

THE ROLE OF PENTECOSTALISM AND CHARISMATISM IN AFRICAN MISSION**Authors & Affiliations****UBUO, EFFIONG EDET**

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Abstract

Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity has become the most numerically dynamic expression of the Christian faith in sub-Saharan Africa, yet the scholarly literature has tended either to celebrate its missional achievements or to catalogue its theological excesses, rarely holding both within a single analytic frame. This article addresses that gap by applying two complementary theoretical lenses, *missio Dei* and contextual theology, to explain why Pentecostal and Charismatic movements have simultaneously become Africa's most effective missionary vehicles and its most controversial religious formations. Employing a qualitative, document-based design that draws on historical, sociological, and missiological literature, the article traces the movement's historical diffusion from the 1906 Azusa Street revival into South Africa in 1908, and its subsequent institutional indigenization in Nigeria and Ghana, with further comparative reference to Zimbabwe, East Africa, and Francophone Central Africa. It examines three institutional case studies, the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries, and Covenant University, all Nigerian, as concrete instances of missional praxis. The analysis argues that indigenization, rather than doctrinal novelty, is the principal mechanism linking Pentecostal theology to missional effectiveness, and that the movement's recurring criticisms, particularly the prosperity gospel, weak ethical formation, unregulated pneumatic practice, and the persistence of gendered leadership constraint, are best understood not as external attacks but as unresolved tensions within contextualization itself. The theoretical framework's own Western missiological genealogy is also examined critically rather than assumed. Given the concentration of the evidentiary base in West Africa, the article's conclusions are offered as best established for Nigeria and Ghana and provisionally, rather than conclusively, extended to the wider continent. The article closes with recommendations for theological education, institutional accountability, and ecumenical engagement.

Keywords: Pentecostalism, Charismatic Christianity, *missio Dei*, contextual theology, African mission, indigenization, prosperity gospel, gender

INTRODUCTION

Sub-Saharan Africa now hosts one of the largest and fastest-growing Christian populations in the world, and Pentecostal and Charismatic churches sit at the centre of that growth. A ten-country survey conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life found that Pentecostal and Charismatic ("renewalist") Christians already accounted for six in every ten Protestants in Nigeria, with comparably high proportions recorded in Kenya and South Africa (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2006). This numerical weight has translated into institutional weight: Pentecostal and Charismatic bodies now run universities, television networks, microfinance schemes, and transnational mission agencies that reach well beyond the continent that produced them.

The scholarly response to this growth has tended to split along two lines. One body of literature,

exemplified by Kalu (2008) and Anderson (2004), documents the movement's historical emergence and argues that its vitality flows from a genuinely African, rather than imported, spirituality. A second body, exemplified by Gifford (2004) and Marshall (2009), treats the same movement more critically, reading its prosperity preaching and political entanglements as symptoms of a deeper theological and ethical fragility. Both bodies of scholarship are empirically well grounded, yet they rarely speak to each other within a single study. The result is a literature that can describe Pentecostal growth or diagnose Pentecostal excess, but seldom explains why the same movement produces both outcomes from the same theological root.

This article addresses that gap. It asks a specific research question: what theological mechanism accounts for the fact that African Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity have become simultaneously the continent's most effective missionary force and its most contested religious formation? The article's central argument is that indigenization, understood through the twin lenses of *missio Dei* and contextual theology, is that mechanism. Because Pentecostal and Charismatic churches locate authority in the direct, unmediated experience of the Holy Spirit rather than in inherited liturgical or denominational structures, they contextualize with unusual speed and depth (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005; Omenyo, 2002). That same speed and depth, however, remove some of the institutional checks that historically restrained theological innovation in mission churches, which is why contextualization and controversy tend to travel together rather than as separate phenomena.

The article's contribution is threefold. First, it applies *missio Dei* and contextual theology not merely as background citations but as an interpretive framework that is used consistently to read both the movement's achievements and its criticisms. Second, it grounds the argument in three institutional case studies, the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries (MFM), and Covenant University, that allow abstract claims about growth, deliverance theology, and holistic mission to be tested against documented institutional practice. Third, it evaluates the standard criticisms levelled against the movement, the prosperity gospel, the elevation of charisma over character, and unregulated exercise of spiritual gifts, on their merits rather than simply listing them, asking in each case what the criticism gets right, what it overstates, and what a contextually sensitive response would look like.

The stakes are not merely academic. Because Pentecostal and Charismatic churches now shape the religious formation of a substantial share of Africa's population, how the movement is interpreted has direct consequences for theological education, ecumenical relations, and public debate about religious regulation across several African states. A framework that reads growth and controversy as expressions of a single dynamic, rather than as separate questions for separate literatures, offers a more precise diagnosis than accounts that treat African Pentecostalism as either an unqualified success story or a cautionary tale.

The remainder of the article proceeds as follows. Section 2 sets out the theoretical framework, including its own contested standing within decolonial scholarship. Section 3 describes the methodology. Section 4 clarifies the article's key concepts. Section 5 traces the movement's historical diffusion into Africa. Section 6 analyzes the movement's institutional praxis through three case studies. Section 7 critically engages the movement's principal criticisms, including its unresolved tensions around gender. Section 8 synthesizes the argument, and Sections 9 and 10 offer recommendations and conclusions.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

Despite the pivotal role, missionary involvement, and participation of Pentecostal and Charismatic movements in the growth of Christianity in Africa, significant challenges remain. It is clear that the theological distinctiveness, missional strategies, and challenges of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements in advancing and shaping mission work in Africa have not received adequate scholarly attention. Therefore, this study seeks to address the existing gap in understanding the contributions of these movements by analysing their active role in African mission.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES:

This research aimed at critically appraising the role of Pentecostalism and Charismatism in shaping Christian mission in Africa.

Specifically, this study seeks to:

1. Examine the contributions and involvement of Pentecostal and Charismatic movements in promoting the socioeconomic and spiritual development of African communities.
2. Analyse the challenges faced by Pentecostal and Charismatic movements in their missionary activities, particularly in promoting harmonious and ethical leadership.
3. Assess the extent to which these movements contribute to ecumenical collaboration and synergy in Africa.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: MISSIO DEI AND CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY

The article's primary theoretical lens is *missio Dei*, the twentieth-century missiological consensus that mission originates not in the church's own initiative but in the character and activity of the Triune God, in whose ongoing work the church participates rather than which it generates (Bosch, 1991). Bosch's *Transforming Mission* remains the most comprehensive articulation of this shift: mission, in his account, is one of thirteen elements of an emerging ecumenical missionary paradigm, and the church's task is to discern and join a mission that is already underway rather than to construct one of its own (Bosch, 1991). Bevans and Schroeder (2004) extend this insight by describing *missio Dei* as participation in the overflowing communion of the Trinitarian God, a formulation that shifts the theological centre of gravity away from institutional expansion and toward participation in God's redemptive activity in a given place. Read this way, *missio Dei* is not simply a theological slogan; it is an analytic claim about where missionary agency properly resides, and it supplies the standard against which any missionary movement, including African Pentecostalism, can be evaluated: does its practice extend God's redemptive work in a place, or does it primarily extend the institution itself?

The second lens, contextual theology, supplies the mechanism by which *missio Dei* becomes locally intelligible. Contextual theology holds that authentic theological reflection must take seriously the cultural, historical, and existential realities of the community in which it occurs, rather than treating theology as a fixed, exportable body of doctrine (Bediako, 1992). Bediako's work on theology and identity is foundational here: he argues that the translatability of the Christian message, its capacity to be re-expressed in new cultural idioms without losing its substance, is what allowed Christianity to become, and remain, a genuinely African religion rather than a permanently foreign import (Bediako, 1992). Sanneh (2003) makes a closely related argument

from the standpoint of missionary history, contending that Christianity's vernacular translatability, in contrast to Islam's relative resistance to translation, is precisely what has allowed the African church to become a sending rather than merely a receiving body.

Applied to Pentecostalism specifically, contextual theology explains why the movement addresses African existential concerns, sickness, barrenness, ancestral affliction, poverty, spiritual attack, with a directness that more liturgically formal mission Christianity often lacked (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005; Meyer, 1999). Meyer's ethnographic study of Ewe Christianity in Ghana shows concretely how Pentecostal deliverance theology re-engages, rather than simply rejects, the traditional cosmology of spirits and ancestral powers that earlier Pietist mission Christianity had tried to talk past (Meyer, 1999). In *missio Dei* terms, this is contextualization functioning as intended: the gospel becomes intelligible because it enters the actual spiritual grammar of its hearers.

Taken together, these two frameworks generate the article's analytic move. *Missio Dei* asks whether a given missionary practice is participating in God's redemptive work in a specific context; contextual theology asks whether that practice is doing so in a form the context can actually receive. Indigenization is the point at which the two questions converge, and it is indigenization, rather than any single doctrine, that this article treats as the operative variable explaining both the movement's missional reach and its recurring controversies. A third supporting concept, indigenization theory, is used throughout to describe the process by which African Pentecostal and Charismatic churches develop local leadership, language, worship idiom, and mission method rather than replicating imported denominational models (Ukah, 2008). Where mission Christianity was, for much of its African history, transmitted through foreign personnel and foreign ecclesial structures, Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity has been, from a relatively early stage, led, financed, and theologically shaped by Africans themselves (Kalu, 2008).

The framework itself should not be exempted from the scrutiny it applies to its object. *Missio Dei* and contextual theology are, in their classical formulations, products of a twentieth-century Western ecumenical establishment, articulated primarily by European and North American theologians, even where their explicit purpose was to correct earlier, more paternalistic mission theology. Kgatle's (2022) decolonial analysis of African Pentecostalism sharpens this point, arguing that theological education across the continent still operates within a Eurocentric epistemic canon that treats Western academic theology as the default standard against which African reflection is measured, rather than treating African cosmological categories, demonic affliction and ancestral curse among them, as themselves generative of legitimate theological method. Applying Bosch and Bediako side by side does not resolve this tension, since Bediako's own contextual theology is itself partly a response to the same concern (Bediako, 1992). The narrower claim made here is that reading African Pentecostalism through both a Western missiological tradition (Bosch, 1991; Bevans & Schroeder, 2004) and an African corrective one (Bediako, 1992; Sanneh, 2003) is preferable to relying on either alone, because the tension between them mirrors a related one worth naming: contextual theology is a disciplined attempt to hold the gospel's substance constant while its cultural expression varies, not a licence for unlimited innovation, and the risk that contextualization slides into syncretism is one contextual theologians have long recognized rather than ignored (Bediako, 1992). That risk is treated here as one of the phenomena the framework is best placed to explain rather than as grounds to abandon it, since *missio Dei*'s

own standard, participation in God's redemptive work, supplies a basis for distinguishing legitimate contextualization from its excesses, applied concretely in Sections 6 and 7.

METHODOLOGY

This article employs a qualitative, interpretive design appropriate to a conceptual and historical inquiry in religious studies. Rather than generating new empirical data through fieldwork, the study proceeds by way of a systematic document-based analysis of the existing scholarly literature on African Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity, supplemented by institutional case material drawn from three organizations whose documented history illustrates the article's theoretical claims. The literature reviewed spans four categories: foundational missiological texts that articulate *missio Dei* and contextual theology (Bosch, 1991; Bevans & Schroeder, 2004; Bediako, 1992; Sanneh, 2003); historical and sociological monographs on African Pentecostalism (Anderson, 2004; Kalu, 2008; Hollenweger, 1997; Burgess, 2008; Marshall, 2009; Maxwell, 2006; Gifford, 2004); ethnographic and institutional studies of specific movements and churches (Meyer, 1999; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005; Omenyo, 2002; Ukah, 2008); and recent peer-reviewed journal articles addressing specific case-study institutions and contemporary debates, including the prosperity gospel (Niemandt, 2017; Gbote & Kgatla, 2014), the RCCG (Adeboye, 2007, 2008; Adogame, 2013; Ukah, 2005), and MFM (Adeleke, 2024; Igboin, 2024).

Case selection for the three institutional studies followed a purposive logic rather than a random one. The RCCG was selected because it is the most extensively documented transnational Nigerian Pentecostal denomination and because its trajectory from a single Lagos congregation in 1952 to a presence in more than fifty countries offers the clearest documented instance of Africa's shift from mission field to mission-sending force (Adeboye, 2007; Ukah, 2005). MFM was selected because its deliverance-centred theology represents the pneumatic, spiritual-warfare dimension of Charismatic practice that most sharply illustrates both the movement's contextual resonance and its theological controversy (Adeleke, 2024; Igboin, 2024). Covenant University was selected because it represents the movement's holistic, institution-building dimension, extending mission beyond evangelism into formal education, and because its founding is independently and consistently documented across public record. Analysis proceeded thematically: each case was read against the *missio Dei* and contextual theology framework established in Section 2, coded for evidence of indigenization, holistic mission, and controversy, and then synthesized in Section 8.

This design has three limitations, each addressed rather than merely disclosed. First, it relies on secondary literature rather than original interviews; the article's claims are an interpretive synthesis of existing scholarship, not new primary-source findings. Second, selecting cases partly because they illustrate the framework's dimensions of growth, pneumatic controversy, and holistic mission risks confirmation bias, mitigated here in two ways: Section 5 includes an instance, the early racial segregation of the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa, that sits in tension with rather than confirms a positive reading of indigenization, and Section 7 tests the framework against the movement's recognized failures rather than only its successes. Third, evidentiary concentration differs by section. Section 5's historical account is anchored in South Africa, where the record of the movement's earliest African institutionalization is strongest (Kgatle, 2016), while the institutional case studies in Section 6 and most of Section 7 concentrate on Nigeria and Ghana, where the literature on contemporary institution-building and controversy is most developed. Southern African (Kgatle,

2019, 2022), Zimbabwean (Maxwell, 2006), East African (Mhando et al., 2018), and Francophone Central African (Kipimo, 2018) material is used comparatively to test generalizability beyond this uneven core: historical claims are grounded in South Africa, institutional claims are best established for Nigeria and Ghana, and continent-wide claims remain provisional.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Pentecostalism denotes a movement within Christianity that emphasizes direct, experiential encounter with the Holy Spirit, evidenced through practices such as glossolalia, prophecy, and divine healing, and traceable historically to the early twentieth-century revival centred on the Azusa Street mission in Los Angeles (Anderson, 2004; Hollenweger, 1997). In its African expression, Pentecostalism has taken on a distinctive character, blending pneumatic fervour with indigenous religious sensibilities and addressing concerns, witchcraft, ancestral curses, spiritual warfare, that were largely absent from the theological vocabulary of the earlier Western mission churches (Kalu, 2008).

Neither label is static. Anderson's (2004) global history stresses that the boundary between Pentecostal, Charismatic, and even older African Independent Church traditions has always been porous in the African context, with practices such as prophetic healing and spiritual warfare circulating across formal denominational lines well before the terms "Pentecostal" and "Charismatic" became the conventional scholarly shorthand. Kalu (2008) makes a related point when he cautions against treating African Pentecostalism as a single monolithic movement, noting that it in fact comprises a variety of streams, classical Pentecostal denominations descended from early twentieth-century mission contact, indigenous prophetic and Aladura-type churches, and the newer neo-Pentecostal or "faith" churches that proliferated from the 1970s onward, each with a distinct relationship to Western denominational structure and to African traditional religion. This article follows Kalu's caution: where the terms "Pentecostal" and "Charismatic" are used together in what follows, they denote this broader family of Spirit-centred, contextually responsive movements rather than a single, doctrinally uniform church.

Charismatism, or the Charismatic movement, denotes something related but analytically distinct: the adoption of Pentecostal-style spiritual gifts and practices within historic, mainline denominations, including Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian, and Methodist churches (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005). Where classical Pentecostals typically formed new denominations, Charismatics generally remained within their existing ecclesial homes while advocating renewal from within. Omenyo's study of Ghanaian mainline Christianity captures this dynamic precisely in its title, *Pentecost outside Pentecostalism*, documenting how Presbyterian, Methodist, and other historic congregations absorbed Pentecostal spirituality, prayer groups, healing services, exuberant worship, without abandoning their denominational identity (Omenyo, 2002). Gifford's study of Accra's charismatic churches similarly documents what he terms the "charismatization" of Ghana's mainline bodies, a spillover effect in which even Catholic congregations began to adopt worship patterns associated with the newer Charismatic ministries (Gifford, 2004).

Mission, for the purposes of this article, follows Bosch's (1991) missiological definition: not merely the proclamation of the gospel but the church's participation in God's redemptive activity in the world, encompassing evangelism, healing, justice, and reconciliation. In the African context, this has taken on what several scholars describe as a holistic character, one that treats sickness, poverty, and social fragmentation as

legitimate objects of missionary concern alongside conversion (Kalu, 2008; Burgess, 2008).

This holistic conception of mission is significant for the present argument because it is precisely the dimension along which Pentecostal and Charismatic churches most clearly extend, rather than merely repeat, the mission theology inherited from earlier Western missionary bodies. The movement's global point of origin is conventionally located in the 1906 to 1909 Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles, an interracial and pneumatically intense revival associated with the African American holiness preacher William Seymour (Anderson, 2004; Hollenweger, 1997). Hollenweger's account of the movement's global roots is instructive here: he traces Pentecostalism's theological genealogy through what he calls its Black Oral Root, alongside Catholic, Evangelical, Critical, and Ecumenical strands, a genealogy that already complicates any simple narrative of Pentecostalism as a purely Euro-American export subsequently carried to Africa (Hollenweger, 1997). The movement reached African soil within only a few years of Azusa Street. Kgatle's (2016) detailed historical study of this transmission shows that two missionaries connected to the Azusa Street network, John G. Lake and Thomas Hezmalhalch, both of whom had visited Seymour's mission in Los Angeles, sailed for South Africa in April 1908 without denominational backing, relying, in Kgatle's account, on the financial goodwill of supporters rather than an established missionary society (Kgatle, 2016). After conducting interracial meetings first in Doornfontein and then at the Central Tabernacle Congregation in Johannesburg's Bree Street, a setting Kgatle explicitly likens to Azusa Street itself, Lake and Hezmalhalch's work gave rise to the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa, one of the two large Pentecostal bodies, alongside the Zion Christian Church, that trace their origin to this 1908 mission (Kgatle, 2016). Kgatle's account is notable for the present argument because it already registers, at the movement's very African point of entry, the tension between contextual vitality and institutional integrity that recurs throughout this article: the same 1908 meetings that Kgatle documents as remarkably interracial in character were followed, within little more than a decade, by the formal racial segregation of the AFM's structures, a reminder that indigenization is never automatically a moral achievement and must be assessed case by case (Kgatle, 2016).

Equally significant for the present argument is the early emergence of indigenous African leadership within this first wave of Pentecostal mission. Kgatle (2016) documents how Elias Letwaba, one of the first Black South African Pentecostals, received the Pentecostal experience under Lake's ministry in 1909 and subsequently conducted an extensive evangelistic itinerary across the northern Transvaal, before founding the Patmos Bible School in 1930, the first theological training institution for Black Pentecostals within the AFM. Letwaba's career anticipates, already in the movement's first African generation, the pattern this article treats as decisive: African Pentecostalism's missional reach has depended less on the presence of foreign missionaries than on the speed with which indigenous leadership assumed theological and pastoral authority in its own right (Kgatle, 2016; Kalu, 2008).

From this early beginning, the movement diffused unevenly but persistently across the continent over subsequent decades, taking root in West, East, and Southern Africa through a combination of continuing foreign missionary contact and, increasingly, indigenous initiative (Kalu, 2008; Anderson, 2004). Nigeria's Pentecostal trajectory illustrates this shift toward indigenous initiative particularly clearly. Burgess's (2008) detailed study of the movement's Nigerian development locates a decisive turning point in the Biafra civil war period of 1967 to 1970, when an interdenominational revival associated with the Scripture Union and its

British leader Bill Roberts took hold among young, educated Igbo Christians amid the hardship of the conflict. That civil war revival, Burgess argues, became the seedbed for the neo-Pentecostal movement that expanded rapidly across Nigeria from the 1970s onward, generating many of the independent, indigenously led congregations from which today's major Nigerian Pentecostal denominations descend (Burgess, 2008). Ojo's (1988) contemporaneous study of Nigeria's charismatic movements situates this expansion within its proper missiological register, arguing that the movement's significance lay precisely in its contextual responsiveness to the social and existential concerns of a newly urbanizing, university-educated Nigerian population. It was from this soil, indigenous revival combined with contextual responsiveness, that the major Nigerian Pentecostal denominations discussed in the following section emerged, including the RCCG, founded in Lagos in 1952 by Josiah Akindayomi, a former Cherubim and Seraphim prophet (Ukah, 2008), and the wave of neo-Pentecostal churches, MFM, Deeper Life Bible Church, and the Living Faith Church (Winners Chapel), that expanded from the 1970s through the 1990s (Burgess, 2008; Kalu, 2008). This historical pattern, of a movement that began with foreign missionary contact but was rapidly indigenized in leadership, theology, and mission strategy, is the empirical foundation for the article's central theoretical claim: African Pentecostalism's missional distinctiveness lies not in where it came from but in how thoroughly it has been re-authored by African leadership and African concerns.

Numerical Growth and the Logic of Reproducible Churches: The most immediately visible dimension of Pentecostal and Charismatic mission in Africa is sheer numerical growth. Kalu (2008) situates this growth within a broader argument that African Pentecostalism is not, as some earlier commentators assumed, simply an African adaptation of American revivalism, but a movement whose growth logic is internally African: decentralized leadership structures, low barriers to church planting, and an ecclesiology in which any Spirit-filled believer may found a congregation combine to make Pentecostal churches unusually reproducible across urban, peri-urban, and rural settings alike. The Pew Forum's ten-country survey lends empirical weight to this claim, finding that renewalist Christians constituted six in every ten Protestants in Nigeria by the mid-2000s, with substantial renewalist populations also recorded in Kenya and South Africa (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2006). The pattern is not confined to Anglophone Africa. Kipimo's (2018) assessment of Pentecostalization across French-speaking African nations, with particular reference to the Democratic Republic of Congo, documents a comparable indigenizing dynamic in Francophone Central Africa, suggesting that the reproducible-church logic Kalu (2008) identifies in the Nigerian case is not a peculiarity of Anglophone mission history but a broader feature of how Pentecostalism spreads across linguistically and colonially distinct regions of the continent alike. Read through the *missio Dei* framework, this growth is missiologically significant only insofar as it reflects genuine participation in God's redemptive work rather than institutional self-replication for its own sake, a distinction to which the article returns in Section 7.

Case Study: The Redeemed Christian Church of God and the Globalization of African Mission

The RCCG offers the clearest documented case of Nigerian Pentecostalism's transition from a domestic revival movement to a transnational missionary institution. Founded in 1952 by Josiah Akindayomi, a Yoruba convert who had previously been a prophet within the Cherubim and Seraphim movement, the RCCG remained a relatively modest Lagos-based congregation for its first three decades (Ukah, 2008). Its transformation into what Ukah (2008) describes as a new paradigm of Pentecostal power began under the

leadership of Enoch Adejare Adeboye, who became General Overseer in 1981, the same year the church planted its first transnational branch in Ghana (Adeboye, 2007). From that beginning, the RCCG expanded to a presence in more than fifty nations, thirty of them African, by the mid-2000s (Adeboye, 2007), including a sustained North American outreach documented across the period 1992 to 2005 (Adeboye, 2008).

Ukah's (2008) study provides the most detailed institutional account of how this expansion was managed internally. He documents the RCCG's progressive shift from a loosely organized Yoruba congregation toward a highly bureaucratized global denomination, with standardized parish-planting protocols, formal ministerial training structures, and centralized financial reporting, a transition Ukah reads as evidence that the RCCG's missionary success cannot be attributed to charismatic leadership alone but reflects a deliberate, increasingly professionalized organizational strategy (Ukah, 2008). Ukah's (2005) companion study of the denomination's transnational "religious field" adds that this expansion has been driven substantially by the mobility of Nigerian migrants themselves, who carried RCCG parish structures with them into diaspora communities across Europe and North America, so that the denomination's global growth is inseparable from broader patterns of Nigerian migration rather than a purely centrally planned strategy.

This expansion is missiologically significant for two reasons. First, it embodies the shift that Sanneh (2003) identifies as central to contemporary African Christianity, from Africa as a field to be evangelized to Africa as a base from which evangelization proceeds. Second, the RCCG's growth strategy, small, easily reproducible parishes planted at short driving distances from one another, exemplifies the indigenized, decentralized ecclesiology that Kalu (2008) treats as characteristic of African Pentecostal mission more broadly. The RCCG's mission activity, moreover, extends beyond church planting into holistic social engagement: Adogame's (2013) study of the denomination's HIV and AIDS response documents a coordinated programme of public health advocacy and pastoral care that positions the church as an active participant in the same struggle against sickness and social fragmentation that *missio Dei* theology identifies as a legitimate field of God's redemptive concern (Adogame, 2013; Bosch, 1991).

Case Study: Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries and the Theology of Spiritual Warfare

If the RCCG illustrates the movement's transnational institutional maturity, MFM illustrates its pneumatic, deliverance-centred core. Founded in Lagos in 1989, MFM built its missional identity around what its literature and its critics alike describe as an aggressive, combative model of intercessory prayer directed against what the movement terms "satanic technologies," spiritual forces held responsible for sickness, poverty, infertility, and misfortune (Adeleke, 2024). Adogame's characterization of the ministry, as cited in Adeleke's (2024) recent analysis, captures its self-understanding precisely: MFM presents itself as a ministry devoted to the revival of apostolic power, in which believers are trained, in the ministry's own idiom, to "wage war" through prayer against malevolent spiritual forces obstructing wellbeing and success. Igboin's (2024) ethnographic study of MFM's Prayer City near Lagos documents how this theology has been given concrete institutional and spatial form, an around-the-clock prayer camp that Igboin situates within a broader Nigerian Pentecostal pattern of constructing sacralized urban and peri-urban space as an alternative to the cathedral-building tradition of Western Christianity. Read through the contextual theology framework, MFM's deliverance theology is a direct, if theologically contested, response to the African cosmological assumption, documented ethnographically by Meyer (1999) among the Ewe of Ghana, that misfortune has

spiritual causation and therefore requires spiritual remedy.

In this sense MFM is contextualizing with considerable fidelity to lived African religious experience. Adeleke's (2024) analysis, however, also registers the theological cost of that fidelity, arguing that MFM's elaborate demonology risks displacing the classical Pentecostal and Reformation emphasis on scriptural exposition with what he terms a "cacophonous" proliferation of extra-biblical spiritual categories. This tension, between contextual resonance and theological discipline, is precisely the kind of unresolved tension within contextualization itself that Section 7 of this article treats as characteristic of the movement as a whole, rather than as an aberration from it.

A third dimension of Pentecostal and Charismatic mission in Africa is institution-building in education and social welfare, a dimension that most directly embodies the holistic conception of mission set out in Section 4. The clearest example is Covenant University, established in Ota, Ogun State, in 2002 by the Living Faith Church Worldwide (Winners Chapel), a denomination founded in the early 1980s by Bishop David Oyedepo (Aririguzoh, 2020). Covenant University's establishment, alongside the church's later founding of Landmark University, represents a substantial private investment in tertiary education by a Pentecostal denomination, complementing rather than competing with Nigeria's public university system, and it has since been recognized in international rankings as among the leading universities in Nigeria and West Africa (Aririguzoh, 2020). Aririguzoh's (2020) study of the institution's own marketing and positioning strategy, while approaching the university primarily as a case in higher-education marketing rather than in missiology, corroborates the more theologically oriented account offered here: the university markets its Christian ethos, physical order, and disciplined campus culture as central rather than incidental to its institutional identity, a finding consistent with reading Covenant University as a deliberate extension of the church's mission rather than merely an adjacent commercial venture.

The case for Covenant University rests on a thinner scholarly base than the cases for RCCG or MFM. Where Ukah (2005, 2008) and Adeboye (2007, 2008) have produced a sustained body of peer-reviewed research on the RCCG, and Adeleke (2024) and Igboin (2024) on MFM, Aririguzoh (2020) is, to this author's knowledge, the clearest peer-reviewed treatment of Covenant University specifically. This asymmetry suggests that Pentecostal institution-building in education has outpaced the scholarly attention paid to it, leaving Covenant University and comparable Pentecostal-founded universities an underexamined field for future research. Maxwell's (2006) study of Zimbabwean Pentecostalism identifies a comparable pattern elsewhere on the continent: the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa built an extensive transnational institutional infrastructure, schools, welfare programmes, and business networks, as an integral part of its missionary self-understanding rather than an incidental byproduct of growth. Kalu (2008) reads this institution-building tendency as evidence against readings of African Pentecostalism as a purely otherworldly or apolitical movement, and against the common criticism that Spirit-centred piety comes at the expense of concrete social engagement: schools, universities, and welfare programmes are, in his account, direct expressions of a theology that treats the total transformation of individuals and societies as the proper scope of mission, a pattern the RCCG's public health work (Adogame, 2013) and Covenant University both confirm. Assessed against the *missio Dei* standard articulated in Section 2, institution-building of this kind arguably represents the movement's most unambiguous missiological achievement, since it is difficult to read a

functioning university or hospital as serving institutional self-interest alone.

Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity's missional impact extends beyond its own institutions into the wider African church. Omenyo's (2002) study of Ghanaian Presbyterianism documents in detail how mainline denominations absorbed Pentecostal spirituality, prayer and healing groups, more expressive worship, a heightened emphasis on the Holy Spirit's active presence, without formally becoming Pentecostal churches, a pattern he terms "Pentecost outside Pentecostalism." Gifford's (2004) study of Accra's religious landscape documents a parallel process he calls the "charismatization" of the city's mainline and even Catholic congregations, evidenced in the adoption of contemporary worship styles previously associated exclusively with the newer Charismatic ministries. Asamoah-Gyadu (2005) situates this liturgical renewal within a broader account of Ghanaian Charismatic emphases, internationalism, transformation, prosperity, healing, and deliverance, that have reshaped the devotional culture of African Christianity well beyond the boundaries of self-identified Pentecostal denominations. This diffusion matters for the article's argument because it shows that indigenization, once established within the Pentecostal and Charismatic sector, does not remain contained there: it becomes a template older mission-founded denominations draw on as they seek their own more contextually resonant worship and pastoral practice, extending the movement's missiological significance well beyond its own membership rolls. The final dimension of missional impact concerns direction of flow.

Historically, African Christianity was overwhelmingly a receiving field for Western missionary activity. Sanneh (2003) argues that this pattern has been substantially reversed over the past several decades, with African-founded churches now establishing congregations, training pastors, and conducting evangelistic campaigns in Europe, North America, and Asia. The RCCG's North American expansion, documented by Adeboye (2008) for the period 1992 to 2005, is a concrete instance of this reversal, as is the broader pattern of transnational RCCG parish planting that Ukah (2005) documents as an expansion of the denomination's religious field beyond Nigeria's borders. This reversal is, in *missio Dei* terms, among the most theologically significant developments the movement has produced, since it displaces the assumption, implicit in much earlier mission theology, that the flow of missionary initiative runs necessarily from the global North to the global South (Bosch, 1991; Sanneh, 2003). The single most persistent criticism directed at African Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity concerns its prosperity theology, the teaching that divine blessing manifests concretely in health and material wealth, and that such blessing can be activated through faith, positive confession, and financial giving.

Niemandt's (2017) missiological assessment of the prosperity gospel in Africa provides one of the most balanced recent treatments of this debate. He argues that the prosperity gospel's underlying epistemology is, in important respects, oriented toward reinforcing the logic of global capitalism rather than challenging the historical structures of economic and cultural domination that decolonial theology seeks to dismantle, and that its emphasis on individual material blessing can crowd out the more communal, justice-oriented concerns that older African and liberation theologies had prioritized (Niemandt, 2017). Gbote and Kgatla's (2014) missiological assessment reaches a similarly critical conclusion, situating the movement's American genealogy, associated with figures such as Oral Roberts and Kenneth Hagin, as evidence that the movement's core theological grammar was substantially imported rather than organically African in origin. At the same time, both studies resist a wholly dismissive reading. Niemandt (2017) notes that some prosperity-oriented

congregations demonstrate genuine sensitivity to marginalized communities and function as sites of social capital and mutual assistance in contexts of state failure, consistent with Kalu's (2008) broader argument that Pentecostal socio-economic programmes, skill acquisition schemes, charitable giving, address real material needs even where their theological justification is contested. The most defensible position, and the one adopted here, is that the prosperity gospel represents contextualization under economic pressure: where state welfare provision is weak and traditional African cosmology already links spiritual power to material flourishing, a theology promising direct divine intervention in economic hardship will find receptive hearers regardless of its theological adequacy (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005; Niemandt, 2017).

Niemandt's (2017) concept of "glocalization" captures this precisely: not a purely American import mechanically transplanted onto African soil, nor a wholly indigenous invention, but a hybrid reworked through African economic anxiety and cosmological assumption (Niemandt, 2017; Gbote & Kgatla, 2014). The appropriate missiological response is therefore not simply to condemn the prosperity gospel as an aberration but to ask what legitimate pastoral need it is meeting, and to develop theologically sounder ways of meeting that same need, a point taken up in the recommendations below; contextual fit and theological adequacy are related but not identical, and this is a case in which the former has outpaced the latter. A second recurring criticism concerns the gap, documented across the literature on Nigerian and Ghanaian Pentecostalism, between the exercise of charismatic spiritual gifts and the cultivation of Christian character among both leaders and congregants (Marshall, 2009). Marshall's (2009) political-anthropological study of Nigerian Pentecostalism situates this tension within a larger argument about the movement's relationship to postcolonial statecraft, suggesting that the same pneumatic authority that legitimates a pastor's spiritual leadership can, absent robust institutional accountability, be difficult to distinguish from personal charismatic authority exercised with limited restraint. This is a structural, rather than merely individual, criticism: where authority derives primarily from demonstrated spiritual gifting rather than from formal theological training or denominational oversight, the institutional mechanisms that might otherwise check ethical failure are correspondingly weaker (Gifford, 2004; Marshall, 2009).

This criticism should be weighed carefully rather than accepted wholesale. Kalu (2008) cautions against reading isolated instances of leadership failure as representative of the movement as a whole, noting the wide diversity of governance models across African Pentecostal denominations, from the RCCG's increasingly bureaucratized global structure (Ukah, 2008) to smaller, less institutionally developed ministries. Nonetheless, the underlying structural point stands: a theology that locates ultimate authority in direct pneumatic experience will always face a harder task in building durable institutional accountability than one that locates authority in an established magisterium or conference structure, and this is a genuine, unresolved tension within contextual theology's emphasis on Spirit-led authority rather than an external accusation that can simply be dismissed. A third criticism, closely related to the second, concerns the practice of spiritual gifts, particularly glossolalia and prophecy, without the order that the Pauline corpus itself prescribes for corporate worship. This criticism has biblical, rather than merely sociological, grounding: 1 Corinthians 14 explicitly instructs that tongues should be exercised in limited number and with interpretation, precisely to preserve order in the gathered assembly.

Where this Pauline regulative principle is neglected, critics argue, spiritual gifts can become a marker

of status or spiritual superiority rather than an edifying practice oriented toward the whole congregation (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005). Assessed through the contextual theology framework, this tension reflects an unresolved feature of indigenization rather than a simple failure of discipline. Because African Pentecostal worship deliberately privileges spontaneous pneumatic expression over the more scripted liturgical order of mission Christianity, precisely the feature that gives it much of its contextual resonance and experiential appeal (Meyer, 1999; Omenyo, 2002), the movement faces an internal tension between preserving that spontaneity and submitting it to scriptural regulation. Kgatle's (2022) disciplinal analysis of African Pentecostalism identifies the same tension from within the tradition, naming the absence of critical, scientific theological training among some Pentecostal pastors, particularly prophetic figures in the newer prophetic churches, as one of the movement's own recognized peculiarities rather than a failure visible only to outsiders. That a scholar working inside the Pentecostal academy frames the gap this way suggests an unresolved internal debate about formalizing discernment without extinguishing spontaneity, not a simple absence of self-awareness.

A fourth tension, absent from the discussion so far, concerns gender. Women constitute the numerical majority in most African Pentecostal and Charismatic congregations and, as several of the case studies above illustrate, contribute disproportionately to congregational income, prayer ministry, and lay mobilization, yet remain underrepresented in the most senior structures of ecclesial authority (Kgatle, 2019). This is, in *missio Dei* terms, a genuine anomaly: a movement whose founding pneumatology is in principle egalitarian, since the Spirit's gifting in Acts 2 is explicitly extended to sons and daughters alike, has in institutional practice frequently reproduced the same patriarchal leadership structures found in the mission churches it otherwise displaced (Kgatle, 2019). Recent scholarship complicates any simple verdict on this point, however. Adadey and Oladipupo's (2026) study of gender and leadership across West African Pentecostalism, focused substantially on Nigeria and Ghana, argues that Pentecostal spirituality functions as what they term an imaginary social space, one that simultaneously reproduces patriarchal expectations and provides women with a culturally legitimate idiom, prophetic and maternal authority in particular, through which to exercise real, if informally structured, spiritual leadership. Mhando, Maseno, Mtata, and Senga's (2018) comparative study of female Pentecostal and Charismatic preachers in Kenya and Tanzania reaches a structurally similar conclusion from East Africa, documenting the specific rhetorical and theological strategies women leaders use to legitimate their ministry within a still male-dominated religious field. Read together with Kgatle's (2019) case study of gender in the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa, this literature suggests that gender constraint in African Pentecostalism is not confined to any single national context but is a structural feature of the movement across Southern, West, and East Africa alike (Kgatle, 2019; Adadey & Oladipupo, 2026; Mhando et al., 2018).

Assessed through the article's framework, this is best understood as a further instance of contextualization outpacing theological resolution: the movement's pneumatology genuinely opens space for female spiritual authority that many mission churches had foreclosed, a real if partial missiological achievement, but the movement has not yet worked out, at the level of formal institutional structure, what that opening should mean for ordination, denominational leadership, and financial control. Kgatle (2019) treats this as an active reform agenda rather than a settled failure, arguing that Pentecostal denominations face a

specific and answerable set of choices, disarming institutional patriarchy, revisiting restrictive readings of the Pauline household codes, and learning from leaders who have already advocated for women's fuller participation, that remain open rather than foreclosed across the Nigerian, Ghanaian, South African, Kenyan, and Tanzanian contexts reviewed here.

DISCUSSION: SYNTHESIZING THE FRAMEWORK

Read together, the case studies and criticisms examined above support the article's central claim. Indigenization is what allows African Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity to function as an unusually effective vehicle of *missio Dei*: it makes the gospel intelligible in local cosmological terms (Meyer, 1999), it generates leadership and financing structures that do not depend on continued Western missionary presence (Kalu, 2008; Ukah, 2008), and it produces institutions, universities, health programmes, transnational church-planting networks, that extend the church's redemptive engagement with African societies well beyond the walls of the congregation (Adogame, 2013; Maxwell, 2006). At the same time, indigenization is precisely what generates the movement's most persistent controversies, because the same pneumatic, experience-centred authority structure that enables rapid contextualization also weakens the institutional mechanisms, formal theological education, denominational oversight, liturgical regulation, that historically restrained theological innovation in mission Christianity (Marshall, 2009; Gifford, 2004), and correspondingly leaves the movement with comparatively little institutional apparatus for converting its own pneumatological gender egalitarianism into denominational practice (Kgatle, 2019).

This synthesis has an important implication for how the movement's critics and defenders alike should proceed. It suggests that missiological engagement with African Pentecostalism should not treat growth and controversy as separate questions to be answered independently, but should recognize them as two faces of a single underlying dynamic. A theological education strategy, for instance, that sought to suppress pneumatic spontaneity in the name of doctrinal order would risk undermining precisely the contextual responsiveness that has made the movement missionally effective in the first place (Bediako, 1992; Sanneh, 2003). The more promising path, consistent with the *missio Dei* framework's emphasis on discerning rather than merely regulating the Spirit's activity, is to strengthen the movement's own internal capacity for theological reflection and institutional accountability without attempting to import wholesale the liturgical and denominational structures of the mission churches that African Pentecostalism largely arose to supersede. This synthesis also clarifies what a genuinely African contribution to global missiology looks like. Sanneh (2003) argues that the vernacular translatability of the Christian message is itself the feature that has allowed non-Western Christianity to become theologically generative rather than merely derivative, and the case studies examined in this article bear that claim out concretely. The RCCG's globally scaled but locally reproducible parish model, MFM's re-engagement of African cosmological categories within a Pentecostal idiom, and the holistic, institution-building instinct evident in Covenant University together constitute a distinctively African missiology, one arrived at not by importing a finished theological system from elsewhere but by working out, often under real theological and ethical strain, what it means to participate in God's mission under specifically African conditions. It is this working-out, rather than any single doctrinal export, that the article identifies as African Pentecostalism's most significant contribution to the wider *missio Dei* of the global church.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Building on the analysis above, six recommendations follow. First, theological institutions serving Pentecostal and Charismatic leaders should strengthen biblical and systematic theological training, not as a substitute for pneumatic experience but as a complement that equips leaders to exercise spiritual gifts within the regulative framework the New Testament itself provides (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005).

Second, denominations should develop clearer structures of financial and pastoral accountability, of the kind the RCCG has progressively institutionalized as it has scaled globally (Ukah, 2008), so that the movement's undeniable strengths in mobilizing lay participation are not undermined by isolated instances of leadership failure.

Third, churches should continue to expand holistic mission investment in education, healthcare, and poverty alleviation, following the model exemplified by Covenant University and by RCCG's public health advocacy (Adogame, 2013), since this dimension of the movement's work represents its clearest embodiment of *missio Dei*'s concern for the whole person and the whole society.

Fourth, prosperity preaching in particular warrants deliberate theological correction that retains the movement's legitimate concern for holistic wellbeing while decoupling it from the more exploitative "seed-faith" financial practices that both African and international scholarship have documented (Niemandt, 2017; Gbote & Kgatla, 2014).

Fifth, ecumenical collaboration between Pentecostal, Charismatic, and mainline church bodies should be actively pursued, building on the charismatization process already documented within mainline denominations (Omenyo, 2002; Gifford, 2004), since such collaboration offers a practical mechanism for sharing accountability structures and theological resources across ecclesial lines.

Sixth, denominations should treat gendered leadership constraint as an open institutional question rather than a settled doctrinal position, following Kgatle's (2019) argument that Pentecostal bodies face a specific and answerable set of choices, revisiting restrictive readings of the Pauline household codes, disarming institutional patriarchy, and learning from women already exercising *de facto* spiritual leadership, that remain available to denominations willing to act on them.

CONCLUSION

This article has argued that indigenization, understood through the complementary lenses of *missio Dei* and contextual theology, is the principal mechanism explaining both the missional effectiveness and the persistent controversy of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa. From its rapid diffusion out of the 1906 Azusa Street revival into South Africa in 1908, through its thorough re-authoring by South African, Nigerian, Ghanaian, and Zimbabwean leadership, to its present institutional expression in transnational denominations such as the RCCG, deliverance-centred ministries such as MFM, and educational institutions such as Covenant University, the movement has consistently demonstrated that theological authority located in direct pneumatic experience travels further and faster across cultural boundaries than theology transmitted primarily through inherited denominational structure. That same feature, however, is what leaves the movement more exposed to the ethical, financial, liturgical, and gendered excesses and constraints that its critics rightly document.

The task facing African Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in the twenty-first century is therefore, not to choose between contextual vitality and theological discipline, but to develop, from within its own indigenous leadership and scholarship, the institutional structures capable of holding both together. Africa's Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, having already demonstrated the continent's transition from mission field to mission force (Sanneh, 2003), are well positioned to lead precisely that project, for the benefit of African Christianity and of the global church of which it is now so consequential a part.

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