

HOUSTON'S NIGERIAN CHURCHES

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In recent years, global or world Christianity has attracted much attention both in academe and the media. As is now well known, Christian numbers are expanding rapidly outside the faith's traditional Euro-American heartlands, in the continents of Africa, Asia and Latin America. In some cases, the Christian presence in new, while in others, older churches and denominations are increasingly rivaled by newer upstart bodies.

That global phenomenon also has a sizable impact in North America and Europe, as a result of immigration. Although Muslim migrants attract much notice and controversy, Christians make up a very large share of the new ethnic presence. In a few cases, the expansion of new Global South churches represents a deliberate decision to undertake missionary ventures, but much more commonly, it arises as a natural by-product of ordinary migration, commonly driven by economic factors. Whatever the reason, the migration has resulted in the foundation and expansion of countless new churches and denominations in what were once regarded as the traditional bastions of the Christian faith.¹

This essay describes the spread of new African churches in one US city, namely Houston, Texas. Although no one city is typical of the emerging picture of immigrant derived churches, Houston is particularly valuable because of the nature of the migrants, who mainly stem from Nigeria. This is of the most spectacularly thriving and creative centers of Global South Christianity. Also, the firm presence they have established in Houston means that this important city has become a significant base for further expansion.²

Let me say from the outset what this paper is not. The current literature on immigrant churches is sizable and of high quality, and it addresses many themes of great significance: gender roles in churches, generational relations and conflicts, power structures and succession issues, religious ideology versus ethnic identity. The present paper deals with

¹ For the impact of immigrant congregations in the United States, see for instance Tony Carnes and Anna Karpathakis, eds., *New York Glory* (New York: New York University Press, 2001); Gerardo Marti, *A Mosaic of Believers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); Karen I. Leonard, Alex Stepick, Manuel A. Vásquez, and Jennifer Holdaway, eds., *Immigrant Faiths* (Lanham, Md.: AltaMira Press, 2005); Stephen Prothero, ed., *A Nation of Religions* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Paul D. Numrich, *The Faith Next Door* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

² For African Christian migration in the West, see Jacob Olupona and Regina Gemignani, eds., *African Immigrant Religions in America* (New York University Press, 2007); Afe Adogame, Roswith Gerloff, and Klaus Hock, eds., *Christianity in Africa and the African Diaspora* (New York: Continuum, 2009); Moses Biney, *From Africa to America* (New York University Press, 2011); Frieder Ludwig and J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, eds., *African Christian Presence in the West* (Trenton NJ : Africa World Press, 2011); Afe Adogame, *The African Christian Diaspora* (New York: Bloomsbury 2013).

none of these. It is solely intended as an introduction to the religious geography of one particular ethnicity in a major US city.

Nigeria

In economic and political terms, Nigeria is arguably the most significant country in black Africa. It is also home to a great many Christians, and those numbers are growing steadily.

Partly, this is a matter of conversion. If we look at the African continent as a whole, then Christians represented just ten percent of the population in 1900, rising to some 46 percent by the end of the century. Taking the continent as a whole, the main African story of the twentieth century was that about half the population moved from primal, animist, religions to one of the great monotheist faiths, and by a four to one margin, they chose Christianity over Islam. In the lands that became Nigeria, Christians accounted for one percent of the population in 1900, but 45 percent by 1970. Today, they may represent half the population, although actual figures are controversial.

More significant though, the overall population soared in these same years, so that those shares came to signify much larger absolute numbers. The region that would later be defined as Nigeria had [perhaps fifteen million members in 1900, but that number then grew dramatically, to 33 million in 1950 and 55 million in 1970, and to 180 million today. By 2050, there could be 340 million Nigerians. If we assume the Christian proportion of that population to remain steady at 45 percent, then Nigeria presently has 80 million Christians, potentially rising to 150 million by 2050. By that point, this will be one of the world's largest Christian populations, far exceeding any European nation. Although long term projections are shaky, recent UN projections suggested that by 2100, Nigeria might have a population of over 700 million.

Although Nigeria is a large nation in its area, that massive population expansion has inevitably resulted in major concentration in particular urban areas. Lagos, which in 1950 had perhaps 300,000 people, today has over twenty million in its wider metropolitan area. That social change has religious implications in that the new cities have been especially appealing to emerging churches, and their distinctive styles of worship and evangelism.

New Christians

European missionaries introduced Christianity during the nineteenth century, under the auspices of the colonial empires. They found little success among northern peoples like the Hausa, with their proud and ancient Islamic traditions, but won a hearing in the south and east, among followers of pagan or primal faiths. The Igbo of the south-east became enthusiastic converts, mainly to Catholicism. The Yoruba of the west divided equally between Islam and Christianity.

Many of Nigeria's Christians adhere to churches that would be quite familiar to Euro-Americans. Among the country's largest denominations, we find Roman Catholics (24 million) and Anglicans (23 million), as well as Presbyterians and Methodists. According to the World Christian Database, Catholics and Anglicans alone constitute 55 percent of

Nigerian Christians. “Independents” though, very broadly defined, are also numerous, with 32 million followers, almost forty percent of the population.³

That Independent category includes a great many groupings. Many are AIC’s, African Independent Churches, which particularly in the 1960s and 1970s were the subject of much scholarly investigation. Many owed their foundation to prophetic or charismatic founders. An individual was enthusiastically converted through one of the mission churches, from which he or, commonly, she, was gradually estranged. The division might arise over issues of church practice, usually the integration of native practices. The individual received what is taken as a special revelation from God, commonly in a trance or vision, and the message was usually attributed to an angel. The prophet then began to preach independently, and the result might well be a new independent church. Particularly where the movement originates from a founder's revelation, such churches place a heavy premium on immediate spiritual experience, manifested through visions, charismatic gifts, and angelic communications.⁴

Nigeria produced many such examples, which will be central to our story. In the Yoruba lands, the dreadful influenza epidemic of 1918 led to the foundation of the faith-healing churches known as *Aladura* (the Owners of Prayer). From the 1920s on, the *Aladura* movement spawned many offshoots, usually under the leadership of some new charismatic leader or prophet. Such were the Cherubim and Seraphim Society, Christ Apostolic Church, and the Church of the Lord, Aladura. In some cases, the new bodies saw the divine messages received in trances and dreams as equal to the inspired word of the Bible.⁵

A prominent heir to that tradition was the Church of the Cherubim and Seraphim, “C and S,” which in turn spawned dozens of breakaways and new plantings. The most significant is the Redeemed Christian Church of God, RCCG, which was founded in 1952 by Josiah Akindayomi, and was subsequently headed by Enoch Adeboye. Since the 1970s it has achieved a stunning global reach, with a fiery sense of mission, and it has enjoyed wide success across North America and Europe. Its headquarters, Redemption City, claims to be able to accommodate a million worshipers.⁶ The RCCG is in the process of becoming a new global denomination.

Megatrends

³ Akinyele Omoyajowo, ed., *The Anglican Church in Nigeria (1842–1992)* (Lagos, Nigeria: Macmillan Nigeria, 1994); Ogbu U. Kalu, ed., *A Century and a Half of Presbyterian Witness in Nigeria, 1846–1996* (Lagos, Nigeria: Ida-Ivory, 1996); M. M. Familusi, *Methodism in Nigeria, 1842–1992* (Ibadan, Nigeria: NPS Educational Publishers, 1992); Elizabeth Isichei, ed., *Varieties of Christian Experience in Nigeria* (London: Macmillan, 1982).

⁴ I discuss these trends at length in Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom* 3rd edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁵ Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁶ Andrew Rice, “Mission From Africa,” *New York Times Magazine*, April 12, 2009; John Burnett, “Nigerian Church Spreads African-Style Zeal Across North America,” NPR, May 18, 2014, at <http://www.npr.org/2014/05/18/313612376/nigerian-church-spreads-african-style-zeal-across-north-america>

I identify several religious styles and themes prominent in Nigerian Christianity: or as we might call them, megatrends. They would include, at a minimum, a central emphasis on healing and spiritual warfare; a strong culture of revival and mass gatherings; a tendency to become more Pentecostal; a Prosperity theme; and creative means of evangelism.⁷ Over time, older AIC's became much more obviously evangelical in tone as they made conscious decisions to move towards the Christian mainstream. This trend affected the RCCG, which also shared in a general move towards more Pentecostal forms of worship.

We might in fact speak of the Pentecostalization of African religion, both in the sense of the spread of US-founded Pentecostal denominations, and of the imitation of their styles by native-founded bodies. One major aspect of this has been the growth of a culture of spectacle in African Christianity, with the pivotal role of great revival movements and gatherings highly reminiscent of the revivals on the American frontier from the 1790s onwards. Most successful churches are charismatic in their lively and open worship style, and their openness to supernatural experience. Although I am quoting from a study of Tanzania, in Nigeria too charismatic services are marked by "rapturous singing and rhythmic hand-clapping, with . . . prayers for healing and miraculous signs."⁸

Nigeria also demonstrates other critical trends in African religion, especially the mass popular appeal of Christianity and Christian culture. In Nigeria, that religious boom was especially a feature of the 1980s, the start of what scholar Ruth Marshall has aptly termed the Pentecostal Revolution.⁹ We see an intense and pervasive interest in religious issues, and the development of an extreme buyers' market in religion. Religious bodies know that millions of consumers are out there, but that a vast number of competitors serve these consumers, who can easily redirect their business to many one of a number of competitors. In order to serve this hothouse market, suppliers often turn to American styles of marketing and promotion. I stress that I am speaking of the appropriation of styles by groups like the RCCG, rather than the imposition of outside control.

Also successful have been "health-and-wealth" churches, practicing varieties of spiritual warfare but also promising their adherents material blessings here and now. These prosperity churches have proved very attractive to the middle classes as well as the poor. Perhaps the best example is the Winners' Chapel founded by Bishop David Oyedepo in the mid-1980s. Its great showplace is Lagos's Faith Tabernacle, which reportedly seats fifty thousand worshippers.

Other flourishing institutions are vast open air "evangelical campgrounds" with names such as Mountain of Fire and Miracles, Deeper Life, and Redemption Camp (the last spreads over some twelve thousand acres). Such campgrounds are often used for all-night services of prayer, worship, preaching and testimony that are so absolutely standard across Africa. In the global South, at least, such vigil services have become a signature of emerging Christianity. Particularly among the AICs, prayer is accompanied by healing and exorcism.

⁷ Philip Jenkins, "Letting Go: Understanding Mormon Growth in Africa," *Journal of Mormon History*, 35(2)(2009): 1-25.

⁸ Quoted in Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*.

⁹ Ruth Marshall, *Political Spiritualities: The Pentecostal Revolution in Nigeria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). Richard Burgess, *Nigeria's Christian Revolution* (Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock, 2008);

These very popular services commonly draw attendance in the thousands, sometimes the tens of thousands, and Nigerian churches sometimes claim still larger attendance. We will encounter some of these churches again in an American context, especially Deeper Life, and how they have tried, however tentatively, to reproduce those worship styles on American soil

Many of these churches have deployed innovative means of evangelism, commonly using the most advanced contemporary technology. Little known in the West, one of the main expressions of popular evangelical faith in Africa is the Nigerian-based video industry. Since the 1990s, popular religious and charismatic videos have appeared in their hundreds, presenting stark calls to spiritual warfare. Such films teach doctrines of deliverance and sanctification while constantly reminding believers of the dangers of occult dabbling. Made largely in a mixture of Yoruba and English, Nigerian Christian videos enjoy a continent-wide distribution through satellite networks and cable channels.¹⁰

To some degree, all these trends cross denominational boundaries. This means that while denominations flourish in African Christianity, the differences separating them are quite different from what might be expected in the American or European territories that were their birthplace. Denominational border-crossing is thus another obvious megatrend in Nigerian Christianity.

Migration

A brief historical summary helps explain the background to the Nigerian migration to the US. Nigeria became independent in 1960, and was immediately subjected to extreme strains founded in tribal and religious divisions. From 1967 through 1970 the country suffered a bloody civil war that claimed perhaps a million lives. Over the following decades, the country was usually governed by military dictatorships dominated by northern Muslim groups. The economy in these years lurched from disaster to disaster, partly due to official corruption and mismanagement. In consequence, it became very difficult for educated and talented people to find appropriate work in the country. All those problems were very much in evidence long before the recent rise of the Islamist movement Boko Haram, which has massively escalated violence and tension in the country since its foundation in 2002.¹¹

The resulting migration affected Christians far more than Muslims. The Christians of the south and east – Igbo and Yoruba - had stronger ties to the outside world, especially to Europe. Oil also played a major role. The country's oil region was heavily concentrated in the Igbo south-east, which was in fact the region that attempted to secede in the 1960s, precipitating the civil war. This oil connection offered natural ties to the US and especially to Texas, which from the 1980s became a major destination for migrants. Early migrants were swiftly followed by relatives and friends in the well-known pattern of chain migration. Unlike other immigrant communities, Nigerians faced little difficulties in terms of a language barrier, in that virtually all arrived with at least some knowledge of English, and most were

¹⁰ Philip Jenkins, "Nigeria's Christian Videos," *CC*, November 4, 2008: 45.

¹¹ Niels Kastfelt, *Religion and Politics in Nigeria* (London: British Academic Press, 1994); Toyin Falola, *Violence in Nigeria* (University of Rochester Press, 1998); Karl Meier, *This House Has Fallen* (London: Allen Lane, 2001).

fluent. Nigerian-Americans usually score among the most highly-educated of all recent immigrant groups, with a high proportion of migrants holding advanced degrees.

Texas has several Nigerian centers, including in the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area and in Austin. Houston, though, is by far the strongest. That city today is one of the most ethnically and cultural diverse cities in the US. A historic moment in the migration process came in 2011, when Continental Airlines finally began nonstop flights between Lagos and Houston's international airport, a link that local residents had sought for decades.

Although estimates vary, the city's Nigerian community probably totals between eighty and a hundred thousand, with Christians massively in the majority. Some areas of the city have large African communities, especially in the south-west quadrant, west of Route 288 and south of the Westpark Tollway. In those areas, we commonly find African retailing and cultural institutions, including shops selling African food and clothing, and videos. Over time, immigrants have tended to move out from those areas to new suburban and ex-urban centers, and churches have followed them. Fort Bend, in the south-west suburbs, has a very active Nigerian community.

Houston's Nigerians have several community institutions, including the Nigerian Foundation, which dates from 1982. In 2012, the activist movement Occupy Nigeria even acquired a Houston branch. Beyond the religious realm, Nigerian-Americans like "Fat Tony" have also contributed to Houston's flourishing hip-hop scene. Typically for his generation, "Tony" is the son of a Nigerian who fought in the country's civil war, and then emigrated to the United States to find work as an engineer.

New Churches in a New Land

In these sections, we also find Nigerian churches, which are of course just one part of a much broader ethnic landscape. At the beginning of this century, Helen Rose Ebaugh reported finding almost eight hundred immigrant religious institutions in the Houston area, among which Africans represent only one small element.¹²

The Nigerian religious presence in the US is by no means confined to churches specifically identified by some ethnic label. For one thing, there are Muslim migrants, although these are a small proportion of the whole. Also, as we have seen, lots of Nigerians were affiliated to "mainstream" denominations with many branches in the US, such as Catholics or Methodists. Undoubtedly, many Nigerian migrants affiliated to such congregations.¹³

Despite this, we can in fact observe a steady drift to Nigerian ethnic churches. I offer one case study that I have witnessed myself, in which a Pentecostal church in a Pennsylvania city developed a strong African focus, due entirely to the interests and concerns of one (white

¹² Helen R. F. Ebaugh and Janet Saltzman Chafetz, eds., *Religion and the New Immigrants* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira, 2000).

¹³ Yushau Sodiq, "African Muslims In The United States: The Nigerian Case," in Jacob Olupona and Regina Gemignani, eds., *African Immigrant Religions in America* (New York University Press, 2007), 306-24.

American) pastor. As more and more Africans gravitated to this congregation, it became known as the “African church” in town, and attracted new African arrivals who derived from very different theological backgrounds. At no time, incidentally, did Africans come close to constituting a majority of this church. It just managed to achieve a critical mass in which Africans could rely on finding friends and acquaintances from familiar backgrounds.

In virtually no case did those Christian churches arrive in the United States with a specific goal of mission or evangelism, although later leaders have sometimes retrojected such intentions. Like so many other migrants in these years, Nigerian people arrived and formed communities, and established institutions to maintain social links and promote the welfare of the community. Those desires naturally manifested themselves in the churches that were such a standard part of life in the old country. Once in operation, those churches also developed the familiar functions of mutual support and community, and passing values on to the younger generation.

Gradually too, they developed from unofficial groupings meeting in rented or borrowed premises to formal institutions with fixed homes and property holdings. The United States offers many attractive advantages to such new churches with its favorable laws about taxation and zoning for religious bodies, and social attitudes are especially favorable in a Texan city like Houston.

Once a network of such churches was established, that in turn attracted other denominations that came to the US specifically to work among African migrants, and even with the goal of wider evangelism. Nigerians in Houston were after all widely connected within what has become a global Nigerian Diaspora. Networks of family and friends usually extended to major cities like Chicago, New York, Atlanta and Toronto, and very often to European centers, above all, London. For ambitious Nigerian evangelists, Houston seemed like a mighty bridgehead on American soil, with the potential of still wider outreach to other continents.¹⁴

Although it is difficult to generalize about the appeal or outlook of these churches, we find a faithful rendering of one kind of congregation in Tope Folarin’s prizewinning story “Miracle,” in which Texas Nigerians gather to see a blind pastor and prophet on his tour across America:

We have come from all over North Texas to see him. Some of us have come from Oklahoma, some of us from Arkansas, a few of us from Louisiana and a couple from New Mexico. We own his books, his tapes, his holy water, his anointing oil. We know that he is an instrument of God’s will, and we have come because we need miracles.

We need jobs. We need good grades. We need green cards. We need American

¹⁴ There are several relevant essays in the important collection Jacob Olupona and Regina Gemignani, eds., *African Immigrant Religions in America* (New York University Press, 2007). See especially Elias Bongmba, “Portable Faith : The Global Mission Of African Initiated Churches,” 102-131; and Ogbu M. Kalu, “The Andrew Syndrome : Models In Understanding Nigerian Diaspora,” 61-87

passports. We need our parents to understand that we are Americans. We need our children to understand they are Nigerians. We need new kidneys, new lungs, new limbs, new hearts. We need to forget the harsh rigidity of our lives, to remember why we believe, to be beloved, and to hope. We need miracles.¹⁵

Congregations

Today, some 25 churches of African origin operate within the Greater Houston area. Rice University scholar Elias Bongmba found at least seventeen Nigerian congregations, besides two from Cameroon, and two Ethiopian, but that number has certainly increased substantially over the past decade.¹⁶

Incidentally, the ethnic balance of Nigerian immigrants in the US is not well studied, and that applies especially to the relative role of Igbo and Yoruba, both of whom are numerous. Inquiries on message boards about relative numbers are usually met with some hostility on the grounds that importing “tribal” attitudes to the US is not desirable. This is however an important question for research into migrant communities, as it is much easier to find and map independent congregations of distinctively Nigerian origins than Catholic churches (say) that happen to have significant numbers of Nigerian members.

As independent churches like the Aladura-derived bodies are much more likely to be Yoruba, we are thus much more likely to find Yoruba religious groups rather than Igbo. With that caveat, we can say that major denominations include:

Redeemed Christian Church of God

As noted above, the RCCG operates widely around the world, pursuing its motto of “Made in Heaven, Assembled in Nigeria, exported to the world.” It began its US presence in Detroit in 1992 before expanding to Dallas and Tallahassee and, of course, Houston, where it has a number of affiliates – at least fifteen.¹⁷

The RCCG now has some twenty thousand parishes worldwide, of which at least several hundred are in the United States. (Some estimates range much higher). Their operations in “Dallas, Tallahassee, Houston, New York, Washington, and Chicago, Atlanta, Detroit, Maryland, etc.” One congregation, in Bowie, Maryland, claims two thousand members, qualifying it as a megachurch. The RCCG is currently building a splendid new North American headquarters near Greenville, Texas, a town that in the early twentieth century boasted the motto of “The blackest land and the whitest people.” In a facsimile of its enormous Nigerian center, the proposed Texas complex would include “a large dormitory, a 10,000-seat sanctuary, an amphitheater, an artificial lake and perhaps even a modest water park.” Like its counterparts at home in Nigeria, the American church projects a powerful media presence, with a Dallas-based television network, and other media operations.

¹⁵ <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/jul/09/caine-prize-tope-folarin-african-writing>

¹⁶ Leslie Casimir, “African-Rooted Churches Flourish In Houston,” Houston Chronicle April 15, 2008, <http://www.chron.com/life/houston-belief/article/African-rooted-churches-flourish-in-Houston-1551080.php>

¹⁷ <http://www.ngex.com/bd/c/Religion/Churches/United%20States/Texas/Houston/>

Some Houston churches of “the Redeemed” include

Restoration Chapel, Beechnut Drive
 Dominion International Centre, Beechnut St.
 Dominion Chapel, Stafford
 Isaac Generation Assembly, Sugar Branch Drive
 Living Word Chapel, Richmond Avenue
 Pavilion of Redemption, Old Richmond Road in Sugar Land
 King’s Palace in Katy (west of Houston).

Isaac Generation is typical in its recent foundation, and its mushroom growth. According to its website,

The Isaac Generation Assembly chapter started on Oct.15th 2000, under the headship of the Trinity, and His under-shepherd, Pastor Shola Awobajo in a hotel in the South West side of Houston (Adams Mark Hotel). The first service had 22 adults in attendance and since then it has been growing tremendously. Within 6 months we had out grown the hotel facilities and we secured a temporary but permanent accommodation at 9525 Town Park Dr. Houston TX 77036 a space of about 3300 sq ft in size. By December 23rd, 2007, the church moved into their state of the art ultra modern worship center on approximately 6 acres of land they acquired in year 2004 on 10330 Sugar Branch Dr., Houston TX 77036.¹⁸

Restoration Chapel claims a similarly “miraculous” growth narrative:

RCCG came to Texas in 1995. Today, there are several dozen parishes of RCCG in Texas. Restoration Chapel started on a modest note at the end of 1996. It later moved its meeting place to a hotel. It then moved to a rental space located on a strip mall on Bissonnet Street, Houston in September 1997 with only 11 adults. The Church was formally inaugurated by Pastor E A Adeboye, in May 1998. The rented space became too small for the church due to rapid growth. God being so good, He gave the ministry a new property of about 8 Acres on which the current church auditoriums are standing on 13406 Beechnut Street, Houston.... The phenomenal growth which the church began experiencing continued until the auditorium became grossly inadequate hence the need for a bigger space. A new 1500-seater, ultra modern auditorium was completed early in 2006, and was formally dedicated by Pastor Enoch Adeboye, just before the start of the 2006 North America convention of RCCG, which took place in Houston.¹⁹

Pavilion of Redemption freely admits to being a work in progress:

¹⁸ <http://www.isaacgeneration.org/about-us.html>

¹⁹ <http://www.rccgrestoration.org/about-us/the-church>

The parish kicked off with virtually no membership on ground. Pastor Grace Okonrende (an evangelist by calling) took the bull by the horn when she set out in January 2005 on the streets of Houston. She went on evangelizing to gather people to our “Spring board Venue” 7707 Bissonnet Street. Her efforts soon yielded fruit as a family agreed to be in fellowship. That was a seed that has never ceased to grow. The Church was blessed with a piece of land (9.428 acres). The land is presently being developed. It is our prayers that God who has begun a good work in us, will complete it in Jesus name.²⁰

Like all RCCG churches, these congregations are avowedly multi-racial. At Stafford’s Dominion Chapel, for instance, Pastor Bayo Fadugba claims that “under his leadership, the church has grown in every area of ministry, and is becoming one of the most culturally diverse churches in Houston, Texas.” Its website is available in Spanish as well as English.²¹

All these churches, incidentally, present a sophisticated public face through well-designed and user friendly websites that fully integrate American and Nigerian material. Services are made available through streaming and podcasts. All also link to the main site of the North American branch of the denomination, RCCGNA, which is headquartered in Dallas.²²

Cherubim and Seraphim

We have already encountered the Cherubim and Seraphim – the Eternal Sacred Order of Cherubim and Seraphim - as an offshoot of the Aladura movement. In this instance, the church was founded in 1925. At least as much as its counterparts, it is heavily focused on healing. Its Houston branch, the Mount of Christ Healing Church, is based in Sugar Land.

Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries

Another church devoted to the miraculous is the MFM, Mountain of Fire, which describes itself as

Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries, is a ministry devoted to the revival of Apostolic signs, Holy Ghost fireworks and the unlimited demonstration of the power of God to deliver to the uttermost. Absolute holiness within and without, as the greatest spiritual insecticide, and a condition for Heaven is taught openly. MFM is a do-it-yourself Gospel Ministry, where your hands are trained to wage war and your fingers to fight.

Its Houston branch can be found at Bellaire Boulevard.²³

Deeper Life Bible Fellowship

²⁰http://www.rccgpavilion.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=76&Itemid=508

²¹<http://dominionchapel.org/index.php/about/pastors/>

²²<http://www.rccgna.org/> ; <http://dominionchapel.org/index.php/media/broadcast/>

²³<http://www.mountainoffire.org/about>

The Deeper Life church has several congregations in the greater Dallas-Fort Worth area, as well as in Austin. In the Houston area, Deeper Life churches can be found in Katy, Richmond and Sugar Land. The Houston congregation, incidentally, follows African precedent in offering a night vigil on the last Friday of each month.²⁴

Suggesting the pattern of new immigrant congregations, we often find African churches located in the same neighborhood as other non-Christian places of worship. Deeper Life's Sugar Land church operates just a few blocks from a new Hindu temple, the Shri Swaminarayan Mandir. The Mountain of Fire church has as its neighbor a Shi'ite mosque, Markazi Imam Bargah Al-Murtaza.²⁵

Christ Apostolic Church

Another growing denomination is Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) that, like the RCCG, is rooted in the Aladura movement. "By the leading of the Holy Spirit on October 1928, the late Apostle Joseph Ayo Babalola founded Christ Apostolic Church in Ilesha, a town in Osun State, Nigeria." According to the group's official history, its international outreach began in Ibadan, Nigeria, in 1979 when Prophet T. O. Obadare decided

to hold three days of fasting and prayer concerning the situation of Nigerians abroad. After the three-day revival, a lady prophesied for almost an hour concerning the same issue of Nigerians abroad. The prophet then went into an additional seven days of prayer and fasting concerning the issue.

After forming a CAC church in London, Prophet Obadare moved to Houston in 1981, and then developed a network of congregations across the United States. Christ Apostolic Church of America has now developed congregations in New York, New Jersey, Baltimore, Washington D.C., Birmingham (Alabama), Chicago, Houston, Dallas, Oklahoma City, and Los Angeles. These are distinct from a number of rival denominations that also claim to be the rightful inheritors of the true CAC tradition, such as Christ Apostolic Church Babalola.

In the Houston area, CAC has four congregations, respectively:

Christ Apostolic Church - VOC – Houston, 6231 South Highway 6
 Christ Apostolic Church - Revival Center, Houston, 5930 Hwy 6 North
 Christ Apostolic Church – Mercyfield, 9621 Southwest Freeway
 Christ Apostolic Church, 11601 Ormandy St

All are chiefly suburban, and their internet presence suggests rather less marketing sophistication than the RCCG. None appears to have a free-standing website.

Brotherhood of the Cross and Star

Somewhat further removed from mainstream Christianity is the messianic and millenarian Cross and Star movement, which was founded by Olumba Olumba Obu, in Calabar, Nigeria, in 1956. Followers regard Obu not just as a prophet but as an incarnation of the

²⁴ <http://www.dlbchouston.org/>

²⁵ <http://www.al-murtaza.org/>

Holy Spirit, and the church borrows heavily from traditional African religion. In the Houston area, the Cross and Star founded its Bethel church in 1988, and this is now located in the city's south-west.²⁶

The “Mainline”

Roman Catholic Church

It may seem curious to list Catholics as part of the Nigerian ethnic church spectrum. Still, Nigeria is one of the world's largest Catholic countries, and its role in that church will grow steadily in coming years. It also produces many priestly vocations, and Nigerian priests are commonplace throughout Europe and North America, including in Ireland. In the US, Nigerian Catholics face problems similar to those at home in ensuring that Catholics do not defect to other denominations. In both lands, religion is a buyers' market, and no “supplier” can afford to relax in the face of competition.

The Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston reports a Nigerian Catholic population of fifteen thousand. The church of St. Albert of Trapani has a group specifically directed to the Nigerian Catholic community, while St. Thomas More invites Nigerian Catholic Women.²⁷ Houston has an office of the Missionary Society of St. Paul, which supervises some thirty priests working in North America, which they view as mission territory. An Igbo Catholic Community Centre is located on Creekbend Drive. Its place of worship is St. Mary of the Purification.²⁸

Although this is incidental to my theme here, I should add that Cameroonians also maintain a strong Catholic identity, with particular churches serving their needs.

Anglicans

Nigerian Anglican churches also have a presence in the region, distinct from the Episcopal Church that is the US branch of the Anglican Communion. Political and theological agreements have though led many African Anglicans to seek separate jurisdictions. In 2000, All Saints Houston became a purely Nigerian-run parish in the Houston area, although it has been deeply divided in recent years. Despite these controversies, one observer of a service noted approvingly that a service at this church “was typical Igbo people at their best.”²⁹

²⁶ Harvey C. Kwiyani, *Sent Forth: African Missionary Work in the West* (Orbis Books, 2014).

²⁷ <http://stalbertoftrapani.org/nigerian-catholic-community>;
<http://stmhouston.org/nigerian-catholic-women>

²⁸ For diocesan estimates of numbers, see <http://www.archgh.org/mobile/?pid=279> ;
<http://www.igbocatholicshouston.org/>

²⁹ <http://www.allsaintshouston.com/> ; “Facts of the Crisis at All Saints Anglican Church, Houston,” at <http://usafricaonline.com/2011/10/27/advertisement-facts-of-the-crisis-at-all-saints-anglican-church-houston/> ; the quote is from

Assimilation?

Houston, then, has become home not just to a number of scattered Nigerian churches, but to a whole religious ecology, which in many ways reproduces conditions from the home country. Clearly, this fact offers wonderful opportunities to researchers.

What is not yet clear is how long these conditions will persist. However faithful they may be to “home country” norms, immigrant churches find it hard to retain their distinctiveness beyond a generation or two, and the dangers are all the greater when so many of the migrants speak English. Within a few decades, it is likely that the independent churches that I have identified here will have merged with more traditional US evangelical or Pentecostal denominations, or else come to resemble them in all but name. The main exception to that is the RCCG, which stands a good chance of retaining firmly independent status, and an African identity.

Whatever the outcome, though, the process of integration and religious assimilation – and its timetable – will be fascinating to observe.