Peter Nyende, “Institutional and Popular Interpretations of the Bible in Africa: Towards an Integration,” *The Expository Times* 119:2 (2007): 59-66.

*African Church*¹⁵ focused on the non-use of Scripture by the “Friday Masowe” Apostolics of Zimbabwe, and commands attention for its local account.

In this chapter, I identify five ways that the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, the Church of the Lord (Aladura), and the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn read and use Scripture. First, Scripture is an imaginative world that narrates the experiences of life. Second, Scripture is read communally to address everyday concerns and needs. Third, Scripture is appropriated as a means of maintaining the distinct identity of transnational religious movements. Fourth, Scripture is a basis for preaching. Fifth, the Bible is read as words that have power. Much more could be said, but in this group of themes I think we find some of the richness and uniqueness of African diaspora readings of Scripture. Prior to proceeding to these matters, I first discuss the end to which African Christians read the Bible.

THE END OF READING

In New York City, members of African churches read their Bibles throughout the week, bring them to church, hold them tight during prayer, lift them high in joy during times of praise, underline them during sermons, and attend classes that discuss what they teach. In the words of their English, Yoruba, and Twi Bibles they hear teaching about God, an invitation to be born anew, good news of release for the oppressed, moral guidance, and promises of breakthroughs in this life.¹⁶ By and large, they do not read their Bibles to gather historical information, grow in appreciation for its literary form, compose formalized doctrines, or defend its veracity. Ultimately it is not that they are not interested in these subjects, but rather they read the Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, with a priority to enact it in

¹⁵ Matthew Engelke, *A Problem of Presence: Beyond Scripture in an African Church* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

¹⁶ The importance of the vernacular has been classically described by Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact of Culture* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1989).

their lives, to live as faithful disciples, and construct theology in service of their community life and journey.

In so doing, African churches in New York City are a creative example of what Stephen Fowl believes biblical interpretation historically has been: “Christian interpretation of Scripture is primarily an activity of Christian communities in which they seek to generate and embody their interpretations of Scripture so they may fulfill their ends of worshipping and living before the triune God.”¹⁷ For African churches in New York City, their hermeneutical approach connects the biblical story with everyday life, but does so from the perspective of “pre-understandings” of the world, the questions and needs they bring to the text.

As Fowl does in his writings, we can compare such an approach with Augustine the Bishop of Hippo (354-430), who stands at the front of Africa’s long Christian story.¹⁸ For Augustine, reading Scripture is in service of a journey. In his primer on biblical interpretation titled *On Christian Teaching*, Augustine contended that there are two primary rules for the reading of Scripture. First, Scripture is to be read for the cultivation of love of God, and second, it is to be read in loving service of one’s neighbor.¹⁹ As Augustine approaches the reading of Scripture, he finds in it not an end in itself, but a means to end. A correct reading of Scripture for Augustine leads to love for God and neighbor. The Word then becomes embodied in the reader.²⁰ At that point, the need for the Christian to read Scripture would cease except for teaching others.²¹ Therefore, reading Scripture for Augustine is not an end in itself

¹⁷ Fowl, *Engaging Scripture*, 161.

¹⁸ For my reading of Augustine I am indebted to Stephen Fowl. In addition to *Engaging Scripture*, see Stephen E. Fowl, “Further Thoughts on Theological Interpretation,” in *Reading Scripture with the Church: Toward a Hermeneutic for Theological Interpretation*, A.K.M. Adam, Stephen E. Fowl, Kevn J. Vanhoozer, and Francis Watson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 125-130.

¹⁹ Saint Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, trans. R. P. H. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 27.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 28-29.

²¹ *Ibid.*

but a means along the way toward home with God. The Bible is a travel guide for pilgrims.

Augustine's approach to Scripture aptly describes the Bible for African Christians in New York - the Bible is travelling truth that is performed in everyday life as it is experienced before God. As Gerrie ter Haar summarizes, the Bible is viewed as "the book of life for believers."²² Allan Anderson, speaking of Pentecostals but in ways that characterize a more pervasive emphasis, states "Their purpose in reading the Bible is to find there something that can be experienced as relevant to their felt needs."²³ Thus the hermeneutic of New York's African churches converges with a reading of the Bible that is concerned with providing for life needs and human flourishing. For African Christians, this means that the Bible still 'speaks' today; it is not just a book about the past.

With their emphasis on mobility, lived religion, and practice over text, these shifts are on display in the use of the Bible in African churches in New York. Mentalist and discursive readings take a secondary place to readings that are embodied and materialized, marking another difference with Enlightenment-shaped religion. While some theologians may argue that reading the Bible in such a focused and pragmatic way is problematic, I think it is much closer to patterns of interpretation that have long proceeded in the Christian church. Theology in African churches, to use the terminology of Anthony Thiselton, is "action-oriented" and related to the "contingencies" of everyday life.²⁴ Not to minimize the use of biblical stories and figures, but expressing "action-oriented" theological convictions about God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit is perhaps the most prominent feature of African churches in New York City.

²² Gerrie ter Haar, *Halfway to Paradise: African Christians in Europe* (Cardiff: Cardiff Academic Press, 1998), 49.

²³ Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 225.

²⁴ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 21.

I now take up the ways that the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York, the Church of the Lord (Aladura), and the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn read Scripture for the ends of their journey together.

LIVING IN THE WORLD SCRIPTURE IMAGINES

For African Christians in New York City, the Bible is first of all not a book of moral precepts or doctrinal teachings, but an imaginative world.²⁵ This world described in the Bible is embraced as the story of the world. Closely related is the idea of narrative emplacement. As Nimi Wariboko proclaimed in a sermon I discussed in chapter 1, “If Paul and Peter can do it, I can do it...He [God] will do it again.”²⁶ By citing biblical characters and events, people place themselves in the biblical story. There is an assumption that while the details of historical events in the biblical text and events in New York are inevitably different, they are not all that unrelated.

To explain what I mean by the imaginative world of Scripture, I turn to the work of Luke Timothy Johnson, a New Testament scholar at Emory University. Johnson argues that the Bible presents a world that is more expansive and more complex than what we see. It is the world created by God, a world where God’s power is at work, where grace transforms. “By imagining the world as always and essentially related to God, Scripture reveals the world and at the same time reveals God.”²⁷ From this flow a number of implications. “People act on the basis of the imagined world in which they dwell,” Johnson observes, “and by acting on what they imagine, they help establish their worlds as real.”²⁸ Like a city that is intuitively known and lived in, Johnson suggests that the world of Scripture can also be inhabited.²⁹

²⁵ Simon Coleman, *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity: Spreading the Gospel of Prosperity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 117-142.

²⁶ Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn, Field Notes, October 10, 2004.

²⁷ Luke Timothy Johnson, “Imagining the World Scripture Imagines,” *Modern Theology* 14:2 (1998): 166.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 166.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 167-169.

The Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York, the Church of the Lord (Aladura), and the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn, share in common themes as well as divergent emphases in how they engage the world of Scripture. For all three churches, the defining feature of the imaginative world of Scripture is Christ, and particularly God as triumphant in Christ over powers seen and unseen. The narrative life and actions of Jesus present themselves here. In the Pentecostal telling, the resurrection of Jesus is at the forefront, revealing God's ultimate power over human frailty, sickness, and death. During his life he also ministered to the sick and announced good news. Church life is the experience of the resurrected Lord who still heals, ministers, and proclaims.

At the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn, Pentecost particularly introduces a new reality into the world. "Like the day of Pentecost, fire fall on me" is a song that is often part of worship. With Pentecost, the Spirit came upon persons. The words of the song are often sung today directly to invoke the Spirit's presence and activity. But equally in the Christian story, Pentecost involves not just the flame of the Spirit, but the living powers of the future manifest in the present.³⁰ Not only does the 'fire' fall in Brooklyn, but also so do the energies of the Spirit. A new world of eternal joy is also created. What is invisible, the new life of God that *is* God, is rendered visible in miraculously healed bodies and born again hearts. The conditions that give rise to faith are essentially empirical – God is still active in healing and transforming. How do you know Jesus' presence and power is real? By testing it, seeing it, and experiencing it.³¹

For the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Jesus is the Saviour, guiding and instructing the Christian life, but also Jesus the life-giver. The unseen world is also very active,

³⁰ This is a major theme in Moltmann's work on the Holy Spirit. I consider Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), to be among his most enduring "contributions," and see also *The Source of Life: The Holy Spirit and the Theology of Life* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997).

³¹ I owe this way of putting things to a comment made by Professor David Kerr during a seminar at the Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World on the New Testament scholar Charles Dodd.

and God protects and leads in this area. For the Church of the Lord (Aladura), the imaginative narrative rests prominently on a conflict between God and Satan, in which God has achieved a victory. But a conflict remains with evil forces, requiring a life of prayer, fasting, and the use of Scripture to combat the forces. There is also a strong pneumatological emphasis.

African Christians in New York City assume and recognize the potential for ill of witchcraft, spirits, and possessions quite normally.³² Wayne Meeks effectively describes the early Christian viewpoint. “From the beginning of their movement, it seems, the Christians live in a world with demons filled. Paul, explaining a change of plans, can say, “Satan prevented me” (1 Thess. 2:18) as casually as we might say, “My car had a flat tire.””³³ In New York City, the unorganized world of spirits, powers, and demons recognized in the Bible remains real, not collapsed under the inactive cosmology of the West.³⁴ But this cosmology becomes redescribed in relationship to the biblical story. Christ controls the world, and faith in God engages the world with power and authority. Reading Scripture is an act of interpretation of this world and also a dimension of spiritual conflict and victory.

As Teresa Okure indicates, biblical interpretation is often divided between exegesis (the meaning of the text in its original context) and hermeneutics (the meaning of the text in its contemporary setting). Okure questions this fissure, arguing that there are “natural limitations” to objectivity in every reader and that objectivity is not possible.

³² See Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History*, 116-135. On the “primal” substructure of African Christianity. Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, and Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995), 91-108. See also Ogbu U. Kalu, “Preserving a Worldview: Pentecostalism in the African Maps of the Universe,” *Pneuma* 24:2 (2002): 110-137.

³³ Wayne A. Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality: The First Two Centuries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 112.

³⁴ Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst, eds., *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden: Brill, and Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

Rather, she presses, we all read in terms of our cultural and social realities.³⁵ For African Christians the imaginative world of Scripture provides a better description of the world as it is.³⁶ In this world, God does intervene, protect, lead, heal, and speak. To the well-known charge that African Christians, especially Pentecostals, are caught up in the promises of modernity, their appeal to the world of Scripture causes us to think it through further.

READING IN COMMUNITY

Not only do African Christians live in the imaginative world of Scripture, but also, secondly, they read the Bible together in community. In Fowl's characterization of reading the Scripture, the text is not self-generating in its "meaning," but depends on a communal process that discerns a faithful reading for a specific context.³⁷ This is evidenced in both sermons and Bible studies in the three churches.

In the previous chapter I introduced the Bible Study and Prayer Group of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York. Bibles in hand, the dozen or so members come from home and work each Friday evening to pray to God in community and read the Bible. A Bible study from August 19, 2005, led by Kwabena Gyasi, illustrates how they read scriptural texts.³⁸ This evening there are eight women and four men. After praying for twenty minutes, Matthew 17 is the first text they read together for their discussion of "praying to receive something special from God." Sitting around a table, primarily the format is teaching with some discussion. Five ways are given. First, "pray to the Father in Jesus' name." From John 16, the group speaks of Jesus as advocate. Second, "when we pray, believe and you shall receive," with Matthew 24 providing a basis. Third, forgiveness is required. That is, forgiveness from God. Fourth, the Holy Spirit must help you. Fifth, "you must build yourself up by prayer in the Holy Ghost." As the study concludes, the group brings

³⁵ Teresa Okure, "I Will Open My Mouth in Parables (Matt. 13:35): A Case for Gospel-Based Hermeneutics," *New Testament Studies* 46:3 (July 2000): 445-463.

³⁶ Johnson, "Imaging the World Scripture Imagines," 167.

³⁷ Fowl, *Engaging Scripture*.

³⁸ Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York, Field Notes, August 19, 2005.

John 14:16 back into the discussion. The Holy Spirit is a personal “advocate” and “comforter,” they stress.

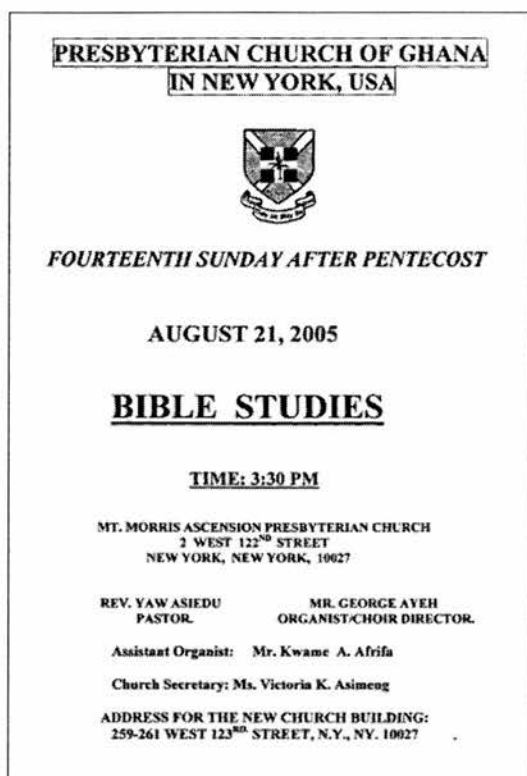


Fig. 5.1 Bulletin, Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Announcing Bible Studies. 2005

Let me summarize what is taking place at the Bible Study and Prayer Group. They are studying biblical texts such as Matthew and John without engaging in concerns of critical scholarship. Instead they connect biblical texts together toward the end of Christian living. The Bible Study and Prayer Group read together in friendship, prayer, and worship.

For the Redeemed Christian Church of God, both the Sunday school class and Digging Deep Bible Study are settings for studying the Bible. Because I will look closely at these activities in the next section in relationship to ecclesial identity, I will next illustrate reading in community by providing two examples from the Church of the Lord (Aladura).

When two or three gather at the Church of the Lord (Aladura) in New York to discuss the Bible, the readings that occur address everyday life. At the church's founding, Wednesday evening was set apart for Bible Study – the day and time are

still posted on their sign. But it became apparent that work obligations and travel distances precluded regular attendance on Wednesday evening, so Mother Cooper incorporated the Bible study into Sunday worship. So every Sunday afternoon, mid-way through the service, the liturgy is paused and the leaders come down from the platform and sit on folding chairs among the congregation. There is another way to look at this: reading Scripture now takes place within a worship setting, which for the ends of the Church of the Lord (Aladura) is perhaps the best possible setting.



Fig. 5.2 Bible Study, Mother Cooper and Minister Joy, Church of the Lord (Aladura). 2005

Typically, Minister Joy sits on a folding chair front and center, with Mother Cooper seated to her right. To select a text, either a guide produced by the Church of the Lord (Aladura) is consulted or one of the leaders proposes a biblical text. In a typical format, first someone is asked to read the text aloud and then over the course of approximately one hour, an exchange of questions, answers, and viewpoints takes place. One example is from October 17, 2004. Deacon David is asked to read Matthew 24, identified as a discussion on “Signs of the Coming of Christ.” Mother Cooper begins the discussion by sharing that she “heard on the radio Christ is coming that September.” However, it is now October. Christians need to read the Bible, she states. “Christ - no one, not even angels - knows when he is coming.” Christ is however announcing signs, and they are related to mission. “When God says go. Whenever he is in my spiritual imagination, he is getting ready when [the] Father says move...we must know when the time is getting close.” How will we

know when the time is close? “Strange things, false prophets,” Mother Cooper ruminates.

Someone then asks the question, what is the gospel? At this point Mother Cooper reads Matthew 24:14, which in her King James Version reads, “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.” Reference is made to the importance of the open air preaching in the Church of the Lord (Aladura) in Liberia, speaking the gospel in the subway, the use of different languages to communicate the gospel. But what is given most attention is the story of a woman in the Church of the Lord (Aladura) who could not read and write to whom “God gave her knowledge of the Word of God.” Mother Cooper comments, “God will give people different gifts.” Indeed, “God raises up people to speak to the poor and PhDs.”

After a period, the discussion then turns back to Matthew 24:13 and the notion of service, pressing forward. Along the way, Mother Cooper comments that the “love of flesh is a transitory love” and reminds the community not to “let anybody shake your faith.” The Christian life, she offers, is “a day to day business, he doesn’t want us cold, or lukewarm. God is so hot. God wants strong people. God wants committed people.” She brings up the powerful presence of the Spirit. “The Holy Ghost...like fire, a mighty wind is the day of Elijah.” As the hour of Bible discussion comes to a close, the topic turns to Liberia, to “wars and rumors of war.” “Look what happened to our country,” laments someone in the group. What to do hangs in the air. To conclude the study, Mother Cooper exhorts, “Keep steady, fasting and praying.” The Bible lesson ended, Mother Cooper and Minister Joy return to the platform, and soon a “strong prayer” brings the liturgy back into focus.

An example of a communal and socially critical or prophetic reading of Scripture at the Church of the Lord (Aladura) takes place on Sunday, December 18, 2005. During the Bible lesson on John 14, Deacon David asks to discuss verse 3, which reads, “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto

myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.”³⁹ “What does this mean?” he asks. Mother Cooper pauses to think, and then provides a profound theological commentary on social reality. It is “not the kind of selfish mansion we have here...a very expensive house” where you can “walk in and feel satisfied.” In heaven, “these mansions are not houses set aside” but “a peaceful place...of love...where everyone will have a share and there will be no segregation.” Here “everybody will have no need” and “there will be an equal share, no time to envy [the] next [mansion].” Further, she reasons, “if no sin, no selfishness... nobody will be [sick], nobody will be homeless.” Instead, “there is togetherness.” Expands Mother Cooper, “white, black, pink...all of them who believe in Jesus Christ will rejoice together.” In the new world, there is “no hunger...because there will be no need to cook. Instead of work, the community will “just [be] singing and praising God like the angels.” Imagining such a world as this, says Mother Cooper, takes a certain God. “God is one God, one in three, three in one.”

What takes place in these gatherings is that as communities are reading the Bible they share experiences, questions, and ideas. They work with one another toward transformation after Christ. Women and men bring their knowledge of the world, the city, and their faith together. When read in community, the texts are not in free play without reference to their original settings, but by the workings of the Spirit merged with the present horizon.

BIBLICAL TEXTS AND IDENTITY

The Biblical text plays a significant role in shaping the identity of African congregations in New York. For a precedent, we need only look to the development of early Christianity, where textual identity came to be an important element in communal self-understanding.⁴⁰ Today an emphasis on a textually inscribed identity for African immigrant churches forms believers in a way of life and helps connect between two cultural worlds. For the Mother churches, distance and expansion bring

³⁹ King James Version.

⁴⁰ Judith M. Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

about constant change and introduces new leaders. The need to have mechanisms to shape a common identity can be urgent.

A good picture to introduce this element is found in the Children's Service at Presbyterian Church of Ghana. During the service Julie Agyemang led over twenty children in the following song:⁴¹

Read your Bible
Read your Bible
Read your Bible
In the morning
In the afternoon
In the evening
In the night
Read your Bible everyday

After singing this song through a number of times in English, the same song was sung in the Twi language, reinforcing the emphasis on the Bible in two languages. Church and home, Julie Agyemang explains later, are the only two places where they can learn to speak the Twi language. While the children have all been born in the United States and English is or will be their primary language, Twi is important culturally and by extension religiously.⁴² Through the Bible as medium, they will gain knowledge of their Ghanaian culture.

On the face of things, J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu is certainly correct in his observation that "Pentecostalism is itself a movement that relies on direct experience of the divine rather than on codified beliefs, creeds or philosophies."⁴³ Yet whether one attributes it to an inevitable process of institutionalization or to other factors,⁴⁴

⁴¹ Service, November 25, 2007.

⁴² Julie Agyemang, Interview, November 25, 2007.

⁴³ J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 17; cf. 54.

⁴⁴ For example, David Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

there is indication that a set of codified beliefs is considered essential to maintain the identity of the far-flung operations of Redeemed Christian Church of God, the largest Pentecostal church in Nigeria and one of the fastest growing churches worldwide. A particularly instructive example is their Sunday “Search the Scriptures” program.

Religious faith can be mediated through what Thomas Kirsch terms “print globalization.”⁴⁵ In Redeemed Christian Church of God congregations, pastors select their sermon texts and topics themselves, but Digging Deep and Sunday school instruction is the same whatever parish you attend and in whatever part of the world you do so. Sunday school instruction is more widely attended than Digging Deep, at least in Brooklyn. Attendance is strong, and the classes are broken into three groups each with a leader. Local practice reflects a global organizational mandate. As an indication of the growth of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, instead of importing the books from Nigeria, the North American office now reprints the booklet developed by its Directorate of Christian Education in Lagos; it is also available on their Web site at no charge.⁴⁶ Digging Deep material is now available only on the church’s Web site.⁴⁷

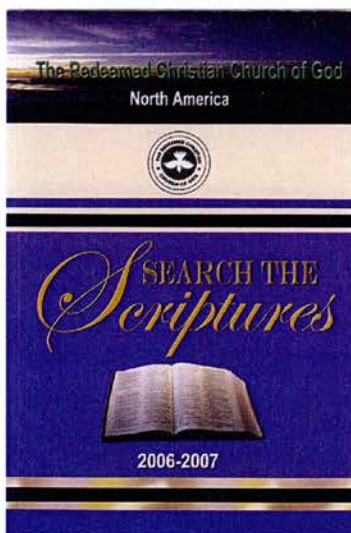


Fig. 5.3 Redeemed Christian Church of God, *Search the Scriptures*

⁴⁵ Thomas G. Kirsch, “Ways of Reading as Religious Power in Print Globalization,” *American Ethnologist* 34:3 (2007): 509-520.

⁴⁶ See <http://ss2007.rccg.org/>.

⁴⁷ See <http://diggingdeep.rccg.org/>.

Writing in the preface to the 2006-2007 Sunday school manual, the General Overseer E. A. Adeboye instructs:

The Redeemed Christian Church of God has witnessed a lot of growth and God has been gracious to us in many ways. Many of our parishes have joined the wise ones who are growing through Sunday Search the Scriptures. No doubt, Search the Scriptures on Sunday is one avenue or means to teach biblical doctrines to match the speed of our growth. Being a formal school, therefore, its syllabus, as it were, needs to be tailored towards presenting undiluted biblical teachings, which must consider the different categories of people in the church, the young Christians, the middle aged and the matured ones.⁴⁸

Adeboye's words indicate how the Sunday school manual is designed to help unite a global organization with an increasing variety of parishes.



Fig. 5.4 Segun Oyesanya teaching Sunday school, Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn. 2005

Organized quarterly and by themes, the manual begins with a ten-part study on “Foundational Truths” that includes Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and sanctification. The manual goes on to teach on other topics such as ministry, healing, apostles, prophets, divine favor, holiness, faith, marriage, money, victorious living, prosperity, soul saving, and restitution. The earlier 2002-2003 Sunday school manual begins with a history of the church. The themes of this manual are readiness for the king, Jesus our

⁴⁸ *Search the Scriptures* (Redeemed Christian Church of God North America, 2006), 6.

Baptizer, and what are called “revelation,” “inspirational,” and “power” gifts as well as marriage, home life, the great commission, and prayer.

While there are many similarities between the two manuals, the more recent of the two manuals is even more intentional about doctrine and formation. Of course the “texts” that are selected for study are explained in the manual. With a uniform reading of Scripture, the Redeemed Christian Church of God is using its Sunday Bible classes as a form of global catechesis. And in so doing, the church is establishing moral and theological boundaries. Put another way, the Sunday school manual is building tradition into a charismatic movement. As a church with an increasingly global operation and an aggressively decentralized approach to growth, the Redeemed Christian Church of God is seeking uniformity in identity through normative readings of Scripture.

Like the Redeemed Christian Church of God, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana headquarters provides direction and material on what to study in the local parish. A good example of this is the church-wide Bible study that takes place monthly during the Sunday worship service. Mid-point into the August 21, 2005 Sunday service, the church breaks into three language groups for Bible study: Twi, Ga, and English. Each group meets in a different portion of the sanctuary and is led by a different lay leader. For almost an hour, the study follows a Bible Study booklet published by the Presbyterian Church of Ghana headquarters and imported for use in the church. “This is a Bible church,” the leader of the English group proclaims as he encouraged people to bring their Bibles to church. The topic of this session is “repentance,” and Isaiah 55:7, Psalm 38:18, 2 Samuel 12, and Luke 19:8 are read and discussed in this regard. The groups end and return to their pews. Summarizing what has been discussed, Rev. Asiedu tells the church: “May He help us choose between the world and Him.” Soon the Singing Band has the church joyously praising God.

Reading Scripture is a mark of identity in the Church of the Lord (Aladura). Harold Turner notes, “The constitution declares that the Scriptures are the official basis of the Church, and an effort is made to support practice and teaching by biblical

references. The Church desires to be a biblical church and holds the Bible in great reverence.”⁴⁹ Peter Probst connects this emphasis on the Bible with an early stress on literacy and written texts⁵⁰ in the Church of the Lord (Aladura) including Josiah Ositelu’s “holy words” committed to writing.⁵¹ In such a setting, the members trust in the working of the Spirit through reading.



Fig. 5.5 Presbyterian Church of Ghana Almanac for Preaching. 2007

PREACHING FOR LIFE

Preaching is another key way that the biblical text connects with the lives of African Christians in New York City. As I began this project, I expected to hear sermons on the diaspora, messages that find in Abraham, Sarah, or Ruth analogues for faith in a foreign land. But although on occasion the topic does come up, it is not as the

⁴⁹ Harold W. Turner, *African Independent Church*, vol. II - *The Life and Faith of the Church of the Lord (Aladura)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 83.

⁵⁰ Peter Probst, “The Letter and the Spirit: Literacy and Religious Authority in the History of the Aladura Movement in Western Nigeria,” *Africa* 59:4 (1989): 479.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 489-490, 492.

exclusive emphasis of a sermon. Allusions to “home” are very common, however. This often takes the form of a geographical reference, a familiar saying, or a story. Most typically, sermons read the biblical text to emphasize godly living, the church’s common life, trusting in God, and the centrality of Jesus. In other words, they are reading for the ends of what it means to live and serve God.⁵² Because elsewhere in this thesis I offer examples of preaching, my descriptions and remarks here are brief.

At the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York, preaching calendars are joined between Ghana and New York. Each week the selection of texts follows an “almanac,” meaning that preaching texts are assigned for even visiting preachers. The pulpit is recognized as holding great consequence, and ministers undertake formal theological training, which in part forms them in correct ways of reading the text.

A sermon delivered by Rev. Asiedu on Easter Sunday 2005 is based on readings from Acts 10:34-43, 1 Corinthians 5:6-11, and Matthew 28:10.⁵³ Rev. Asiedu starts off with a question: “What is new for us today?” The message of the resurrection for those who “have Christ” should lead, in the words of John’s Gospel, to “go...and tell them about Jesus Christ: He is risen.” For Rev. Asiedu, “Jesus rose from the grave so that we might have faith. Salvation is for everybody...we need salvation.” From the Corinthians reading he makes the point that “church discipline is needed” because “one bad apple spoils a bunch of apples.” In conclusion, he emphasizes that if you believe or have faith, you will “prevail,” you will be a “conqueror” and you will be a “victor.” The sermon is delivered in English, but he stops along the way to provide short summaries in Twi.

Evangelist Eleanor Campbell is one of the regular preachers at the Church of the Lord (Aladura). A sermon she delivered in February 2005 on Matthew 5:1-10 hones

⁵² I return here to the important work of Stephen Fowl, *Engaging Scripture*.

⁵³ Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York, Field Notes, March 27, 2005.

in on the saying “blessed are the poor in spirit.”⁵⁴ “This is how I want to explain it,” she says.

When [there is] no where else to turn...look to your left, right, backwards, and forwards. You feel like you’re in another world...When you’ve lost a loved one...you have to come to the Lord.

To this end Sister Eleanor quotes Psalm 37:11, which reads, “But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.” David’s story offers an example. “You have to humble yourself before the Lord and he will lift you up.” She then talks about the white garments that members wear, including head coverings for women. Recalling the practice in Liberia, for her the white garments represent spirituality.⁵⁵ “You have to humble yourself to ask for prayer. Right now ask for salvation of your soul,” she concludes.

Space precludes me from following the innovative lead of Harold Turner who analyzed the distribution of biblical texts across a wide selection of sermons in the Church of the Lord (Aladura).⁵⁶ As did Turner, overall I heard a wide range of Old Testament and New Testament texts preached on. However, whereas Turner raised concerns about a “muted testimony to Christ,”⁵⁷ I heard a very significant devotion to Christ.

When Nimi Wariboko comes to the pulpit to preach at the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn, he brings his Bible and a notebook containing his sermon points. In March 2005, he preached on the topic of revival, based on Acts 2:1-8. Typically, Pastor Wariboko has a number of points to each sermon, and James Adieze or another worker, sitting to the side, types verses and an

⁵⁴ Church of the Lord (Aladura), Field Notes, February 6, 2005.

⁵⁵ For further background see Elisha P. Renne, “‘Let Your Garments Always Be White...’ Expressions of Past and Present in Yoruba Religious Textiles,” in *Christianity and Social Change in Africa: Essays in Honor of J.D.Y. Peel*, ed. Toyin Falola (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2005), 139-163.

⁵⁶ Harold W. Turner, *Profile Through Preaching: A Study of the Sermon Texts Used in a West African Independent Church* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1965).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 79, cf. 12-13.

outline into a laptop computer that projects onto a screen for the congregation to view.

Pastor's Wariboko's sermon on revival has seven points.⁵⁸ First, "there is a turning to Christ in holiness." Second, "here is a manifestation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit" that offers the hope of a church where "there is no discrimination and racism in the midst of God's people." This applies to other possible divisions: "a Green Card doesn't make you better. God has brought us here to our destiny." Third, "emotional and physical healings take place in our midst." Fourth, "there is a strengthening of faith." Fifth, "there is unity in the church" through grace that abounds. Sixth, there is a "missionary drive." Seventh, there is "prophetic criticism" that includes the social situation. He explains that fasting is part of social criticism. Pastor Nimi closes by summoning people to "stand up and speak unto Christ."

The preachers in each of these three sermons seek to empower people to place their lives in the care of God. The Bible is not explained by way of historical context or critical issues, but inter-textually. Rev. Asiedu, Evangelist Eleanor, and Pastor Wariboko have each crafted a message within a particular tradition of preaching – the personal emphases of the seminary-trained Presbyterian minister, the words of an Evangelist giving reasons for the hope she has, and the message of transformation from a Pentecostal preacher.

WORDS OF POWER

Christian Scripture in African churches creates a world, builds community, shapes identity, and is proclaimed for life. As we will now explore, it also "does things" and produces change. For African Christians, while God urges and instructs in the Scriptures, more attention is given to how God performs actions through the words of the Bible. Biblical words are seen to have within them the capacity of spiritual power, an attribute bound up with divine authority. Here we have an example of

⁵⁸ Because it appeared that Pastor Nimi Wariboko combined a number of points along the way, I recognize that the numbering may vary.

how what African Christians believe about God is reflected in their view of the Bible.

The power conveyed that comes through the use of biblical texts - saying them, reading them, and praying them - comes into play for pastoral needs. For example, the text has performative ability in the area of deliverance, healing, and power that connects to life needs in the city. It is not so much that the biblical text “speaks” to persons but rather that when its words are repeated they carry power. In speech-act theory, God does things by illocutionary acts – words do things when God speaks them.⁵⁹ African Christians have developed a hermeneutical framework with affinities to speech-act theory: God’s words do things when spoken by persons. But we should also see that this is effective only when words are projected in faith. The biblical words themselves have strength only within God and the agency of faith.

The use of the name of Jesus is a frequent practice and a means of receiving God’s influence in all areas of life. “In the name of Jesus!” one is healed and delivered, a phrase drawn from Acts in the New Testament.⁶⁰ Here the continual repetition of Jesus’ name aloud is crucial. A related theme is the “blood of Jesus,” understood to protect, cover, and heal persons. Asamoah-Gyadu draws these elements together as they are found in Ghanaian neo-Pentecostalism: “the deployment of divine resources, that is, power and authority in the Name or Blood of Jesus - perceived in pneumatological terms as the intervention of the Holy Spirit.”⁶¹ The underlying image of atonement is not judicial in its emphasis but experiential; salvation is healing that comes continually into the believer’s life through Christ’s death.

At the Church of the Lord (Aladura) in the Bronx, the reading of particular psalms is a factor in many areas of divine involvement. Psalm 24 is used for consecration, Psalm 121 for protection. Like other Aladura, Mother Cooper and the church ascribe

⁵⁹ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁶⁰ Acts 3:6.

⁶¹ Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 165.

particular powers to the Psalms.⁶² When a person presents a problem she says, “I refer them to the book of Psalms,” which focuses on “prayer and supplication.”⁶³ The words of the Psalms are understood to make claims and produce specific actions. In the Aladura tradition, words are considered to have power.⁶⁴

As observed in chapter 1, Grace Presbyterian in Ghana yearly sends a healing team to New York. A core element of the healing process involves “the client” reading lines from Scripture. The protocol on healing, a typed sheet with the heading “Healings,” has twelve lines from Scripture.⁶⁵ An example is the first line: “God’s ideal way of creation was to be devoid of evil including sickness. Genesis 1:31.” There are different causes of sickness, not always but possibly including sins, which requires confession. Line eleven is “MAINTAINING the healing is also heavily dependent upon your CONTINUED ASSOCIATION with Jesus Christ. John 15:4-7.” Overall, the protocol asks, “What is the relevance of Jesus Christ (the healer) to your life?”

An accompanying sheet of “Prayer Lines” directs an additional step in the healing process. The prayer lines begin with “Give thanks to [the] Lord who came to bind the broken hearted, free the captives and release prisoners.” Other lines that can be assigned for prayer include “Bind every spirit of infirmity in the name of Jesus,” “Pray in the name of Jesus to release yourself from every hereditary sickness,” “Ask the Lord to perform a divine surgery in every area of your body, which requires such an operation,” and “Pray that you would always enjoy a good health, body, soul and spirit.” The standard interpretation would be these words are to be applied to the problem in question. But that alone doesn’t help; the words and their objectives must be voiced and therefore embodied.

⁶² David Tuesday Adamo, “The Use of Psalms in African Indigenous Churches in Nigeria,” in *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends* (Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2001), 336-349.

⁶³ Marie Cooper, Interview, March 15, 2005.

⁶⁴ Peter Probst, “The Letter and the Spirit,” 478-495.

At the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn one can hear worship leaders direct the entire church to “prophesy to yourself,” with each person then filling in some words from Scripture such as “blessing” or “success.” For example, “God, I prophesy blessing into my life today.” Blessing, which presupposes God’s active engagement as a life-changing force for good, brings about certain results understood to be the logic of promise and holiness.

CONCLUSION: THE WORD ABIDES

After the sermon at the Church of the Lord (Aladura) is concluded, the congregation sings: “The living words of God/The living words of God/The Living words of God/Abides within me.” For emphasis, it is sung through three times. This is a fitting way to conclude this chapter on the Bible in African churches in New York City. For the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York, the Church of the Lord (Aladura), and the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn, Scripture is viewed as living, powerful, and relevant, especially when it is inhabited in the bodies of believers and communities of worship to which they belong. Reading is not required, but hearing and abiding is. The Bible speaks to the totality of everyday life, to family life, to employment, to politics, and to school. It is not information, but a story to be performed. In a global setting, reading the Bible together provides continuity of belief and continually shapes self-understanding.

⁶⁵ “Healing,” no date.

CHAPTER 6

WITNESSES IN THE CITY: DYNAMICS OF A NEW MISSIONARY MOVEMENT

INTRODUCTION

Where Nostrand and Parkside Avenues meet in Brooklyn is a jumble of everything—pharmacy, childcare center, grocery store, mosque, bodega, restaurant, and a stop for the 2 Train. Also located in this cultural and interreligious zone is the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel. As people are coming up out of the subway and into daylight, Bola Oyesanya, a minister at the church, greets people, offers an evangelistic tract, and then asks if they have a few minutes to talk about Jesus. Later Minister Bola explains that she begins by asking, “Do you have a few minutes for me to share with you about the love of God?” Then she shares that Christ died for them and invites them into a relationship with God. “Sometimes a soul is won, sometimes just a seed is planted,” Bola reflects.¹

On January 29, 2006 the *New York Times* magazine featured a cover story titled “The Post-Colonial Missionary: What in God’s Name American Evangelicals are Doing in Africa.”² The cover photograph pictures two people: on the left is Rick Maples, a white missionary from California dressed in a soft blue shirt and corduroy pants, the very embodiment of American suburban culture. Standing on his right next to Maples is a Samburu warrior, adorned in a spectrum of colors, criss-crossed with finely woven beads, and a bright feather on his head. The story is largely a profile of the Maples family and the way that their evangelical convictions took them from the California suburbs to the scrub of the Kenyan countryside for the purpose of evangelizing the Sambura people and beginning a church.

¹ Bola Oyesana, Interview, September 23, 2007.

² Daniel Bergner, “The Call,” *New York Times Magazine*, January 29, 2006, 40-47, 72, 74-75.

Although an earlier article drew attention to the emergence of African churches in New York,³ most readers of the *New York Times* would be unaware that a potentially far more significant missionary movement from Africa to New York is underway. If the subject matter of the article was reversed like the mission is, it would read, “The Post-Colonial Missionary: What in God’s Name are African Christians Doing in America?” Befitting a missionary movement whose tributaries are a revival in Africa and migration, the picture might feature a person like Bola Oyesanya, who shares the gospel on the streets of Brooklyn but also offers a witness in her professional vocation and ordinary life in the city.

Fuelled by an outpouring of the Spirit, built by its own vision, sustained out of its own resources, launched on the establishment of apostolic outposts in urban centers, and animated by the charismatic powers of life, African Christians are bringing their faith to the streets, communities, and workplaces of the city. No more is mission just something that the West does. Today, imbricated within the structures and processes of globalization,⁴ mission is global in source and reach.⁵

“Christianity,” observes Andrew Walls, “has throughout its history spread outwards, across cultural frontiers, so that each new point on the Christian circumference is a new potential Christian centre.”⁶ Today an important part of that story is the post-colonial mission diffusion of Christian faith in Africa to New York City and the global urban world. Of course, African Christianity as Ogbu Kalu writes, has a long

³ Daniel Wakin, “In New York, Gospel Resounds in African Tongues,” *New York Times*, April 18, 2004, A-1. As a historical notation, this article began with the present writer’s research.

⁴ Manuel A. Vásquez and Marie Friedmann Marquardt, *Globalizing the Sacred: Religion Across the Americas* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003); Webb Keane, *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 44-45.

⁵ On the “back story,” see Lamin Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations: Pillars of World Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) and Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002).

⁶ Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2000), 22.

history of indigenous African missionary enterprise, reflected at three levels: “missionary work within a nation, within Africa, and cross-culturally outside Africa.”⁷ It is the third phase of mission where we now pick up the story.

The subject of this chapter is how African churches conceive and practice their mission, how they cross cultures and borders with the gospel. In my reading, the basic picture of mission on the ground involves not as much sending missionaries from Africa to New York City as it is a mission intertwined with migration.⁸ African mission to New York City follows a dispersion pattern “of among the nations” more than a “Great Commission” of “going to the nations.”⁹ The dissemination of the gospel from Africa to New York City is taking place through global networks of faith with churches coming to be the connecting points of circulation. Its features are those of the changing urban world: transnational, planetary in consciousness, articulated in a global economy, and flexible.¹⁰ Rather than forming mission societies or organizations, African mission in New York is church-based.

African mission to New York City is also a story with continuities across time. As Walls reminds us, there is a close relationship between migration and mission in the Christian movement.¹¹ In attending to this story, one recalls from Acts that the early church grew as “those who were scattered went from place to place, proclaiming the word.”¹² And while one should not draw simplistic parallels, Wayne Meeks¹³

⁷ Ogbu U. Kalu, “Pentecostalism and Mission in Africa, 1970-2000,” *Mission Studies* 24 (2007): 36. See further Matthews A. Ojo, “The Dynamics of Indigenous Charismatic Missionary Enterprises in West Africa,” *Missionalia* 25:4 (December 1997): 537-561.

⁸ Peter Beyer sees these as two choices in *Religion in a Global Society* (London: Routledge, 2006), 146-147.

⁹ This may be the correct grammatical sense of Luke’s “Great Commission” found in Luke 24:47.

¹⁰ Simon Coleman has identified such features in Pentecostalism, but I assign them more broadly and locate them in the city. See Simon Coleman, *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity: Spreading the Gospel of Prosperity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1-5, 49-71.

¹¹ Andrew F. Walls, “Mission and Migration: The Diaspora Factor in Christian History,” *Journal of African Christian Thought* 5:2 (December 2002), 3-11; “Migration and Evangelization: The Gospel and Movement of Peoples in Modern Times,” *The Covenant Quarterly* 63:1 (2005): 3-28.

¹² Acts 8:4.

reminds us of the trans-urban character of this early Christian expansion. None of the churches label the city an abode of Satan, but see New York City for the opportunities and challenges it presents.

In this chapter I describe and analyze the mission discourse, beliefs, institutional capacities, and practices found in the churches and membership of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Church of the Lord (Aladura), and Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn. First, I provide background on their global scale and ambitions, a very basic way of understanding globalization.¹⁴ Second, I will examine the basic model of mission of each of the three churches. Third, I show how a mission of expressing the charismatic power of God through healing belongs equally to the three churches. Fourth, I look at the new “missionaries,” bringing the discussion back to the paradigm of migration and mission highlighted by Walls. This takes us out of the context of the church setting and into daily life in New York City. Finally, I tell how African-initiated mission to New York is moving full circle back in service to meet spiritual, social, and economic needs in Africa.

A GLOBAL VISION IN A NETWORK CULTURE

African churches do not have small visions. Their visions of the missionary nature of the church are expansive and comprehensive, the entire globe covered with disciples of Jesus Christ, extensions of their own ecclesial communities in every part of the world. In this ambition they exhibit what Arjun Appadurai identifies as a “global imagination”¹⁵ and Simon Coleman speaks of as a “global orientation” and “global consciousness.”¹⁶ Crossing spatial and cultural borders is deeply rooted in

¹³ Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983). See also Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders Christianity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

¹⁴ Saskia Sassen, “The Many Scales of the Global: Implications for Theory and for Politics,” in *The Postcolonial and the Global*, ed. Revathi Krishnaswamy and John C. Hawley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 83.

¹⁵ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

¹⁶ Coleman, *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity*, 51, 58.

the Christian story, but through globalization and immigration has become intensified.

An international sensibility is part of the history of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana going back to the beginnings of the church with the Basel Mission.¹⁷ Expanding on this global outlook in ways almost certainly unforeseen by the Basel Mission, October 24, 2004 was a watershed day in the history of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. On this day, over 500 members of congregations of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana travelled from Chicago, Maryland, Virginia, Houston, Dallas, Newark, Worcester, and New York to the Bronx. Here the churches gathered in the expansive building of the First Ghana Seventh Day Adventist Church for the purpose of officially organizing the Overseas Mission Field of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana.

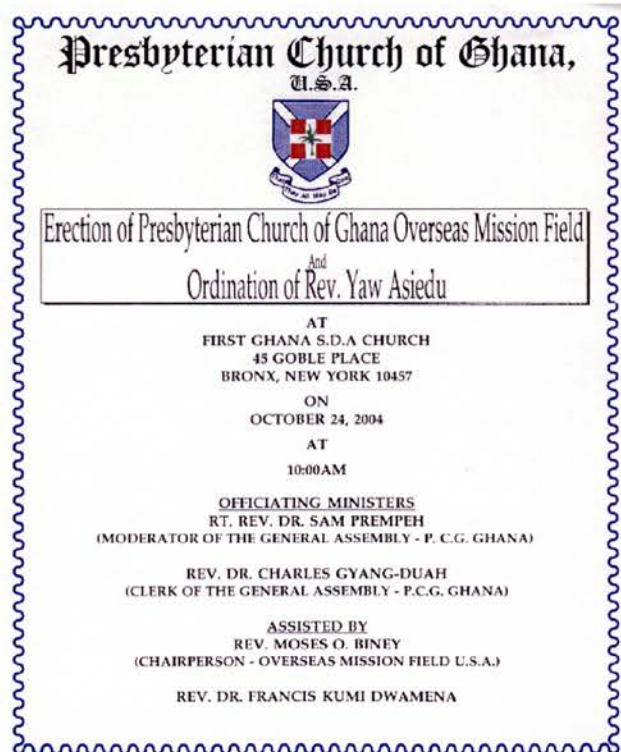


Fig. 6.1 Bulletin, Inaugural Service, Overseas Mission Field, Presbyterian Church of Ghana. 2004

¹⁷ Noel Smith, *The Presbyterian Church of Ghana, 1835-1960: A Younger Church in a Changing Society* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1966).

The Reverend Dr. Samuel Prempeh, the Moderator of the General Assembly and Reverend Dr. Charles Gyang-Duah, the Clerk of the denomination, the two highest officials of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, led the vibrant service. Also present from Ghana was Catechist Abboa-Offei. According to Prempeh, the purpose of organizing the Overseas Mission Field is to “acknowledge this number of congregations with us and want to get better organized.”¹⁸ Remarked Prempeh to the congregations, we “want you to be assured [that we] remember you and pray for you.” Visiting many of the churches in North America, he explained we “have come to say hello, see how you are getting along.”



Fig. 6.2 Banner in Harlem announcing Mission Convention of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. Note the citation of the “Great Commission,” Matthew 28:19. 2007

On the day prior to the service, a meeting of Overseas Mission Field (OMF) was held at the church offices in Harlem, attended by church leadership from Ghana and the United States. Here they discussed plans and budgets. With a small office in the back of the New York church building on 123rd Street, Rev. Moses Biney, then a doctoral student at Princeton Theological Seminary, served as acting director from 2003-2006. Upon his retirement as Clerk of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, in 2006 Reverend Dr. Charles Guang-Duah was appointed head of the office, moving to New York to assume the role and raising its profile.

¹⁸ Samuel Prempeh, Interview, October 24, 2004.

The history of the OMF is in measure shaped by a story of divergent choices. Initially the OMF was an umbrella group for “all Presbyterian churches in the United States with Ghanaian membership.”¹⁹ However, a number of the churches determined to instead become part of the Presbyterian Church USA, dividing the Ghanaian Presbyterians into two groups. In 2004, ten churches operated together in the Presbyterian Church of Ghana fold. Finances were often given as a reason for more closely aligning with the American mainline denomination, but other factors were involved, including leadership differences. As stated in a report, “After the split, the PCG Overseas Mission Field in USA was formed to serve as a de facto presbytery for the churches operating under the administrative and ecclesiastical leadership of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana.”²⁰

Under this structure, mission, evangelism, and corporate assets were held together between Ghana and the United States. Still, in 2007 the Presbyterian Church of Ghana was in conversation with the Presbyterian Church USA, seeking a closer relationship. The wound of the divide was local, not denominational. On numerous occasions, including late 2007, I heard that the conversation for ways to work together continues at the denominational level.

The Church of the Lord (Aladura) emphasized an expansive view of its mission reach from the earliest days, its universal trajectory ultimately leading to the Bronx in 1994, as I described in chapter 2. “The Church has never regarded itself as merely one small denomination among others, or confined to one West African tribe or territory,”²¹ summarizes Harold Turner. According to the texts of Church of the Lord (Aladura) founder Josiah Ositelu, among his early revelations in 1927 were included “a promise that ‘the fame of the glory of my God’s name shall spread up to

¹⁹ Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Overseas Mission Field in USA, 2004 Clerk’s Report.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Harold W. Turner, *African Independent Church*, vol. II: *The Life and Faith of the Church of the Lord (Aladura)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 93.

Syria and America.”²² As a child, it is reported that Ositelu had “prophesied the future, revealed unknown secrets of the past, read signs in the sky, been able to detect witches, and to have had unusual dreams of being taught by holy beings.”²³ His parents, whom Turner describes as “illiterate pagan farmers,” turned to an Ifa priest in Ogere for counsel, and were told “these were signs of a great future, when he would lead both Europeans and Africans.”²⁴

Spreading the Church of the Lord (Aladura) in Africa began with sending missionaries to Sierra Leone in 1947²⁵ and Liberia in 1947,²⁶ and Ghana in 1953.²⁷ There was also expansion within Nigeria to the north and east.²⁸ By 1964, the church was first established in Europe with the opening of a branch in London, considered to be perhaps the first African church in England.

Pressing this global sensibility, Oduwole, in a 1960 sermon quoted by Turner comments: “It is time for Africa to get up, and this Church is going to show the world and the white men that Africa has the Holy Spirit.”²⁹ For Turner, this assessment is born out: “It is because the Church of the Lord has discovered its peculiar Africanness as a church, and so becomes a real church within its context, that it also feels compelled to a universal mission; for, as the world church has been discovering afresh in our time, mission is of the *esse* of the church.”³⁰ Today the full name found in official publications and Web sites is the Church of the Lord (Aladura) *World-Wide* (italics mine), underscoring a renewed global vision for the

²² Harold W. Turner, *African Independent Church*, vol. I, *The Church of the Lord (Aladura)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 44, cf 45.

²³ *Ibid.*, 35, cf 35-39

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 114.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 137.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 161.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 72-88.

²⁹ Turner, *African Independent Church*, vol. II.

twenty-first century. In line with the global view of God's work, Mother Cooper looks to God, who "will put all nations together."³¹

When Primate Rufus Ositelu came to the Bronx parish on October 8, 2006, he did so while on a mission called the "U.S.A. for Christ" crusade. Along with his message of encouragement in faith, he brought with him material from headquarters: cassette tapes of Tabborrar music, programs from major events, calendars with photographs of church life, and copies of his book. Also during his visit he met privately with the Bronx branch and members of a new branch getting off the ground in Brooklyn. There was an air of familiarity between all, and the transnational ties between the Bronx and Nigeria were reinforced.

Click on the Redeemed Christian Church of God Web site in 2007 and you are immediately introduced to a global vision. Beneath a photograph of the General Overseer E. A. Adeboye is a map of the world that stretches from the United States to Africa.³² Then clicking to enter the site, the "Parish Directory" link on the home page has a globe with flags from around the world for the design element.³³ This links the viewer to the International Directory page. While the heading includes a globe of the world, more to the point is a flat map of the world that is the main design on the page. On this map, Africa is at the center. A red circle is found where Nigeria is located, and another red circle concentrically flashes outward to the rest of the world.³⁴ There are two directories and headings that link to Africa/Nigeria, North America/South America, UK/Europe, and Asia/Australia. As noted previously the

³⁰ Ibid., 322.

³¹ Marie Cooper, Interview, February 13, 2005.

³² See <http://ww.rccg.org> (accessed on August 26, 2006). By January 1, 2008 the Web site design was altered. Adeboye remains prominent on the home page, which features his prophecies for the new year and links to Redeemed Christian Church of God in North America and the United Kingdom. The picture on the home page is now an open road.

³³ <http://home.rccg.org/home.html> (accessed on August 26, 2006).

³⁴ <http://directory.rccg.org/home.html> (accessed August 26, 2006).

total number of Redeemed parishes worldwide is unclear, but estimates place it at over five thousand.³⁵

Symbolized by a globe of the world on the home page, the church's planetary aspirations are also emphasized throughout the Web pages of the Redeemed Christian Church of God in North America. Their mission is described as follows:

As received by the General Overseer (G.O.), Pastor E. A. Adeboye, and communicated to the Headquarters leaders, our vision and mission statement shall remain intact, with a qualifying addendum in view of the peculiarity of the demography in the North American region. They are as follows:

- To make heaven.
- To take as many people with us.
- To have a member of RCCG in every family of all nations.
- To accomplish No. 1 above, holiness will be our lifestyle.
- To accomplish No. 2 and 3 above, we will plant churches within five minutes walking distance in every city and town of developing countries and within five minutes driving distance in every city and town of developed countries.

We will pursue these objectives until every Nation in the world is reached for the Lord Jesus Christ.

ADDENDUM: For planting new parishes in North America & Caribbean countries, the location to any existing parish must be at least 10 minutes driving distance.³⁶

It is noteworthy that it begins with what the G. O. has "received." In conversations at church events, I had heard that the G. O. seeks a member of the church in every household in the world, but here it is publicly stated.

The following "Purpose Statement" presented in 2007 captures another facet of the Redeemed Christian Church of God's mission dynamic: "To bring people from all nations to Jesus, continually growing and abiding together in the Lord by the teaching of the Word of God and the kingdom principles; Receiving the power of the

³⁵ James Fadele, Interview, March 21, 2004.

³⁶ <http://www.rccgna.org/mission.asp> (accessed February 26, 2008).

Holy Spirit for effective witnessing to the world... We are world changers!!!³⁷ Just as in the previous statement, there is a global perspective in outlook and call to action, but in this form the power of the Holy Spirit and change are emphasized. The mix they seem to be seeking on the global scene involves both “universalism and particularism.”³⁸

In supporting this mission Redeemed Christian Church of God has established an ambitious operation in North America, with headquarters in Detroit and a large tract of land in Dallas Texas for a “Redemption Camp.” James Fadele is Chairman of Redeemed Christian Church of God in North America, which oversees around 300 parishes. At church events where I heard him address the North American membership in 2004 and 2005, Fadele is business-like and professional. At the Annual Convention in 2004 held at the Secaucus Convention Center in New Jersey, he provided an analysis of American culture. He also introduced a plan for each branch to work with the “purpose-driven church” model associated with the American evangelical Rick Warren. Other topics Fadele spoke of were financial records, visas for ministers, and new church development. Here he laid out a vision for establishing the church’s identity in North America:

Let’s Position our Church as a Distinct Class

For people who care about their Spiritual diet and won’t compromise on ambiance, message and standard of worship, **RCCG NA** must transcend traditional ‘*churching*’ by offering a variety of events that meet the different demographic classes living in our society

Let’s make every program an experience they’ll ever desire to re-live!³⁹

Fadele’s emphasis on reaching a broader American culture is clear; he makes no reference to reaching Nigerians or any African immigrants. However, neither do his remarks reflect an institutional translation across cultures.

³⁷ James Fadele, “Visit to Zone 18” Presentation Packet, 2007.

³⁸ Paul Freston, “Globalisation, Religion and Evangelical Christianity: A Sociological Meditation from the Third World,” Position Paper 151, Currents in World Christianity Project, 2001, 23.

³⁹ James Fadele, 8th Annual RCCG North American Convention, PowerPoint Presentation.

In Mark C. Taylor's *The Moment of Complexity: Emerging Network Culture*, he argues that a cultural shift is taking place whereby the world is moving from being organized on the basis of a "grid" to a "network."⁴⁰ With globalization, as Taylor shows, society is more complex, the rate of change more propulsive, and inter-relationships more pervasive. "Whereas walls divide and seclude in an effort to impose order and control, webs link and relate, entangling everyone in multiple, mutating, and mutually defining connections in which nobody is really in control. As connections proliferate, change accelerates, bringing everything to the edge of chaos."⁴¹ While Taylor's view of networks and webs is inadequately grounded for the urban context, he can help us see African churches in New York City as part of a global Christianity that is dynamic and in tune with a period of cultural change.

Phillip Berryman's fascinating essay "Churches as Winners and Losers in the Network Society," focused on Pentecostal religious development in Latin America, offers a point of reference relevant to our study.⁴² In Berryman's reading of the Latin American church scene, the fastest growing churches are Pentecostal and operate on a decentralized model; the historical churches where growth is at best stagnant reflect a more traditional and bureaucratic structure.⁴³ Pentecostal pastors are free to focus on their parishioners, provide locally determined leadership, and do what is required for sustainability.⁴⁴ Yet they also remain accountable to local leadership and draw strength from their fellow pastors. A network model emphasizes "horizontal integration, flexibility, adaptability, rapid and context-specific responses."⁴⁵ In a centralized model of church life, decisions concerning resources, strategy, and leadership are determined from the top down.

⁴⁰ Mark C. Taylor, *The Moment of Complexity: Emerging Network Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 23; cf. 157-194.

⁴² Phillip Berryman, "Churches as Winners and Losers in the Network Society," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 41:4 (1999): 21-34.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 25-26, 30.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 26-27.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

Given the hierarchical leadership of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, beginning with the General Overseer, it would appear the church is a classic example of a bureaucratic organization. However, it is not.⁴⁶ Thus far the church's growth has come from being a decentralized movement, exemplifying the model of a network organization outlined by Berryman. One way this is reflected is in the zonal structure that divides North America into eighteen zones, each with their own coordinator, who is also a parish pastor. In 2006, New York City, which had been established as Zone 1, was divided, splitting Brooklyn, Long Island City (in Queens), Staten Island, and New Hampshire into a new Zone 18, with Nimi Wariboko as coordinator.⁴⁷ Each zonal pastor keeps in close contact with all the pastors, but each branch pastor has the full responsibility for growth, leadership development, and resource gathering.⁴⁸ Individual innovation, direction, and creativity are required for success, while collaboration and mutual care among leaders also takes place at the local level.

While in his public presentations James Fadele, the chairman of Redeemed Christian Church of God in North America, is seeking to centralize core practices such as accounting procedures and visa applications, "putting our house in order" as he puts it, in actual fact this is largely a matter of keeping up with decentralized growth. As the church grows, this will be something to watch. On a smaller scale, Mother Cooper and the Church of the Lord (Aladura) also represent a decentralized model, with responsibility related to the local level. Within the framework of a network analysis, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana operates in a more formally structured way. Decisions and processes move slower, and must directly involve leadership in Ghana. This pattern fits the identity of the denomination, even with its increasing Charismatic influences. Notably, the different headquarters in Africa retain one factor of control in each of the three churches: ordination of leadership.

⁴⁶ For an apparent contrast see Opoku Onyinah, "Pentecostalism and the African Diaspora: An Examination of the Missions Activities of the Church of Pentecost," *Pneuma* 26:2 (Fall 2004): 216-241.

⁴⁷ Zone 18 includes Brooklyn and beyond to New Hampshire.

⁴⁸ Nimi Wariboko, E-mail Correspondence to Zone 18, November 6, 2006.

THREE MODELS OF MISSION

There is no single model of African mission in New York City, although there are several features that each church will have in common. Allan Anderson identifies five elements operating in Pentecostal mission in the “majority world,” or non-western world. Mission is: (1) pneumacentric; (2) mission praxis is dynamic with an emphasis on healing; (3) evangelism is the central missiological thrust; (4) leadership is contextualized; and (5) ordinary men and women are mobilized.⁴⁹ I appreciate this paradigm and believe it has wider saliency, but want to stress in this section that each of the three focus churches offers a unique and creative model of mission in New York City. In the section that follows this one I will examine the three churches’ common interest in healing as an understanding of mission.

Mission as Member Care

The model of mission emphasized by the Presbyterian Church of God is one of pastoral accompaniment of its scattered membership. Member care and institutional maintenance appear to be the backbone of their mission strategy. This represents a primary mission focus on the Ghanaian Presbyterian community in the city.



Fig. 6.3 Representative of Presbyterian Church of Ghana congregations in the United States holding a large Bible as the Overseas Mission Field is inaugurated. 2004

⁴⁹ Allan Anderson, “Towards a Pentecostal Missiology for the Majority World,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 8:1 (2005): 29-47.

As relayed to me during an interview by then Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana Samuel Prempeh, pastoral care and social support for their church members is the denomination's principal mission concern in New York City.⁵⁰ Over time, attention might be given to other groups, starting with the wider Ghanaian population. If this strategy is limited to one group of people and sounds exclusive, it may be simply based on a realistic appraisal of time and resources. The mission model here is similar to chaplaincies, and Prempeh drew an analogy with the international churches of the Church of Scotland.⁵¹ The regular visits from Catechist Abboa-Offei, framed as missionary in nature, reinforce this dimension of member care.

Each church service involves the use of three languages: English, Twi, and Ga. Language is a marker of identity but in practice it is a means of pastoral care for the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. Overall, language is a major concern for many African immigrant churches, as W. David Stevens explains in his doctoral study on Ghanaian churches in the Chicago area.⁵² Should the service be in an African language, enabling people to feel at home, or in English as a common language that will allow for broader participation? Splitting the difference, many African immigrant churches have chosen to add a service in English.⁵³ But is the use of a culturally dominant language different from one's primary linguistic allegiance a rejection of culture?⁵⁴ To carry the underlying argument further, do words exclusively represent a culture?⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Samuel Prempeh, Interview, October 24, 2004.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² W. David Stevens, "'Taking the World': Evangelism and Assimilation Among Ghanaian Pentecostals in Chicago" (PhD Dissertation, Northwestern University, 2003), and "Spreading the Word: Religious Beliefs and the Evolution of Immigrant Congregations," *Sociology of Religion* 65:2 (2004): 121-138.

⁵³ Stevens, "Spreading the Word," 132.

⁵⁴ Laila Lalami, "Native Speaker," *Boston Review*, September/October 2006, online at <http://bostonreview.net/BR31.5/lalami.php>.

⁵⁵ On some of the broader theoretical linguistic issues, see Fred E. Jandt, *An Introduction to Intercultural Communication: Identities in a Global Community*, 4th ed (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2004): 149-151.

Language will be a theme I pick back up in chapter 8 on the second generation. Here I am asking questions related to mission. In practice, language is among the culturally self-limiting factors in who associates with the church. Taking the point of view of linguistic theory applied to the new African Charismatic churches, Moradewun Adejunmobi in *Vernacular Palaver* argues for a reconsideration of the relationship between language and identity in the postcolonial world.⁵⁶ The “territorially-fixed community, with claims to common origins, a common history and cultural specificity is only one of many possible types of community,”⁵⁷ and represents but one type of belonging. This type of community, however, can be a barrier to other language groups.

However, with a change in denominational leadership the overarching mission outlook may be evolving. “You are the ones to carry the message of salvation to people around you. That’s why you’re here,” sermonized the Right Reverend Dr. Yaw Frimpong-Manso in 2005, visiting the Harlem church as the new moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. Having come to New York City, he declared it a “missionary visit,” ministering to his scattered flock.⁵⁸ There is the diaspora, the flock that are far-flung members of their denomination, but there is also a larger mission.

During the summer of 2007, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York held a missions conference that underscored its belief in the universality of the gospel. Stretched out across the front of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana building on 123rd Street was a banner announcing the annual convention of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana Overseas Mission Field (USA District) in July 2007. In large type across the bottom of the banner were words from the Gospel of Matthew: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.” Under the aegis of the Spirit, the church is calling its

⁵⁶ Moradewun Adejunmobi, *Vernacular Palaver: Imaginations of the Local and Non-Native Languages in West Africa* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters LTD, 2004), vii.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 164.

⁵⁸ Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Field Notes, September 18, 2005.

members to proclaim good news outside of Ghana to the world, to the streets of New York City and beyond. The propulsive command of Matthew is publicly urging members to fill the space of the world with disciples of Jesus. However, the emphasis of the church remains solidly on providing pastoral care for the Presbyterian Church of Ghana membership who are living, working, and raising their families in New York City.

Mission as Intercession

“Don’t be selfish...let your prayers extend far and wide to the world,” members of the Church of the Lord (Aladura) are exhorted. “The responsibility is ours, the praying people.”⁵⁹ The model of mission of the Church of the Lord (Aladura) in New York is one of prophetic and prayerful intercession for the world.

I asked Mother Cooper what she calls herself. “A pastor?” I offer. Her answer is descriptive. “I do a lot of counseling and a lot of praying, asking the Lord to help us solve whatever problem.” She then states, “I don’t know what you’d call it.”⁶⁰ On another occasion, Mother Cooper elaborates, “Ministers stand in the gap” for those who need prayer, such as people in hospitals and prisons, those who need a lawyer, and world leaders.⁶¹ She understands her ministry as faithfully following a call to proclaim the Christian message. “Even if it’s to one person, even if it’s a child, the gospel must be preached,” Mother Cooper holds.⁶² Mission for the Church of the Lord (Aladura) resembles a struggle on behalf of people in need.⁶³

A good example of the prominence given to intercession is provided by what occurred at the end of the Tarry I described in chapter 4. As the Tarry is ending, Mother Cooper has a prophecy that somewhere in the world there will be “a terrible

⁵⁹ Church of the Lord (Aladura), Field Notes, February 6, 2005.

⁶⁰ Marie Cooper, Interview, January 12, 2006.

⁶¹ Marie Cooper, Interview, February 6, 2005.

⁶² Church of the Lord (Aladura), Interview, October 17, 2004.

⁶³ Samuel Irving Britt, “The Children of Salvation: Struggle and Cosmology in Liberian Prophet Churches” (PhD diss. University of Virginia, 1992), 291.

plane crash.”⁶⁴ In response, the church is called to pray, “Let us ask God to reverse this terrible plane crash...whether in Europe, America or Africa.” She continues, we are “asking you for mercy. Reverse. You can stop it. Mercy, mercy, mercy. Pray.” She leads the church in intercession for the pilot and passengers. “You can stop it,” she prays to God. The meaning of “you” may also be stretched to include the church at prayer. Mission is elevated to the global, and involves the prophetic and revelatory dimension of the church. During the same service, Mother Cooper prays, “Someone is in the operating room right. Help them. Pray for the sick, the shut-ins. Pray for the prisoners.”⁶⁵ Similar prayer concerns could be duplicated from nearly any service. The pattern of praying for people in need of the gospel also reflects an overt concern for the poor, sick, the incarcerated, and marginalized.

The mission attraction to outsiders is spiritual power and its intercessory effect upon their lives. After living in New York for a number of years, David Grigsby found himself in need of effective prayers, too personal to openly share with me. It is a story he related to me on more than one occasion, and I wrote of it in Chapter 4. What he emphasizes in its telling is that as he called on Mother Cooper to pray with and for him, his needs were answered.⁶⁶ Throughout each service, the congregation prays for one another.

As I interpret the mission of the Church of the Lord (Aladura) in the Bronx, it is as much who they are as what they do. Prayer is both their identity and mission. As Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder emphasize, prayer and liturgy are rightly considered forms of action.⁶⁷ At the Church of the Lord (Aladura), intercession touches the broken world of the sick, the imprisoned, and the lost. God is acting, the church believes, outside the boundaries of their fellowship for the salvation of the world.

⁶⁴ Church of the Lord (Aladura), Field Notes, November 2, 2007.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ David Grigsby, Interview, March 13, 2005.

⁶⁷ Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004), 368.

Mission as Church Planting

On the wall opposite Nimi Wariboko's desk in his office at the church is a large map of Brooklyn. The map is divided into seven sections, each one representing where a new branch of the Redeemed Christian Church of God will be "planted." I first saw the map in 2004, when the parish had just helped launch two new branches in Brooklyn, one in Coney Island and another in East New York. By 2006, four more branches were started in Brooklyn.



Fig. 6.4 Church Planting Map of Brooklyn, Redeemed Christian Church of God, International Chapel. Note the "HQ" is the International Chapel. 2004

Mission for the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn is very much focused on the development of new churches or branches, expanding the work of God one new church at a time.⁶⁸ For now at least in New York City, the idea is not to build a mega-church but to create as many branches as possible. Because they are seeking to cover the whole borough and not just ethnic communities, it also represents the practice of mission at the local level. Evangelism is an underlying passion and driving force as the church seeks to build the kingdom not only one church at a time, but also one new convert at a time. Church members hand out tracts on street corners, preach on buses, and go into the community to engage in personal evangelism. While the residency of membership can be distributed around the city, most live in Brooklyn, reinforcing the parish concept as a mission in itself and as a base for mission.

⁶⁸ For more on Pentecostal motivation in church planting, see Julia C. Ma, "Pentecostalism and Asian Mission," *Missiology* 35:1 (2007): 32.



Fig. 6.5 Pastor Adebisi Oyesile at the Chapel of Hope. Note the choir on the side. 2007

This vision for Brooklyn is fulfilled through church planters like Adebisi Oyesile, who by day works in Manhattan for a global insurance firm but devotes the rest of his time to build and pastor his church, Chapel of Hope. On the day before the official end of summer 2006 when most New Yorkers were cramming in one last day at the beach, Adebisi Oyesile was planning a new church. A worker in Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn, Adebisi was challenged by Pastor Wariboke to launch a new church. At first he resisted, but then a dream confirmed his call. “God told me to move,” Adebisi recalled, by which he means make a “move” to start a new branch of Redeemed. To prepare, he travels via Paris to the Redeemed “camp” (headquarters) where he spends a week in prayer.⁶⁹

Returning to New York, he kicks off the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel of Hope in a storefront located on Lafayette Avenue in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn. Fully responsible for its growth, pastoral care, financing, and operations, Pastor Adebisi left the Brooklyn “mother church” with a gift of \$10,000 to pay the first months of rent, purchase sound equipment and music instruments, and support of a few members, including his wife and daughter. A year later, on October 7, 2007 Pastor Adebisi and the Chapel of Hope celebrated their first anniversary. To accommodate members and guests, they rent a school

⁶⁹ Adebisi Oyasile, Interview, September 3, 2006.

auditorium across the street from the church. As they outgrow their storefront, they plan to begin another church in Brooklyn, leaving the Chapel of Hope in place.

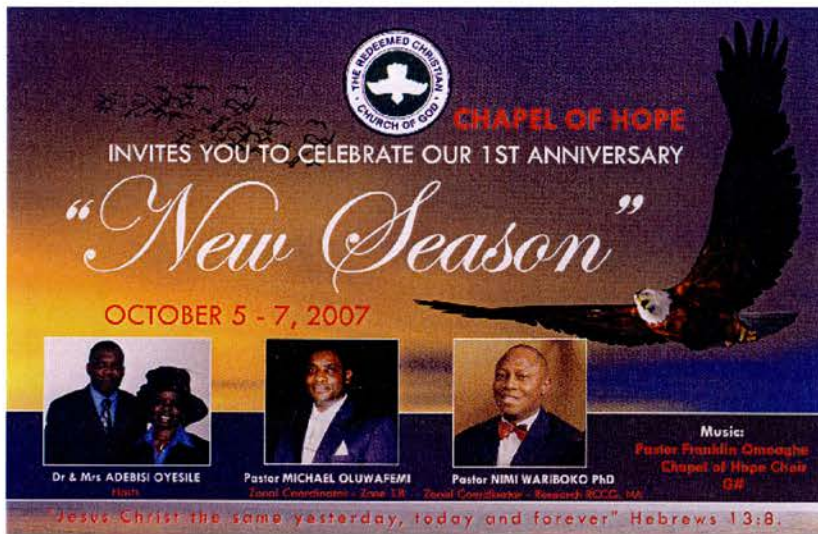


Fig. 6.6 Anniversary Service, Chapel of Hope, Announcement

Pastor Adebisi doesn't just talk or pray about his mission: he lives it "24/7." The model is self-funded by the church in New York and based on the production of leaders in the local parish. Funding comes through the pastor and his family who frequently pay the church's rent with their tithes and offerings, tithing among church members, and special offerings; no grants are garnered from fundraising, no "denominational" finances are made available.⁷⁰ Instead, as part of the Redeemed network, for the first two years the church is mandated to pay 10 percent of its tithes and offerings to the Redeemed Christian Church of God, North America, going up to 20 percent after year two. Other offerings, such as the "First Fruit Increase" that is a percentage of salary at the beginning of the year, are paid to the parish and then also go to the North American office.

Church planting skills are developed on the job and in the context of workers' meetings and regional pastors' meetings. Knowledge comes through reflection on praxis. Mix this funding model and leadership strategy together with a robust faith, a handful of willing church members, an entrepreneurial drive, an intuitive sense on how the systems of the city works, and we can see how African mission comes

⁷⁰ This stands in contrast to the ongoing Western missionary involvement in Africa as shown by Paul Gifford, "The Nature and Effects of Mission Today: A Case Study from Kenya," *Social Sciences and Mission* 20 (2007): 117-147.

together in New York City. There is no handbook or seminary that prepares, just the local church. Peggy Levitt has identified in similar transnational church planting movements, how such an approach is far more successful, and I would add far more in tune with the logic of the city, than more heavily programmed and financed American counterparts.⁷¹

Pastor Adebisi's work in Brooklyn is an example of the network and decentralized approach I discussed earlier in this chapter. He files reports, attends ministers' meetings locally and nationally, fulfils tithing requirements, and has his first point of contact in the Zonal Coordinator, Nimi Wariboko. Other contact with Redeemed leadership is through e-mail, conference calls, and meetings. But ultimately Adebisi has the sole responsibility to meet the needs of the congregation and determine strategy.

WHAT IS YOUR CHOICE?
TWO ALTERNATIVES
Accept Reject
CHRIST OR CHRIST
TWO DESTINATIONS
Heaven and Hell
YOU CANNOT SAY NO ONE CARES FOR YOUR SOUL
FOR SOMEONE GAVE YOU THIS CARD
SUNDAY - 10:00AM-12:00PM; WED-10:00AM-
1:00PM; WED-7:00PM-8:30PM; FRI-7:30PM-8:30PM

My Friend, what will you do with JESUS CHRIST.
Will You **ACCEPT** Him, or **REJECT** Him?

To accept Him means everlasting life. If you reject Him, you will perish, and serve eternal punishment. Jesus said, "Verily, Verily I say unto you, he that believeth on Me hath everlasting life" John 6:47 The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Rom 6:23 If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord and shalt **BELIEVE IN THINE HEART** that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation



THE REDEEMED CHRISTIAN CHURCH OF GOD
672 Parkside Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11226

Fig. 6.7 Evangelism Card, Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn

⁷¹ Peggy Levitt, *God Needs No Passport: Immigrants and the Changing American Religious Landscape* (New York: The New Press, 2007), 132-133.

The worship service itself is a missionary enterprise.⁷² Project 500, Project 600, and Project 700 were a series of special Sunday services at the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel in 2005 that sought to bring 500, 600, and 700 people to worship. Greater attendance in turn would grow the church and fuel expansion. But at the same time, people who attended the special services would benefit from an encounter with the Spirit's power that would be present. The power of life is attractive, and the festive celebration of Jesus inviting. Although salvation is always presented as personal, one of the most striking aspects is how salvation is understood as fully realized in the church, and therefore becoming a Christian means joining and participating in a body where God is present and the Spirit active.

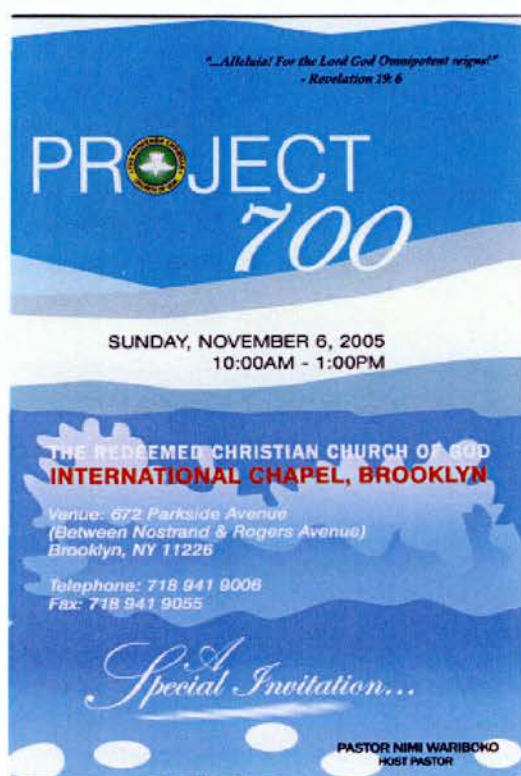


Fig. 6.8 Project 700

Pastor Wariboko insists that English is the exclusive language of the church. The use of English as a more global language is a way of transcending locality. Like the array of African and Caribbean flags in the front, the use of language is intended to make a mission statement. There is a striving after what John Burdick refers to in a

⁷² Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, 362-365; Dana L. Robert and M. L. Daneel, "Worship among Apostles and Zionists in Southern Africa," in ed. Charles E. Farhadian, *Christian Worship Worldwide: Expanding Horizons, Deepening Practices* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 70.

Brazilian setting as “pneumatic egalitarianism.”⁷³ That is, the Spirit equalizes all persons, breaking down barriers of ethnicity, race, and gender. This does not mean that ethnic groups have broken down all barriers at Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, or that culture is denied. The annual Celebrate Jesus event, naming ceremonies, and weddings are indicators that “Nigerian culture” remains a part of identity. Internally at the church, the possibility of marriage across ethnic lines remains an area of concern. But there is a real hope and strategy to be a church that transcends ethnic, cultural, and linguistic differences for the sake of the gospel.

MISSION AND THE CHARISMATIC POWERS OF LIFE

The communities of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York, the Church of the Lord (Aladura), and the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn believe in the power of the Spirit to bring about healing and deliverance. This belief anchors a specifically African Christian concern for the work of God in redeeming the world. Just as healing and a spirituality of the Charismatic powers of life represent the face of popular religion in Latin America and a key source of its growth,⁷⁴ the same is also true of the African story. Healing touches people at their point of daily life and need. In my observation, healing involves release or emancipation and protection from the powers that oppress, cause illness, block success, and inhibit life, bringing forth in its place release and flourishing.⁷⁵ This message makes the gospel attractive in settings of suffering and need, leading to the expansion of Christianity. In New York City, churches that provide healing help African immigrants on the journey in ways that are constructive and not compensatory. A religion of healing is for all, regardless of economic means. We

⁷³ John Burdick, *Blessed Anastácia: Women, Race, and Popular Christianity in Brazil* (New York: Routledge, 1998): 119-148. See also Mathijs Pelkmans, “‘Culture’ as a Tool and an Obstacle: Missionary Encounters in Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 13:4 (2007): 881-899.

⁷⁴ A relevant comparative example is R. Andrew Chestnut, *Competitive Spirits: Latin America’s New Religious Economy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁷⁵ J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyda identifies these themes in “Mission to ‘Set the Captives Free’: Healing, Deliverance, and Generational Curses in Ghanaian Pentecostalism,” *International Review of Mission* 93:370/371 (July/October 2004): 389-406.

have already seen in chapter 1 that healing is an important aspect of the pastoral ministry of the three churches, but before further describing its place in mission, it is helpful to situate healing historically.

Throughout Christian history and across its traditions, healing has a special relationship to Christian expansion.⁷⁶ A western reader would likely be surprised to read Adolf Harnack's treatment of healing in *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*. Here Harnack devotes significant attention to the role of conflict with demons, healing, and place of the miraculous in the advance of the early church.⁷⁷ He recounts, for example that "with regard to his own church, Irenaeus...was convinced that the very dead were brought back to life by its members."⁷⁸ Some members have healing gifts, "others possess a fore-knowledge of the future, with visions and prophetic utterances."⁷⁹ Early Christians also believed in "innumerable hosts of demons"⁸⁰ and the possibility of possession."⁸¹ Focusing on the first century of early Christianity, the relationship between healing, deliverance, and the very real physical and social afflictions of people, as well as the social context of magic and healing, are integral to the story of Jesus and the church.⁸² Given this background, the widespread belief in African religion and African Christianity that the aetiology of illness is a result of outside supernatural forces⁸³ is hardly strange within Christian tradition.

⁷⁶ Amanda Porterfield, *Healing in the History of Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁷⁷ Adolf Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of the Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, trans. James Moffatt (Glocester: Peter Smith, 1972 [1908]), 125-146.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 135-136.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁸² Justin Meggitt, "Magic, Healing and Early Christianity: Consumption and Competition," in *The Meanings of Magic: From the Bible to Buffalo Bill*, ed. Amy Wygant (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 89-114.

⁸³ Matthews Ojo, "Healing in Sub-Saharan Africa," in *The Encyclopedia of African and African-American Religions*, ed. Stephen D. Glazier (New York: Routledge, 2001), 139.

Healing is at the forefront of the mission of the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn. With “the class of Jordan,” a row of seven workers about to be consecrated before him, Nimi Wariboko turns to Matthew 10:1:⁸⁴ “And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease.” Healing is part of salvation, and salvation is the message of the gospel for Pastor Wariboko. “The word salvation means healing....Christ came to save means Christ came to heal.” This healing of Jesus is multi-dimensional. Jesus came to “heal physical sickness, emotional sickness, and spiritual disease.” In the prior chapter of Matthew, Jesus has performed a number of healings, including that of a demonically possessed man who was also mute. As interpreted by Wariboko, “The man is sick, his tissues separated from normal body function.” The separation is “demon influenced,” “splits a person in two,” the “inner mind is not united,” and there is a “condition of estrangement.” But “when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, [there is] a reconnection.”

The workers’ foremost responsibility, Wariboko tells them, is to realize that “the power of God comes to you to connect for a purpose.” In other words, consecration to being a worker brings an anointing of power, a “destiny” to bring reconnection and healing. But in order to do that, they must recognize their mission context. “Americans will say [we] don’t need healing. But you know there is estrangement in America.” This means they will hear, “All you Africans want to do is talk about healing.” But as he saw it, the challenge remains, particularly in one area. “Many people in America need [their] past healed...things they have done in the past - always curses and blessings.” In other words, “How do you forget about [the] past and move out to blessing?” Their message must be one of repentance and forgiveness, announcing that the “curse [and] sins of the past...have been forgiven...turn around.”

⁸⁴ Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn, Field Notes, March 20, 2005.

Reemphasizing the points he had been making, Wariboko urges the workers to recognize that they are being charged with a “power to heal the sick” and a call to “remove separation.” Separations can also be “racial,” the other side of Galatians 3:28. Healing is “physical, spiritual.” But it is not connected to their agency alone. “God will do it.” At this point Brother James presents the workers, six women and one man.

In a similar way, Mr. Asare offered that Westerners such as myself do not fully recognize the powers that afflict our culture. On more than one occasion, I tried to get a sense if any particular territorial spirits or curses travelled with African Christians to New York. It is difficult, if not impossible, in the context of such a line of inquiry, for a white Westerner like myself to come across as anything but suspicious of the African worldview. During one such attempt, Mr. Asare turned the tables on my question. Westerners don’t believe in the powers, so the powers take on new forms in order to blind them to their influence. Disbelief and self-sufficiency can be their own forms of enthrallment.⁸⁵

Healing is very much part of the life of the Church of the Lord (Aladura). A participant at the Taborrar festival in 2007, an event I describe in the next chapter, asked me after the service what most “attracted me to the church.” My reply was their understanding of God and practice of prayer. He didn’t seem sure of my answer, but he went on to say, “We are a people who take prayer to be our business, healing the sick, raising the dead, and performing miracles.”⁸⁶ As I have introduced it in Chapter 1, the mission of healing is closely related to Mother Cooper’s early commitment to open a faith home. The living quarters and sanctuary of the church building in the Bronx are not simply a house or sacred sanctuary, but a faith home and place of prayer. As Mother Cooper explains, the faith home is for “people in need, [the] sick.” “Enter with faith and things go well,” she also observes.⁸⁷ The transformation of this house into a place where healing through intercession can take

⁸⁵ Samuel Asare, Interview, December 13, 2006. His point brings to mind the late French philosopher and social prophet Jacques Ellul.

⁸⁶ David Agbaye, Interview, August 13, 2007.

⁸⁷ Mother Cooper, Interview, June 23, 2005.

place is a significant mission initiative of the Church of the Lord (Aladura). Mother Cooper's vision for ministry in New York was not simply to begin the first branch of Church of the Lord (Aladura) in North America, but to open a faith home, a place of healing.

As Gerrie ter Haar explains, "Christian miracles in Africa combine effectively the 'sign' and the 'proof' character of Biblical miracles. They are seen both as proof of the power of God and as a sign of his kingdom to come."⁸⁸ She observes that this framework also carries over to the diaspora context.⁸⁹ I think this is also correct for the New York City context. Behind such an expectation of God's presence and involvement in the world by African Christians in New York City is a conceptualization of the "miraculous" that paradoxically may reframe miracles from the extraordinary to the ordinary. Jürgen Moltmann powerfully portrays a view where the charismatic powers of life are at work in the world:

Jesus does not bring the kingdom of God only in words that awaken faith; he also brings it in the form of healings which restore health. God's Spirit is a living energy that interpenetrates the bodies of men and women and drives out the germs of death. Jesus' miraculous healings are what Christoph Blumhardt called "miracles of the kingdom". In the dawn of the new creation of all things, they are not really "miracles" at all. They are completely natural and just what we have to expect. It is only if this eschatological hope is lost that these "wonders" appear to be miracles in an unchanged world. But in the framework of hope for the kingdom of God, Jesus' healings are reminders of hope. They justify expectations brought to the Spirit of Jesus now, in the present.⁹⁰

There is a sense that Charismatic powers of life, the miracles of the kingdom, are part of everyday life. It is what is expected, for the kingdom of God is not just in the future, but the here and now.

⁸⁸ Gerrie ter Haar, "A Wondrous God: Miracles in Contemporary Africa," *African Affairs* 102 (2003): 427.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 190.

A traditional focus of Christian mission involves crossing boundaries and translating the Gospel into a new culture.⁹¹ But at this moment the African churches in New York are perhaps just at the beginning of such an “inculturation” process. Given the interreligious space of New York City and the complex interplay between religion, cultures, and modernity, it is not entirely clear what this should mean. The “host culture” does not exist; New York City is populated with many cultures. The communication of the gospel must of necessity be “multi-lingual” in the deep sense.⁹² Moreover, at best notions of secularity are highly contested.⁹³ Therefore, practices such as healing may provide a “counter-inculturation” witness amid a diversity of religious, social, intellectual, and economic needs.⁹⁴ Certainly universal aspirations are present in each of the three churches, most prominently among the Pentecostal Christians of the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn. The impact of a new African mission movement on the ground, however, is being felt in ways that takes a different set of lenses.

THE NEW MISSIONARIES

African mission in New York City may be most influential in disseminating the gospel where it is least obvious. Early on in my research I started asking questions about the role played by Christian faith among church members at work. My interest was in the relationship between vocation and Christian commitment, and the way in which the two relate to one another. No matter how I framed the subject or tried to clarify the question, the answers I received turned to descriptions of the opportunities work afforded people to witness to Jesus and the gospel. This points to a significant and neglected perspective on the African missionary movement. Rather than measuring cross-cultural and inter-ethnic mission through church attendance,⁹⁵

⁹¹ For a discussion on the many meanings of mission, see Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context*.

⁹² John Howard Yoder, “On Not Being Ashamed of the Gospel: Particularity, Pluralism, and Validation,” *Faith and Philosophy* 9:3 (1992): 285-300.

⁹³ For a most important analysis, see Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2007).

⁹⁴ I am adapting a twist in terminology proposed by Octávio Velho, “Missionization in the Post-Colonial World: A View From Brazil and Elsewhere,” *Anthropological Theory* 7:3 (2007): 282.

⁹⁵ Stevens, “Spreading the Word.”

mission primarily takes place where people are, and in New York, that is at work, on the streets, and in their communities - the daily situations and encounters of human relationship that define urban life. This is what Helen Liggett calls the “lived space” of the city.⁹⁶ African Christians simply think of it as following God’s call.

An example is Segun Oyesanya, a vice president at an international bank in New York City.⁹⁷ Tall and always dressed in a suit and tie, Segun Oyesanya exudes confidence and poise. He became a “born again” Christian at university, through Ogun State Fellowship, a Pentecostal student group in Nigeria. After a brief stay in Los Angeles with family, Segun and his wife, Bola, whose ministry began this chapter, moved to New York in 1999. Having been a member of the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Nigeria, once in New York made inquiries online and was directed to the nascent Brooklyn parish. Soon Segun and Bola became highly dedicated workers in the church. Segun has a strong sense of God’s calling on his life, and consequently he teaches and practices evangelism at church. Yet he sees his primary mission context as the workplace. Referring to the role his faith has at his place of employment, Segun explains, “I do let it show. I say it. I share it with persons. I try to minister to people at work.” Even still, Segun’s evangelism is less spoken than lived; “how I do my work and how I deal with pressure,” and how he performs his responsibilities with absolute “integrity” is his witness. “At work I’m a Christian first,” he states.

Other stories also point to work as a mission context. Prince Asante, a member of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in Harlem is a taxi driver in New York City. As Prince drives his shift, “I put on Christian music [for my passengers], and it’s calming. Sometimes they even thank me for it.”⁹⁸ When Joy Cooper managed a day care center for children, she would open staff meetings with prayer. It was not a Christian or religious day care center, but she felt it was important.⁹⁹ Sarah Richards

⁹⁶ Helen Liggett, *Urban Encounters* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

⁹⁷ Segun Oyesanya, Interview, June 11, 2006.

⁹⁸ Prince Asante, Interview, August 6, 2006.

⁹⁹ Joy Cooper, Interview, January 16, 2005.

remarked how important it was that she would stop to share the goodness of Jesus to a co-worker. And a moving example is Kwasi Agyare. A *New Yorker* since 1994, he was a professional in Ghana. Like “everybody [I] came here to look for the future, to take care of family.”¹⁰⁰ In Ghana he worked as a professional, now he works in a restaurant. When taking his break, Kwasi uses the time to read his Bible. People often approach him with their problems, and he is able to offer “some prayers and encouragement.”¹⁰¹

Matilda Oyeyemi of the Redeemed Christian Church of God provides another variation on this theme of mission within the structure and routines of the city. Deeply involved in her church, Matilda has created her own ministry that combines prayer, healing, and church planting. A registered midwife in New York, she works part time at her own pace so she can dedicate time to her ministry.

I thank God for my ministry. Many are called, few are chosen. God has really established me in the ministry of praying. I do intercession, I do counseling. I visit people in the hospital and have a ministry healing. I counsel pregnant women near delivery and I continue to pray for families. I am missionary person because God has used me in many years of church planting. God has connected me to so many churches, in partnerships. I have a giving ministry to them. In the Bible this is talked about. I give for the kingdom of God. Being led by the Spirit of the Lord, I [look] to be in charge of a parish. God has given me the name of the parish: the Rose of Sharon Sanctuary. I have made this intention known to Zonal Coordination. God gives the addition and God will surely provide.¹⁰²

A member of the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn, in 2006 Sister Matilda joined with one of the parish’s new church initiatives, the Chapel of Love, in downtown Brooklyn.

¹⁰⁰ Kwasi Agyare, Interview, July 30, 2004.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Matilda Oyeyemi, Interview, February 12, 2008 and interviews in January and June 2004.

“Migration mission,” a term used by John Howard Yoder, may be the best label for the paradigm of mission that we are seeing. Yoder, a Mennonite theologian who emphasized the narrative life of Jesus as a basis for Christian discipleship, was in the 1960s a mission executive who saw “fundamental change” coming to “world missions” entering into a post-colonial period. In the slight 1960 publication *As You Go: The Old Mission in a New Day*,¹⁰³ Yoder proposed that instead of a perpetuation of traditional missionary patterns, a day was coming when Christians would migrate to strategic parts of the world, live as residents, become employed in their vocations, and have a long-term impact on their adopted culture. He calls this “migration evangelism.”¹⁰⁴

In a series of descriptions that sound remarkably descriptive of African Christians in New York City, Yoder locates a precedent for this pattern in the early church.

Where they went, they took their faith with them, and new Christian cells were planted.... This church growth was not a matter of organized “mission.” Christians, often serving as artisans or merchants, following the ordinary lines of travel and commerce, established themselves father and farther from their original homes, taking their faith with them and making an economic contribution to the society into which they moved.¹⁰⁵

Such “missionaries” today require no financial support, no language training, do not send out missionary letters, and will not go home on furlough.¹⁰⁶ They take their own initiative and develop their own leadership.¹⁰⁷

Yoder is pointing to a shift away from the West as missionary “sending” to a more pluralistic and different type of mission movement altogether. In a global world and

¹⁰³ John Howard Yoder, *As You Go: The Old Mission in a New Day* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1961). I am grateful to Joon-Sik Park, “‘As You Go’: John Howard Yoder as Mission Theologian,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 78:3 (2004): 378-379, for drawing my attention to this publication.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 12,13. The seeds of migration mission are often traced to the narrative impulse of Acts. For this and other relevant themes in Luke-Acts see Dana L. Robert, “Encounter with Christ: Luke as Mission Historian for the Twenty-first Century,” in *Evangelical, Ecumenical and Anabaptist Missiologies in Conversation: Essays in Honor of Wilbert R. Shenk*, ed. James R. Krabill, Walter Sawatsky, and Charles E. Van Engen (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2006), 19-27.

¹⁰⁶ Yoder, *As You Go*, 15.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

church marked by motion, terminology such as “reverse flow” reflects an older paradigm of mission. Migration mission presses church members in a dynamic world to come to terms with their “missionary obligations.” Although Yoder’s emphasis was Western churches, he recognized the non-Western story beginning to take place.¹⁰⁸ For Yoder, the cross-cultural witness will rest on a distinctive social and ethical way of life.¹⁰⁹

As Jehu Hanciles, one of the foremost observers of this development points out, “With millions of non-Western Christian migrants fulfilling a ‘missionary’ function within their own continents and in Western societies, the inattentiveness within Christian historiography to the role and significance of migrants as key actors in the Christian missionary movement translates into a major analytical flaw - a deficiency evident in ongoing efforts to calculate the comparative numerical strength of the Western and non-Western missionary movements.”¹¹⁰

African Christians in New York City rarely describe themselves as “missionaries.” Instead, there is an underlying assumption that every Christian is to share, proclaim, and witness to Jesus Christ. They are Christians and New Yorkers, living accordingly. As they proclaim the gospel in New York City, they are certain of their convictions but do not share in the rhetoric of spiritual crisis and peril found in much of American evangelicalism and fundamentalism. Nor do they share in a spiritually negative view of the city that is so characteristic of American evangelicals. Rather, they graft their faith onto the pluralistic culture and everyday encounters that is New York City. In a global and information age, African Christians practice mission and evangelism foremost through relationships. By reaching into the circles and networks in the city, the members of the Church of the Lord (Aladura), the

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 10-25.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 27, cf. 24-25.

¹¹⁰ Jehu J. Hanciles, “God’s Mission through Migration: African Initiatives in Globalizing Mission,” in *Evangelical, Ecumenical, and Anabaptist Missiologies in Conversation: Essays in Honor of Wilbert R. Shenk*, ed. James R. Krabill, Walter Sawatsky, and Charles E. Van Engen eds, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2006), 65.

Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York, and the Redeemed Christian Church of God International recall the migration pattern of early Christianity.

MISSION IN EVERY DIRECTION

African mission in New York City is not unidirectional but globally multidirectional, notably in a movement of return to Africa through the sharing of resources and the development of ministries.



Fig. 6.9 Telephone Cards for Africa and New York City, Harlem storefront. 2008

Migrant remittances help address the economic needs of families and churches back home in Nigeria, Liberia, and Ghana. Research indicates remittances are a major component of global economics, often surpassing other types of economic development.¹¹¹ Every person I interviewed in every church sends money home via Western Union. With mobile telephone technology increasing, people speak of receiving telephone calls wherever they are in the city from family and friends at home in Africa seeking help.¹¹² And help they do, as noted in chapter 3, with work

¹¹¹ For a journalistic account with reference to relevant literature, see Jason DeParle, “A Good Provider is One Who Leaves,” *New York Times Magazine*, April 22, 2007, 50-57, 72, 122-123.

¹¹² This is part of a much wider dimension of globalization. See Steven Vertovec, “Cheap Calls: The Social Glue of Migrant Transnationalism,” *Global Networks* 4:2 (2004): 219-224.

as the primary reason given for moving to New York City. One church member casually mentioned staying in a high paying job she did not enjoy to earn more money to send home. Typically money goes to support parents and put siblings through school. Western Union advertisements in African newspapers and Bodega windows are reminders of the corporate competition for the money transfer market.¹¹³ Given the great economic and social needs of Africa, remittances from the West may be an important expression of holistic mission “under the radar.”¹¹⁴

Mother Cooper operates an orphanage in Monrovia, basing her resource gathering from the Bronx. Filling the room where I would meet with Mother Cooper during the week were aqua blue barrels, well-travelled suitcases, and taped-up boxes that towered to the ceilings. These were supplies for the orphanage and school in Monrovia that by force of will and prayer Mother Cooper opened in 2002. Soon the blue containers would be filled and shipped by boat to Liberia, the suitcases repacked for the journey by plane. It is not unusual for people to arrive with twenty pairs of shoes or clothing to be added to the barrels and boxes.



Fig 6.10 Mother Cooper with supplies for the James E. Cooper Child Foundational Academy and Smiling Face Orphanage. Note the blue barrels for shipping. 2005

¹¹³ Jason DeParle, “Western Union Empire Moves Migrant Cash Home,” *New York Times*, November 21, 2007, A-1, 20.

¹¹⁴ For a proposal of mission in Africa today that addresses everyday needs, see Philomena Njeri Mwaura, “Integrity of Mission in the Light of the Gospel: Bearing Witness of the Spirit among Africa’s Gospel Bearers,” *Exchange* 35:2 (2006): 169-190.

Liberia faces the legacy of two brutal regimes and wars. Samuel Doe's violent regime (1980-1990), underwritten by the American government for Cold War positioning, ended in his death and with a civil war that went from 1989 until 1996. Charles Taylor became president in 1997 and engulfed the nation in brutal violence, with another civil war that ended in 2003. By accounts that will later be heard by a war crimes tribunal in the Hague and on Staten Island, Taylor, who made "born again" claims,¹¹⁵ was responsible for a death count that was unspeakable. Doe and then Taylor left the economy and infrastructure destroyed. In 2005, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was elected the president of Liberia.¹¹⁶

As a response to conditions produced by the war, Mother Cooper opened the James E. Cooper Child Foundational Academy and Smiling Face Orphanage.¹¹⁷ Founded by Mother Cooper in 2000, opened officially in 2002, the school is named after her late husband. For Mother Cooper, the school and orphanage represent her personal calling, not an official church ministry. But church members all seem to find ways to help. In Spring 2006, there were 15 children in the orphanage and 222 children in the school, with ages ranging from four to twelve. A principal and business manager oversee the school in Monrovia, and there are ten teachers including teacher aides, three matrons who help with the orphans, and a janitor that draws water and occasionally turns on the generator. Because in 2006 there was still no electricity in much of the city, the school uses lanterns at night.

Mother Cooper maintains constant contact with the school and orphanage by occasional visits and regular telephone calls. In 2006, she went for more than three months to Monrovia to oversee the construction of a new two-story building. The first floor was to function as a classroom and the second as an addition to the orphanage. This will enable her to double the number of children she is able to care for. All the children from the orphanage attend the school, and some of the other

¹¹⁵ Stephen Ellis and Gerrie ter Haar, *Worlds of Power: Religious Thought and Political Practice in Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 108.

¹¹⁶ Jon Lee Anderson, "After the Warlords: Can Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Remake her Nation?" *The New Yorker*, March 27, 2006, 58-65.

¹¹⁷ Mother Cooper, Interview, September 18, 2006.

orphans of the war, “living with grand aunts, uncles, living with relatives but not able to do for them” are provided scholarships. A small fee is charged to other children in the neighborhood, and basic supplies like pencils, perhaps a uniform, and some meals are provided. When children from the orphanage out-grow their care, “they remain there until I [know] what God has planned for them.”¹¹⁸

Mother Cooper somehow cobbles the funding together to keep the school going. In fall 2006, she was working to fill a shipping container with “school materials, chairs, tables, and school supplies.” With plans to finish the new building, she intends to go back in January to Monrovia, home of the Liberian see of the Church of the Lord (Aladura) in Liberia. It will be summer then, better to complete the work. If the James E. Cooper Child Foundational Academy and Smiling Face Orphanage was founded to heal some of the wounds of violence, it now plays a role in the hopeful rebuilding of Monrovia and the nation.

With a concern for pastors in Nigeria, Nimi Wariboko and Elsie Obed decided to organize and fund a conference in the Rivers State. Pastor Elsie Obed founded and is president of Lilies International Christian Outreach, which has offices in New York City and Lagos.¹¹⁹ Along with her husband Olu Obed, Elsie Obed laid the groundwork for Redeemed Christian Church of God in New York and North America. Given their history and shared concerns for mission, Wariboko and the Obeds have remained in contact over the years.

If in the nineteenth century missionaries were respected for what they gave up, in the twenty-first century African Christians and pastors are respected for what they have achieved. In Nigeria, the impression of Nigerian pastors in the United States is that they are “second rate” in spiritual commitment. Expending their own funds, Wariboko and Obed rented a conference room and provided accommodations to the pastors and their spouses in a hotel. The idea, Wariboko explains, was to encourage pastors, to let them know they are not alone.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ See <http://www.liliesinternational.org/>

Wariboko's motive was "giving something back." "The joy for me I felt like I'm [returning] to my roots where I'm from."¹²⁰ Through the conference, he found himself "pleasantly surprised" to see Christian developments in the Niger delta. Rather than just giving, "I learned more from them." In particular, he gained respect for the "high price" that the pastors pay for ministry. The needs he encountered were great, as pastors asked for financial help, for Bible education, and for Christian books. To be unable to help is "painful." But the meeting of pastors would go on in locally initiated gatherings.

In all of this, globalization is a factor. Distances are bridged with phone cards, airplane travel, and Western Union. Mission encompasses the breadth of needs by family and community. People, spiritual gifts, and money are channelled to Africa in a globalizing approach to faith in the world. Mission calling is very strongly felt and practiced, with models of community work and pastoral training generated based on need, relationships, and opportunity.

CONCLUSION: MISSION IN A NEW KEY

In this chapter I have sought to show the historical context, convictions, and practices of mission found in Church of the Lord (Aladura), the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York, and the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel. I depicted their models of mission and their shared commitment to the healing of persons. Of course mission is about the work of each church in preaching, healing, praying, and evangelism. This, however, seemed to me to only partially capture their mission influence. Instead, I located the fullest expression of mission in everyday life. If we examine what is taking place in New York, it is a mission without imperial power. To understand why this represents mission in a new key, I bring the work of Chinua Achebe into dialogue with Philip Jenkins.

¹²⁰ Nimi Wariboko, Interview, November 15, 2006.

Chinua Achebe's iconic novel *Things Fall Apart* tells the story of Okonkwo, and in so doing renders a much larger story of social and cultural change among the Igbo.¹²¹ The first part of the novel tells of his life and exile from his village; the second part records his return and encounter with Western missionaries and colonizers. "The white man has indeed brought a lunatic religion, but he had also built a trading store and for the first time palm-oil and kernel became things of great price, and much money flowed into Umuofia."¹²² At first the arrival of missionaries is about "the strange faith and the white man's god,"¹²³ but soon religion and colonization run together. "But apart from the church, the white man had also brought a government."¹²⁴

Mr. Brown, the first missionary, would sit and dialogue about God and religion,¹²⁵ is succeeded by the Reverend James Smith, "a different kind of man." It is Rev. Smith's actions that will lead directly to the destruction of Okonkwo. Achebe's textured picture of the missionaries is notable.¹²⁶ Yet the two missionaries are separated only by degree; Mr. Brown and Rev. Smith are both complicit in the colonial government and the havoc it brings. Of the "white man," the view is:

He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart.¹²⁷

A warning had already been given: white people are like "locusts,"¹²⁸ a plague and not agents of Good News.

¹²¹ Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (New York: Everyman Library, 1992 [1958]).

¹²² *Ibid.*, 153.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 124.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 153-156.

¹²⁶ Alison Searle, "The Role of Missions in *Things Fall Apart* and *Nervous Condition*," *Literature and Theology* 21:1 (2007): 53.

¹²⁷ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 152.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 120.

Philip Jenkins' widely discussed *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*¹²⁹ offers evidence for the church as now globally diverse with Africa, Asia, as well as Latin America, at the forefront. But Jenkins wants to do more than speak of a shift in Christian demographics; he wants to speak of the meaning of this development. If Achebe's accomplishment is to view the Anglican mission from inside the standpoint of the Igbo,¹³⁰ Jenkins approaches the non-Western advance of Christianity from inside the Western point of view.

Jenkins interpretive proposal is not in the image of the old Christendom¹³¹ but the image of a "new Christendom."¹³² "Worldwide," Jenkins believes, "religious trends have the potential to reshape political assumptions in a way that has not been seen since the rise of modern nationalism."¹³³ Jenkins wants us to see the potential ramifications, perhaps most ominously between Muslim and Christian.¹³⁴ Europe and North America politics will be shaped by North-South conflicts, he holds.

Developments are by no means limited to the "global South." Jenkins goes on, "We can even imagine Southern Christians taking the initiative to the extent of evangelizing the North, in the process changing many familiar aspects of belief and practice, and exporting cultural traits presently found only in Africa or Latin America."¹³⁵

I think Jenkins is right on many fronts, including his sense that the changes taking place in the church represent a major development. But Jenkins' Christendom template is a category error because the Christianity emerging in Africa, Asia, and

¹²⁹ Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

¹³⁰ Searle, "The Role of Missions in *Things Fall Apart* and *Nervous Condition*," 50-51.

¹³¹ Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 209.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 10-13.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 13, cf. 192.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 13, 212.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

Latin America is not projecting a new territorial imperialism like the European powers of past.¹³⁶ There is no state, military, or economic apparatus behind African mission to New York. African missionaries are not installing a new government and military court in Brooklyn. Instead, they come in the power of the Spirit, not with an imperial army. African mission is taking place without the affluence or influence that characterizes mission rooted in the West. It is a movement marked by vulnerability and dependence on God.

Emmanuel Katongole argues that Jenkins conception of Christianity is a faith without a social imagination. Addressing Jenkins' work, Katongole offers the trenchant criticism that "*The Next Christendom* is bad news for Christians not simply because it assumes the existing North-South dichotomies shaped by the economic and political realities of late capitalism, but because it seeks to secure this current vision of the world against any possible interruption from Christianity."¹³⁷

The mission reach of African Christianity in New York City is comprehensive, bringing church planting, pastoral care, prayer, and healing together. Instead of engaging New York City in a single way, a variety of mission encounters are occurring, with the mission stance of churches and the "missionary" call of individuals working together. At the same time, their unique expression of the gospel, which involves depending upon God for all of life, is at once a critique of and a witness to Western culture.

No one knows whether African mission in New York City is at the beginning, mid-point, or near its end. Because it is a movement initially rooted in migration, its future is hard to assess. Christian movements historically have a serial character,

¹³⁶ For a different assessment, however, see Nina Glick Schiller, "Transnational Social Fields and Imperialism: Bringing a Theory of Power to Transnational Studies," *Anthropological Theory* 5:4 (2005): 439-461.

¹³⁷ Emmanuel M. Katongole, "Hauerwasian Hooks, Stories, and the Social Imagination of the "The Next Christendom," in *A Future for Africa: Critical Essays in Christian Social Imagination* (Scranton: Scranton University Press, 2005), 24. See further, Peter C. Phan, "A New Christianity, But What Kind?" *Mission Studies* 22:1 (2005): 59-83.

with political, economic, and other developments playing a role.¹³⁸ One thing is certain: the story of African Christian mission in New York City is still being written by the churches and in the lives of “new missionaries.”

¹³⁸ Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process*, 27-48.

PART 3

DIRECTIONS

CHAPTER 7

TRANSFORMING PILGRIMAGE: RELOCATING SACRED GEOGRAPHIES

INTRODUCTION

Let me take stock of my argument thus far. My aim in the first part was to introduce African Christianity in New York City as a series of formations. To this end, I told the story of the three lead pastors of the Church of the Lord (Aladura), the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York, and the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn. From here I examined the three churches, providing historical, theological, and global detail. I then followed with an overview of African churches in New York and their explanatory relationship to the global city thesis. My aim in the second part was to explore three primary practices of African churches in the global city: prayer, reading Scripture, and mission. Placed together, these two sections present a picture of a vibrant transnational religious movement.

This part of my thesis is entitled “Directions” because it concerns the future of African Christianity in New York City. I employ direction in two different but related ways. The first sense is temporal describing how the three churches are moving into the future, and the second is spatial, concerning the continuing flow of faith across borders. How will a movement based on global migration fare in future years? What will be the relationship between the New York City churches and the original center? In this chapter I begin to offer an answer by recounting what I call transformed pilgrimages, the movement of spiritual geographies to serve communities unable to travel to Africa; in the subsequent chapter I focus on an additional dimension of the future, the perspective and involvement of the second generation.

Pilgrimage is a long-standing form of Christian spirituality. In general terms, pilgrimage is a practice that links mobility together with a place, object or person that holds out some hope of change. A pilgrimage involves an encounter of expectation or hope of transformation and healing. Protestants have traditionally been ambivalent at best about such religious expressions, but there is increasing emphasis on pilgrimage in modern society and all parts of the world.¹ Surely Charles Taylor is correct in pointing out that “people still seek...moments of fusion, which wrench us out of the everyday, and put us in contact with something beyond ourselves.”² But how does pilgrimage work in African Christianity in New York? Can the category of a transformed pilgrimage be accepted?

Following the lives of three focus churches, I came to appreciate the role of what I call “transforming pilgrimages.” Here I refer to the reproduction across borders of spaces, histories, and events in New York, not merely African Christians in New York setting up their own religious events. Thomas Tweed speaks of “sacrosapes,” the flows of religion across global landscapes.³ The imagery is one of fluidity, and dynamism across space and time.⁴ The scenario is one of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, the components of a spiritual event or space moved to a new globalized location.⁵ Global networks are the linkage between sites of assembly.⁶ This relocated spiritual geography comes into being through acts of the imagination, discourses, and bodily practices.

The three pilgrimages I analyze are: (1) the Annual Conference and Holy Ghost of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, (2) the 175th year Anniversary Celebration for the

¹ For an example, see John Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

² Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 516-517.

³ Thomas Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 61.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 61-62.

⁵ This language comes from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

⁶ Manuel A. Vásquez, “Studying Mobile Religions via Networks,” unpublished paper.

Presbyterian Church of Ghana and (3) the annual Tabborarr festival of the Church of the Lord (Aladura). This chapter recounts each of these events situating each within a global, social, and theological framework. In so doing, it examines the connection between portable geographical and imaginative spaces in the maintenance of transnational communities. From this point of view, each pilgrimage increases the universal scale of African churches.⁷

A range of pilgrimages is found across Christian tradition. In their interesting study, *Pilgrimage in Graeco-Roman and Early Christian Antiquity: Seeing the Gods*,⁸ Jas' Elsner and Ian Rutherford suggest a typology of over twenty different types of pilgrimages.⁹ Their typology is empirically designed and shows incredible diversity, including pilgrimages of healing and initiation in classical Greek culture¹⁰ and Scriptural, relic, icon, and living saint pilgrimages in Christian culture.¹¹ "Pilgrimage," Victor and Edith Turner maintain in their benchmark study, "is...[a]...universal drama, cutting across cultures, societies, polities, language groups and ethnicities."¹² Leaving aside the critique that the Turners' model requires more historical context,¹³ it points to important universal concerns and the possibility of liminal experience. In pilgrimage, a theology is not as much defined as experienced.

Simon Coleman and John Eade speak of reframing pilgrimage, of "implicit stories of movement"¹⁴ that can also be different modes of travel, "embodied, imagined,

⁷ Peter Beyer, *Religions in Global Society* (London: Routledge, 2006), 24.

⁸ Jas' Elsner and Ian Rutherford, ed., *Pilgrimage in Graeco-Roman and Early Christian Antiquity: Seeing the Gods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁹ Jas' Elsner and Ian Rutherford, "Introduction," in *Pilgrimage in Graeco-Roman and Early Christian Antiquity*, ed. Jas' Elsner and Ian Rutherford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 12-30.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 16-18.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 28-30.

¹² Victor Turner and Edith L. B. Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 16.

¹³ Manuel A. Vásquez and Marie Friedmann Marquardt, *Globalizing the Sacred: Religion Across the Americas* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 67.

¹⁴ Simon Coleman and John Eade, "Introduction: Reframing Pilgrimage," in *Reframing Pilgrimage: Cultures in Motion*, ed. Simon Coleman and John Eade (London: Routledge, 2004), 1.

metaphorical.”¹⁵ Pilgrimage provides an analytical construct for a type of travel that “seeks.”¹⁶ The object of seeking is the destination. Unprecedented developments in the growth of Christianity in Africa have not only produced new churches, ministries, and movements, but also introduced a range of spiritual geographies, with new sites of “pilgrimage.”¹⁷ Within this new range of spiritual geographies, how are boundaries crossed within constraints and limits?¹⁸ What is the relationship of the diaspora to the center? How does the new periphery relate to the old center?¹⁹ One answer is found in the examples I recount in this chapter.

My framework in this chapter is first of all descriptive, examining the reproduction of sacred spaces and pilgrimages in New York City. This enables me to develop “pilgrimage” in a flexible manner and take account of its interplay with globalization. As a matter of the research “field,” pilgrimage adds to the diversity of ethnographic sites.²⁰

“LET SOMEBODY SHOUT HALLELUJAH”

“Anywhere he [the General Overseer E. A. Adeboye] is, the Redeemed Christian Church of God headquarters is. New York City is the headquarters of the Redeemed Christian Church of God.”²¹ These words relate the globalization of a key event and person in the Redeemed Christian Church of God. From June 15 through 17, 2005, the Theater at Madison Square Garden hosted the 9th Annual North American Convention of the church, gathered this year under the theme of “Pillars of Greatness.” At great

¹⁵ Ibid., 3.

¹⁶ Ibid., 6.

¹⁷ In addition to the example I develop in this chapter, see André Mary, “Pilgrimage to Imeko (Nigeria): An African Church in the Time of the ‘Global Village,’” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 26:1 (March 2002): 106-120; John Eade and David Garbin, “Reinterpreting the Relationship Between Centre and Periphery: Pilgrimage and Sacred Spatialisation Among Polish and Congolese Communities in Britain,” *Mobilities* 2:3 (2007): 413 - 424.

¹⁸ Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 123-163.

¹⁹ Vida Bajc, Simon Coleman, and John Eade, “Introduction: Mobility and Centring in Pilgrimage,” *Mobilities* 2:3 (2007): 321-329.

²⁰ Mary, “Pilgrimage to Imeko (Nigeria): An African Church in the Time of the ‘Global Village,’” 108.

²¹ Words from a speaker, June 17, 2005.

expense, the most recognizable public space in New York was selected for the event that attracted members from over two hundred churches in North America but also Europe and Africa, spotlighting the Redeemed Christian Church of God in the global public sphere.



Fig. 7.1 Pastor E. A. Adeboye, General Overseer, Redeemed Christian Church of God at Madison Square Garden. 2005

In Nigeria, the Annual Convention is “the most important event in the liturgical calendar”²² of the church. Its basic features are replicated each summer in the United States. During the daytime, leaders based in Nigeria ordain women and men into new leadership offices, and church members from over two hundred parishes in North America conduct church business and attend seminars on topics ranging from marriage to prayer to money. Special rooms are curtained off for prayer, and teams are scheduled to be praying throughout the conference. James Fadele, chairman of the Board of Coordinators for the Redeemed Christian Church of God North America, gives a PowerPoint presentation on the church, its plans for growth, and the obligations of ministers.

In the evenings are large meetings featuring magnificent choirs, guest speakers, and the General Overseer (“G.O.”) of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, E. A. Adeboye. On the final night of the convention, an overflow crowd of some five thousand people

²² Asonzeh Franklin-Kennedy Ukah, “The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Nigeria. Local Identities and Global Processes in African Pentecostalism” (PhD diss., Bayreuth, 2003), 217.

attend the Holy Ghost service, an event renowned in Lagos for attendance that is reported to regularly exceed one million, with some placing attendance at over four million.²³ People come just for the evening from nearby parishes of the Redeemed Christian Church of God but also it was reported to me that a large number of Nigerian Pentecostals from other churches in New York were in attendance. It is a good example of when networks intersect,²⁴ in this instance, Nigerian Pentecostal networks. Something much larger happens. I am reminded here of the many members of the Brooklyn parish who described themselves most immediately as Pentecostal rather than position themselves first as members of Redeemed.



Fig. 7.2 Egbefun Adieze (left), first member of Redeemed in New York City, in midtown Manhattan being served lunch at the Pillars of Greatness Convention. Note Madison Square Garden in the background. 2005

For Redeemed Christian Church of God parishes in Zone 1, which in 2005 included the New York area, a year of work went into preparation for the Annual convention. At the Brooklyn church, members are enlisted in a variety of tasks and many volunteered their time for more than one year. Segun Oyesanya is on the organizing committee; Pastor Nimi is in charge of protocol, enlisting members with cars to transport leaders from the airport; leaders like Ossai Chegwe make sure members were registered; Wapemi Wariboko is in charge of childcare. Everyone seems to be contributing prayers, time, and resources.

²³ Based on Ukah's description, "The Redeemed Christian Church of God," 217-228, there are some differences, but the general format, emphases, and outcomes are the same.

²⁴ Mark C. Taylor, *The Moment of Complexity: Emerging Network Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

The culminating event of the Annual Convention is the Holy Ghost service. The Holy Ghost service, which took place on June 17, 2005, is a combination of singing, special choirs, preaching, praying, healing, spiritual pronouncements, multi-media participation, and offerings.²⁵ The scale of the Holy Ghost service in North America may be smaller than what occurs in Lagos, but it reproduces an important if not essential component of the Redeemed Christian Church of God spiritual experience.



Fig. 7.4 Bola Oyesanya, Minister at Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn, at Pillars of Greatness Conference, Madison Square Garden. 2005

Different stages mark the Holy Ghost service, all of which build to the climatic sermon and declarations of the G.O. Praise and worship begin the evening, with such corporately sung songs as “Worthy is the Lamb.” From the podium the speaker announces the expectation to “heal America, to heal Nigeria, to heal Africa.” Continuing the theme of a global impact, the hope is conveyed: “Starting from New York City, three days of meeting, let it end in...revival.” It soon feels like a revival service complete with mass choir, special music, prayer, and a youth dance choreographed like it belonged on Broadway.

²⁵ Field Notes, June 17, 2005.

At significant expense, guest preachers from outside Redeemed Christian Church of God are invited to participate in the Holy Ghost service. Guest preachers perform two functions. First, they indicate connection to a global Pentecostal culture. Second, they act as warm-up for the G.O. Pastor William “Bill” Winston is the first guest speaker, and he wants the audience to know that he arrived in New York on his own private jet, part of a fleet of airplanes he controls. After he finishes speaking, he informs the crowd that he will fly back to Chicago where he is based, and then to South Africa. Winston emphasizes his travels around the world, and names himself “a revelation preacher” who addresses “obstacles, breakthroughs.” On bills, Pastor Winston declares, “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, be paid off!” The phrase “With God all things are possible” frames this declaration.

“Pastor Paula” White is the next speaker, and like Bill Winston, she comes from the American Pentecostal circuit.²⁶ Because she has a television program, “introducing the next speaker would be a waste of time” the Master of Ceremonies states. However, I have never heard of her, and the members of the Brooklyn parish that I canvas have not heard of her either. People stood and cheered for her, but it appears from her introductory remarks that she has little awareness about the people or scale of the group she is speaking to. Somewhere I hear a rumor that upon arriving in New York City, she had a personal meeting with Donald Trump. True or false, it goes to the perception of a certain form of success. Pastor Paula, as she is called, brings a “Rhema” word, not a sermon, a distinction that seems to accent the special spiritual power to her words. “Are you ready for favor? God is getting ready to change some things,” she declares. Among her prophecies, your “season of struggle is over.” In a vision of the world, she exclaims that there are “blessings all around you.”

²⁶ In 2007, Paula White was in the news for marital troubles and a United States Senate investigation into her “ministry” (and other well-heeled ministries). Her website is <http://www.paulawhite.org/>.

One of the jobs of the “warm up” preachers is to set the stage for the offerings. As the second offering of the evening is taken, the Jesus House Mass Choir, a Redeemed branch congregation that sounds like an African American choir, sings “Shabach Hallelujah” with great polish and enthusiasm. Before the General Overseer is introduced, the worship leader states, “Prophesy into your life,” which leads to a room packed with people prophesying aloud. This is followed by the sweeping chorus “Holy, holy, holy.”

From the moment Adeboye says, “Let Somebody Shout Hallelujah” and the response is a booming “Hallelujah,” the Holy Ghost service is in its climatic hours. He had come on the platform with Mummy G.O. earlier into the evening. Relatively speaking, the G.O. does not deliver the oratorical fireworks of the prior speakers brought in to “warm up” the crowd. But from the moment he begins to speak it is clear he has charismatic authority that situates him in an altogether different category than the previous speakers.²⁷ Sharply dressed in a green suit with white shoes, Adeboye exudes confidence in his role as General Overseer. In many ways, Adeboye is central to the pilgrimage, his charismatic and prophetic authority at the heart of the Redeemed movement. Adeboye begins to speak around 1:30 a.m., and continues conducting ministrations until he declares the North American convention over just after 4:00 a.m.

Upon hearing his signature phrase, “Let somebody shout hallelujah,” with a roar five thousand people at the Theater at Madison Square Garden do just that. Adeboye then falls to his knees and prays, with more prayer and choruses like “Glory, glory, glory,” to follow. He then gives a string of declarations to the people gathered: “The Almighty God is here to answer prayer...Father send your word to me.” Together, the room is asked to repeat, “Father, do something new in my life.” A call to prayer is issued, “Now whatever you want God to do for you tonight, talk to him now,” at which thousands of people fill Madison Square Garden with preaching prayer.

Adeboye’s message is on the topic of ten “Pillars of Greatness,” also the name of this Annual Convention. The ten “pillars” are divine favor, dedication unto God, humility, loyalty, focus, hot prayers, rugged determination, right connection, faith, and holiness. Accompanying his recitation of each pillar is a series of verses and an exposition. Throughout the course of his message, Adeboye cites some eighteen texts from the Old Testament and six from the New Testament, with an emphasis on 1 and 2 Kings. Topical concerns blend with biblical instruction to situate listeners in not just a way of life but a world of faith.

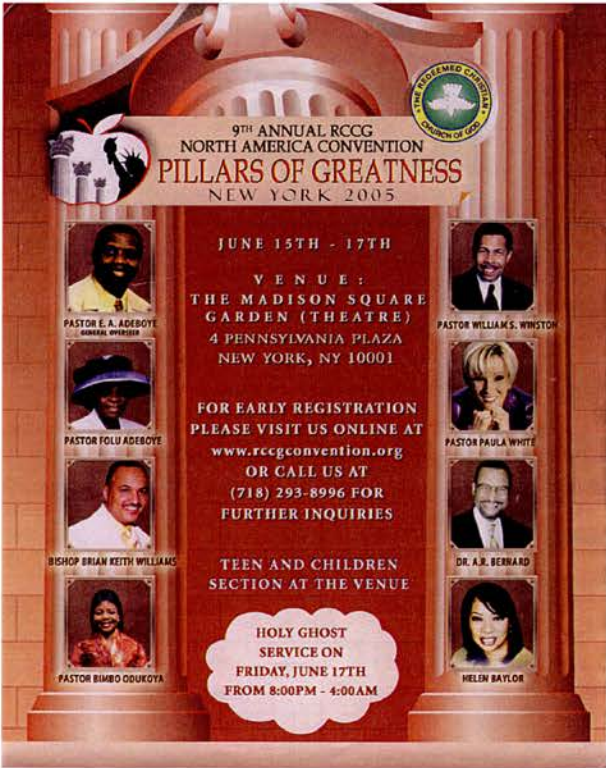


Fig. 7.4 Pillars of Greatness Poster. 2005

At 3:00 a.m., Adeboye introduces a video that appears on two large screens. The video is of a worship service that Adeboye had conducted at the Redemption Camp in Lagos. So while he is speaking at Madison Square Garden, simultaneously there are two mega video screens playing an earlier event in Nigeria. The specifics are unclear to me, but in the video Adeboye is holding a long pole and swinging it around as he turns. As

²⁷ For an insider story of his life, see Tony Ojo, *Let Somebody Shout Hallelujah! The Life and Ministry of Pastor Enoch Adejare Adeboye* (Lagos: Honeycombs Cards and Prints, 2001). At the time of the book’s publication, the author was described as a pastor in the Redeemed Christian Church of God.

soon as Adeboye moves the rod in the video, people in New York begin to clap, louder and louder. By now he is physically standing to the side as the video screen images become more prominent. The room is filled with people clapping on the video screens and clapping at the Garden, with Adeboye holding forth in both worlds simultaneously. Rapturous prayer envelopes the Garden as everyone is speaking aloud to God with the kinetic force of preaching. Images, sounds, prayers, and visions are circulating back and forth across borders.

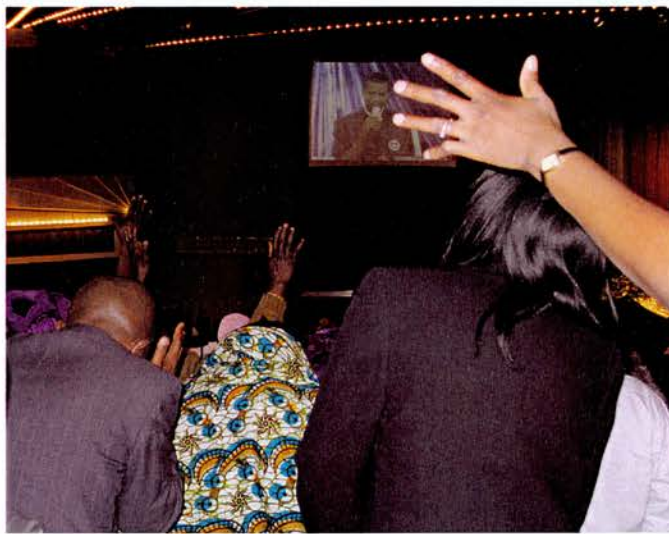


Fig. 7.5 "In Two Places at Once" - The General Overseer in a pre-recorded video from Nigeria, projected at Madison Square Garden while he speaks in person. 2005

The image appears to be Moses-like in transference: the General Overseer parting the figurative sea.²⁸ Through his physical presence in New York City, he declares, "From tonight forward all the Pharaohs and his hosts in your life [are] defeated." Adeboye imparts spiritual power by enacting the experience of a biblical figure, drawing in a global community to a transnational event. Part of Adeboye's leadership involves story telling, placing the church into a biblical narrative event. In the space-time merging of the biblical allusion, video event, and live encounter, horizons past and present become one.

²⁸ In passing, Ukah, "The Redeemed Christian Church of God," 246, mentions that Adeboye's personal office in Nigeria is considered a sacred space; pastors remove their shoes during visits, reminiscent of the "holy ground" theme in Exodus 3:5.

This experience confirms Appadurai's observation that "collective experiences of the mass media, especially film and video, can create sodalities of worship and charisma."²⁹ in which a consciousness of the "Global Now"³⁰ operates on many levels at once. Ruth Marshall-Fratani describes Pentecostalism in Nigeria as "part of a transnational movement, one in which the circulation of narrative via the media plays a central role."³¹ Global media, images, and ideas have the power to create a movement beyond Nigerian borders, with effects on the identity of participants.³² Electronic means of global connection, including the use of the Internet, videos, and tapes, used by the Presbyterian Church of Ghana and the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Brooklyn, in particular, are modest and often event specific. In Brooklyn the church makes CDs and tapes of its weekly services, mostly it seems for members. Still, it should not be overlooked that the use of media is secondary to the actual message communicated. African churches do not yet appear to be posting blogs or enlisting newer platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, and MySpace. Ogbu Kalu describes the relationship between ministry and the use of media in a way that fits the New York component: "African Pentecostals used media as complementary to their ministries, extending their public presence, and signifier of the relative importance of a ministry."³³

Near the end of the Holy Ghost service, Adeboye summons those who have been healed during the service to come forward. "I see some people healed who are sitting down," he announces as the space near the stage floods with people. Rental arrangements at Madison Square Garden are expensive and time overruns costly, and Adeboye voices

²⁹ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 8.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 2-11.

³¹ Ruth Marshall-Fratani, "Mediating the Global and Local in Nigerian Pentecostalism," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28:3 (1998): 280, cf. 278-281, 293-299.

³² See further, Rosalind I. J. Hackett, "Charismatic/Pentecostal Appropriation of Media Technologies in Nigeria and Ghana," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28:3 (1998): 258-277; J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "Of Faith and Visual Alertness: The Message of the 'Mediatized' Religion in an African Pentecostal Context," *Material Religion* 1:3 (2005): 336-356; Birgit Meyer, "Impossible Representations: Pentecostalism, Vision, and Video Technology in Ghana," in *Religion, Media and the Public Sphere*, ed. Birgit Meyer and Annelies Moors (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 290-312.

³³ Ogbu U. Kalu, "Pentecostalism and Mission in Africa, 1970-2000," *Mission Studies* 24 (2007): 30.

frustration. The same Garden employees that work the Knicks games are stationed at various points around the room. It is announced that the 2006 Annual Convention will be in Dallas, Texas next year, where the church has purchased land to build a permanent reproduction of Redemption Camp.³⁴ It is just after 4:00 a.m. when, reluctantly, every one spills out on to Broadway and underground to the subways and trains.

In ways imaginative, spatial, and spiritual, the Holy Ghost service of Lagos “travelled” to New York so its membership could continue to share in the experience.³⁵ Both the geography and the institution are mobile.³⁶ Following patterns established in Lagos, the Holy Ghost services promise a special encounter with God, mediated through the entire evening’s events but particularly through Adeboye. The Holy Ghost service is a remarkable combination of set biblical themes, video clips, prophecies, ecstatic prayers, and musical rhythms that bend between two days. Moreover, it provides a ministry encounter with the General Overseer. The global flow of religious goods meets the global dispersion of people in New York City, resulting in an encounter of the body.³⁷ The divine encounter aids the “pilgrims” in the United States on their journey to greatness.

During interviews, people recounted their experiences of attending the Holy Ghost service in Nigeria. It involved arduous travel, time, and expense. As with pilgrimages of the past, significant expense can be involved in travelling to a Holy Ghost service.³⁸ Here the event has come to them in New York City, greatly reducing the potential costs. People still journey to the service of course, and instead of returning home to Brooklyn or Queens, many take rooms in local hotels, just to be near the event. More than one

³⁴ The plans for the Dallas property include a conference center, fish farm, recreational facilities, and large pavilion. See further, Afe Adogame, “Contesting the Ambivalences of Modernity in a Global Context: The Redeemed Christian Church of God, North America,” *Studies in World Christianity* 10:1 (2004): 32-35.

³⁵ Coleman and Eade, “Introduction: Reframing Pilgrimage,” 3.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

³⁸ Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 231.

reason brings people to the convention. Matilda Oyeyemi's convictions represent what many told me: "[I came] for signs and wonders, for testimonies, for miracles."³⁹

"LET US WALK IN THE LIGHT OF THE LORD"

While a major celebration of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana's 175th anniversary took place in Ghana, a smaller parallel version was held in New York during the week of May 17-23, 2004, complete with special imported cloth, a week of revival, and a Sunday anniversary service featuring a denominational leader from Ghana. In marking this history, the anniversary celebration is intended as an encounter with God, not merely a catalogue of historical events. Like all pilgrimages, this one requires an act of imagination.⁴⁰ One has to remember the past, the people whose sacrifices made this anniversary possible.



Fig. 7.6 Celebrating 175 Years of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Anniversary Uniforms. 2004

The week of May 17-23, 2004 begins with evening "revival" services led by different groups within the church. The first revival service was held on Monday, May 17, 2004 and was led by the "Osofo Group." The intense multi-vocal prayers of the Pentecostal

³⁹ Matilda Oyeyemi, Interview, June 22, 2005.

⁴⁰ Coleman and Elsner, "Introduction: Reframing Pilgrimage," 6.

tradition are in full swing,⁴¹ focused on the church. Thelma Annan delivers the sermon on the theme “That all May be One,” words that come from John 17:21. “Oneness” can be traced back to the church’s earliest days, she remarks, including the renaming of the church in 1957 with national independence.⁴² “They didn’t fight about the name.” With an eye on the present, Annan observes, “Real love overcomes mistakes.” Through their experiences “God is telling us we should be responsible to [our] pastors and leaders. God blesses churches that are united....175 years, this is how far God has taken us.” Her words were in English, with brief summaries in Twi.

Friday, May 20, 2004 is an “All-Night Service” at the church building on 123rd Street. The event is being videotaped, and with the extra lights and a filled room, the room is hot. Nearly everyone has on Presbyterian Church of Ghana tee shirts, many with the words “Pray Without Ceasing” inscribed on the back. Others stated “Presbyterian Women’s Fellowship U.S.A.” As people pray, there are the loud voices of “preaching prayer” and shouts of “In Jesus’ Name.” In the spirit of a Pentecostal revival, the worship leader declares: “Before you leave here you have to be a different person.” A biblical reflection, a special song, testimonies, and more prayers are offered.

The evening’s centerpiece is a historical overview of the Presbyterian Church by Rev. Asiedu, beginning with the Basel missionaries. “Some people somewhere they left everything, all the pleasures, came to us, taught us what we have now. 175 years, a very long journey.” To tell this story, Rev. Asiedu distributes and explains photocopies of the “Basel missionaries who left everything behind to travel to Africa.” He describes the death of the early missionaries and the later use of Jamaicans. There would be no “Presbyterian Church of Ghana if those men and women had not come.” Rev. Asiedu talks about Rev. Ramsayer, illustrated by a picture of him preaching at Abetifi. He mentions the first baptism in 1847, the development of the seminary in Akropong in 1848, the introduction of the Salem system, and the role of Scottish missionaries.

⁴¹ Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Field Notes, May 17, 2004.

When Rev. Asiedu mentions Peter Hall, the first moderator, “a descendent of pioneer Jamaican missionaries,” he establishes the context as “local leadership right from [the] beginning.” “Today,” Rev. Asiedu comments, “the Presbyterian Church of Ghana is a “key player in Ghanaian society.” For evidence he cites 1,907 schools, a university, 37 health institutions, 7 agricultural programs, a prison ministry, and 23 congregations in Western Europe and North America. Yet there are “still people in Ghana and elsewhere who [need] to trust in Christ.” Then, Rev. Asiedu makes the connection to the history of the church here in New York. Casting the challenges they face in spiritual terms he says that “all obstacles...help us grow spiritually.” With an offering and prayer, the service ends.

Some weeks prior to the 175th anniversary of their denomination, there is a blessing during the service of “the anniversary cloth.” Large rolls of the green, blue, red, white, and yellow cloth with sketches of church leaders from their history have been shipped to New York, where members will purchase sections and make clothing for the grand day. One section features Isaiah 2:5, “Come let us walk in the light of the Lord,” words that encircle “175th Anniversary 1828-2003.” The parallel section features photographs of fourteen “Moderators,” including Samuel Prempeh.

The anniversary clothing of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana presents a glimpse into the material dimension of religion.⁴³ Webb Keane is certainly right in pointing out that clothing “has an indisputably intimate relationship to persons”⁴⁴ and can be deeply

⁴² It had been the Presbyterian Church of the Gold Coast.

⁴³ For the importance of material culture in the urban church context, see Camilo José Vergara, *How the Other Worships* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 265-270. More generally see, Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

⁴⁴ Webb Keane, “Signs are Not the Garb of Meaning: On the Social Analysis of Material Things,” in *Materiality*, ed Daniel Miller (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 183.

meaningful, not superficial.⁴⁵ If clothing can be a “text,”⁴⁶ and in this instance it is imprinted as a text, then it shows a reading of their story. One of the interesting features of the entire anniversary is the difference between the story Rev. Asiedu tells at the all- night service and the story told by the anniversary cloth.⁴⁷ While at no point is anything but a positive interpretation given to the work of the Basel missionaries, the anniversary cloth that is used to make uniforms for the anniversary celebration exclusively emphasizes Ghanaian figures and contributions. More than a cultural object, the anniversary cloth communicates a certain authority and narrative. Through the materiality of the cloth, a story circulates across borders.

“Pass on the word to those afar, [we] will raise our voices Lord to proclaim thy glory,” Rev. Asiedu offers in his opening prayer of the climatic anniversary service on Sunday, May 23, 2004. “Pray for those who have gone out to proclaim thy word all around the world,” he prays. The leaders in the churches today, “evangelists, catechists, pastors,” are also prayed for. Together the church recites in English the Lord’s Prayer. To the beat of a hand bell, the Women’s Fellowship sings, waving white handkerchiefs. The Men’s Fellowship gathers and performs a special song.

The Reverend Dr. Yaw Frimpong-Manso, chairperson of the Ashanti Presbytery and a lecturer in Old Testament at Trinity College, Legon, is introduced as the guest preacher; later in the year he will become the moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. “Greetings from Ghana, your friends and relatives,” he begins. His theme is “Come let us walk in the light of the Lord,” words taken from Isaiah 2:1-5, the theme of the denomination for this occasion. Linking the story of Isaiah with the life of the church, he notes the “heavy responsibility of [the] people of Israel.” Earlier in December, he recalls that they had celebrated the church anniversary in Ghana. In this telling, “Missionaries came to our part of the world” and “passed responsibility on to local

⁴⁵ Ibid., 196.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 196-197.

⁴⁷ Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York, May 20, 2004.

people.” The implication is that the mission continues in New York. “Walk in [the] light,” he exhorts, “all those around you will see.” Here in New York, “remain united and love one another.” He also appealed to the church in New York to support the work of the church back home.

Rev. Asiedu delivers greetings from Mama Ohemeng, the founder of the church, who is homebound. Framed certificates honor members who have provided leadership over the years. It is nearly 7:00 p.m. when the service ends with an offering taken up for the Presbyterian Church of Ghana.

The history of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana is treated not generically but spiritually. People and place are recalled and situated in a spiritual narrative; church membership is a community that crosses borders. In marking out the early Mission House in Akropong, recalling the work of Rev. Ramsayer, and in connecting this story to their own journey in New York, they are shaping their own memorial across borders. Picking up the theme of reverse flow, the Reverend Dr. Yaw Frimpong-Manso came to New York, enlarging the sacred circuit of remembrance for a future of mission. Ghana is a place of spiritual meaning, and by travel, through the medium of photographs, friends, blessed cloth, and prayer it has journeyed to New York.

“WE ARE ON MOUNT TABBORAR”

Over five thousand miles from the Bronx, Mount Taborar stands on a patch of land in Ogere, Nigeria. The Taborar was inaugurated in 1937 in Ogere, Nigeria, when the founder of the Church of the Lord (Aladura), Josiah Ositelu, reports that he was given a vision to go to a site and pray and fast, during which time he received revelations.⁴⁸ The site of these revelations in Nigeria was given the name Mount Taborar, a word

⁴⁸ Rufus Okikiolaolu Olubiyi Ositelu, *African Instituted Churches: Diversities, Growth, Gifts, Spirituality and Ecumenical Understandings of African Initiated Churches* (Hamburg: LIT, 2002), 138; H. W. Turner *African Independent Church, volume II - The Life and Faith of the Church of the Lord (Aladura)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 221-230.

with biblical connotations to Mount Tabor, but of course mountain imagery is crucial in the biblical narrative. According to a seventieth anniversary program published in Ogere, “the name stands for the mountain of power, victory, and blessings. The mount where the Holy Spirit will be disseminated upon all and sundry from all the remotest part of the world.”⁴⁹ Thereafter Josiah Ositelu designated it a site of yearly August pilgrimage for the leadership and membership of the Church of the Lord (Aladura). While not an event in commemoration of the founder of the Church of the Lord (Aladura), the Tabborarr is very much an event that keeps the role of the founder, Josiah Ositelu, before the wider church.

Large numbers of pilgrims continue to journey each year to the mountain for healing, for renewal, for prophecies, for proclamations.⁵⁰ For the Church of the Lord (Aladura), the Mount Tabborarr season or festival is its most distinctive and important communal event. As a recent decal or sticker declared, “The Church of the Lord (Aladura) Worldwide (a.k.a The Tabieorar People).”⁵¹ Held annually in August, the Tabborarr involves thirteen days of praying and fasting, culminating on August 22 with a “finale” service that pronounces the thirteen blessings of Tabborarr, after which everyone breaks their fast.

Instead of having its members travel to Ogere for the Tabborarr festival, the church relocates its practice to New York. In New York its disciplines of fasting and prayer are not only kept, but the discourse of the finale service suggests that the sacred topography of Ogere has been transferred or relocated. That is, the world created in marking the Tabborarr - fasting, prayer, worship on the mountain, healing, blessings and breaking the fast - is experienced on Mount Tabborarr in New York. I participated

⁴⁹ “Tabieorar @ 70 Programme,” The Church of the Lord (Aladura) Worldwide, Tuesday, August 22, 2006.

⁵⁰ Olatunji F. Aina, ““Psychotherapy by Environmental Manipulation”” and the Observed Symbolic Rites on Prayer Mountains in Nigeria,” *Mental Health, Religion and Culture* 9:1 (2006): 1-13; J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyda, ““On the Mountain of the Lord’: Healing Pilgrimages in Ghanaian Christianity,” *Exchange* 36:1 (2007): 65-86.

⁵¹ Due to the many different spellings given for “Taborarr,” I use “Tabborarr” unless citing a text that uses an alternate.

in two Tabborarr festivals, the first in August 2004 and the second August 2007. The description that follows is from 2004.⁵²

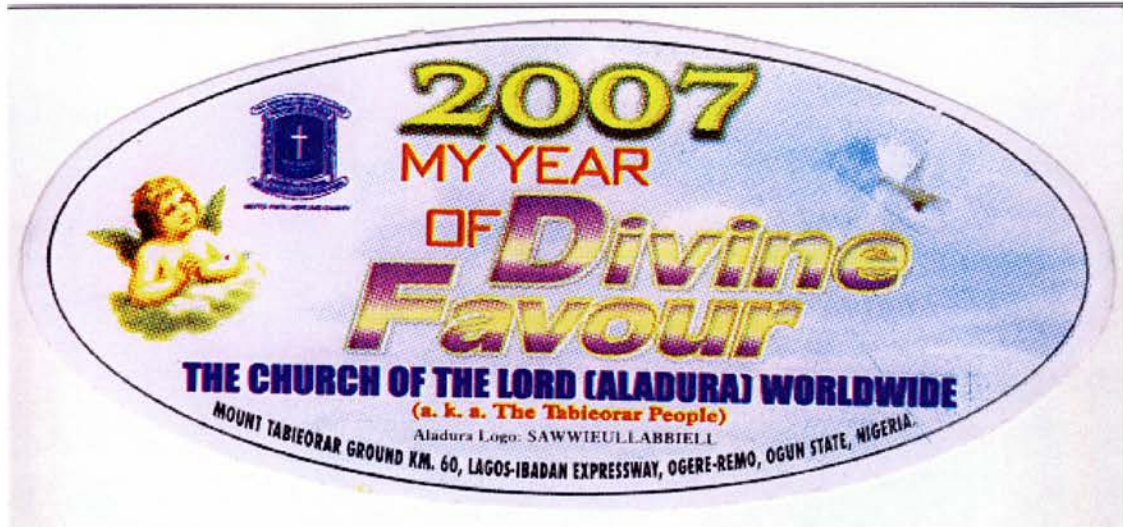


Fig. 7.7 Church of the Lord (Aladura) sticker, “aka. The Tabieorarr People.” 2007

In New York City, Tabborarr pilgrims arrive from New Jersey, New York, Atlanta, and Rhode Island. Outside in the hot summer evening the teenagers talk about sports and music. Inside, bottles and gallon jugs of water are being placed in the front altar area, in preparation for the Tabborarr blessing.



Fig. 7.8 Mother Marie Cooper, Leading Tabborarr Worship. 2004

⁵² June 22, 2004.

Prayers, ecstatic shouts and loud exclamations of “Thank you, Jesus” emanate from the prayer room located behind the altar area. By 7:00 p.m., with hand bells ringing, five calabashes swirling, and hand drums catching the rhythms, the service begins with a congregation that will reach sixty pilgrims elatedly singing the processional song, “Tabborrar De o, Tabborrar De o Halleluyah o” which means “Tabborrar Day Hallelujah.” Officiating the service along with Mother Cooper is the representative of the Primate of the Church of the Lord’s (Aladura), Archdeacon John Lachana, who is based in Atlanta, Georgia.⁵³ In a service with closely followed components, the hymns, prayers, readings of psalms, and a sermon all lead to a liturgical height, the thirteen blessings of Tabborrar. For all the liturgical order, a fluid dynamic characterizes the service.



Fig. 7.9 Celebrating the Tabborrar, Church of the Lord (Aladura), Bronx. 2004

Following the processional song, we sing the Introit hymn, a nineteenth century hymn known by its opening line, “Immortal, Invisible, God only wise.” Next in order is a reading of Psalm 51, leading to a confession of sin. “Holy Spirit move! Move in thy Holy Ghost power!” the worship leader declares, and a woman in front falls over under the influence of the Spirit. More hymns and singing follow. Then Mother Cooper asks, “Who wants a Tabborrar blessing?” to which the congregation replies, “I do!” For the next thirty minutes praise and worship take place, beginning with “What a mighty God

⁵³ John Lachana, Interview, August 22, 2004.

we serve” and including “Amazing Grace.” Kneeling, Sister Sarah then offers a prayer focused on God. She proclaims, “Our God help in ages past...God who never fails, God of Tabborarr...”

Archdeacon Lachana preaches a sermon from Judges 14:1-14 that underscores how God blesses. As he recounts the story, it pivots around honey and the lion. For Lachana, the lion is a symbol of “power...the devil, enemy, adversary.” We may face “difficult lions” such as at work and sickness, but there is the possibility of honey. Honey in the Bible, he states, can mean wealth, riches, and the good. For reference, he cites the land of milk and honey in Exodus 3, Isaiah 7:14, Mark 1:6, and 1 Samuel 14:24-29. “Honey is a symbol of blessing.” “On Mount Tabborarr tonight there is honey in the lion.” A principle follows, “After every attack comes a promotion.” Human action is required in response. “If you obey God and listen to his word, take a bold action and see what he will do.”



Fig. 7.10 Archdeacon John Lachana, Blessing the Tabborarr fruit and water. 2007

Biblical interpretation leads to immediate results in the Tabborarr service. Lachana proclaims, “If you believe, you will not go away empty” tonight. Just as “the lion had become food for him [Samson]” so we have an “inheritance.” If God gave to Samson, he will give to you. The language of portion, inheritance, and possession overflows. What is our possession distributed from God? “Healing, deliverance, joy, peace, favor, the power of the Holy Ghost, mercy, riches, prophecy...that is God’s will for you.”

“Have you ever been blessed by your enemies?” Ultimately, the God of Tabborarr “will tell your enemy to be a blessing.” “In the name of Jesus I declare healing...I bind every spirit of sickness, I command it to leave.”

After the sermon it is time for the thirteen blessings of Tabborarr. We are “on Mount Tabborarr” archdeacon Lachana announces during a Tabborarr service. In Liberia, congregations of the Church of the Lord (Aladura) construct a small version of the holy mountain.⁵⁴ Land becomes sacred ground. In New York City, the Tabborarr arrives in spiritual, almost in Eucharistic form in my assessment. The merging of sacred time and sacred space⁵⁵ is spiritually manifested in the worshiping community. In the trans-temporal ritual action they follow, as their hands are lifted up in prayer, the mountain becomes present. A gesture of prayer creates the sacred mountain, not a shovel.

Inside the Bronx church, Archdeacon Lachana begins a liturgy of the Tabborarr:

Question: Whence commeth ye thou hither ye pilgrims in white robes?

Answer: Tabborarr, Tabborarr, the mountain of the Lord.

Question: What is your first request here ye pilgrims in white robes?

Answer: (First blessing) Forgiveness of sins from King Olufiji⁵⁶ that God of Tabborarr may forgive all our sins

Thirteen Tabborarr blessings are pronounced: forgiveness of sins, God’s cleansing, God’s mercy, God’s blessing, perfect peace, good children, victory, salvation, God’s healing, Joy, God’s favour, mighty power of the Holy Spirit, and steadfastness. Following the recitation of each blessing follows a similar rhythm of call and response, singing, prayer, sermonic exhortation, and a declaration of blessing. It is nearly thirteen liturgical services bound into one. In response to each of the thirteen blessings of Tabborarr, from the congregation there are a series of choruses and shouts, special intercessory prayers, vows, and testimonies. Voiced as a vow for individuals are the

⁵⁴ Samuel Irving Britt, “The Children of Salvation: Struggle and Cosmology in Liberian Prophet Churches” (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 1992), 280, 297, 308.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ The reference to King Olufiji is not clear to me.

words, “Lord, I come to the Holy Mountain of Tabborarr and I make this vow.” The service throughout is punctuated with the phrase, “God of Tabborarr, manifest your power.” As the service ends, Lachana and the other ministers on the platform bless the fruit and collected water bottles and jugs. Then it is upstairs to break the fast with Jamba rice, fruit, soft drinks, and juices. It is into the morning hours.

Back on Mount Tabborarr in Ogere, the head of the Church of the Lord (Aladura) is receiving a set of prophecies that will be distributed around the world via paper pamphlet and the Internet. The paper copy I obtained was sent via postal mail to Mother Cooper and the church. Titled “Divine Revelation for the Year 2005 from Holy Mount of Tabieorar,”⁵⁷ it is dated “18.8.2004,” corresponding to the Primate Rufus Ositelu’s time on the Mountain. The preface of the 2005 booklet opens with “Sawwiellakkabie” and “Happy Tabieorar” followed by thirty eight pages of revelation and prayers. There are “Divine Revelations and Prophecies for Each Month” in 2005, monthly prayers, divine revelations and prophecies for each month, and general and country-specific revelations, and divine revelations to different occupations such as drivers and computer scientists.

I offer one example, the revelation regarding the United States.

The Lord said, the Nation of America should be careful and pray so that their political activities would not cause commotion. Pray against things that could bring set-back to the economy of this country. The deception of many prominent personalities in the society will be exposed. The Lord said, let this Nation not relent in their prayer because of enemies that pretend to be their friends. There will be a new beginning that will usher in hope and stability to the country. The Lord said, the end of the year will bring peace to the Nation.⁵⁸

As is evident, there is a prophetic character to the revelation; one could add it provides a critical analysis of the United States while embedded in general observations.

⁵⁷ Church of the Lord (Aladura).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

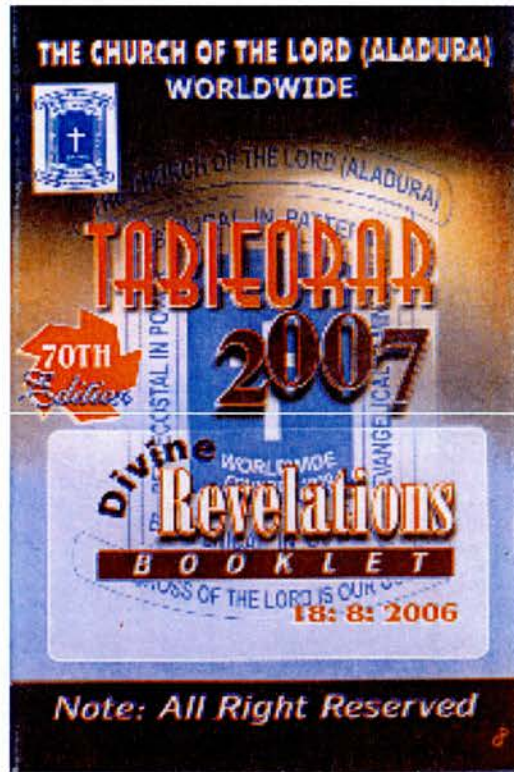


Fig. 7.11 *Tabieorar 2007 Divine Revelations Booklet, Church of the Lord (Aladura)*

Throughout the whole Tabborarr season of thirteen days but especially in the finale night, there is a conviction that participants “will not leave here the same.” Mother Cooper refers to “a new life” that is operative in people. She also noted that no one became sick or ended up in the hospital as a result of the fasting. If the process of keeping the Tabborarr involves sacrifice and discipline, the intended outcome is human flourishing.⁵⁹ As evident in the testimonies and comments, Tabborarr blessings are responsive and adaptive to the context of life in New York.

In Harold Turner’s earlier assessment of the Tabborarr, he finds “it is difficult to come to clear conclusions about the Taborar development and why it has occurred.”⁶⁰ He concludes, “The ambiguous nature of its chief liturgical creation is a token of the uncertainty attending its own future.”⁶¹ Forty years since Tuner’s study, with a view

⁵⁹ Program 2004 and 2007.

⁶⁰ Turner, *African Independent Church*, volume II, 230

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

from the Bronx, its value is much clearer. The Tabborarr is a religious event that holds out the promise of flourishing and preserves the unique identity of the Church of the Lord (Aladura) as a global church.

CONCLUSION: MOVING EXPECTATION

I began this chapter by defining pilgrimage. Historically, pilgrimage involves planned travel to a specific site for an encounter of deep meaning. Following Simon Coleman and John Eade, I reframed pilgrimage to include movement along “new modes of travel.”⁶² In describing pilgrimage this way, I sought to show how through the Annual Convention and Holy Ghost service of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, the Tabborarr festival of the Church of the Lord (Aladura), and the 175th Anniversary of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, sacred geographies and events are moved across borders. While maintaining the idea of movement and encounter, these transported events enable each of the larger church movements to break down constraints of distance and provide a crucial experience of faith for their dispersed membership.⁶³

While taking into account differences, the three pilgrimages that I experienced share at least four features. First, the pilgrimages maintain core religious identities through highly identifiable rituals, narratives, and experiences. Each event helps ensure people stay involved across borders. Second, the events demonstrate the power of memory and imagination, recalling home and establishing community. The preaching, the music, the participants, the textiles and clothing all help move people into this transformed space. Third, each event reinforces the importance of religious networks. This is true for both leaders and participants. Each event links the participants to religious networks around the globe. Fourth, each gathering places front and center the primacy of the celebratory religious experience.

Whether it is for healing or remembrance, empowerment or hope, in each pilgrimage event there is an encounter, an expectation, and a change that is sought. The shared

⁶² Coleman and Eade, “Introduction: Reframing Pilgrimage,” 1, 3.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 6.

features of each pilgrimage - maintaining identity, nurturing memory and imagination, staying connected to religious networks, and celebrating faith - show us the global direction of African Christianity.

CHAPTER 8

HANDING OFF: FAITH IN THE SECOND GENERATION

INTRODUCTION

Sunday August 14, 2005 is confirmation day at the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York, one of the most significant events in the life of the church.¹ For months if not years, fifteen young men and women have been instructed in the beliefs and practices of the church - the nature of Christ, the Holy Ghost, and the 10 Commandments. As they kneel one by one before Pastor Yaw Asiedu, he lays his hands upon them as they affirm the vows of membership. Then beginning with the elders, followed by the whole of the church, a line stretches around the sanctuary to shake hands with, hug, and celebrate each new member. "First communion" follows for just the new members. Rev. Asiedu remarks, "on [this] day he [Jesus] is dining with you, same as the disciples." The service is followed by a celebration of eating and dancing in the basement of the church. For the fifteen young people, this public commitment is not simply a gesture of faith; it is an affirmation of their parents' history and tradition, a participation in a story that usually runs many generations.

In Latin, "translation" means "to transfer," to hand-off. Translating faith from one generation to the next is of perennial concern for religious traditions and for Christianity.² On this account the well-known words from Deuteronomy come to mind: "But take care and watch yourselves closely, so as neither to forget the things that your eyes have seen nor to let them slip from your mind all the days of your life;

¹ Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York, Field Notes, August 14, 2005.

² James L. Heft ed., *Passing on the Faith: Transforming Traditions for the Next Generation of Jews, Christians, and Muslims* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006); Carolyn Chen, "From Filial Piety to Religious Piety: Evangelical Christianity Reconstructing Taiwanese Immigrant Families in the United States," *International Migration Review* 40:3 (2006): 573-602.

make them known to your children and your children's children."³ Compared to previous generations, today there are new challenges to raising children in a particular faith tradition. Pluralism and its options join with social pressures and changes in moral standards to challenge African families as they raise children in global New York City. Away from the reinforcements of culture and tradition, these issues are compounded.

As I have emphasized throughout this thesis, New York City is an immigrant city, and this is perhaps most evident in its youth: "among New Yorkers under age eighteen, 62.4 percent are second- or 1.5-generation."⁴ Here "second generation" is a term for children born in New York City to new immigrant parents, and "1.5" generation are youth born in a "home" country but raised in New York City. If in immigrations past an assimilation model of incorporation prevailed, children of global migrations today live in more than one world. Issues of identity, belonging and faith span borders.

In this chapter, I examine some of the current dynamics of transferring and receiving the faith from one generation to the next at the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York, the Church of the Lord (Aladura), and the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn. Supplementing my general observations and personal interviews, near the end of my research I conducted two focus group sessions with young people of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York and the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn.

No area of research drew more encouragement by the congregations themselves than this topic. And perhaps no area is of more determinant value in life outcome than religion and family, as Christian Smith argues in his impressive *Soul Searching: The*

³ Deuteronomy 4:9

⁴ Philip Kasnitz, John H. Mollenkopf, and Mary C. Waters, "Worlds of the Second Generation," in *Becoming New Yorkers: Ethnographies of the Second Generation*, Philip Kasnitz, John H. Mollenkopf, and Mary C. Waters eds. (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2004), 2. [1-19]

Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers.⁵ Of the many notable conclusions produced in this study, two are particularly relevant for the present inquiry. First, Smith's research indicates that teenagers are most significantly influenced by the religious beliefs and practices of parents.⁶ The influence of other adults is important, but parents matter most. Second, the study also found a correlation between religious belief, practice and positive life outcomes.⁷

Before I offer the results of my study, I note that just as much of the literature on the second generation leaves out religion, emphasizing instead race and ethnicity.⁸ On the other hand, the literature on youth and religion is largely incomplete due to its omission of immigrants, Pentecostal settings, and non-Western Christianity. This points to the need for further research.

IT TAKES A CHURCH

Drawing on an ancient Christian practice that baptisms take place at Easter, on Easter Sunday, March 27, 2005, Rev. Asiedu of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York calls forward a group of parents and children to be baptized.⁹ Both parents and children are mostly dressed in white. The Elders stand behind Rev. Asiedu; parents are positioned to his front left and right. Rev. Asiedu reads the Scriptures and recites a series of questions - in English. As an elder, not the pastor or parent, holds each child, Rev. Asiedu baptizes the children "in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." In his prayer for the parents raising children, Rev. Asiedu acknowledges that the work of parents "is not easy...especially in this country." Nothing symbolizes that the parents are not alone in this challenge more than what happens next. The elders proceed to carry the newly baptized children up the centre aisle so the

⁵ Christian Smith with Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁶ Ibid, 56, 120, 261.

⁷ Ibid, 218-258.

⁸ On this development generally, see Gerrie ter Haar, *Halfway to Paradise: African Christians in Europe* (Cardiff: Cardiff Academic Press, 1998), 164-165.

⁹ Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York, Field Notes, March 27, 2005.

congregation “learns them,” as it is put. With this act, the church is proclaiming that it takes a community of faith to raise a child for Christ, not simply a nuclear family.

With its pronounced connection to history and culture, the continuation of faith for the Presbyterian Church of Ghana is not only a religious concern, but holds cultural and institutional importance. In an interview with Rev. Asiedu, he shared that if the church had the funding, they would begin a Saturday school for youth that taught Ghanaian languages, culture and history.

Inhabiting a parallel time, the youth meet together during the regular church service. Neither the “Brigades” nor the “Young People’s Guild” (YPG), groups functioning in Ghana, are in full swing. What takes place on Sundays seems to function as a youth group. At Mount Morris Church, they meet in the basement, a room with flickering florescent lighting, ceilings with peeling paint, floors encrusted with dirt, and a door with no spring that booms shut. With the sanctuary above, the ceiling pulsates as music is played.

Their de facto leader is Rex Agyemang, a faithful member of the church who week after week “pastors” the youth of the church. Rex has done this for years without a title, salary, or official position in the church. He does it with passion, commitment, and contextual sensitivity. Summarizes Rex, “I’m always trying to help them understand the meaning of being a Christian” and especially urge them to live as a “Christian among their friends.” Rex explains his youth work in this manner: “I would love for us to get to the point where we can call on one another, pray for one another.”¹⁰ As a good youth leader, Rex is trying to foster spiritual maturity and community.¹¹

This is a challenge, as I found during a focus group meeting on December 2, 2007. Here I was able to hear directly from a group of sixteen young people approximately

¹⁰ Rex Agyemang, Interview, May 31, 2006

¹¹ Smith, *Soul Searching*, 261-262.

ages 13-18 about their faith and church life. Before we talked, as is their standard practice, they had a time of worship that alternated between praying and singing. The songs, such as “He is Lord” and “We May Magnify Your Name,” are sung first in English and then Twi.



*Fig. 8.1 Youth Service, Presbyterian Church of Ghana.
Note the leader, Rex Agyemang at the right. 2007*

They are an active group of young persons, the vast majority of whom live in the Bronx, where they also attend school. While a few of the young women keep in contact during the week by mobile phone, they mostly see each other only in church or special church activities such as “outdoorings.” So it is on Sundays that the group primarily meets together. Their closest friends are not necessarily fellow church members.

Racial and ethnic identity are on the surface of their daily lives in New York City.¹² When I asked how they identified themselves, I suggested as possible categories “Ghanaian,” “African American,” or “Christian.” At first, eight people responded they considered themselves as “African American,” six “Ghanaian,” and one “Christian.” One person, who had been born in Japan, preferred being recognized as Japanese. After some discussion, it became clear that in their minds, “African

¹² Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut, *Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation* (Berkeley: University of California Press and New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2001), 147-191.

American,” as I was using the term, meant “Black American.” As they discussed terms, there was consensus for something like “Ghanaian American.” They were Americans but also quite pointedly Ghanaian.

Along this line, I asked their assessment of the Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama, whose father was Kenyan and mother was white. Because of Obama’s race, they give a decidedly tepid review of his ability to get elected in America. As one young woman somewhat apologetically remarked, “The white man [has] been running the show for too long.” From their personal experience in New York City, they know there is “still racism” in America. At school they are often taunted with “you look like a gorilla” and “you don’t have no clothes.” Perhaps because of this they expressed pride in and affirmation of their Ghanaian identity. But overall, school is not only a place for achievement;¹³ it is also where identity comes into question.¹⁴

All of the youth attend church because a parent or family member brings them. However, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana places great stress on the role of the institution in religious formation, an example of “it takes a church” to raise a Christian. Through participation¹⁵ in the life of the church, “spiritual capital” is passed on from generation to generation. At the same time, for parents, church life is a strategy for negotiating transnational identity.

When I inquired about the youths’ personal religious practices such as prayer and reading the Bible, church not home was primarily where this occurred. But overall, as one young woman put it, we seek to put “Christ first.” This faith guides them through life. Overall, they felt that their parents held them to higher standards than the parents of friends outside of church. “Come try that at my home,” one person reported telling a friend who said and did things they never would. A number of

¹³ Ibid., 192-268

¹⁴ Ibid.,

¹⁵ Joanna L. Waters, “Transnational Family Strategies and Education in the Contemporary Chinese Diaspora,” *Global Networks* 5:4 (2005): 359-377.

children attend parochial (Catholic) schools because parents view it as a more “ordered” environment. No matter what age, parents continue to play a major role in their social life.

There is a great disconnect between parents and youth concerning the worship service. Part of the gap involves language. As one person muses, language has “always been my insecurity.” The youth do not always understand Twi (few reported being fully bilingual). Youth enjoy listening to Ghanaian music, which they are able to purchase at Ghanaian markets in the city. They also hear Ghanaian music at parties with friends. But the message from the adults is that the traditional hymns “are closer to scripture.”

The search for the self among Ghanaian youth is present in Rex Agyemang’s story.¹⁶ Born at Harlem Hospital, he was raised in the community, and has only been to Ghana once. Yet “I’m Ghanaian,” he asserts, and “I feel more African and proud of it.” He recognizes that there is a concern on the part of some African Americans that “Africans have come here to take their jobs.” Here Rex also identifies another group of African Americans which sees itself “as more African” and by implication, more welcoming of newcomers. “I feel sometimes caught in the middle. I can feel what African Americans are going through and think. And to some degree I can think through what Africans are thinking.” He uses the word “passionate” to describe his positive feelings toward Martin Luther King, Jr. But no matter his subjectivity, Rex realizes that he remains “black” to the police and others. He lives in multiple worlds, moving among a diverse “black” community and city, yet also affected by the potentials of racial discrimination. Complex does not begin to describe it.¹⁷

¹⁶ Rex Agyemang, Interview, August 29, 2006.

¹⁷ Philip Kasinitz, John H. Mollenkopf, and Mary C. Waters, “Identity,” in *Becoming New Yorkers: Ethnographies of the Second Generation*, Philip Kasinitz, John H. Mollenkopf, and Mary C. Waters eds. (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2004), 281-287 and Natasha Warikoo, “Cosmopolitan Ethnicity: Second-Generation Indo-Caribbean Identities,” in Philip Kasinitz, John H. Mollenkopf, and Mary C. Waters, “Worlds of the Second Generation,” in *Becoming New Yorkers: Ethnographies of the Second Generation*, Philip Kasinitz, John H. Mollenkopf, and Mary C. Waters eds. (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2004), 361-391.



Fig. 8.2 Confirmation meal with church and family, Presbyterian Church of Ghana. 2005

I want to return to the vignette I provided at the beginning of this chapter around confirmation Sunday at the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. From the outset of my time at the church, it was evident that for parents it was a matter of paramount importance that as their children become adults they would become confirmed as members of the church. It is I think most profoundly a sign of their care for their children.¹⁸ For parents, much more than the youth, joining the church is not simply about beliefs, but a means connecting generations. It is grandparents, schools and communities, in other words memory.¹⁹ For the youth, it is about making their way in New York City and honouring their parents. But as one youth told me, confirmation was perceived as more important for the parents, at least at that point in time. The parent-child relationship continues to be prominent even if movement across borders has strained it.

As in Ghana,²⁰ it is not unheard for grown children in New York City to switch from the Presbyterian Church to a Pentecostal church. I ran into a few people who did just this during a visit to Ghanaian Pentecostal church in New York City. Some youth return to the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York on certain Sundays to please their parents.

¹⁸ Smith, *Soul Searching*, 259.

¹⁹ Mary Chamberlain and Selma Leydesdorff, "Transnational Families: Memories and Narratives," *Global Networks* 4:3 (2004): 227-242.

²⁰ Cephas N. Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism: A Study of the Development of Charismatic Renewal in the Mainline Churches in Ghana* (Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 2002), 131.

On a number of occasions I spoke with Eric Gyasu.²¹ Eric attends college, and he is on his way upward in life in the United States, with many professional options before him. I ask Eric, Do you expect to be attending this church or another Presbyterian Church of Ghana in ten years? As he is leaving to catch his ride and soon return to college, he pauses to think about it, then replies: “the short answer, yes.”²² So the church faces the challenge of maintaining their traditions while accommodating a new generation.

CHILDREN OF THE LORD



Fig. 8.3 Alana, Church of the Lord (Aladura). 2007

Because of the size of the Church of the Lord (Aladura), my review is necessarily briefer than for the other two churches. There is however a clear pattern. Children learn the ways of the Church of the Lord (Aladura) by fully participating in the life of the church. Alana is now ten, and her participation is indicative of this process. In the first few years that I was part of the church, during the Sunday service she distributed the hymnals, Bibles and offering envelopes. More recently, she is reading the Bible before the congregation. Alana actively participates in the Sunday Bible study and prayer meetings, asking questions and offering prayers. There is no

²¹ Interviews, Eric Gyasu, August 29, 2004 and August 6, 2006.

²² Interview, Eric Gyasu, August 6, 2006.

separate space or activities for Alana and the other children who visit from time to time; they are an integral part of the service and life of the church.

One of the strategies for securing the success of the second generation is sending them “back home” to attend school or to stay with family. Expense can make this difficult, but it is an option some consider. An illustration of this comes from a family associated with the Church of the Lord (Aladura) in the Bronx. To help him succeed in America, his family has sent him back to Liberia for school. I learn that the church is praying for him and his family.



Fig. 8.4 Praying for children and youth, Church of the Lord (Aladura). Note the cross in Minister Joy's hand. 2005

SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF PENTECOST

During my years of attending the Redeemed Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn I observed that children are given a special place in the life of the church. Pastor Nimi travels to people's homes for naming ceremonies, conducts baby dedications in church services, and prays regularly for the “fruit of the womb.” Parents of new children are given money from the church to open a savings account. Children go to their own room during the sermon, but otherwise are active in the service. There is also a new mothers' room for feeding adjacent to the sanctuary. After Sunday worship has ended children play together in the main room as their parents engage in meetings or conversations.

I met with a focus group of eight young people at the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn on October 14, 2007. They ranged in age between 18 and 24, with one person soon turning 18. During the time at the church, I had frequently seen many of them at a diverse array of service and activities. What I found in my focus group was a religiously intense and personally committed group of young people who held strongly to the practices of Pentecostal faith but also had independent ideas about ministry. They are what Smith might call the “highly devoted.”²³

Before I had an opportunity to ask a question of a focus group of young people at the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn, they wanted to know if I was a Christian. What is striking is that I had been in regular attendance for years. It didn’t matter. They wanted to know if I was “born again,” not taking for granted any general impression church members may have had of me, but requiring a personal conversation. Significantly, baptism for Pentecostals comes with conversion, not because of a family’s membership. At Redeemed, baptism takes place from age ten onwards. If one was baptised as an infant, rebaptism also takes place with conversion.



Fig. 8.5 Baby dedication of James and Egbefun Adieze, Pastor Wariboko. 2005

²³ Smith, *Soul Searching*, 110.

Church life is seen as a very important factor in their daily lives, with prayer at the forefront. Like most of her peers in the group, Stephanie West-Erhabor has been a member of the Brooklyn church for a number of years, in her case six years. With her sister Sena, she and her family pray together every morning from 6:00 am to 7:00 am. I came to understand that family devotions are a common activity; doubtless they play a key role in forming the religious devotion of youth, confirming Smith's conclusions.²⁴ Theological identity is passed on through learning the bodily practices of prayer.

Bola Ogungbuyi daily prays the Lord's prayer; Kimberly Jean Baptiste prays each morning before leaving home, for the "transportation" she will take and for "guidance." She also writes poems to God. Lashe Davies prays each day and also sings to God. "Guide me Jesus," she asks. A few indicated praying before exams, not for "success," but that their "potential" would be evident in results. Youth are highly engaged in worship as a "collaborative process,"²⁵ with music as an attraction point and outlet.



Fig. 8.6 Youth of Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn, 2007

²⁴ Ibid., 261.

²⁵ Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 132.

In other words, the youth at the Redeemed Christian of God International Chapel, Brooklyn do not just hold spiritual values, but incorporate the Christian tradition and its practices in their daily lives. As Lashe Davies put it, “church helps [when] you’re going through stuff” and helps her “find a solution.” Others affirmed this perspective. Church is where “God addresses” people. Or as Stephanie West-Erhabor puts it, “stuff happens” in life and church helps her “remember” God in the midst. Bola Ogungbuyi frames it simply: “Jesus is [the] example.” Therefore, Christians are not to worship what they call idols such as “cars” and “sex” and “lust.”

This sense of moral commitment fits within what David Martin calls the Pentecostal narrative.²⁶ From my conversations, it is evident that Pentecostal youth have a particular way of speaking theologically about their faith; they appear very comfortable in doing so. The youth also exhibit confidence in the area of leadership. This came through particularly as they expressed a desire to develop a greater ministry to their Brooklyn community than presently exists. Bola is clear that “when we grow up, we will be the next leaders.”

Perhaps not surprisingly, the youth of Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn report they are friends in and outside of church. In youth sessions, they discuss and “understand things different than adults.” They share with one another how they are “going through things.” What appears to unite them the most is not an ethnic or racial culture, or even a church tradition, but a culture of faith. It is a faith of being born again.

Underlining all of this is the cosmopolitan outlook one might expect from New York kids raised in two worlds, but it is not where I initially began. When I began my conversation with this group of young adults at the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn, I thought of them as the next of generation of New Yorkers. That may be true, but most expressed a strong desire to visit more of the world before they consider settling in New York City. This sense of the world

²⁶ David Martin, *On Secularization: Towards a Revised General Theory* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 141-154.

correlated to how long they had lived in New York City; the longer they lived in the city, the more of the world they wanted to see. It also follows their parents who continue to live in multiple worlds.

I expected a high percentage would see their faith journeys as continuing in the Redeemed Christian Church of God, wherever they located. This was true for some of course. But what was more important for most was their identity as Christian and Pentecostal, of belonging to a church that fits their devotion to God. This was neither about brand loyalty or negative feelings toward the church. Rather, it appears to reflect their commitment to follow and worship God faithfully wherever they are, and their emplacement with the Pentecostal narrative. If they are not the children of Pentecost in Brooklyn, they will be children of Pentecost beyond into the world.

CONCLUSION: CONVERSION AND COMMUNITY

A common thread unites the three churches – a concern for the faith of the second generation. In this chapter we have seen diverse examples of “handing off” faith to the next generation. As the discussion revealed, this transfer is closely bound up with diverse notions of conversion and the meaning of community.

For the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York, confirmation is linked to both personal faith and the tradition to which generations of their family have often belonged. It is what you are expected to do. Membership joins family, cultural and faith obligations. Confirmation is a public recognition of faith and belonging to a very specific faith community, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. At the Church of the Lord (Aladura), belonging is linked to a spiritual community that works to protect, guide, and provide for its children.

For young people at the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn, the starting points are conversion and then the practices of faith that include prayer, fasting, and a disciplined moral life. An active faith can help lead the young people, they believe, to success in life; a moral life can lead to flourishing.

Wherever they go, they intend to keep faith, and certainly plan to continue in their Pentecostal tradition. They may or may not attend a Redeemed parish; what matters to them is being born again and living this life of faith.

Passing on faith is an act of translation. It is one of the most important things that a church does. No church assumes the process is simple, particularly with the divergent forces that can impinge upon the life of faith in New York City. Living between worlds, families put great emphasis upon church life as a space of moral and spiritual guidance. The future of the second generation is not clearly defined, but dependent on God and the itineraries of faith. But in the end, like no other factor, faith shapes life in the global city.

CONCLUSION

GIVING AND RECEIVING

CROSSING OVER

A sermon by Nimi Wariboko of the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn is more an event than a set piece of rhetorical prowess. In every service you expect his opening words to be “Let somebody shout hallelujah,” the biblical texts to be crunched together at lightening pace, the points many, and the prayers of the congregation to close his preachments. But very often something new and unexpected happens.

It is summer 2005 and the sermon, based on Matthew 6:9-13, is on debt.¹ Wariboko believes that debt is a spiritual power that has infiltrated the lives of African immigrants, the false lure of credit card companies that max people out. With his economics background, he gives a miniature lecture on types of debt, blending the spiritual and material together. His declaration that “God will set you free” means many things. In an altar call, Pastor Nimi tells the church, “If you are not born again, I want to pray with you.” Then he summons people forward for prayer in need of having debt paid off. “The Lord almighty will do it.” As a stream of more than one hundred people move forward to receive the anointing of the Spirit, the choir sings, “He is able, abundantly able, to deliver and to save,” and “Jesus is a winner man, a winner man all the time. I am on the winning side all the time.”

We know this is where the sermon event usually ends, but instead it continues, because in Pastor Nimi’s words, “The anointing is in the house!” The choir begins to sing, “I am what I am by the grace of the Lord. I’ve crossed over to destiny. I will never fail by the grace of the Lord.” With these words repetitiously looped over in

¹ Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn, Field Notes, June 5, 2005.

the background, the entire church sings and dances along, laughing and sharing embraces. In the moment, Pastor Nimi beckons Segun Oyesanya and another member forward, where arm in arm, shoulder to shoulder, they walk across the platform. The idea is that they are crossing over to their destiny together, the individual and the church together. No one doubts that “this is the day that the Lord has made.”

In this thesis I have sought to show how African Christianity has “crossed over” through the pairing of Christian expansion in Africa with migration to New York City. African Christianity is not merely a numerical development, but a combination of people and institutions, desires and imaginations, convictions about God and ways of narrating salvation, and liturgies and dance moves. Each of the three churches, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York, the Church of the Lord (Aladura), and Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn have constructed a common life within their unique understanding of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Theology is lived, action-oriented, and performed with all the senses. Each church embodies many identities at once: ancient and future, pre-modern and modern, local and global. For all of their differences, which I do not want to minimize, the three churches are joined together through a common discourse and theological outlook.

My thesis is also an account of a global city and church in change at the beginning of a new millennium; the African churches of New York City are representatives of a wave of post-Western Christianity in the city that also includes churches from Asia, Latin America, and the West Indies. The trope of continual border crossing is important. As people have travelled, so has faith, resituating African Christian institutions, experiences, beliefs and practices across borders. Inspired bodies have reorganized ecclesial bodies of faith through global urban networks, reproducing religious fields. In Manuel Vásquez’s words, the churches signal an important shift for religious studies, “from text to territory, from theology and doctrine to lived religion, and from symbol to practice.”²

² Manuel A. Vásquez, “Studying Mobile Religions via Networks,” unpublished paper, 9.

The development and growth of African Christianity in New York City is taking place not from the “top down,” but from the “bottom up.” This reflects a remarkable yet perennial theme of Christian history whereby the “margins” are the key site for the growth, creativity, and energy of the church. Before I turn to consider the meaning of African Christianity in New York City, I will first review the key arguments and conclusions of this thesis.

In the first part, chapters 1 through 3, I characterized and discussed African churches in New York City as “formations.” To this end, I began in chapter 1 with a description and analysis of the pastors or spiritual leaders of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York, Church of the Lord (Aladura), and the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn, respectively Rev. Yaw Asiedu, Mother Cooper, and Pastor Nimi Wariboko. With a bodily competence and pastoral imagination, each leader is developing new leaders and communities across borders. The four domains of ministry - spiritual direction, healing, institution building, and cultural bridge building - bring a spiritual, social, physical, and material focus to pastoral activity, reflective of a narrative of salvation. African Christians in New York City have not moved away from a spiritually active universe, and church leaders function within this range. Rather than offer theologies of communion, pastors mediate theologies of life.

Formation is directed toward place-making and institutional life, and in chapter 2, I described the history and character of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, the Church of the Lord (Aladura), and the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn. In the genesis of each church, women played particularly important roles. Each of the three churches is focused on God and building a fellowship of friends across borders, providing a home away from home. In the formulation I offered, globalization is not new or exclusively economic, but space-time compression. Through connection across borders, religion in a global world provides identity and meaning.

In chapter 3, I surveyed the landscape of Ethiopian Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, independent, Pentecostal, Francophone, Liberian, and other African churches in New York City, arguing that the clustering of congregations, branches, communities, and overseas headquarters is related to the global city and the convergence of Christian expansion in Africa with migration. African churches are global in outlook, and can be identified as transnational religious corporations. Because of their cosmopolitan character, Gerrie ter Haar speaks of African International Churches.³ From my standpoint, they are also New York City churches. In all of this, African Christianity is embedded in the basic features of the global city, while also recalling New York's historic commitment to religious toleration.

The story of global New York City is also a local story. When we consider the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York, the Church of the Lord (Aladura), and the Redeemed Christian Church International Chapel, Brooklyn, we locate them in both local and global contexts. Through the flows of people and institutions, experiences and practices from Accra, Monrovia, and Lagos, the local goes global and becomes reconstituted as a new local in New York City. Here the local story exists in multiple layers, moving from New York City's history as New Amsterdam, to the spatial level of the boroughs of the Bronx, Brooklyn and Manhattan. In many respects, my goal has been to tell a parochial story of New York City, not a normative one. But clearly, the local that is uniquely New York City is not a hermetically sealed space, but exists in continual construction within a world that is globally connected and influenced.⁴

Working from the "bottom up," I showed a close relationship between religion, the city, globalization, and multi-directional networks. While the potential for uniformity and homogeneity is ever present with globalization, the results presented in this

³ Gerrie ter Haar, *Halfway to Paradise: African Christians in Europe* (Cardiff: Cardiff Academic Press, 1998), 191.

⁴ Manuel A. Vásquez, "Studying Religion in Motion: A Networks Approach," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 20:2 (2008): 151-184.

chapter give every indication that the global city facilitates religious ferment, expansion, and diversity.

As I described throughout this thesis, African churches in New York City create and participate in a variety of religious and social networks. In light of what we have seen, the use of “transnationalism” must be expanded to include religious networks that are multi-directional, rather than limited to two “national” worlds.⁵ Religious networks are not limited to two sites, between for example Lagos and New York City, but circulate in multiple directions simultaneously. Such multi-directionality is represented in the Redeemed Christian Church of God, which is building dense networks throughout New York City and across North America, connected to a now global church. A larger Pentecostal world of networks is also found in New York City, as evidenced among diverse Nigerian churches in attendance at the Holy Ghost service at Madison Square Garden. Churches act as nodes in this flowing world of religious movements and activities, circulating in multiple currents while creating new directions and relationships. In a world of global networks, African religious geography has no single fixed point.

The second part of this thesis, chapters 4 through 6, examined a series of core practices of the three focus churches. Emerging out of the experience and worship of the risen Jesus Christ, the practices of prayer, reading Scripture, and mission, are brought into encounter with the global city. These mobile practices at once sustain people while projecting forward a universal vision of life in God. Faith is not forced into a niche, but engages the public sphere, albeit at the micro-scale.

In chapter 4, I explained how each church is a community immersed in the life of prayer. In prayer African Christians look to God to lead, deliver, and open up new opportunities. Presence in the global city is accompanied by “power from on high” that comes when personal stories are placed within the larger narrative of God’s

⁵ Ibid.

saving activity. Prayer is bodily, its kinetics and disciplines frequently accompanied by fasting. The life of prayer in the three churches illustrates the connection between God and the world, the spiritual and material that is so deeply held by African believers. In chapter 5, I examined how Scriptural texts shape communal identity, but even more than that bring faith into home life, the doctor's office, work and other areas of ordinary life. Reflective of how they view God, the hermeneutical paradigm of the three churches brings together daily needs with a strong conviction that the Bible is powerful. Reading the Bible, and in the case of the three churches this entails the whole canon, is about performing faith as it abides within the person and community.

In chapter 6, I delved into the different models and commonalities represented in the three churches' approach to mission. African churches have a strong global consciousness but diverse models of mission. Rather than locating their primary mission influence through intentional church-based activities, I argued that a more diffuse urban "evangelization" is taking place in the encounters of everyday life. Healing, prayer, evangelism, and worship are its main components. Drawing on John Howard Yoder, I contended that a "migration mission" model is more operative than an institutionally driven "great commission" model.

New York City is a city of opportunity, a place where people from around the world come to build a better life. However, it is not an urban utopia for African immigrants, but often a site of hardship and struggle as well as opportunity. Yet they believe that God promises new life found in Jesus, evidence of which is shared in testimonies. Such positive faith in God grounds activities in education, raising and supporting families, work, and sharing faith.

It is in the experiences, practices, and beliefs that operate in everyday life that we encounter something of the relevance of faith in the city. For immigrants in the global city, as Saskia Sassen assesses, presence is not equal to power. Conversely, based on my research, I have argued that African Christians understand themselves to have achieved both presence and power. For data, there is no shortage of "testimonies" to God's provision of personal and family "breakthroughs" in the

global city, whether socially, economically, or even politically. Prayer, I find, is a particular an expression of such agency in the city. This is a reading of “tactics” over “strategy,” to borrow from Certeau. It is socio-political change not from the “top down,” but percolating from the “bottom up.”

But the social implications or “data” of faith includes other elements. First, there is role that church members play as New Yorkers, each contributing to the building of a city endlessly under construction. Whether as a student, taxi driver, health care worker, investment banker, or parent, each contributes to the economic and social fabric of the city. Second, there is the factor of community impact, for example, the way in which Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn has played a major role over the course of years in the economic revitalization of their immediate geographical community.

In chapters 7 through 8, I addressed the natural question of the future of African churches in New York. First I developed the idea of “transformed pilgrimages” as a form of spatial connection from Africa to New York. The “mother churches” are relocating key geographies and experiences to New York, expanding the scale and scope of the church. This brings a festiveness and expectation to life across borders. In the final chapter, I concluded with reflections on the second generation and the manner in which faith is “translated” and identity is formed. A key component appears to be the influence of parents and adults, the community of faith. Faithfulness for the second generation is closely linked to underlying notions of conversion.

African Christianity’s continuity is present in its map of the universe and doctrine of salvation; its adaptability is found in the ways that it resources members who live across borders; its influence is expressed in the way it is projecting a vision of the world as under the reign of Christ; and its power is found in reliance on the Spirit. In a global world, African churches that are the most flexible, decentralized, and in tune with a network culture have an edge. In short, the churches in New York City display a holistic soteriology, a participative ecclesiology, an applied Trinitarian

theology, dynamic liturgies, intense practices of prayer and fasting, readings of Scripture that are creative and relevant, mission adapted to a global moment, and mobile spiritual geographies that deepen faith. A festiveness and celebratory atmosphere is a connecting thread throughout the churches, a reflection of a focus on God and the conviction that God saves and transforms. The sacred does not merely survive in the global city, but thrives. To live in New York City is not to dwell in a “secular city;” instead the city is where African Christians believe God is present and active.

In this thesis, I have emphasized cultural plurality. I have particularly accented the relationship of religion and culture - the bonding of particular Christian experiences, beliefs and practices to the processes of migration. As Andrew Walls, Kwame Bediako, and Lamin Sanneh have stressed, the local or situational context of faith entails cultural appropriations. In retrospect we can see how “cultural incarnations” of faith, in Bediako’s turn of a phrase, have been a durable factor of African Christian migration to New York City.⁶

One place we can see such “translation” and “inculturation” continued is in the ongoing importance of African “maps of the universe.” Such maps, according to our study, have been maintained as part of the “script of salvation” that guides pastoral ministry and conceptions of everyday life. There is divine protection while traveling in the city, openings for employment that only God could produce, and answers to prayers concerning immigration status. In dealing with spiritual entities, Jesus still offers answers.

African believers in New York City live across multiple cultural worlds. As religious and other forms of African culture relocates to New York City, the potential of disruption is ever present. However, as I have followed the stories of church life, I

⁶ Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press and Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995), 109-125.

have seen that continuities of faith are maintained and applied to new challenges. For Pentecostal believers, a trans-cultural faith is most important. Yet in the end, cultural particularities, from language to material object to prayer traditions, are resources that African believers draw upon in their global journey. In the long run, however, it is likely that as African Christianity encounters New York City in all of its pluralism, it will produce new cultural expressions befitting the local and global dynamics of faith and space.

Peter Beyer's conclusions on the importance of African Christianity in reverse flow to the West are insightful:

The importance of such "reverse-flow" phenomena in my argument is not their size or their level of overall influence. Rather, it is that they illustrate a significant dimension in the dynamics of contemporary religion construction: particular versions of, in this case, Christianity spread through missionary activity or migration to other parts of the world where they are adopted and partially transformed by indigenous people there.⁷

African Christianity in New York City represents church life and mission in a global urban world. How should the churches of the West encounter this story?

CATHOLICITY IN THE CITY

How we frame the discussion about the meaning and importance of African Christianity is crucial. Gerrie ter Haar's comments are highly appropriate for the context of New York City.

By emphasizing other people's perceived cultural identity, in this case that of African Christians in the Netherlands, Dutch Christians provide for themselves an opportunity to distance themselves from African Christians and to classify them as a different type of Christian. This is also reflected in the common references to their churches as 'African' churches, which not only implies a number of unspecified notions about the essence of being African, but, in its given context, also carries the suggestion that this is something which is good for Africans alone.⁸

⁷ Peter Beyer, *Religion in a Global Society* (London: Routledge, 2006), 146-147.

⁸ ter Haar, *Halfway to Paradise*, 161.

Also in the European context, Afe Adogame speaks of a need for a “renewed commitment to each other” in order to move beyond exclusion.⁹

In this section I want to respond to the challenge of mutuality by offering a series of largely theological reasons why African Christianity in New York City should be important, why Christian experiences, beliefs, and practices first shaped in a non-Western context should have a particular claim on the West. Hence, this is an argument for mutuality in a shared quest for faithful discipleship, of “exchange” in the global city. It arises from an ethos of community, not otherness. To say this is to believe that the particularities of Christian faith, reflected in stories of translation across space and time, ultimately affirm a universal faith.

Rather than offering simply a list of implications of African Christianity for the West or a method of responding to their presence, I present a framework that opens the door to learning in unexpected ways. While offering no quick and easy formulations, this approach may lead to rich and unexpected outcomes. Here I will draw on the work of Emmanuel Katongole and Andrew Walls, bringing their views on African Christianity and ecclesiology into conversation. My hope is to move away from segregation and division to mutuality and interconnection.

For Emmanuel Katongole, African Christianity is one part of the single story of Christian faith. As I indicated in chapter 6, on this basis he questions the legitimacy of “Western/non-western” and “North/South” divisions within Christianity.¹⁰ Katongole’s basic concern is that such distinctions, present for example in Philip Jenkins’ work, feed into geo-political divisions.¹¹ In their place Katongole proposes the lens of Catholicity, a return for the church to its origins and identity in Christ.

⁹ Afe Adogame, “The Quest for Space in the Global Spiritual Marketplace: African Religions in Europe,” *International Review of Mission* 89: 354 (July 2000): 408.

¹⁰ Emmanuel Katongole, Review of Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* in *Pro Ecclesia* 15:1 (2006): 143.

¹¹ Emmanuel M. Katongole, “Hauerwasian Hooks, Stories, and the Social Imagination of the “The Next Christendom,” in *A Future for Africa: Critical Essays in Christian Social Imagination* (Scranton: Scranton University Press, 2005), 231-252.

Taken this way, the churches of Africa are part of the “universal communion of discipleship.”¹²

Katongole goes on to expand this crucial observation:

For what a radical notion of Catholicity names is not mere geographical distribution of Christians but the presence of concrete communities and practices that are at once local and global in their very nature and way of life. It is through concrete church communities, made possible through such practices as baptism, that the local and universal can be seen to penetrate each other and to exist as internal one to another.¹³

Assuming a notion of Catholicity can open new ways of seeing, interacting, and being in relationship between local communities and communions.¹⁴

While Katongole urges a framework of Catholicity, Andrew Walls offers what he calls “Ephesian Christianity” as a way of seeing the wider church. This comes from Walls’ reading of the New Testament story as one of cross-cultural movement discipleship, a situation described in the Epistle to the Ephesians.¹⁵ For Walls, the story behind Ephesians is a moment when two culturally distinct Christian cultures, Jewish and Hellenistic, could have formed two different churches, but instead together they formed one new community. The result is not the erasure of difference, but the richness of cultural mutuality that births a deeper comprehension of Christ.¹⁶ Looking over Christian history, Walls believes the experience described in Ephesians was a brief episode that soon passed, but that such a time may now have come again.¹⁷

¹² Katongole, “Review of Lamin Sanneh,” 144.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 145.

¹⁵ Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Christian Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002), 72-81.

¹⁶ This is how Walls reads Ephesians 2 - 4.

¹⁷ Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process*, 78.

“Like the old Jerusalem Christians,” Walls observes, “Western Christians [have] long grown used to the idea that they were guardians of a “standard” Christianity; also like them, they find themselves in the presence of new expressions of Christianity, and new Christian lifestyles that have developed or are developing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to display Christ under the conditions of African, Indian, Chinese, Korean, and Latin American life.”¹⁸ If Western Christians today are feeling their perceived religious hegemony challenged by a multiplicity of Christian cultures and expressions, the situation may well have a parallel in early Christianity.

Walls identifies two potential responses to the current Ephesian moment: one is that the dominant Christian culture can seek to protect or even try to establish its position as normative; the other is to acknowledge other viewpoints but ignore any deep engagement.¹⁹ A very different approach is presented in Ephesians:

The Ephesian metaphors of the temple and the body show each of the culture-specific segments as necessary to the body but as incomplete in itself. Only in Christ does completion, fullness, dwell. And Christ’s completion, as we have seen, comes from all humanity, from the translation of the life of Jesus into the lifeways of the world’s cultures and subcultures through history. None of us can reach Christ’s completeness on our own. We need each other’s vision to correct, enlarge and focus our own; only together are we complete in Christ.²⁰

When different cultures together form a complete body of Christ, Walls suggests that growth in theological knowledge, economic sharing, and growth in comprehending the Gospel will occur.²¹ As Walls has long argued, diffusion is the lifeblood of Christian faith,²² with “diffusion across cultural lines” has always come the salvation

¹⁸ Ibid., 78.

¹⁹ Ibid., 78-79

²⁰ Ibid., 79.

²¹ Ibid., 79-81.

²² Andrew F. Walls, “Converts or Proselytes? The Crisis over Conversion in the Early Church,” *International Bulletin of Mission*, 28:1 (January 2004): 2-6.

of Christianity.²³ Herein also is the possibility of the realization of the full body of Christ.²⁴

Katongole and Walls have similar approaches to Christianity and the church. Rather than stressing the numerical importance of Christian growth in Africa, each underscores the mutual enrichment that can come to the whole body of Christ. They both seek alternate ways of speaking about “world Christianity,” and stay far away from categories like “Christendom.” One reason for such closeness is that both see the church from the ground up. Katongole is looking for signs of the new social imagination, giving attention to what is taking place in daily life; Walls seeks to understand theology, discipleship, and Christian life through the phenomena of local translations.²⁵

Neither Walls nor Katongole tries to fit faith into a neat ecclesiastical box, instead allowing concrete ecclesial communities (as opposed to abstract concepts on the church) to animate a wider conversation involving the social imagination and theological renewal. In other words, for Walls and Katongole much more is at work than a “comparative ecclesiology.”²⁶ While comparative ecclesiology implies that churches learn about each other simply for the purpose of maintaining a kind of enlightened tolerance of each other’s traditions – a dynamic that could well leave cultural and theological divisions intact – Walls and Katongole emphasize mutuality, growth, Catholicity and communion.

²³ Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996), 2.

²⁴ Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process*, 69.

²⁵ James L. Cox, *A Guide to the Phenomenology of Religion: Key Figures, Formative Influences and Subsequent Debates* (London: Continuum, 2006), 153-159, describes Walls as a phenomenologist of religion.

²⁶ Nicholas M. Healy, ““By the Working of the Holy Spirit””: The Crisis of Authority in the Christian Churches,” *Anglican Theological Review* 88:1 (2006): 13.

Surely this approach has relevance for New York City. Differences can lead to divergence, but in recognizing differences there is a true opening for growth.²⁷ In New York City, with its many churches from around the world and a diversity of itineraries, experiences, practices and beliefs, there is the possibility of new theological conversations, breakthroughs, and constructions. Because none of us can reach Christ's completeness without one another, there is a great need for reading the Scriptures together, for praying together, and celebrating a common faith in Jesus. This is how the gifts of African Christianity might be received.

GIFTS AND CHALLENGES

The strengthening of the catholic community comes from the resources of the gospel. As Emmanuel Katongole emphasizes, such resources are drawn from ecclesial communities that live and imagine the gospel; they come from lives dedicated to God and dependent upon the Spirit.²⁸ Accordingly, I now ask: what do the particular stories, people, and leaders of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York, the Church of the Lord (Aladura), and the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn offer to enrich the life to the churches of the West? In Christian theology, led by the Spirit, every gift from God is to be shared with others in Jesus' name. Building on the sacramental character of Catholicity and the theology of Ephesians, I speak of gifts to be given and received.²⁹

A first gift of African Christianity in New York City is that it offers a living witness to the church as a global community. African churches can help churches of the West see themselves as but one member of a global body, and in a post 9/11 world, this has fresh importance. African churches can help the West situate itself as belonging to a transnational body. Herein lies the task of learning a new narrative, and

²⁷ John Howard Yoder, "On Christian Unity: The Way from Below," *Pro Ecclesia* 9:2 (2000): 178-179.

²⁸ Emmanuel M. Katongole, "Prospects of Ecclesia in Africa in the Twenty-First Century," *Logos* 4:1 (2001): 193, and Emmanuel M. Katongole, *A Future for Africa: Critical Essays in Christian Social Imagination*, Scranton: Scranton University Press, 2005).

²⁹ Emmanuel Katongole, "The Tales of African Christianity: Singing a New Song in the Midst of Africa's Histories," unpublished paper, 2005.

unlearning a politically dominant one.³⁰ With this, Christian faith can come more in line with its interdependencies than being defined by borders.

A second gift of African Christian faith is that it highlights an embodied over an intellectualistic version of Christianity. In *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor sees this as a real difference in understanding the various Christian encounters with modernity.³¹ For Taylor, “official Christianity has gone through what we can call an “excarnation,” a transfer out of embodied, “enfleshed” forms of religious life, to those which are more “in the head.”³² Taylor goes on to emphasize, “The issue here is not how many positive invocations of the body we hear....The issue is whether our relation to the highest – God for believers...is mediated in bodily form.”³³ African Christianity offers a more holistic and connected spirituality, grounded in a more complex understanding of the human plight and the reversal of evil. With this view of the person and emphasis on healing, African Christianity may well contribute to a greater dialogue between the natural sciences and theology.

A third gift of African Christianity in New York is the “life-giving Spirit,” to use Jürgen Moltmann’s phrase.³⁴ From the perspective of early Christianity, Wayne Meeks provides an intriguing perspective:

If one engages in ritualized occasions in which neighbors fall into trance and prophesy; if while the whole group joins in a rhythmic chant, others begin to speak in ecstasy but unintelligibly; if elders lay hands on sick persons and declare them healed; if stories of other miracles are recited; then unless one has the sceptical defenses of an ancient Lucian or a modern academic, one’s moral world as well as one’s imaginative world will very likely be affected.³⁵

³⁰ Katongole, *A Future for Africa*.

³¹ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2007), 71, 554.

³² *Ibid.*, 554.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992).

³⁵ Wayne A. Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality: The First Two Centuries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 101.

Through the name of Jesus, African Christians believe the Spirit brings forth new birth, heals the sick, makes days new, conquers the past, casts out evil spirits, answers prayers, and raises to new life.

Western theology, suspicious of religious experience, should give serious consideration to the experience of God in the life giving Spirit. Here I think Moltmann especially offers a theological bridge between ecclesiastical traditions, but relationships and shared worship are even more necessary. Theologians such as Amos Yong and J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu may also be important in opening up new horizons.³⁶ Ogbu Kalu's *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* also points in this direction.³⁷ Along these lines, the lengthy worship services of African churches may be difficult for western Christians to understand and participate in, but if theological works can be lengthy because "theological praise of the eternally bounteous God is never-ending,"³⁸ I think African Christians would say the same applies to worship.

A fourth gift of African Christianity in New York is a lens for reframing the immigration debate in the United States.³⁹ As I write this, immigration has been a topic of much public debate and discussion, much of it acerbic. African churches make the debate concrete, breaking the conversation away from the abstract. At the very least, African immigrants can remind America that each of us is part of an immigrant story. Moreover, great appreciation should be given for the economic and social energy immigrants bring to New York City.⁴⁰ Without drawing attention to

³⁶ Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005). See also Kirsteen Kim, *The Holy Spirit in the World: A Global Conversation* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2007).

³⁷ Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 288.

³⁸ Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*, translated by Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 14.

³⁹For an excellent discussion, see Manuel Vásquez, "Dispatches from the Borderlands: The Immigration Impasse: How Did We Get Here," online at <http://www.religiondispatches.org/Gui/Content.aspx?Page=AR&Id=92&SP=1> (accessed on February 27, 2008).

⁴⁰ Fiscal Policy Institute, "Working for a Better Life: A Profile of Immigrants in the New York State Economy," 2007, available at http://www.fiscalpolicy.org/publications2007/FPI_ImmReport_WorkingforaBetterLife.pdf.

themselves or taking credit, immigrants are at the forefront of renewing neighborhoods throughout the city. All of this should be recognized. Diversity and chain migration should be advocated for in any new legislation. It is also a story that could lead to a recovery of Christian thought and language in the areas of the immigrant, the stranger, hospitality, and justice.

A fifth gift of African Christianity in New York is that it shows all theology to be translation.⁴¹ “Theology” is not what is done in the West while other communities have “contextual theologies.” Rather all theology is “contextual,” and the theologies of the West’s theology are no exception. N. T. Wright, the Bishop of Durham, offers an example of this. Recently he has offered a popular summary of what it means to be “simply Christian,” an introduction to a Christianity that “belongs to all.”⁴² While any definition of the gospel will comprise some universal or constant elements around the story of Jesus and salvation, as Wright emphasizes, every Christian community displays in their reading of the gospel a response to contextual questions, spiritual struggles, and their life world.⁴³ Although he doesn’t present his argument as such, Wright is reflecting the apologetic concerns facing the church in western culture, and his work would have a different impact read in other cultural and social settings. Christian faith “makes sense” to African Christians for reasons different than they do for Wright.

As Lamin Sanneh forcefully insists, “The relationship of the Christian movement to culture was shaped by the fact that Christianity is a translated - and a translating - religion, and a translated Christianity is an interpreted Christianity, pure and simple.

⁴¹ For a striking explication of the experience of Christ as an individual and communally forming activity see Hendrikus Boers, *Christ in the Letters of Paul: In Place of Christology* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006). Further comparison of this view to the proposals of Walls would be constructive.

⁴² N. T. Wright, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense* (New York: Harper Sanfrancisco, 2006). I am not questioning Wright’s project but drawing attention to its contextual character.

⁴³ The approach of Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004) appears to be deeply influenced by Walls. See their argument on pages 32-33 in particular.

“Original” Christianity is nothing more than a construction.”⁴⁴ In the West Christianity’s interaction with culture is largely unperceived, and what is provisional at best is enshrined as a canon of beliefs and practices. African Christianity in New York can help us see that all theology is interwoven with culture, both as captive to culture in a positive sense and as a potential redeemer of culture.⁴⁵ The churches of the West can grow from the guidance of “Jesus of Africa,” as Diane Stinton has shown.⁴⁶

A sixth gift of African Christians in New York is that through their involvement in the economy and social fabric of New York City they are giving witness to God’s peace for the city.⁴⁷ As several scholars have recently contended, exile functions not as an exception in Jewish and Christian traditions, but instead provides normative direction for a faithful mode of social existence.⁴⁸ African Christians in New York model the Jeremiah paradigm, which urges the people of God in exile to “seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it has peace, you too will have peace.”⁴⁹ Multiple approaches to faith and citizenship are part of the demand of this model; there is no single right way to engage culture. Here diaspora is not as much a mission as the mission itself.⁵⁰ No city is ever finished, but the African Christians who live in it, walk in it,

⁴⁴ Lamin Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations: Pillars of World Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 25.

⁴⁵ Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, 3-15.

⁴⁶ Diane B. Stinton, *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christology* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004).

⁴⁷ Here once again I have great appreciation for the argument of John Howard Yoder in *As You Go: The Old Mission in a New Day* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1961).

⁴⁸ Jonathan Boyarin and Daniel Boyarin, *Powers of Diaspora: Two Essays on the Relevance of Jewish Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Themes* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002); John Howard Yoder, *For the Nations: Essays Public and Evangelical* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 51-78.

⁴⁹ Jeremiah 29:7.

⁵⁰ Yoder, *For the Nations*, 51-78.

travel its subways, raise their families in it, and contribute to its economic life are ever renewing New York City.⁵¹

It is not my place to seek to in any way to correct, reformulate, or supplement the theology and practice of African churches of New York, but to listen and learn. Still, from time to time members and leaders in the three churches expressed a desire to hear from me any potentially critical observations or questions that arose during my research. So in a spirit of mutuality, I offer some areas for further exploration on the part of the churches.

A first area for exploration is the relationship between power and service, the resurrection and the cross. How does spiritual power come to express itself in self-giving love for the other? Is there a place for weakness, vulnerability, and struggle? A theological emphasis on the resurrection produces a powerful way of being in the world, yet there can be a lack of vulnerability among members. J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu thinks that in the case of barrenness, the cross could add empathy to the Pentecostal movement in Ghana.⁵² What would happen if the dynamism of resurrection power also brought a pastoral theology of the cross to bear on personal struggle and suffering? Such a combination of the self-giving of the cross with the renewal of the resurrection could provide a new theological paradigm. Of course, the cross is a form of power, the power of costly self-giving. Power and its relationship to service will also influence models of church leadership. Spiritual authority and the ways of negotiating difference can impact church life.⁵³

A second area for exploration is the relationship between healing and social justice. What would happen if the African churches such as the Church of the Lord

⁵¹ Michael de Certeau, "Walking in the City," in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 91-110.

⁵² J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "'Broken Calabashes and Covenants of Fruitfulness': Cursing Barrenness in Contemporary African Christianity," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 37:4 (2007): 458.

⁵³ For larger concerns in this area, see Emmanuel Katongole, "Kannungu and the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God in Uganda: A Challenge for Christian Social Imagination," *Logos* 6:3 (2003): 108-143.

(Aladura), the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, and the Redeemed Christian Church of God added to their role in healing an equal commitment to health and economic equity?⁵⁴ Could the salvation of human beings and the spiritual empowerment of the gospel also lead to a broader commitment to economic and social justice for Africa? What if they embraced personal holiness and the United Nations Millennium Development Goals for ending poverty? Could the churches also speak to the groaning of creation in this time of ecological crisis that is hitting Africa's poor and vulnerable with such force?

A third area for exploration is the relationship between new African immigrants and African Americans. In the crucible of scarce housing and jobs in Harlem, there can be a distance and even tension between these two communities. That this is ultimately the direct result of America's legacy of racism should not be lost. In Harlem and elsewhere there are stereotypes that prevent relationships and friendships. What is required is bridge building, and a good place to start can be at the church level.

There is much to celebrate and learn from the gifts of African Christianity, and I think over time that much more is to come. Presently, New York City stands between recent waves of gentrification and an economic crisis. Yet the borderlands of Harlem, Brooklyn and the Bronx, along with Queens and Staten Island, may well be the most fertile of ground for the growth of faith. In the manifestation of the Spirit across borders, there is vitality and a sense of eternal life in daily life. In the men and women who bear the gospel, there is integrity, commitment, and sacrifice. Empowered by the Spirit, they offer holy lives dedicated unto God in the space of the global city. Like in the Old Testament, the common life and commitments of the people of God can be a light among the nations.⁵⁵ In so many ways, the three churches are on the cutting edge of urban ministry in the twenty-first century.

⁵⁴ Afe Adogame, "HIV/AIDS Support and African Pentecostalism: The Case of the Redeemed Christian Church of God," *Journal of Health Psychology* 12:3 (2007): 475-484.

⁵⁵ James Chukwuma Okoye, *Israel Among the Nations: A Mission Theology of the Old Testament* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2006), 129-143. This is of course also a theme found in the New Testament, but it rests on the Old Testament.

Perhaps the place to end is where we began, with a return to the metaphor of the Word made global. Running through John's gospel are a series of themes: the experience of the Spirit through the gift of Jesus, the centrality of new life in God, an assumption of Christ's extension to all of creation, and the expectation that wonders are yet to be performed by every disciple.⁵⁶ In John's gospel, the resurrection story of Jesus continues in the presence of communities that, having encountered the one who is risen, rise up to new lives of forgiveness, hope, sharing, and witnessing. It is through the community of those touched by the power of God that the Spirit is encountered.⁵⁷ The Word still made flesh is found in communities that testify to the power of the risen Christ.

The stories of the Church of the Lord (Aladura), Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York, and Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn show how faith in the Lord Jesus Christ has travelled with them from Monrovia, Accra, and Lagos. Each ecclesial narrative is a unique rehearsing of the gospel, but all three point to an energizing vision and experience of God in the global world. If Christian faith requires witnesses before reasons, testimonies of resurrection life before arguments, then the truth of the gospel is in evidence.

I began this study wanting to learn about African Christianity, New York City, and the two together. This I hopefully accomplished. In the pilgrimages of faith, struggle, and joy found in the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York, the Church of the Lord (Aladura), and Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn along with the scores of other African communities of faith present in New York City, I also found an opening for a fresh encounter with the Word made flesh.

⁵⁶ In addition to John 1:14, see John 1:1 with its correlation to Genesis 1:1 and creation, John 14:12 with its expectation that "you will do greater things," the promise of the Spirit in John 16:7. Jesus is interpreted as the Word made flesh and then transferred to the Spirit dwelling in flesh. On the Spirit in John's prologue, see David F. Ford, *Christian Wisdom: Desiring God and Learning in Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 53-56.

⁵⁷ For these reflections, focused on John 20-21, I am indebted to Harold W. Attridge, "Resurrection in the Fourth Gospel," unpublished paper, SNTS Johannine Literature Seminar, Aberdeen, 2006. I thank Skip Masback for sharing this paper with me.

In a global world of “uncertainty and instability,” African churches point to dependence upon God and the risks of faith.⁵⁸ But while gifts can be offered, to receive them requires another journey.

⁵⁸ For a crucial analysis but a different response, see Mark C. Taylor, *After God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

AFTERWORD

THE WORD KEEPS MOVING

Change is the only constant of life in a globalizing world. This thought comes to mind on Sunday June 24, 2007, Nimi and Wapemi Wariboko's last Sunday as pastors of the Brooklyn parish they had poured their lives into for nearly a decade. With his PhD from Princeton Theological Seminary in hand, Nimi accepted a full-time academic position in ethics at Andover-Newton Theological Seminary in Boston. They were moving in a few weeks, a life built in New York uprooted for new opportunities.

Ever the business school graduate, Pastor Nimi put a succession plan in place before making an announcement to the church. The first person he informed was the Redeemed Christian Church of God North American Chairman, James Fadele, and then the workers. Nimi wanted the new pastor to succeed, for the church to realize it was at "the beginning of the beginning." In a religious environment where pastoral departures often represent divisions, he was determined to be different. When internal choices turned down the position, Fadele selected Pastor Dolapo Osinfade. A pastor of a Staten Island branch of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Pastor Dolapo had been in New York City for three years.

The Wariboko's final Sunday was an anointing service, and it seemed that the teaching, singing, preaching, praying, and testifying stayed decibels above any other service. Shifting from the sermon to a season of anointing, Pastor Nimi summoned people forward - those in need of fruit of the womb, those starting a business, and people in need of the gift of prophecy and wisdom. Person by person he laid hands on and prayed for them, some swooning in the Spirit, others simply returning to their

seats. Pastor Nimi was not leaving them behind, but empowering them to go the “next level” empowered by the Spirit.

In a few weeks, the church would have a formal send-off for the Waribokos. And in the coming months, Segun and Bola Oyesanya, two workers who were an integral part of the church since near the beginning, would leave and become involved in a Redeemed branch on Staten Island. But today beneath the shadows of the wide brimmed hats of the women were hidden many a tear-stained face. When Wapemi Wariboko stood before the congregation, she brought the new pastor’s two sons forward and asked the church to make a place for them, just like they did for her family. Her voice barely held together. “We are family,” she stated simply. The room was painfully silent except for the sound of crying.



Fig. A Pastor Dolapo Osinfade receiving the Spirit of leadership, Pastor Nimi Wariboko’s last service in Brooklyn. 2007

The concluding act of Pastor Nimi’s final service as pastor was not a charge or public word to his successor. Instead, as Pastor Dolapo lay on the floor of the sanctuary, arms open before both God and the congregation, Pastor Nimi passed on what he called the “flow,” transferring the Spirit and passing on the mantle of leadership.

Herein is an image that captures African Christianity in a global world. Just as the Spirit “flows” from one pastor to another, so does the Word keeps moving, a global migration of the Spirit that started on the streets of Lagos and moves through global urban networks to the streets of Brooklyn.

The work of Redeemed in Brooklyn carries on in new ways. Saturday mornings an evangelism team goes out in the neighborhood, knocking on doors and meeting new people with whom to share the gospel. The result, Sister Catherine reports, is new church members, and not just Nigerian, but Haitian and West Indian. The building they rent is still for sale, and with faith, prayer, and every dollar they can put together, they expect one day to purchase it, or something better.

In July 2007 the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York traded the pews of the Mount Morris Church for the folding chairs of their new building. In the beautifully retrofitted gym, basketball hoops are now joined with colorful fabrics that wave across the room. Present to inaugurate the sanctuary is the Catechist Abboa-Offei. His sermon challenges people to deeper commitment to Christ. Healing is once again part of his visit, in public and in special consultations.

With their own space for Sunday worship, even with three flights of stairs to walk, attendance increases. Rex Agyemang and the youth are no longer in the basement, meeting instead on the second floor, a major improvement. Community is building, and Rex urges the youth along on their Christian walk.

With joy and compassion, Rev. Asiedu faithfully carries out his ministry. His office remains always open, his mobile phone ready to receive a call for prayer and assistance at any time of the day or night. Trips to Ghana continue, of course, as the ministry spans borders. People are being healed and helped on their journeys of

faith, and the message of Jesus and grace is proclaimed. Through prayer and mutual support, the church family continues to care for one another.

Nearly everyone was present for the final day of the Tabborarr festival on August 22, 2007. Mother Cooper, Minister Joy, Evangelist Sarah, Evangelist Eleanor, Edwin Flowers, and David Grigsby were all there. Water was blessed, Tabborarr blessings recounted, and testimonies offered. In the past year, God has blessed. “No limbs” were lost, and “no deaths” to mourn in the year that passed. God’s Tabborarr blessings had brought everyone through.

During the past year, Evangelist Eleanor had been through a lengthy surgery on her back that left her learning to walk once again. To everyone’s delight, she was at the service, helped from a wheelchair to her seat. As strong prayers were proclaimed for her to be able to walk, with the help of her church family she struggled through a first step. Great thanksgivings to God were shouted. Prayer and community would be Eleanor’s help and healing. People came for healing but more importantly this evening they shared in providing healing for one of their own.

Mother Cooper still maintains a frequent travel schedule between the Bronx and Monrovia, bringing with her clothes, school supplies, and enough funding to keep a new building under construction. She plans to dedicate the building in 2010, coinciding with Church of the Lord (Aladura) assembly meeting planned for Monrovia. For Mother Cooper, this will draw her two life passions together.

The power of the Spirit is embodied in the faithful - Presbyterian, Aladura, and Pentecostal; this is the tradition of African Christianity moving through the twenty-first century. Imprinted upon the African churches of New York City is the story of

salvation, the born again bodies of saints resisting the powers and struggling for life. They are praising Jesus, healing the sick, and preaching the gospel in the global city. Everything is in motion, the word keeps moving, and you never know where it's going to land next.¹

¹ Portions of this sentence are from Bruce Cockburn, "The Gift."

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When I began this project, I had no idea how it was going to turn out. At the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York, the Church of the Lord (Aladura), and the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn, I met not just partners or facilitators in my research, but people who became friends. For their openness in allowing me to tell their stories, for encouragement, for patience in answering questions, and ultimately trust, I am profoundly grateful.

While I cannot here recognize everyone who answered a question, offered me assistance, or shared a story, in particular I want to acknowledge a number of individuals in each church without whom I could not have completed this project.

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It was a brief meeting with Primate Rufus Ositelu of the Church of the Lord (Aladura) in Germany that led to my first contact with Mother Cooper and the church in the Bronx. Mother Cooper spent many hours sharing with me her personal story and life in the Church of the Lord (Aladura). My immense gratitude is also extended to Minister Joy, Evangelist Sarah, Evangelist Eleanor, David Grigsby, David Rquarm, Edwin Flowers, and of course Alana.

To this day, I do not know who at the church answered my first telephone call in the quest for directions, but I was welcomed from that moment forward at the Redeemed Christian Church of God International Chapel, Brooklyn. My profound thanks go most certainly to Nimi and Wapemi Wariboko. During our frequent conversations, by telephone and e-mail, Pastor Nimi helped me to think in new ways about theology and faith. He is a pastor and a professor! Thank you also to Segun and Bola Oyesanya, Sister West, Sister Catherine, James and Egbefun Adieze, Matilda Oyeyemi, Emmanuel and Omo Obogbaimhe, and Justin Emineke for encouraging me on my way and teaching me so much. Thanks to Pastor Dolapo Osinfade for continuing to welcome me into the church. Pastor Adebisi answered many a last minute question.

A better supervisor than Dr. T. Jack Thompson I could not imagine. His interest in and support of my project were obvious from the start, and I always left my meetings with him thankful for his insights and direction. Without his guidance, this project would not have been possible. She may not remember, but Phyllis Thompson taught me how to dance in Scotland.

I am a student of African Christianity because of Andrew Walls. It is safe to say that Professor Walls has caused me to look afresh at religion and Christianity, richly influencing my vocational calling. This work is one more testimony to his ability to inspire scholarship across borders. I'm grateful to Doreen Walls for her many kindnesses.

The Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World has been the ideal setting for this project. Indeed, I can think of no other place to have based such a project. I would like to give special thanks to then Director David Kerr for accepting me into the program, Elizabeth Koepping for encouragement, and Margaret Acton for invaluable research help at the Centre. While at the Centre, I want to thank fellow students Lazarus Phiri, Janice Mclean, and Martin Lunde for adding to the joy of my studies.

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While in Edinburgh, we found ourselves welcomed and cared for in a community of faith called St. John’s Episcopal Church. To Bishop Peter and Dee Price for suggesting we first visit and of course much more, our family is in their debt. Leslie Hodgson first opened the door for us, and Peter and Sheelagh Brand helped us in ways we will never forget. That we gained John and Clare Armes as friends is reason enough to have lived in Edinburgh. They generously made a home for me whenever needed. I will never forget the celebration they provided for me following my viva.

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To all the students who are part of the City Seminary community, I thank you for what you are continually teaching me. A “thumbs up” to my fellow pilgrims of “Cohort 1” who have been part of this from the beginning - Maria, Phil, Eric, Debbie, Laura, Ryan, Hansen, Roger, Carol, Tony W., Alan, Tak, Tony S, and Tony R.

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When this project became a possibility, in a spirit of global adventure Rita said, “Go for it!” Needless to say, I am grateful she said yes, even though it has not always been easy for her. In marriage, we trust in God and in the end can find the most amazing birth of a new story. I know this from Rita. Her vocation brings healing to many lives, and mine. So as always, this and everything is shared with Rita, whose radical love embraces me just as does Christ’s love.

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SOURCES

INTERVIEWS

Name	Church	Office/ Title	Date
Jimmy Addo	PCG	Choir President	August 13, 2006
Ademola Adeabenro	RCCG	Member	June 5, 2005
Wale Adebo	RCCG	Member	April 10, 2005
Solomon Adelaja	Celestial Church of Christ	Senior Evangelist, New York Branch	March 12, 2006
Egbefun Adieze	RCCG MSG	Deaconness, Founding Member, RCCG New York City	July 16, 2005
Jimmy Ado	PCG	Choir President	August 13, 2006
Kwame Adom	PCG	Member	September 1, 2007
Nana A. Afwireng	PCG	Choir Member	August 13, 2006
Kwasi “K.B” Agyare	PCG	Bible Study and Prayer Group	July 30, 2004
Rex Agyemang	PCG	Youth Pastor	August 15, 2004 August 14, 2005 May 31, 2006 August 29, 2006
Julie Agyemang-Du[o]ah	PCG	Member	August 21, 2005 November 25, 2007
Angelena Akiwumi	PCG	Women’s Fellowship Bible Study and Prayer, Elder	August 20, 2004
Dave Francis Ali	Diocese of Brooklyn	Assistant Director, Migration Office	August 4, 2006
George Kofi Amankwah	PCG	Member	August 21, 2005
Isaac Amissah	PCG	Session Youth Representative	August 14, 2005
Apostle Amonah	Church of Pentecost	Leader	April 14, 2004
Amma Amponsah	PCG	Member	August 7, 2005

Oheneba Amponsah	PCG	Member	August 14, 2005
Prince Asante	PCG	Member	August 6, 2006
Ebenezer Asare	PCG	Member	August 21, 2005
*Kwame Asare [Pseudonym]	PCG	Member	August 5, 2005
Samuel Asare	PCG	Member and team mission, Catechist Abboa-Offei	October 27, 2005 December 13, 2006 December 14, 2006
Mindy Asiedu	PCG	Member, Youth Program	August 14, 2005
Yaw Asiedu	PCG	Pastor	March 9, 2004 April 18, 2004 July 16, 2005 August 9, 2005 November 8, 2005 December 6, 2006 September 13, 2007
Seth Atakora	PCG	PCG Bronx Leader, Ebenezer	April 18, 2004
Benjamin Ayeh	Apostolic Church International	Member	August 27, 2006
Moses Biney "Bisolani, Sis." (pseudonym)	PCG	OMF Director	June 10, 2005 June 5, 2005
George Asbe Boafu	PCG	OMF Meeting	October 23, 2004
Eleanor Campbell	CLA Bronx	Evangelist	December 12, 2004
Ossai Chegwe	RCCG	Worker	May 1, 2005
Harold Clarke	CLA	Member	October 21, 2007
Joy Cooper	CLA	Minister	January 16, 2005
Marie (Mother) Cooper	CLA Bronx	Founder and Leader	September 30, 2004 October 17, 2004 December 12, 2004 February 13, 2005 March 13, 2005 May 12, 2005 June 23, 2005 January 12, 2006 October 21, 2007

			February 13, 2008
Rakiya Dada	RCCG	Member	August 11, 2004
Nana Darko	PCG	Catechist in Ghana	August 13, 2004
Daniel Diakanwa	Congolese Church	Pastor	February 15, 2008
Olumuyiwa Durodola	RCCG at MSG		July 16, 2005
Prince Edosa	RCCG	Member	May 29, 2005
Justin Emineke	RCCG	Member, Worker	October 19, 2003 October 10, 2004
Nosa Evbuomwan	Texas RCCG		July 16, 2005
James O. Fadele	RCCG	Chairman, North America Board of Coordinators	March 21, 2004
Grace Fakeye	RCCG	Minister	April 10, 2005
Edwin Flowers	CLA	Member	November 28, 2004 October 21, 2007
David Grigsby	CLA	Member	March 13, 2005 October 21, 2007
Eric Gyasu	PCG	Member	August 29, 2004 August 6, 2006
Kwabena Gyasi	PCG	Member	August 19, 2005
Tobias Haller	St. James Episcopal Church	Pastor	March 14, 2008
Dorcas Idemudia	RCCG	Member	April 10, 2005
Tolashe Jaiyeoba	RCCG	Member	April 17, 2005
Olubunmi (Elizabeth) Kadiri	RCCG	Worker	April 17, 2005 June 22, 2005
Emmanuel Katongole	Duke Divinity School		November 19, 2004
Alfred Kissiedo	PCG	Member	July 31, 2005
John Lachana	CLA	Archdeacon, Rep of Primate based in Atlanta	August 27, 2004
Opanin Kwabena Mensah	PCG	Member	August 14, 2005
Elsie Obed	Lillies	Evangelist, RCCG	April 14, 2007

	International	Missionary to North America	
Olu (Olusegun) Obed	Dayspring Church	Pastor, RCCG Missionary to North America	Feb 18, 2004
Emmanuel Obo	RCCG	Member	April 10, 2005
Omo Obogbaimhe	RCCG	Choir, Worker	May 22, 2005
Catherine (Idusuyi) Obohidusuyo	RCCG	Minister	July 14, 2004 June 22, 2005
Agatha Ofori-Mankata	PCG 123	Member	Oct 27, 2005
Lona Ojedapo	RCCG	Worker	May 29, 2005
Bola Olalade	RCCG	Member	June 5, 2005
Kola Olaleye	RCCG	Member	April 10, 2005
Tunde Olaose	RCCG	Musician, Member	June 5, 2005
Olesegun Olowolabi	MFM		February 19, 2006
Olakunle Onaleye	Living Faith Church Worldwide aka Winners Chapel	Pastor	December 31, 2006
Michael Onyeri	RCCG	Member, Worker	October 15, 2003 October 14, 2007
Rufus Ositelu	CLA	Primate	October 8, 2006
Diana Owusu	PCG	Member, Bible Study and Prayer Group	July 20, 2007 March 4, 2008
Kwaku Owusu	Lighthouse Chapel	Manhattan Branch Ministry Leader	June 25, 2006
Segun Oyesanya	RCCG	Deacon	June 11, 2006
Matilda Oyeyemi	RCCG	Minister	January 30, 2004 June 5, 2004 June 22, 2005 February 12, 2008
Adebisi Oyesile	RCCG Brooklyn	Minister	April 3, 2005 September 3, 2006 January 19, 2008 February 11, 2008 March 13, 2008
Samuel Prempeh	PCG Ghana	Moderator of the General Assembly	October 24, 2004

		(Bronx)	
Sarah Richards	CLA Bronx	Evangelist	December 12, 2004
David Rquarm	CLA Bronx	Deacon	December 19, 2004
Bisola Rotimi-Omodehin	RCCG	Worker/minister	August 25, 2004 April 17, 2005
Sandra Ukoh	RCCG	Member	Sept 1, 2004
Austin Umanmielen	RCCG	Member	April 17, 2005
Nimi Wariboko	RCCG	Pastor	August 25, 2004 November 15, 2006
Wapemi Wariboko	RCCG	Assistant Pastor	May 29, 2005
Sister West-Erhaber	RCCG	Minister	December 7, 2005 February 16, 2006

FOCUS GROUPS

Redeemed Christian of God International Chapel, Brooklyn Youth – October 14, 2007

Name

Kimberly Jean Baptiste

Lashe Davies

Idowu

Nita Idusuyi

Bola Ogungbuyi

Cyril Osinfade

Sena West-Erhabor

Stephanie West-Erhabor

Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York Youth – December 2, 2007

Name

Abena

Abby

Barbara

Debora

Eleanora

Ernest

Fanny
Gifty
Kevin
Kofi
Mimi
Papa
Phyllis
Rosemary
Samuel
Selonma

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Nimi Wariboko, E-mail Correspondence with Author, June 1, 2007.

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Correspondence from Rev. C. B. Ahwireng to Rev. Moses Biney, April 13, 2005

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Survey Data on African Churches in New York City

Church	Primary Country of Origin	Borough
Abundant Life Christian Ministries Worldwide (Abundant Life Christian Center)		
<i>Victory Center</i>	Nigeria	Bronx
<i>Winners House</i>	Nigeria	Brooklyn
Alive Chapel International	Ghana	Bronx
Apostolic Church International		
<i>161st Street</i>	Ghana	Bronx
<i>Brooklyn</i>	Ghana	Brooklyn
<i>Queens</i>	Ghana	Queens
<i>White Plains Road</i>	Ghana	Bronx
Bethel Ethiopian Evangelical Church	Ethiopia	Manhattan
Bethel Outreach	Liberia	Staten Island
Calvary First Nigerian Seventh Day Adventist Church	Nigeria	Brooklyn
Celestial Church of Christ		
<i>Calvary Parish</i>	Nigeria	Queens
<i>Coney Island Parish</i>	Nigeria	Brooklyn
<i>Illeri Oluwa Parish</i>	Nigeria	Brooklyn
<i>New York Parish</i>	Nigeria	Brooklyn
<i>Promise Land Parish</i>	Nigeria	Brooklyn
<i>Queens Parish</i>	Nigeria	Queens
<i>Rock of Ages</i>	Nigeria	Queens
<i>Staten Island Parish</i>	Nigeria	Staten Island
<i>Thy Will Be Done</i>	Nigeria	Brooklyn
<i>Winners Parish</i>	Nigeria	Brooklyn
Cherubim & Seraphim Movement Church (The Holy Order Of)		
<i>#1 - Radde Place</i>	Nigeria	Brooklyn
<i>#2 - Rockaway Avenue</i>	Nigeria	Brooklyn
<i>#3 - Glory Star</i>	Nigeria	Bronx
<i>#4 - Ogo-Oluwa</i>	Nigeria	Brooklyn
<i>#5 - Church of Jesus Christ</i>	Nigeria	Bronx
Christ Apostolic Church		
<i>Agbala-Itura, International Miracle Center</i>	Nigeria	Brooklyn
<i>First in the Americas</i>	Nigeria	Brooklyn

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Christ Apostolic Church of America (W.O.S.E.M.)	Nigeria	Queens
Christ Assembly Lutheran Church	Liberia	Staten Island
Christ Deliverance and Healing Ministries	Nigeria	Brooklyn
Christ Life Ministries Worldwide - Uncommon Champion's Cathedral	Nigeria	Brooklyn
Christ Memorial Christian Church	Liberia	Staten Island
Christ Pentecostal International Church	Nigeria	Bronx
Church of Pentecost		
<i>Bronx Assembly</i>	Ghana	Bronx
<i>Brooklyn Assembly</i>	Ghana	Brooklyn
<i>International Worship Center (Harlem)</i>	Ghana	Manhattan
<i>Queens Assembly</i>	Ghana	Queens
<i>Staten Island Assembly</i>	Ghana	Staten Island
Church of the Lord Aladura		
<i>Bronx</i>	Liberia	Bronx
<i>Brooklyn</i>	Nigeria	Brooklyn
Dayspring Glory Ministries	Ghana	Bronx
Deeper Life Bible Church		
<i>Bronx</i>	Nigeria	Bronx
<i>Brooklyn</i>	Nigeria	Brooklyn
<i>Queens</i>	Nigeria	Queens
<i>Staten Island</i>	Nigeria	Staten Island
Diocese of Brooklyn (Brooklyn, Queens)		
<i>Ghanaian Apostolate/ St. Benedict the Moor</i>	Ghana	Brooklyn
<i>Ghanaian Apostolate/ St. Catherine of Genoa</i>	Ghana	Brooklyn
<i>St. Fortunata</i>	Nigeria	Brooklyn
<i>St. Paul</i>	Nigeria	Brooklyn
<i>St. Stanislaus Bishop and Martyr</i>	Nigeria	Queens
<i>St. Xavier</i>	Nigeria	Brooklyn
Diocese of New York (Bronx, Manhattan, Staten Island)		
<i>Angela Merici Parish</i>	Nigeria	Bronx
<i>Ghanaian Catholic Community of Christ the King</i>	Ghana	Bronx
<i>St. Margaret Mary Parish</i>	Ghana	Bronx
Eglise Evangelique "Amour Du Christ" C&MA	Congo	Manhattan
Emmanuel Worship Center/ Ethiopian Evangelical	Ethiopia	Bronx

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Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church	Ethiopia	Bronx
<i>Holy Trinity</i>	Ethiopia	Manhattan
<i>Medhane Alem</i>	Ethiopia	Manhattan
<i>St. Mary of Zion</i>	Ghana	Bronx
First Ghana Seventh Day Adventist	Liberia	Staten Island
First United Christian Church	Congo	Manhattan
French Ministry of Lexington Avenue United Methodist	Liberia	Queens
Gethsemane House of Prayer	Ghana	Brooklyn
Ghana Wesley United Methodist Church	Ghana	Brooklyn
Ghanaian Reformed Presbyterian Church of Brooklyn	Ghana	Brooklyn
Hill of the Lord Ministries Glory Temple	Ghana	Brooklyn
International Central Gospel Church	Nigeria	Bronx
Light of God International Miracle Center	Nigeria	Brooklyn
Lighthouse Chapel International	Nigeria	Brooklyn
<i>Bronx</i>	Ghana	Bronx
<i>Bronx (Akan)</i>	Ghana	Bronx
<i>Brooklyn</i>	Ghana	Brooklyn
<i>Manhattan</i>	Ghana	Manhattan
<i>Queens</i>	Ghana	Queens
Living Faith Church (Winners' Chapel)	Nigeria	Queens
Mountain of Fire & Miracles Ministries	Nigeria	Queens
<i>Bronx</i>	Nigeria	Queens
<i>Brooklyn</i>	Nigeria	Staten Island
<i>Queens</i>	Nigeria	Staten Island
<i>Staten Island</i>	Nigeria	Staten Island
Presbyterian Church of Ghana	Ghana	Bronx
<i>Bronx</i>	Ghana	Manhattan
<i>Harlem</i>	Nigeria	Brooklyn
Redeemed Christian Church of God	Nigeria	Brooklyn
<i>Chapel of Hope</i>	Nigeria	Brooklyn
<i>Chapel of Love</i>	Nigeria	Brooklyn
<i>Chapel of Praise</i>	Nigeria	Bronx
<i>Chapel of Restoration</i>	Nigeria	Staten Island
<i>Covenant Chapel (Castleton Ave)</i>	Nigeria	Staten Island

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Covenant Chapel (Cebra Ave)	Nigeria	Staten Island
Destiny Sanctuary For All Nations	Nigeria	Queens
Divine Restoration Chapel (East Elmhurst)	Nigeria	Queens
Divine Restoration Chapel (Elmhurst)	Nigeria	Queens
Freedom Court	Nigeria	Staten Island
House of Prayer	Nigeria	Manhattan
International Chapel Brooklyn	Nigeria	Brooklyn
International Chapel Coney Island	Nigeria	Brooklyn
International Chapel East New York	Nigeria	Brooklyn
International Chapel Queens	Nigeria	Queens
International Chapel Roosevelt Island	Nigeria	Roosevelt Island
Rehoboth Chapel	Nigeria	Brooklyn
Restoration Family	Nigeria	Bronx
Restoration Springs	Nigeria	Queens
Solid Rock	Nigeria	Staten Island
Refined Holy Fire of Zion Church	Nigeria	Bronx
Spirit and Life Bible Church	Nigeria	Brooklyn
The Eternal Sacred Order of Cherubim & Seraphim Abgo-Jesu	Nigeria	Brooklyn
The Gospel Faith Mission International, New York	Nigeria	Brooklyn
The Grace of God Ministries Inc.	Nigeria	Bronx
The Sacred Cherubim & Seraphim Church	Nigeria	Bronx
Trinity Baptist	Liberia	Staten Island
United Methodist Church Ghana	Ghana	Bronx
Vineyard International Christian Ministries	Nigeria	Bronx
Zion Sanctuary	Nigeria	Queens

APPENDIX 2

Individual Research Questionnaire

Personal Background

1. What is your name? [Age?]
2. Where in New York do you live? Do you rent or own?
3. What country were you born in?
4. How and when did you come to be in New York City?
5. Do you have family here? (Spouse, children, siblings, other)
6. Where is "home"? Where will you retire?
7. What is your educational background?
8. What language do you read the Bible in? What language do you pray in?
9. What type of job did you hold at home [in Ghana, Nigeria, or Liberia]? What is your current employment in New York City?

Church and Religious Life

1. Did you attend a church in your country of origin? What was the name of the church?
2. Do you attend other churches in New York? Have you attended other churches in New York City?
3. What attracted you to this church? How long have you been attending? What role does the church play in forming your friendships and social life?

4. How would you describe your church? What is unique about it?
5. Are there new elements, ideas, or practices in your church life here in New York City?
6. Are you or more less involved in Christianity than you were in your home country? Is your faith more or less important in your new setting?
7. Do you have specific responsibilities or involvements in the church? A title?
8. How did you come to faith?
9. We have prayed in the service that God would provide for very specific needs. How does God provide for you?

New York City

1. What is your view of New York City? What are its spiritual needs?
2. When you face issues such as housing, immigration, health, whom do you turn to for help?
3. What role does the pastor play in your life?
4. Has living in New York City changed you spiritually?
5. How does your faith enable you to live in the city?
6. What role does faith play in your employment?