

# The Mercurial Characteristics in Kenya's Afro-Pentecostalism: Exploring some critical Pointers

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## Abstract

In 21st century Africa, the Pentecostalism movement has demonstrated its unique characteristics in contrast to Euro-American Pentecostalism or any other form of Pentecostalism that has been witnessed on the global scene. In this article, I refer to it as Afro-Pentecostalism without any intended bias to those who may not prefer Afro as its prefix, as I consider its uniqueness as deserving of a unique recognition. In its hypothetical setting, the article resists placing Afro-Pentecostalism in either of the three traditional so-called historical categorisations of Pentecostalism (Neo-Pentecostal independent groups with prophets and apostles as their leaders; the classical Pentecostal movement that grew out of the 19th century Holiness Movement in the United States, and puts more emphasis on the baptism of the Holy Spirit; and the charismatic movements that have been in existence since the 1960s)—despite their huge differences. As a historical treatise, this article seeks to demonstrate that Afro-Pentecostalism, largely a blending of the three categorisations and indeed the fourth categorisation, is not necessarily keen on the three categorisations and strongly builds more on the commonalities rather than on its divergences. Appealing to the African ethos of wholeness stands out as the common denominator to which this article has given more attention. The mercurial characteristics among the various strands of Afro-Pentecostalism are certainly key concerns in this presentation. The methodology in this article includes interviews with selected people who are connected to this topic, participant observation, and an extensive review of relevant literature.

**Keywords:** Afro-Pentecostalism; Maslow's theory; mercurial characteristics

## Introduction

Kaunda and John (2020, 1) have rightly contended that Afro-Pentecostalism is one of the key religio-cultural imaginations that are gradually influencing social discourses in



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Africa of the 21st century. Unlike in the 20th century, when Afro-Pentecostalism was seen as rigid, conservative, too pietistic, and withdrawn from the socio-political matters, the 21st century has witnessed the changing patterns of Afro-Pentecostalism in immeasurable proportions. Consciously or unconsciously, Afro-Pentecostals find themselves dialoguing with some elements of the African heritage. Ironically though, they sometimes find themselves “condemning” it, as they put more emphasis on the word and the power of the Holy Spirit as the real *modus operandi* in their theological articulation and practice. Generally, African idioms, oral narratives, Christian dances that are rooted in African melodic context, and proverbs, among others, are some of the visible characteristics. Though they may not necessarily proclaim it, Afro-Pentecostals seem to agree with Nyamiti’s (1997, 57) position that “the Christian has something to learn from the traditional African [society]; not in the sense of new doctrines, but in the sense of new insights and new ways of understanding God”; and further, as Barron has noted, learning from the African heritage adds “new insights and new ways of understanding Scripture” (Barron 2021a, 1). In his article, “*Enkiteng* Hermeneutics: Reading the Bible with Maasai Christians,” Barron (2021a, 1) begins by conceding that we all read the Scripture “through a hermeneutical lens,” and he appreciates that “such lenses are necessarily tinged by culture.” He goes on to quote Ukpong (1995, 6), who avers that there is no scriptural reading that is a-cultural, and “none of us has a neutral perspective on ... the Bible” (Mburu 2019, 22). Barron (2021a, 1) is also critical of some practitioners of historical-critical methods of biblical hermeneutics, who ignore the cultural contexts in their discourses. In other words, he has pointed out the danger of rendering our discourses irrelevant by ignoring the cultural context, as biblical or theological discourses cannot be done in a socio-cultural vacuum. He dismisses such blind hermeneutics when he says:

They are, of course, gravely mistaken and confused by their own cultural myopia. A healthy hermeneutic will not only explain, insofar as this is possible, what the text meant to the original recipients in their cultural contexts but will also engage with the cultures of contemporary recipients. Just as “a *Theologia Africana* which will seek to interpret Christ to the African in such a way that he [or she] feels at home in the new faith” (Sawyer 1971, 240) is necessary for a healthy African Church, so healthy African hermeneutics require “African biblical scholars [who are] wary of running away from their African selves or identities and relying heavily on Western paradigms” (Masenya and Ramantswana 2015, 2).

While Afro-Pentecostalism in Kenya is not engaged in scholarly introspection and/or consciously viewing the Great Commission (Mat 28:17–20) from this perspective, there is a sense in which they are not able to ignore Africa’s religio-culture as they propound their mission-minded activities. It is no wonder, therefore, to find an Afro-Pentecostal leader who begins his Sunday sermon by narrating an oral story or quoting a local proverb, or even starting the service by appealing to dances whose tunes are in a continuum with the local African music. While the 21st century has experienced tremendous change, the need to account for these mercurial characteristics is of critical importance. In this article, the term “mercurial characteristics” refers to the changing

patterns in Kenya's Afro-Pentecostal movement, and this is methodologically done by citing relevant examples. It proceeds from the widely acknowledged categorisation of Pentecostalism, and goes on to emerge as the fourth categorisation that is largely a blending of the other three, that is, neo-Pentecostal independent groups with prophets and apostles as their leaders. Neo-Pentecostals place less emphasis on speaking in tongues or the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Characteristically, neo-Pentecostal churches or ministries emphasise deliverance, healing, and prosperity gospel. Samples of neo-Pentecostal independent churches in Kenya include: African Independent Pentecostal Church of Africa—which is also categorised as a charismatic church; the Legio Maria, Voice of Healing and Salvation Church; the Holy Spirit Church of Africa; Faith Evangelistic Ministries; Jesus is Alive Ministries; and the Maximum Miracle Centre among others (Gathogo 2021; Gathogo 2013). There is an obvious overlap, hence the mercurial characteristic, especially where the emphasis on healing, deliverance, and charismatic gifts also puts neo-Pentecostal churches in one category with the charismatic churches.

In the case of the Classical Pentecostal Movement, they grew out of the 19th century Holiness Movement in the United States. They characteristically put more emphasis on the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the speaking in tongues (glossolalia) as the hallmark of becoming a true Christian. By the year 2000, the largest Pentecostal denomination in the United States of America was the Church of God in Christ, which had a membership of about 5.5 million. Other leading classical Pentecostal churches include: the Assemblies of God, Pentecostal Assemblies of God, and the Church of God, among others. In Kenya, the main classical Pentecostal churches include: the Full Gospel Churches of Kenya, Elim Church, the Kenya Assemblies of God, Pentecostal Church of Africa, the Christian Church International, and the Apostolic Churches, among others (Gathogo 2021; Gathogo 2013).

With regard to the charismatic movements, they have been in existence since the 1960s. Participant observation will reveal that the “charismatic spirit” has penetrated the mainline churches in Kenya (refer to Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Methodists, and the Presbyterians, among others). Characteristically, worship in the charismatic movement is largely informal, spontaneous, and lively. In these churches, it is believed that the Holy Spirit is with them when they pray (Gathogo 2021; Gathogo 2013). Curiously, the charismatics also employ formal features in their worship (as in the case of readings and organised prayer), yet they also offer free-flowing services where the aspect of appealing gifts (charisma) is given more attention (Gathogo 2021). Charismatic churches in Kenya will include: the African Independent Pentecostal Church of Africa, Pentecostal Evangelistic Spiritual Ministries, the Kenya Church of Christ, and the Akorino Churches, among others.

As will be demonstrated in this article, Afro-Pentecostalism demonstrates its mercurial characteristics through mutations, splits, theo-doctrinal variations, theo-ecclesial alterations, liveliness, noisiness, pro-activeness, and quick-wittedness— sometimes due

to their unpredictable behaviours. The term “mercurial” has been used in this article to demonstrate the uniqueness of the changing patterns in Kenya’s Afro-Pentecostalism in concrete terms.

### Nature of their Mercurial Characteristics

Unlike the mainstream churches in Kenya, which are liturgical and highly organised, especially in their ecclesiastical ladders, Afro-Pentecostalism is characterised by “the baptism of the Holy Spirit” where adherents are enabled to live spirit-filled lives. This means putting emphasis on spirit-filled lives that include empowering people to speak in tongues, interpret the tongues, divine healing, discerning, and prophesy, among other supernatural gifts (refer to 1 Corinthians:12–14). In the 21st century Kenya, Afro-Pentecostalism ...

... is characterised by an emphasis on the outpouring of the Holy Spirit for salvation, speaking in tongues (*glossolia*), working of miracles, witnessing, prayer, discerning and healing which extends to HIV and AIDS, and more importantly, prophesying. Critically important is the emergency of youthful, conspicuous and charismatic leadership which almost equates church leaders to new messiahs or new liberators. A case in point is “prophet” Dr David Edward Owuor. Prophet Owuor is a renowned preacher who attracts large numbers of believers because of his repentance message in his church known as Ministry of Repentance and Holiness. People from different regions and the world at large gather to listen to his prophecies. Indeed, since the post December 27, 2007 election violence that killed over one thousand and displaced over 500, 000 Kenyans, Prophet Owuor has turned up to be a prophet believed across the social divide (Gathogo 2013, 209).

Further, as noted in Gathogo (2013, 212):

[Afro-Pentecostalism] in Kenya [is] a hybrid of Christian models that blend together Pentecostal/charismatic practices and African religiosity. Their theology is Afro-Pentecostal in genre. In turn, Afro-Pentecostalism is turning out to be the most influential brand of Christianity ever witnessed in Kenya’s history. While it went underground during President Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel Arap Moi’s era (1963–2002), its true colours came out explicitly during president Mwai Kibaki’s era (2002–2012); and particularly in 2007 when a number of clergy openly declared their interests for political seats. Of course, during the 2005 Kenyan constitutional referendum where churches stood together with the opposition and flooded the government (57% versus 43%) most people had not yet realised the emerging powers of the emerging Afro-Pentecostal waves in socio-political arena. But when Bishop Margaret Wanjiru of Jesus Is Alive Ministries (JIAM 2021) and Bishop Pius Muiro of the Maximum Miracle Centre (MMC) declared their interests in joining elective politics in 2006, the birth of a new nation was clearly pronounced. In the Moi era (1979–2002), Pentecostal churches in Kenya were seen as supportive of the government—as “all governments are ordained by God” (Romans 13). They only participated in politics when “praying” for the government. Indeed, there were some reports that some leaders from the Pentecostal churches were being hosted by the government functionaries, given cars and other

favours for their “prayers.” Since 2002 when the National Rainbow Coalition defeated the erstwhile governing party, KANU, which was in power from 1963 to 2002, this trend changed.

From a participant observer’s view, the mercurial characteristics in Afro-Pentecostalism are evident right from the grassroot Pentecostal churches from the village ghettos to the urbanised areas. Experientially, the Afro-Pentecostal outfits, which used to call themselves ministries in the 20th century, reverted to the more conventional phrase, the church. Several cases can be cited to this effect. On their website, the Afro-Pentecostal outfit, *Jesus Is Alive Ministries* (JIAM), which was not keen on politics prior to the turn of the 21st century, now describes their leader, the Hon. Bishop Dr Margaret Wanjiru generously, as a political animal, thus:

Bishop Margaret Wanjiru has for a long time been actively involved with matters of national concern. As a leader she has for years been a vocal participant in governmental policy and leadership issues across the board. Politicians have for years called on the Kenyan churches when elections are near on a vote-seeking mission, only to soon after renege on their every promise to the people of Kenya. Her call to national leadership (politics) is as a result of the people demanding better leadership and representation in government. In 2007, she was elected as a Member of Parliament for Starehe Constituency in a hotly contested election in one of the most challenging constituencies in Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya. She now has the opportunity to not only continue pursuing better governance for the Kenyan people but to also be a key participant in the policy making and implementation process as we work together towards a better Kenya. In 2008, she was appointed into the cabinet as an Assistant Minister for Housing (JIAM 2021, 1).

Besides embracing the titles of bishops and archbishops as church leaders, Afro-Pentecostal outfits that used to be called ministries are now called churches. A case in point is the former Priesthood Fellowship Ministries (PFM), which is now called Priesthood Fellowship Church (PFC). Situated in the Kahawa West area, Nairobi, PFC was founded by Pastor James Gitahi Maina in the mid-1990s, famously called Pastor JJ. By the turn of the 21st century, Pastor JJ’s ecclesiastical title had metamorphosed to Bishop Dr JJ Gitahi, just as his ministry had evolved to a church. In demonstrating the nature of the mercurial characteristics among Afro-Pentecostals, PFCs had also embraced politics and politicians as sojourners in working for a better God’s world, as opposed to earlier times when politicians were seen to be too secular, their money seen as dirty, tithing seen as the only way to raise “blessed” money that promotes spiritual growth, and they discarded fundraising or getting money from “unbelievers” (Kariuki, personal communication 14 April 2021). It is no wonder that politicians, in most of these churches, are given ample time to “preach,” address people, ask for votes, and are sometimes cheered or booed by the congregants, depending on their respective positions on matters of public concern. On Bishop Dr JJ. Gitahi’s official YouTube site, the Deputy President, Dr William Ruto, is (on 26 November 2019) seen offering prayers,

after which he made some political remarks as the congregation listened keenly (Gitahi 2021).

As in the case of the mainline churches, PFCs, like other Afro-Pentecostal outfits in the 21st century, have embraced holistic teachings to their congregants. Such teachings include: drug addiction and the youth; family relations and modernity; church and politics, Christian maturity, and so on. In the 20th century, most of the Afro-Pentecostal outfits in Kenya did not entertain secular issues in their sermons, seminars and workshops, as they insisted that the biblical verses alone have a solution to all human problems. In other words, they avoided biblical exegesis and hermeneutics. In one instance, Bishop JJ is quoted as he counselled married congregants, saying that “women who are dirty and having poor hygiene are the ones contributing to [the] failure of their [respective] marriages” (Njeri 2021, 1). He goes on to explain, “I counsel couples on different issues. Most men come to me complaining that their wives’ smelly situations are adversely affecting their relationships with their spouses” (Bishop cited in Njeri 2021, 1). Such liberal and/or blunt ways of Christian counselling are a new phenomenon in Kenya’s Afro-Pentecostalism, regardless of its classical, charismatic, or neo-Pentecostal leaning.

Like other Afro-Pentecostal outfits, PFC suffers from the “Big Men” syndrome, a phenomenon which Kalu (2018, 21) attributes to the failure to build strong institutions rather than individual cults. Certainly, individually founded institutions cannot escape Big Persons’ syndrome, as the vision carrier will always find himself or herself dominating an otherwise democratic and spiritual society, rather than embrace all gifts within it. In a communalistic society, however, this challenge can be aggravated by the identity crisis that is “evident after the failure of African cultural systems and its unholy alliance with the Western trajectories has created a huge vacuum in the African worldview that is not yet addressed” (Gathogo 2021, 7). Such personality cults have been idolised across the social divides since the 1960s, as post-colonial Africa failed to build strong holistic institutions. PFC, and the rest of Afro-Pentecostals, therefore, should not be seen as isolated cases. Rather, the challenge is also observable among the mainstream churches, albeit covertly. It is also evident within the political parties in Kenya, as “each political party has its owner(s)”—as is a common belief. Further, despite PFC embracing leadership titles that are used in the mainline churches (such as: bishops, archbishops, reverends, and archdeacons, as opposed to their traditional titles such as overseers, elders, deacons, pastors, senior pastors, and apostles among others), the challenge of the cultic Big Persons’ syndrome thus remains a major concern (Kariuki, personal communication 14 April 2021).

Another aspect that demonstrates the mercurial characteristics of Afro-Pentecostalism in Kenya is the dressing in clerical vestments such as the wearing of an amice, a cassock, stole, and the chasuble (Kariuki and Ngiri, personal communication 14 April 2021). While the chasuble is the outermost liturgical vestment worn by clergy for the celebration of the Eucharist among “Anglicans, Roman Catholic, and the Lutheran

Churches and other mainline churches,” the cassock is worn by the clergy both as ordinary dress and as a liturgical garment (Gathogo 2021, 7). The cassock is the floor length garment, a long priestly garment, and is usually black with long sleeves. It fits the body closely and is now getting used by a growing number of officials in the Afro-Pentecostal wing. Afro-Pentecostal liturgies in 21st century Kenya are elaborate and well organised in a manner akin to the way it is done among the Anglicans and the Roman Catholics (Munyua, personal communication 2 August 2021). Equally, doctrinal positions are no longer too legalistic and rigid, as evident by cases such as the administration of the Holy Eucharist, which would be administered after a year or so, and is presently getting frequently shared in a number of Afro-Pentecostal churches in Kirinyaga South (Mwea sub-county), as in the rest of the country (Munyua, personal communication 2 August 2021). To an extent, the frequent administration of the Holy Communion has been viewed as typically a Roman Catholic and Anglican churches’ doctrinal trend. Unlike in the 20th century, the wearing of a clerical collar in public and private spaces is now the vogue among the Afro-Pentecostal leaderships. Previously, in the 20th century, pockets of Afro-Pentecostals could be heard referring to and/or mocking the clerical shirt and collar by derogatorily referring to it as the “Dog’s Collar.” A participant’s observation in the larger parts of central Kenya showed that, as the Afro-Pentecostals referred to Anglicans and Roman Catholics as the Bishop’s churches, they would contrast this by calling themselves spirit-filled churches of God in Christ (*Kanitha cia Kiroho*). By associating themselves with the Holy Spirit, the Afro-Pentecostals were simply equating the mainstream churches with “deadwood churches.” Hence, they were lukewarm, directionless and in missiological error.

From a survey that was carried out in Kirinyaga County of Kenya from September 2020 to July 2021, it was noted that there were still pockets of Afro-Pentecostal leadership that had not embraced the changing patterns noted above. One leading elder was emphatically clear that there were some in the Kagumo Full Gospel Churches of Kenya, Kirinyaga County, who had openly opposed the changing scenarios. A retired Afro-Pentecostal cleric, whose immense influence could be felt even after retirement, was heard complaining thus:

Are we going to adopt the spirit of Jezebel, a Phoenician prince, the daughter of the Priest-King Ethbaal, ruler of the Phoenician cities of Tyre and Sidon, who got married to King Ahab of the Northern Kingdom of Israel? Aren’t we getting misled by this universalising faith of others, just as King Ahab was persuaded by Jezebel to embrace the foreign ways, and eventually introduced the worship of the Tyrian god Baal-Melkart god? Aren’t we going to get entwined in the vicious conflict with our maker for abandoning our ways and be troubled to the very end? Aren’t we also inheriting the pagan gods of infertility as King Ahab inherited from Jezebel? [1 Kings 16]. Aren’t we conforming to the patterns of this world rather than the other way round? And aren’t we failing to offer ourselves as living sacrifices that are holy, pleasing to God and properly worshipping God in the ways it has been revealed to us as spirit-filled churches? [refer to Romans 12:1–3] (Ngiri, personal communication 14 April 2021).

Without proper biblical exegesis, a section of Afro-Pentecostal leadership has, therefore, tried to resist change rather than embrace this rapid revolution that is clearly changing the rhythm of Afro-Pentecostalism. Certainly, the changing patterns of Afro-Pentecostalism in Kenya, as in the rest of tropical Africa, are coming without socio-spiritual preparation. Change has come briskly, without warning, and like an invading army, it is prepared to win and bring Afro-Pentecostals on par with mainline churches: or is it Christ's golden moment of fulfilling his prayer that all may be one church of Christ—in worship, vestments, liturgy, theological education and qualifications, among other things? (John 17:21). Or, could it be the manifestation of Jeremiah's (32:39) prophecy that "I will give them one heart and one way, so that they will always fear Me for their own good and for the good of their children after them?"

For religious outfits that denounced theological training as nothing but secularisation of the church, and insisted on the Holy Spirit as the trainer of the pastors (classical Pentecostals), one wonders why and how the about-turn has come about? Were they in a theo-social catch-22 situation, as the general society, the laws of the land, and the police mounting Kenyan roadblocks demanded clear identification for those who call themselves pastors? Did Afro-Pentecostal pastors wear the clerical shirt and collar merely for identity purposes as they intermingled with the rest of the citizenry who felt that mere smartness, as in the case of being in a tie for men, was not enough? Did they sense fishy things therein, as in the case of tie-wearing con artists posing as genuine pastors, and changing to fishy directions immediately after leaving the sanctuaries? With regard to embracing theological training for their respective pastors, we find a situation that now sees some PhD and honorary doctoral degree holders as their church leaders. It is logical to deduce that even if they initially dismissed such initiatives as unnecessary, as the kingdom of God must be seen and felt on earth, just as in heaven (cf. Mat. 6:10), the tempo of change has dictated otherwise. In view of these developments, Afro-Pentecostals may no longer want to view earthly signs of progress as temporal tents, as the "eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands" (2 Cor 5:1) is the permanent one. The culture of investing in permanent church buildings rather than renting shops, purchasing land parcels for individuals and church use, retraining their clergy, and encouraging prosperity theologies to rule their thinking and articulations, among other considerations, drive us to understand this profound turning point.

Another inescapable turning point that shows the mercurial characteristic in Afro-Pentecostalism is the reliance on science and technology. As a by-product of globalisation, the use of powerful public address systems (PAS)—among other usages of science and technology in most of the Afro-Pentecostal outfits—can easily be seen as mere attempts at pulling people to their side. That is, proselytising and/or sheep-stealing. It must, however, be appreciated that as early as 1957, when the celebrated American Pentecostal leader, T. L. Osborn, led an open air preaching and healing session that exorcised witchcraft in Mombasa City, the use of science and technology helped him to reach out to his huge gatherings that thronged his crusades (Gathogo

2020b, 394). Osborn's arrangements with the then government-controlled Kenya Broadcasting Service (KBS)—renamed Voice of Kenya (VoK) in 1964, now Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC, since 1989)—to offer live coverage for the entire duration was a pointer to the future of the Pentecostal movement in Kenya. The same gesture was replicated in Oral Roberts' Ministries in 1968 and T. D. Jakes's crusades of 2006. Certainly, the latter was more elaborate. Can this be construed to mean that Afro-Pentecostals have now come of age, and their changing patterns are informed by this evolving culture rather than mere attempts at replicating the mainstream churches? As it stood by March 2022, nothing could slow down or stop the rapid tempo of the changing patterns of Afro-Pentecostalism; hence the conservative lot that equated it to Jezebel's spirit of destruction and corruption of authentic spirituality had to get up and dance, for better or for worse, on the arena of this emerging drama. Like the 19th and 20th century missionaries who entered the African scene in Western attire, Western culture, Western science, Western medicine, and Western education (Mbiti 1969); and with new methods of conquering the African worldview, the changing patterns of Afro-Pentecostalism are a reality that cannot be ignored in the scholarly world.

### Some critical Pointers

In attempting to unveil the cause of the mercurial characteristics and/or the changing patterns in Kenya's Afro-Pentecostalism and its relevance to the rest of tropical Africa, a leading Kenyan theologian, Munyua (personal communication 2 August 2021), avers that cases of clerics who are well trained theologians, defecting from mainstream churches to the Afro-Pentecostal outfits, are commonplace. The varying reasons for these defections include: escaping the tyranny of Big Persons' syndrome in the mainline churches and/or escaping persecution by episcopal autocracy; the search for a deeper spiritual life; doctrinal/theological differences; and the need to quench the thirst of the human hearts (cf. Augustine's famous quote is that "our heart is restless until it rests in you" (see also Gathogo 2001, 71). In Munyua's (personal communication 2 August 2021) well considered view, the defecting clergy from the mainline churches carry their theo-doctrinal baggage to their new spiritual homes and eventually exert some influence. Munyua (personal communication 2 August 2021) backed his point further by recalling that the liturgy, as it is practised by the Anglicans and the Roman Catholics, is borrowed from the early church. Hence it is logical to conclude that the incoming clerics influence the "traditional" Afro-Pentecostal leaderships. In any case, the so-called modern religions can also be said to have been influenced, in some aspects, by the ancient religions (refer to Egyptian, Babylonian, Mesopotamian, and the Roman religion). A case in point is the Egyptian religion, which compares well with modern religions (Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, also called Abrahamic religions), as they heavily relied on myths. As a matter of fact, Egyptian religion relied on as many myths. One of the most important ones was the triad of Osiris, Isis and Horus. In particular, the myth of Osiris has it that he was the giver of life and culture. He was killed by his brother, Set. In turn, Isis brought him back to life magically. Horus, the son of Isis, later

defeated Set in retaliation. Afterwards, Osiris became judge and Lord in the underworld. It is through him that believers could be brought back to life after death (Brown 1979).

Regarding rituals, the Egyptian religion was ritualistic, as some ceremonials were set to appease their gods. In such rituals, water and incense were used for cleansing (Brown 1979). Animal sacrifices were presented before gods who, like the modern-day priests in various religions of our time, were dressed in robes and jewels. They were also anointed with oil. Temples were both places of worship and also dwelling places of gods. As in the case of some of our modern religions (refer to Abrahamic religions), only the priests and their servants were allowed in the innermost chamber of the temple in which the gods lived. Of interest to note is that the priesthood was a prestigious and wealthy vocation, which was desired by many people. Their work, as well as that of their assistants, was to sustain the world order by revitalising the gods with food and hymns daily (Brown 1979). Such recollections help us to see the logicity in factoring in the idea of “outside influences”; and eventually understand the changing patterns in Kenya’s Afro-Pentecostalism.

Another critical cause of the changing patterns in Kenya’s Afro-Pentecostalism is with respect to Maslow’s (1943) theory of human motivation. It argues that we act according to the hierarchy and/or priority of needs; hence, we start off by addressing the basic needs before we move on to the higher needs (Maslow 1943, 370–96; McLeod 2020, 1). In stamping their imprints as Afro-Pentecostals, via insisting on glossolalia and the baptism of the Holy Spirit, they first addressed their basic spiritual needs; and in embracing wide-ranging changes that are evident in the first two decades of the 21st century, Afro-Pentecostals are now serving their secondary and/or higher level of needs. As in Maslow’s theory, the bottom-up theory, Afro-Pentecostals began by serving their bottom/primary needs and then moved on to their psycho-spiritual needs, their safety and security needs, their social needs, and their esteem needs. In embracing the more inclusive changes, they are in their self-actualisation and/or self-fulfilment levels. It is in their self-fulfilment and actualisation that they are able to take the Great Commission (Mat 28:18–20) of “go therefore and make disciples of all nations” seriously. In light of this self-fulfilment among Afro-Pentecostals, they are now able to reach the socio-political world in a manner that was not visible in the 20th century. Despite this self-actualisation among Afro-Pentecostals, “their being too tattered, as a movement, with too much mutation” makes them lack a clear solid traceable tradition and/or clear doctrinal standpoint (Karuri-Kirigia, personal communication 4 August 2021).

Another critical pointer to the changing patterns in Afro-Pentecostalism is cultural diffusion. Considering that cultural diffusion describes the spread of peoples’ cultures, faiths, beliefs, music, food, and tools (Gathogo 2011a), the changing patterns among the Afro-Pentecostals in Kenya, as in the rest of tropical Africa, cannot escape this conscious or unconscious change. Indeed, it is due to cultural diffusion that many cultures share similarities globally. In light of globalisation, Afro-Pentecostalism is bound to change as a result of cultural diffusion triggered by religio-cultural trends the

world over. As the spreading of a thing, an idea, or a behaviour pattern from one culture to another (Ezewu 1983), diffusion is bound to mirror the changing patterns of Afro-Pentecostalism. In any case, if every culture had to rely solely on its own religio-cultural inventions, human progress over the centuries would indeed be slow. But cultures have developed rapidly because the process of diffusion has enabled humans to pool their creative/inventive resources (Gathogo 2011a). The Kenyan case is not an exception, as social interaction with mainstream churches has had its own effect on Afro-Pentecostals in the same way the latter has Afro-Pentecostalised the mainline churches in matters of worship, dance, music, and sermon delivery, among other issues. As a result, the Anglican Church in Kenya can best be referred to as the Afro-Anglo-costal Church of Kenya.

Another critical pointer to the changing patterns in Afro-Pentecostalism is the “counter reformation” of the mainstream churches. By counter reform of the mainline churches, we mean the bold appreciation that Afro-Pentecostals “are outsmarting us” in taking the youth, in evangelism and in general outreach, and therefore they are countering their moves by embracing some of their “populist” and “sheep-stealing” gimmicks, such as encouraging vibrant singing, vibrant worship, captivating sermons and indeed Pentecostalisation of diverse elements in the mainstream churches. According to Munyua (personal communication 2 August 2021), this “counter reform” of the 1990s provided a fertile ground for “dialogue” between the Afro-Pentecostals and the mainstream churches, a dialogue that ultimately led to religio-cultural diffusion on both sides of the divide. Hence, both religious outfits, as noted earlier, have influenced one another in propounding 21st century African Christianity.

As an eyewitness, the researcher remembers an event that took place in 1995, when Rev. Daniel Njagi of Kirinyaga Anglican Diocese went to complain to the then Diocesan Bishop (David Gitari) that some neighbouring Afro-Pentecostals (Faith Evangelistic Ministries [FEM]) had secured a neighbouring building and converted it into a “noisy and disruptive worship centre.” Further, their vibrant activities were leading to sheep-stealing and/or losing of membership from his Mutithi Parish of the Anglican Church. Was it a genuine or a cultic movement or just some over-excited heaven goers under the influence of harmful substances, or just deliberate irritants? Can anything be done to contain them, “including legal options or rebuke from someone somewhere?” Rev. Njagi wondered. He went on to explain that they were disrupting the Anglican Church services due to their use of loud and powerful Public Address Systems (PAS) (Njagi, personal communication 2 August 2021). In response, Bishop (later Archbishop) David Gitari told Rev. Njagi, albeit humorously: “Go and purchase a more powerful Public Address System that will counter theirs, and allow your youths to offer lively and appealing music in the church so as to counter them” (Njagi, personal communication 2 August 2021). In other words, Bishop Gitari understood their legal rights to worship as a registered religious society. He also appreciated that a reform of the church, and embrace of some elements of Afro-Pentecostalism, within the Anglican Church, was the perfect counter reform that would address the test.

A further example of “counter reform” in Kirinyaga Anglican Diocese is seen when Archbishop David Gitari (the then Bishop) commissioned the Diocesan Music Committee (DMC) to undertake the task of music revival in the Diocese by coming up with an indigenous sacred songbook. These efforts took effect in 1991 and ended up with the publication of the said book under the title: *Nyimbo Cia Gucanjamura Ngoro* (“Songs to Lift up our Hearts”) under the coordination of the then Director of Communications, Reverend Joyce Karuri-Kirigia. She was assisted by talented musicians from the Diocese and beyond, who included Peter Wanjohi (who later joined the Permanent Presidential Music Commission [PPMC]), Davis Thiaka of Ngiriambu High School, Mr Munene Mbugi, Rev. Harrison Kathaara, and Dr Jason Gathumbi, among others. The task force was privileged to have had a lead music consultant in the person of (the late) Elly Ogalo Osote (a music teacher from Kenya’s top-notch school, the prestigious Alliance High School). The book was typeset by Wahome Mutahi’s Views Media and thereafter published by Uzima Press in 1994 (Karuri-Kirigia, personal communication 4 August 2021).

In a nutshell, DMC was assigned the task of collecting the vibrant African indigenous tunes and songs that could be used for worship purposes. This was a result of two factors. First, the influence of Afro-Pentecostal music, which was vibrant and appealing, had practically diffused into the Anglican spiritual soul and other mainstream churches (Karuri-Kirigia, personal communication 4 August 2021). Hence, as Christians welcomed the bishop whenever he visited individual parishes, he would be welcomed joyfully by the singing-dancing congregants in a manner akin to the emerging Afro-Pentecostal styles. These vibrant songs and welcoming dances would die out the moment they all entered the particular Anglican Church. They would then revert to the Western composed songs, the Golden Bells, which were cool and less joyful and/or enthusiastic. Second, Gitari wanted an African sense of joy to be brought inside the church, and eventually shatter the myth that Anglican or church worship is necessarily meant to be less dramatic, hence dull and cool. For Gitari, Christian worship should be guided by the context of the worshipping community. In his formation and commissioning of the Diocesan Music Committee (DMC), he requested the talented musicians to ensure that they brought a new hymn book that captured the joyful African melodies that were full of life and feeling (Gathogo 2007, 235–257). In a nutshell, DMC had the task of redeeming indigenous music from its cultural context in order to enrich the Gospel of Christ (Karuri-Kirigia, personal communication 4 August 2021).

Critics of this DMC initiative appealed that the singing of ancestral tunes was a bad move, as it was tantamount to reverting to the jingles that were used as back-ups for circumcision rituals for both girls and boys, indigenous marriage rituals, war times ritualistic melodies, harvesting tones, and other ritualistic harmonies. Opponents of this move argued that appealing to ancestral pantheons was a fraudulent move as our African forefathers were not converted Christians. Perhaps an exegesis of Romans 2:12 would have been necessary, as St Paul says that for those Gentiles who did not know the law, they would be judged without the law, as God has put a “law” into everyone.

Nevertheless, the DMC were quick to remind their critics that the Western songs in the Golden Bells may also have had issues with their traditional backgrounds that are unknown to the African context. Who knows? Even the songs that we use from the hymn books may have had their own pre-Christian background akin to the African-ancestral songs. Further, as Barron (personal communication 6 August 2021b) has noted, many of the great “classic” English language hymns date to the 1700s and 1800s, and were quite scandalous when they were introduced—precisely because they were too contextual. That is:

Because they were written to melodies which the “unwashed,” and not-really-Christian lower economic classes, liked. Their very popularity made them suspect. Now those are treasured standards while newer music that is, historically speaking, equivalent in origin is suspect or controversial.

### Morality and the Changing Patterns

The changing patterns in Afro-Pentecostalism are certainly not without pockets of setbacks, false-starts, nightmares, and downright moral-ethical challenges. In Kenya, hardly a month goes by without seeing social media, and sometimes the mainstream media, getting awash with moral-ethical displays in Afro-Pentecostalism (Gathogo 2020b, 391–409). The moral-ethical challenge includes a leading Afro-Pentecostal bishop in Nairobi city announcing publicly to his congregants that they do not need to take medicine as Jesus had conquered it through prayers; rather, they should come to him for cancer prayers, and all will be fine. Shortly later, he himself was treated for cancer and was rushed to a highly specialised cancer hospital in the United States of America, and only returned to conduct his televised ministry after he had stabilised.

Another moral-ethical issue that has been experienced in the second decade of the 21st century was the case of an Afro-Pentecostal bishop who built what he called the “New Jerusalem” within their church compound. He went on to make a weird claim that his architectural outfit was not a symbolic or metaphorical “New Jerusalem,” but the real New Jerusalem for the whole world. Put differently, he fell short of declaring the terrestrial Jerusalem in the Middle East as non-existent and/or as a mere geographical expression. Another bizarre example is the case of an Afro-Pentecostal bishop who told his congregants to pray while facing one of the buildings that they had put up as a church, for divine breakthroughs and as an act of pure and authentic Godly worship. One wonders: Has the building replaced the power of the resurrected Christ? (1 Cor: 15). Among the indigenous Kikuyu (of Kenya), they prayed while facing the “holy mountain of *Ngai* (God)”—Mt Kirinyaga, christened Kenya in 1948, and viewed it as the true worship. The local *Ethaga* rainmakers of the Irungu generation would slaughter and roast a sheep or ram without blemish as a sacrifice to God with huge heaps of firewood, so as to appease God to send rain whenever it failed to come (Gathogo 2017, 115–137).

For an Afro-Pentecostal bishop in Mombasa, telling his congregants to pray while facing one of the many buildings in the compound raises a moral-ethical concern, as

facing the reality of the resurrected Christ or casting their burdens to the Cross of Christ looks more theologically sensible. While it is easy to simply hide under the theology of inculturation, it is not clear how a church building can be comparable to the symbolism of the mountain or the cross of Christ. The moral-ethical challenge is a major impediment to the positive changing patterns of Afro-Pentecostalism, as the Kenyan case demonstrates. In general, the moral-ethical challenge in the first and second decade of the 21st century Kenya has also manifested through “marital infidelity, spouse-swapping, poor leadership structures, con artistry, financial exploitation of the poor, faking miracles, and skewed populist sermons, among others” (Gathogo 2020b, 391). The tendency to win membership by aggressively discrediting theo-doctrinal positions of the neighbouring churches, among some Afro-Pentecostal leaders, also raises a moral-ethical concern; as the vice is set on the wrong premise that one has to paint others in blurred and/or black colours in order for him or her to shine.

Equally, the Rev. Nathan Kirimi’s dismissal of Corona Virus Disease 2019 (Covid-19), on 18 March 2020, as a global hoax, also raises a moral-ethical concern, as misleading a congregation on deadly matters is tantamount to entertaining suicidal thoughts and/or committing murder (Muchui 2020, 1). In other words, the Meru-Tigania-based Afro-Pentecostal cleric of Jesus Winner Ministry went beyond the call of duty when he downplayed a global wave that was sweeping through both poor and rich countries, and had claimed the lives of about 4 000 Kenyans; and there were 205 356 confirmed cases out of 2 149 379 tests, by 4 August 2021. It was indeed a big error (Cheruiyot 2021, 1). The various social media posts, largely from the evangelicals in Kenya, such as “Covid-19 is a punishment for sinners, Covid-19 will leave the holy ones intact, God has now said enough is enough for the sinful world” and so on, raise a moral-ethical concern, as the love of the neighbour (the sinner) amounts to the summary of the law of God, and is indeed the Greatest Commandment in the scripture (Mark 12:28–31).

## Conclusion

This article set out to explore some critical pointers to the mercurial characteristics and/or changing patterns in Afro-Pentecostal churches of Kenya. It began by acknowledging the uniquely characteristic ability to embrace some elements of African heritage without necessarily proclaiming it, and went on to review the relevant literature. It further discussed examples that demonstrate the unique nature of Afro-Pentecostalism. The changing patterns in the first two decades of the 21st century are evident as Afro-Pentecostals embrace some theo-doctrinal characteristics such as leadership titles found in mainstream churches, wearing clerical vestments, clerical shirts and collar, attending theological universities, shifting from missions to churches, building permanent buildings, participating in politics, and embracing holistic teachings.

The article has also attempted to account for the mercurial characteristics and/or changing patterns by exploring several pointers to this phenomenon, and bringing up critical factors such as: the defection of clerics from mainstream churches; influence

from mainline churches; Maslow's theory of human motivation that contends we act according to needs; impacts of religio-cultural diffusion; globalisation effects; and the "counter reformation" of the mainstream churches. The article has also acknowledged that moral-ethical concern is a major impediment to the changing patterns of Afro-Pentecostalism and authentic growth. Certainly, cultic, sectarian groups, and other New Religious Movements (NRMs), which are not authentically Christians, have always soiled the image of Afro-Pentecostalism. Such groups have always projected an image of a conventional church, though, in reality, they are dangerous groups to society. The moral-ethical concern is, however, a general problem that is experienced across the board.

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