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# Finding Faith: Ghana, the Netherlands, and my Year Abroad

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# Finding Faith: Ghana, the Netherlands, and my Year Abroad

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Elissa Vinnik

## I. Introduction

Popular images of globalization stress its economic and political character. However, as capital, people, goods, images, information, and ideologies spill across national borders, different cultures, religions, races, and social values are newly juxtaposed. As a result, there are currently thousands of Buddhists in Iowa and Pentecostal Christians in China. Islam now ranks as the second most common religion in Europe. Since September 11, 2001, Western media has given much attention to Islamic fundamentalism and clashes between Muslims and the West. Yet as a result of globalization, Christianity in both the developed and developing worlds has also undergone significant changes. My months abroad in Ghana and the Netherlands have given me a unique opportunity to explore Christianity in both countries and to consider the effects of globalization on each. Drawing upon scholarly research and my own experiences, this essay will begin with a summary of the history and current practice of Christianity in Ghana, followed by a similar discussion of Christianity in the Netherlands. Each of these sections will also include observations on the relationship between globalization and the practice of Christianity in that nation. Finally, I will share what I have learned about Christianity and globalization from both my research and personal observations.

## II. Ghana

It is simply impossible to overlook religion in Ghana, particularly in its Pentecostal and Charismatic Christian forms. When traveling on Sundays, one cannot help but feel underdressed because virtually all non-Muslim Ghanaians are sporting their most beautiful outfits as they set off or return home from Church. God, Jesus, and Allah appear on the vast majority of store signs: "God Knows Modern Fashion," "In God's Time Mechanics," "Praise Allah Enterprise," and "Jesus' Blood Hair Salon," are only a few examples. Similarly, vehicles' rear windows sport phrases like "Jesus Loves You" or "God Is Good" as well as a smattering of saint and prophet names, like Abraham, Jehovah, Solomon, Amos, and Joseph. Moreover, when riding *tro tros*, the most common form of public transportation, one is likely to find preachers delivering passionate sermons and leading passengers in song. This is usually followed by solicitations for a collection, and soon after, the preacher's departure for another sermon on a different *tro tro*. Traveling bumpy roads through the hillsides or along the coast, churches and mosques stand out, in color, architectural style, or size, even in the poorest towns.

Religion also plays a major role on the University of Ghana's campus. On occasion, a student may be found preaching the gospel in a lecture hall while students wait for the professor to arrive. Notes left on the chalkboard often read, "Please do not erase. God Bless." On Sunday mornings, the campus is virtually deserted, but a short walk among the school buildings reveals the sound of congregations in song emanating from one building after the next. Furthermore, religious organizations are the University's most popular. In fact, my Ghanaian roommate organized a three-day-long all night Crusade outside our dorm. Never before had I seen religion so fully integrated into a society or culture.

What I observed was the result of the Pentecostal movement that has mushroomed from a small group of Christian believers to a global movement with approximately 450 million followers in the past ninety years.<sup>1</sup> The Church of the Pentecost is by far the fastest growing religion in Ghana, part of a trend in southern West Africa and the entire southern hemisphere.<sup>2</sup> A national 1993 poll surveying religious affiliation in Ghana revealed more than ten million of the country's total population of sixteen and a half million to be Christian.<sup>3</sup> In a more recent poll, twenty-four percent of Ghanaians identify themselves as

Pentecostal or Charismatic believers.<sup>4</sup> Given its evangelical origins and diverse international following, Pentecostalism, with its emphasis on spiritual gifts and personal religious experiences, defies simple categorization. Its believers highlight “baptism in the Holy Spirit,” and view glossolalia, or speaking in tongues, to be the outward sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit.<sup>5</sup> Pentecostals also tend to belong to established mainline (former mission churches, largely Protestant and Catholic) denominations.

In contrast, Charismatics, the most recent generation of Pentecostal believers, are just as committed to belief in the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit, but do not view glossolalia as an affirmation of such.<sup>6</sup> Charismatics also operate outside of classical denominations and exist in both mainline and independent denominations. Consequently, its practices are extremely portable and well suited to the movement of people and ideas associated with globalization.<sup>7</sup> Many Ghanaians and other Africans who seek better lives in Europe and elsewhere carry their Charismatic Christian identities and practices with them. Not surprisingly, the largest single established church in all of Europe is the Kingsway International Christian Center in London, a Pentecostal Christian Church with more than 20,000 active members. While not run by a Ghanaian, its leader is a West African born Nigerian neighbor.<sup>8</sup>

A review of the nation’s religious history helps to provide some explanation for more recent explosions of Ghanaian religiosity. Interaction between Ghanaians and Christian missionaries dates back to the late fifteenth century, when Roman Catholic missionaries accompanied the first Portuguese traders to Ghana’s shores.<sup>9</sup> Subsequent discoveries of valuable minerals and raw materials in later centuries attracted more Western business ventures, while missionaries continued to follow those seeking economic gains. Thus, missionary work in Ghana has been inextricably linked with economic development since colonial times.<sup>10</sup> In addition to spreading the Gospel to the underdeveloped and “unenlightened” world, many missionaries were also driven by paternalism and guilt regarding slavery. The churches that were established in the wake of these missionaries unknowingly set the stage for the development of the charismatic churches in what was then the Gold Coast.

Even though the majority of the Gold Coast, which would later become Ghana in 1957, was Christian at turn of the nineteenth century, most adherents were nominalists—Christians “in mind but not in heart.”<sup>11</sup> By dismissing African religious beliefs and practices, the

missionaries also disregarded many of the traditional African laws that were tied to these religions. Likewise, they weakened the traditional leadership of various ethnic groups by diminishing their religious authority and supporting their political roles as agents of colonial powers.<sup>12</sup> In his book, *Pentecostalism in Ghana: An African Reformation*, Amanor argues that the effect of this “non western world evangelization was aimed at transforming the life of the individual in society in such a way that they would feel out of step with their own society.”<sup>13</sup> Indeed, Christianity was a “foreign...consciousness.”<sup>14</sup> The missionaries’ disdain for African spirituality and the social structures that it fostered hampered Africans’ ability to fully subscribe to such Christianity. In contrast, Pentecostalism is rooted in a desire for a “less alien” kind of Christianity that would both reflect an understanding of Africa’s past and suggest a greater understanding and acceptance of African identities.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, Amanor describes the seeds of Pentecostalism as a spiritual revolution “against materialism and shallow religiosity; against cultural passivity and consumerism; and against a religion that is purely internal, inward looking and oblivious to community.”<sup>16</sup>

While the roots of Ghanaian Pentecostalism are closely tied to a rejection of Western missionary paternalism and the adaptation of a form of Christianity that was more compatible with native African practices, they are also tied to twentieth-century prophetic movements and growing African nationalism. Between 1900 and 1950, spiritual and prophetic activities flourished in the southern region of the Gold Coast. Such activities were propelled in large part by Liberian and Gold Coast prophets, in particular William Wade Harris, John Swatson, and Sampson Oppong, who independently mounted large evangelistic campaigns and contributed to the expansion of the missionary church populations.<sup>17</sup> Considered the forbearers of Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity, these prophets offered more radical experiential religious practices that further prepared Ghana for Pentecostalism to flourish.

Such spiritual expansion was bolstered by simultaneous nationalist sentiments emerging throughout the African continent during the 1950s. In part, that nationalism was rooted in the failure of Western missionary movements to adequately embrace traditional African religious thought and spirituality in their churches or promote black African leadership and talent within their own church hierarchies.<sup>18</sup> Indeed many of the nationalists who fought for Ghana’s independence

were educated in mission schools; however, they too urged Christianity to disregard its Eurocentric tendencies in favor of decolonization.<sup>19</sup>

As the Pentecostal spiritual revival spread, its followers began to infiltrate more traditional churches and many practices and tenets were eventually incorporated into many mainstream Ghanaian religious institutions. This offshoot of the movement, often referred to as neo-Pentecost, has thrived on the coattails of globalization as its followers have opted to alter already existing churches rather than founding their own. The neo-Pentecosts were not evangelical in nature until the 1970s, after what had begun as an emphasis on Bible study became an emphasis on entrepreneurship for small businesses, including shopkeepers.<sup>20</sup> By the late 1980s, it had become a popular movement. Indeed, in the span of only a decade (between the late 1970s and 1980s), 2,500 new churches were founded by major Pentecostal denominations, while only 1,400 were established by the mainline older denominations.<sup>21</sup>

The Charismatic movement has proven equally successful. The first Charismatic church arrived in Accra, the capital of Ghana, in 1979; less than twenty years later, it boasted a congregation of 12,000 members, with eleven branches in Ghana and several additional congregations in Britain, the United States, Germany, and other West African nations.<sup>22</sup> The second Charismatic church was founded in 1984 and today is the largest in the nation, with a membership of about 20,000 in the mid-1990s.<sup>23</sup> While not all flourishing churches in Ghana today are Pentecostal or Charismatic in nature, it is clear that heightened church attendance occurs at the expense of the established mainline churches, as well as of the older independent churches.<sup>24</sup> It is also significant that the recent Pentecostal and Charismatic churches were not founded by Europeans but by Ghanaians themselves, all without government financial support.<sup>25</sup>

Ironically, the Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity that have thrived under nationalism and globalization in Ghana (and other African nations) also pose a threat to Ghanaian national identity. They have encouraged an identity that transcends national boundaries and discourages government responsibility. The editor of *Charismatic Christianity as a Global Culture*, Karla Poewe, defines the term *global* not only as “the unbound spatial, temporal, institutional, and linguistic reach of charismatic Christianity,” but also as “a way of life based on perceptions and identities that are transmitted worldwide through high-tech

media; international conferences, fellowships, and prayer links; and mega churches."<sup>26</sup>

Thus, critics of the Charismatic movement suggest that its followers' fervent belief in God rather than government hinders political discussions and diminishes government accountability regarding economic failures, corruption, unemployment, and lack of public services. For example, prominent Ghanaian government official and Charismatic Christian Joyce Wereko Brobbey addressed a national conference, declaring, "only the will of God can change human society for the better, and not governments."<sup>27</sup> Similarly, Charismatic religious leaders Lawrence Tetteh and Heward Mills asserted that, "no political strategy will bring peace; the only way to peace is God's way" and "Africa needs not political changes but Jesus Christ," respectively.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, if nothing more than faith in the true God is required of Ghanaians, as many Charismatic Churches contend, then there is little need for citizens to actively participate in politics on a community or national level.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, it is unlikely that church officials will hold the governments accountable, as they will benefit from congregational growth as their followers' circumstances become increasingly desperate. This lack of a strong national identity will potentially hinder Ghana in the development and execution of public policies that maximize the potential benefits of globalization.

### **III. The Netherlands**

A tour of the major sites in Maastricht, Netherlands, including a respite at an outdoor café, might require four hours. One is immediately struck by the plethora of intimate cafés and narrow streets that make the city feel more like a small town than a growing metropolis. Any tourist in search of attractions would certainly visit the Sint Jan and Sint Servaas churches that dominate the Vrijthof, the city's most famous and central square. Built between the eleventh and sixteenth centuries, these churches are reminders of a time when Christianity was a powerful force in Maastricht. Standing alongside one another, Protestant Sint Jan and Catholic Sint Servaas also symbolize the religious tolerance that has dominated Dutch history. The countless religious stone and painted embellishments that adorn many of the city's buildings and homes, depicting angels, Mary, various saints, and the Pieta, are similar reminders of a bygone era.

Today, these monuments are merely vestiges of Christianity's heyday in Maastricht and in the Netherlands itself. Sint Servaas' main chapel is no longer used for religious purposes; instead, visitors may pay 1.50 euros to visit this chapel, while services are held in a far smaller and less ornate room, attracting fewer than thirty people each week. More overwhelming evidence that Christianity's triumph is long over are the beautifully constructed churches that now serve very different functions: a club, the Selexyz Dominicanerkerk bookstore, and the only five-star hotel in town. Under worn frescos of saints, the latter two serve food and drinks on the former altars. However, the city is not yet prepared to cut all ties with its Christian past and its use of churches as places of worship. Municipal laws dictate that the accoutrements of these new establishments—bookshelves, elevators, cafés, cash registers, etc.—remain free standing, so that if, or when, the population wants these former places of worship to again serve as such, the structures may be converted back to their intended use in less than a month's time.<sup>30</sup>

Somewhere between these two radically different representations of Christianity, the intimate Onze Lieve Vrouwe Kerk Chapel houses dozens of burning candles lit by locals who hope the ritual will bring them good luck. The popularity of this religious space in the midst of a city, country, and indeed a continent that has drifted further and further from Christian practice is representative of the complex relationship the Dutch have with Christianity. The evolution of this process is outlined below.

The Netherlands is considered unique in its longstanding tradition of religious liberty. Indeed, in *The Challenge of Pluralism: Church and State in Five Democracies*, Stephen Monsma and Christopher Soper credit the nation with "one of the most theoretically rooted, thought-out approaches to church-state relations of any of the western democracies."<sup>31</sup> They suggest that cooperation and unity among the Dutch was necessitated by the nation's geography. Because the majority of the population lived below sea level, the Netherlands' survival depended on its citizens' cooperation to build and maintain necessary canals, pumps, and seawalls.<sup>32</sup> Thus, tolerance and unity were rooted in the first centuries of the country's very survival. Likewise, although the 16,000 square mile country was divided into a Catholic South and a Protestant North ever since the Middle Ages (a division further cemented by the Protestant Reformation), the nation's focus on trade and prosperity in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries required



the cooperation of all its citizens.<sup>33</sup> The religiously motivated wars that plagued much of Europe never erupted on Dutch soil. Thus, underlying historical forces fostered religious tolerance and the coexistence of church and state practices.

The nineteenth-century struggle to provide government funding to all Dutch schools, secular and religious, brought about a major shift in the church-state policy in the Netherlands. This policy, known as principled pluralism, would ultimately be applied to all other social institutions and has continued to shape Dutch understanding of the church's relationship to the state.<sup>34</sup> Initially, the liberals in power, seizing the opportunity to foster an increasingly homogenous Dutch national identity, advocated nonsectarian education and culture for all citizens. As a result, religious groups were forced to fund their own schools. In some areas of the Netherlands, these religious schools were grudgingly tolerated; in others, they were completely banned. More than fifty years passed until religious communities were permitted to establish their own religiously affiliated schools. However, government funding for these religious schools was denied.<sup>35</sup>

Furious that religiously affiliated schools would be closed if they were unable to raise sufficient operating funds, the Protestants (also known as the Reformed) and Catholics united against the liberals in a "monstrous alliance."<sup>36</sup> Together they organized a political movement, gathering thousands of signatures as well as a majority in the nation's lower house of Parliament. New legislation, supported by this alliance, required the government to provide public funds to all schools, public and private, secular and religious. The policy was further shaped by the country's religious and political make-up. Because neither member of the Alliance could impose their beliefs upon a nation in which they were a minority, the Dutch opted for a kind of pluralism that respected all religious intellectual movements. Building on this precedent, latter nineteenth-century government and religious leaders insisted upon tolerant pluralism. Under this policy, all religious views were equally entitled to participate in government and public policy decisions, as were their secular counterparts. The emphasis on each religious or secular community's rights to maintain autonomy, now commonly referred to as "pillarization," triumphed over liberal thinking. It dominated national policy, relatively unchecked, from the 1920s to the 1970s.

The adoption of pillarization meant that virtually all social institutions—political parties, workers' unions, television stations, retire-

ment homes, social services, and everything in between—adopted a particular religious or secular point of view. The four main pillars were divided into four categories: Reformed, Catholic, Socialist, and Neutral (lay or liberal).<sup>37</sup> This meant that a family could live exclusively in an environment of one pillar, without any exposure to the other three. Therefore, pillarization had the potential to profoundly limit one's worldview; indeed, education, political involvement, news reports, and so on, could be dominated by a particular religious or secular ideology.<sup>38</sup> However, by the 1960s, increasing secularization began to erode pillarization as voting based on religion declined, Protestants attended Catholic schools, and support for pillarized organizations dissipated. Less constrained to operate within a single pillar of society, the Dutch became freer to pick and choose schools, newspapers, political parties, and hospitals, regardless of religious or secular affiliation. However, despite the advent of greater choices, pillarization persists. Indeed, "if by pillarization one means distinguishing between neutral and Christian or otherwise principled organizations, it is still very much alive."<sup>39</sup> Organizations were never forced to renounce their founding ideologies and the government continues to recognize organizations with affiliations as reflections of a particular religious or secular point of view."<sup>40</sup>

In spite of these hard-won rights to religious fairness and freedom, religious practice has diminished in the last sixty years. Between 1959 and 1986, membership in the Roman Catholic Church fell from thirty-seven to thirty-one percent. Likewise, membership in the two largest Reformed churches decreased from thirty-eight to twenty-one percent. In the same period, the numbers of those declaring no religious preference increased dramatically, from twenty-one to forty-four percent. Church involvement declined as well. Weekly Catholic Church attendance dropped from eighty-seven percent in 1959 to only twenty-six percent in 1986. The larger Reform church attendance fell much less, from thirty-six to thirty-three percent, but its smaller counterpart did not fare as well. Its numbers dropped from eighty-eight to sixty-five percent.<sup>41</sup> In the 2006 *Statistical Yearbook of the Netherlands*, forty-two percent of the Dutch population reported no religious denomination. That number has increased by three percent since 1997. Likewise, seventy-two percent admitted to hardly ever or never attending church.<sup>42</sup>

Yet the empty church pews across Europe are not representative of an atheistic society.<sup>43</sup> Joe Casanova offers a multidimensional definition of secularism in which secular and religious institutions and prac-

tices are differentiated from one another, religious beliefs and practices decrease, and religion is relegated to the private sphere.<sup>44</sup> All three apply to secularism in the wider Europe. Practices and worship in state churches may have declined but cultural Christianity is stronger than it has been in the last fifty years.<sup>45</sup> European secularism is rooted in the Christian tradition and therefore subject to changes in the religious practices that surround it.

Today there are between 800,000 and one million Muslim residents in the Netherlands.<sup>46</sup> The influx of these immigrants since 1949 has done much to challenge Dutch principles of pluralism and pillarization. Immigration policy has shifted from the creation of a non-Dutch pillar for immigrants in the 1980s, in the name of multiculturalism, to an emphasis on inclusion and efforts to ensure social equality.<sup>47</sup> Yet on a continent mindful of a history marred by religiously motivated violence, coupled with the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, the close proximity of Christianity, Islam, and secularism have forced the Netherlands and the rest of Europe to “wrestle with their values and identity as never before.”<sup>48</sup> Like other Western European nations, Holland has struggled to integrate its rapidly growing *allochtonen* (non-Western Dutch residents) population, which currently stands at 1.6 million.<sup>49</sup> While the potential benefits of immigrant populations are many, the possible risks could not have been more clearly underscored than by the 2004 murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh following the release of his controversial film on Dutch television about Islamic treatment of women.

While many scholars predicted such traumatic events would bolster secularism across the continent, little by little they are being proven wrong.<sup>50</sup> Recent media reports cite heightened acceptance and proliferation of prayer in the workplace, greater church attendance among young people in recent years, and the proliferation of books by Christian authors about faith and redemption.<sup>51</sup> Calvinist Jan Siebelink's *Knielen open bed violen* (*Kneeling on a Bed of Violets*) sold an impressive 350,000 copies in its first year, only to be outdone by a new Bible translation in 2004, which sold over half a million copies in a country of only sixteen and a half million.<sup>52</sup>

Why has this renewed spirituality occurred in such an allegedly secular nation? Experts agree that much of the tentative “return to God” is spurred by the influx of devout Christian immigrants. In the Netherlands, as it turns out, the majority of these zealous immigrants are of Ghanaian origin.<sup>53</sup> While many European social scientists have

tended to focus on Muslim immigration alone, Christians from across the world have been arriving in steady and growing numbers. With an estimated 700,000 Christian immigrants to date, reports suggest that for every new Muslim resident, two additional Christian immigrants arrive as well.<sup>54</sup> Given current national debates about assimilation and integration of Muslim populations, Christian immigrants may help to assuage Dutch anxieties and xenophobia. It should be noted, however, that African Christian communities are not generally embraced by established Dutch Christian churches.<sup>55</sup>

Competition may also be a factor. Professor Eva Hamberg at Lund University's Centre for Theology and Religious Studies in Sweden suggests that the resurgence of Christianity across Europe is simply an example of supply and demand. State monopolistic churches have grown lazy, she argues. Drawing on data from Swedish church practice, she cites a correlation between rising church competition and rising church attendance.<sup>56</sup> If there is truth to her theory, church attendance ought to be skyrocketing in Amsterdam, which is home to no less than two hundred immigrant churches.<sup>57</sup> Religious leadership, however, does not appear to mind: Surinamese-born Reverend Hofwijks notes, "competition keeps you humble...it also keeps you focused on what really matters: following God."<sup>58</sup>

While this revitalization of Christianity in the Netherlands and Western Europe is important, it has by no means superseded secularism. Instead, it is part of a growing European secularism that publicly acknowledges its ties to Christianity. This increasingly Christian-laced secularism is not merely a reaction to immigration, but a European response to globalization as well. In a series of recently published interviews, French President Nicolas Sarkozy asserts, "the religious phenomenon is more important than people think, that it can contribute to peace, to balance, to integration, to unity and dialogue..."<sup>59</sup> Within the diverse European community, Christian secularism has the potential to bolster a unified continental identity, building upon a common historical Christian European identity. It also serves to maintain the status quo on a continent in which nations have sacrificed aspects of national sovereignty for the security of the European Union. "Indeed," writes Grace Davies, "it could be argued that the building of a greater European identity and the growth of [the] ecumenical endeavor are part and parcel of the same process."<sup>60</sup> Secularism that is based on a European Christian tradition may in fact be crucial to continued European cohesion.

#### **IV. Lessons Learned**

Studying abroad was much more than an academic experience. For eleven months, Ghana, the Netherlands, and their neighbors were both my classroom and my playground. It was thrilling to discover how often I could not discern where one ended and the other began. My experiences challenged me in ways I never could have anticipated and, as I reflect upon them some months later, in ways I did not necessarily realize when I was there. As an American Studies major, I had little formal instruction about globalization prior to my studies in Maastricht. However, my coursework encouraged me to view the changing religious climates in both Ghana and the Netherlands as a direct response to globalization. Using these nations as paradigms of the developing and developed world, I could view these responses first hand and directly appreciate the many ways that global forces can affect major pillars of society, in this case Christianity, in different countries. I also gained a better understanding of the political potential of Christianity to both solidify and threaten national identities.

I learned that no amount of prior reading could have prepared me for Ghana's depth of religiosity and joy of worship among Christians, Muslims, and even the enigmatic Jews of Sefwi Wiawso in Ghana's western region. I was equally unprepared for the culturally Christian character of the Netherlands; in Maastricht stores are rarely open on Sundays and the entire city shuts down on the Day of the Assumption. Living the contradictions, including the quiet and serious Dutch Sunday services and the stand-up, clap your hands, sing your heart out Sunday worship in Ghana, increased my curiosity about the diversity within Christianity and the distinctions between Christian practice in Ghana and the Netherlands. They gave life to the academic questions I was proposing to study.

Before I left the United States, the differences between these Christian movements seemed simple and clear-cut. Steeped in a legacy of colonialism and the challenges of development so typical of former colonies, I could appreciate the people of Ghana turning to Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity for hope. Conversely, I saw the Dutch's declining practice of Protestantism and Catholicism as choices made by comfortable, if not wealthy, Europeans for whom prayer and faith had largely been replaced by technology and modernity. In short, I thought Ghanaians needed a great deal of faith whereas the Dutch,

as a whole, required less. I have since discovered the nuances of these phenomena.

Now, not only do I have a far greater understanding of how much Christianity is imbued in global and historical processes, but I also can see how the revival of Christianity in both Ghana and the Netherlands are direct responses to globalization. Before embarking on my first International Studies experience in the January seminar, I had given little consideration to globalization's impact on national sovereignty in an academic setting. Peter Singer's discussion of the ethical issues that permeate globalization in his book *One World* challenged my classmates and me to conceive a world in which being a citizen of the world supercedes being a citizen of a nation. I grappled with the low probability that leaders will ever regard the needs of others on par with those of their own citizens. I also tried to appreciate the stark contradictions between national sovereignty and globalization, in which global forces are powerfully undermining national borders and the sovereignty within them. With regard to Africa, this contradiction is particularly striking. National leaders are often pulled between serving their populations' interests and those of the international community, particularly in light of the World Bank's and the United Nations' loyalty to the free market and open trade. Prior to my year abroad, outside of debates about immigration, I did not appreciate the power and scope of sovereignty and borders, or lack thereof, and their ability to so dramatically affect the societies of the countries in question.

What I understand now is that the return to God in Africa and more recently in Europe demonstrates very different national reactions to the reality of increasingly porous national borders. The Dutch view the revival of European Christian secularism as a means to maintain their way of life whereas the Ghanaians seek sustenance in their faith regardless of their geographic location. Many Ghanaians want access to the fruits of globalization so desperately that they are willing to relinquish their own national borders and homeland in exchange for the possibility of wealth or greater opportunities in Europe and elsewhere. Charismatic Christianity and Pentecostalism bolster their faith. Both emphasize individual spiritual experience without regard to national borders. Indeed, these evangelical movements celebrate their lack of direct ties to national infrastructures of any kind. Furthermore, with the rapid growth and zeal of their following, new churches, including the mega churches mentioned above, can be found across Europe.

While Ghanaian Pentecostal Christianity transcends national boundaries, the Dutch, on the other hand, are struggling to maintain a national identity within their borders in the face of increasing immigration. They seek faith in the status quo and their Christian roots as globalization challenges that identity. In that sense, my pre-departure reading of Christianity in both countries was only partially valid. In fact, both the Ghanaians and Dutch are seeking hope from religion to achieve what they consider to be an optimal way of life. For the Dutch, there is hope in reaffirming their past in order to stabilize the present. For the Ghanaians, hope lies in a better future. This is partly because the challenges of globalization have limited (albeit to a different extent) both governments' ability to respond to social and political change, and both populations are turning to religion as a stabilizing force in their lives.

I also discovered another surprise. While I knew that Africans migrated to Europe in large numbers, I was unaware that so many Africans, and Ghanaians in particular, had established churches in the Netherlands and across Europe. Ghanaians are obviously using these churches to maintain their faith, sustain their connections to their country of birth, and gain access to social services.<sup>61</sup> However, in a striking reversal of history, I was fascinated to discover that they are also using these churches as platforms from which to evangelize spiritually bereft Europeans. The process of European-exported Christianity by missionaries has been turned completely upside down! It is no wonder that African Christian communities in Europe now constitute some of the most vibrant Christian communities on the continent.

The more I learned, the more I wanted to know about these unique African Christian communities. I was disappointed by the lack of scholarly research about these communities, since they seem to be perfect microcosms in which to study the struggles, opportunities, and conflicts created by global processes. I also regret that I had insufficient time to explore these communities during my stay in the Netherlands. Similarly, I was frustrated to find a lack of balanced academic information about the burgeoning Christian movements in Ghana. I read authors who blasted Pentecostalism as neo-imperialistic and detrimental to the African continent, and Pentecostal scholars who remained relatively uncritical of their movement. Neither seemed to provide an unbiased view. Discussions focused midway between such two extremes are not always constructive, either, and I failed to find a voice that was both supportive and constructively critical of these Christian

movements. Whether the absence of such a view can be attributed to the lack of scholarly investigation or the existence of only polarized views, I am not sure. I do know, however, that this initial study has sparked my curiosity and academic interest. I hope to have the opportunity to return to these African religious communities on both continents to become more familiar with their motivations, practices, beliefs, and the larger global forces that affect them. I would never have considered such a project had I not been in this program.

I also underestimated the power of Christianity around the globe. Never having traveled to a developing country before, I had not fully understood the degree to which religion could be so attractive and faith so necessary. So many Ghanaians struggle to live in a society in which basic human needs are continually unfulfilled. It is no wonder that they need to believe in the power of something greater—miracles, personal transformation, and redemption. As Ghanaian religious scholar Asomoah-Gyadu writes:

When life is threatened or weakened, prayer is most abundant, both private and public prayer: prayer is a means of restoring balance in life. In African religion, prayer is comprehensive, requesting the removal of all that is bad and anti-life in society, and demanding restoration of all that is good. Nothing less satisfies the religious African mind.<sup>62</sup>

While many may be quick to dismiss the power of prayer, when that is one's only recourse, it becomes a kind of power. As Gerrie ter Haar so accurately points out, "Anyone who wishes to make sense of the revival of religion in the world must think of spiritual power as real power."<sup>63</sup> One can feel that power in Ghana, and in subtler ways, experience it in the Netherlands as well. I realize that in an age when national boundaries are increasingly eroded by globalization, religion (in this case, Christianity) can be used to give strength and identity to a nation. As in other nations of the Global South, the revival of Christianity in Ghana has been used to assert the collective power of a nation caught in a series of international policies and processes largely outside of local control. While the group identity may lie in religion rather than pure nationhood, the religious empowerment also fosters national empowerment. In Western Europe, Christianity and its historical legacy are being used to fortify national identity against the influx of immigrants. The power of religion, even if it extends beyond a nation's borders, can help to transcend or to strengthen national boundaries.



Lastly, I was taught an extremely valuable lesson by the jokes and confused smiles that followed students,' professors,' or even strangers' queries about my chosen college major. "What are you studying?," they wanted know. "American Studies," I would respond. I would then be in the awkward position of trying to explain why such a student would spend an entire year out of the country she professes to be studying. Yet among the greatest gifts I have been given this year is the insight I have gained about my own education at Macalester. The past eleven months have given me the opportunity to simultaneously embrace and reject my major of choice. Having seen so many new places, been exposed to numerous new ideas, met a multitude of fascinating people, and discovered thousands of questions I did not know I had, I remain thrilled with my choice. In fact, my studies of multiculturalism and racism in the United States proved to be a powerful lens through which to view the many new ideas, people, and places I encountered abroad. The challenge to achieve equity and be open to difference resonated with so much of what I observed and lived. At the same time, as I tried to make sense of Seyla Benhabib's complex arguments, listened to sons and daughters of *allochtonen*, or explored the immigrant neighborhoods of Amsterdam, I was also struck by the limitations of American Studies. I could see that struggles with issues of integration, segregation, discrimination, poor urban planning, and persistent social inequalities are not limited to the United States. Yet I am relatively confident that this is one of the purposes of a liberal arts education: to recognize what one has learned as a starting point and push oneself to build on that foundation. Being abroad gave me an opportunity to do just that.

## V. Conclusion

I have concluded that globalization and religion make strange bedfellows and give rise to unexpected outcomes. Concerns over the ebbing importance of national identities and perceived threats of immigrant invasion prevail in Europe, while developing nations are scrambling to get a piece of the pie. On traditional economic measures, Ghana is largely a loser, especially compared to the Netherlands and its European counterparts. At the same time, it is home to the highly successful Pentecost and Charismatic Christian movements that are thriving on renewed global movements and technology. Conversely, Europe, though benefiting far more from globalization, is on the defense to

maintain its status quo and is drawing from the influx of Pentecostal Christian movements to solidify its Christian secularism. Gerrie ter Haar writes, "European governments may come to appreciate the importance of the religious institutions in immigrant communities as a cohesive factor in society at large."<sup>64</sup> Thus, in a somewhat surprising twist, colored by historical and contemporary ironies of colonialism and racism, it may be the immigrant Africans who will help preserve the heritage to which Europe clings. ●

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## Notes

1. Dempster, p. 1.
2. Amanor, p. 25.
3. ter Haar, p. 171.
4. Asamoah-Gyadu, p. 1.
5. ter Haar, p. 176–7.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*, p. 168.
8. "Kingsway International Christian Center."
9. Amanor, 1.
10. Dovlo, p. 631.
11. Amanor, p. 2.
12. Dovlo, p. 632.
13. Amanor, p. 1.
14. Meyer, p. 77.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
18. Stundkler, p. 944.
19. Dovlo, p. 633.
20. ter Haar, p. 173.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 171.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 176.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 177.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 172.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 168.
26. Poewe, p. i.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 167.
28. Gifford, p. 167.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 165.

30. While I do not have the documentation to verify this fact, it was relayed and confirmed to me by several Maastricht residents.
31. Monsma, p. 51.
32. Ibid., p. 52.
33. Ibid., p. 52–53.
34. Ibid., p. 58.
35. Ibid., p. 61.
36. Amanor, p. 4.
37. Guiraudon, p. 1.
38. Ibid., p. 61.
39. Ibid., p. 61.
40. Ibid., p. 62.
41. Ibid., p. 53.
42. "European Value Studies," p. 56.
43. Ford, p. 4.
44. Davie 2005, pp. 210–211.
45. Ibid.
46. European Muslim Network, p. 1.
47. Gijsberts, p. 27.
48. Ford, p. 1.
49. Gijsberts, p. 7.
50. Thomas, p. 28.
51. Livestro, pp. 1–4.
52. Ibid., p. 2.
53. ter Haar, p. i.
54. Livestro, p. 3.
55. ter Haar, p. 159.
56. Higgins, p. 2.
57. Ibid., p. 4.
58. Livestro, p. 3.
59. Ford, p. 5.
60. Davies, p. 7.
61. ter Haar, p. 43.
62. Asamoah-Gyadu, p. 223.
63. ter Haar and Ellis, p. 4.
64. Ibid., p. 196.

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