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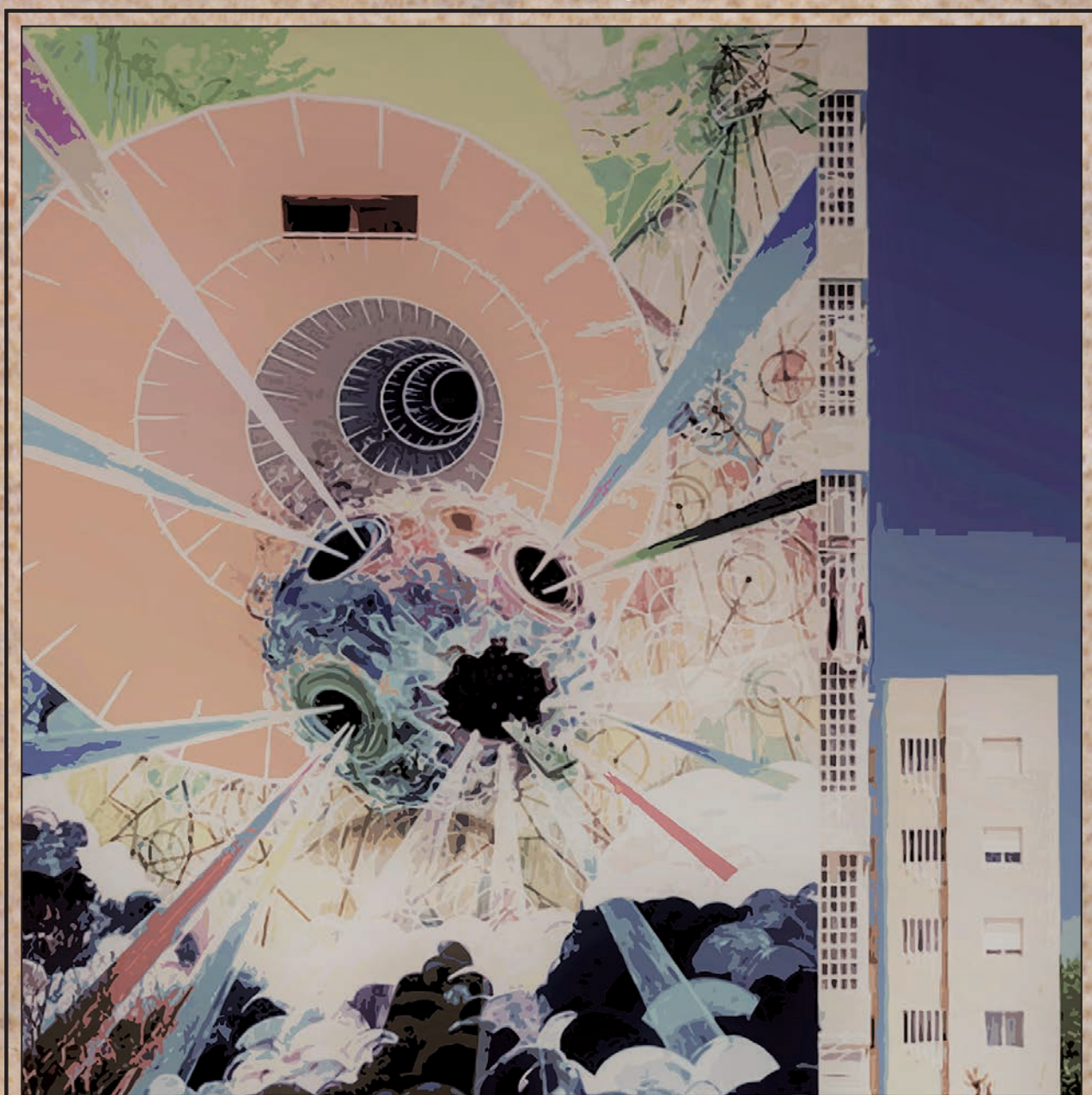# ANNALES

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VSEBINA / *INDICE GENERALE / CONTENTS*

GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY *ANTE PORTAS*: REVERSE MISSION AND THE CLASHING CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF RELIGION

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ABSTRACT

Christianity's centre of gravity has moved south, giving rise to the phenomenon of Global Christianity. This has in turn enabled the phenomenon of the reverse mission. Largely a missionary concept, reverse mission loosely refers to the conscious attempts by Global South churches to re-evangelise Europe. In any event, reverse missions have not been successful in converting non-immigrant Europeans. This paper analyses and reflects upon missionary and theological writings on these failures. Analysing the clashing Christianities, we pinpoint the religious body as an overlooked dimension of reverse mission failures. It is thus shown that the clash of Christianities reveals the clash of culturally specific conceptions of religion.

Key words: religion, migration, Global Christianity, Charismatic Christianity, reverse mission, body, sociology of religion

CRISTIANESIMO GLOBALE *ANTE PORTAS*: MISSIONE INVERSA E LO SCONTRO TRA CONCEZIONI DI RELIGIONE

SINTESI

Il centro di gravità del cristianesimo si è spostato verso sud, dando origine al fenomeno del cristianesimo globale. Questo ha permesso a sua volta lo sviluppo del fenomeno della missione inversa. Prevalentemente un concetto missionario, la missione inversa si riferisce approssimativamente ai tentativi consapevoli delle chiese del Sud globale di rievangelizzare l'Europa. Tuttavia, le missioni inverse non hanno avuto successo nel convertire gli europei non immigrati. Questo articolo analizza le riflessioni missionarie e teologiche di questi fallimenti. Analizzando lo scontro tra cristianità diverse, individuiamo nella corporeità religiosa una dimensione trascurata dei fallimenti della missione inversa. Così, mostriamo che lo scontro tra cristianità rivela uno scontro tra concezioni culturali specifiche della religione.

Parole chiave: religione, migrazione del cristianesimo globale, cristianesimo carismatico, missione inversa, corpo, sociologia della religione

ANNALES · Ser. hist. sociol. · 34 · 2024 · 4

Igor JUREKOVIČ: GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY *ANTE PORTAS*: REVERSE MISSION AND THE CLASHING CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF RELIGION, 499–512

INTRODUCTION[1]

Scientific literature on migration primarily discusses the topics of securitisation (Kaya, 2009), integration (Norris & Inglehart, 2012), citizenship (Kofman, 2006), media discourses (Smrdelj & Vogrinc, 2020; Smrdelj, 2021) along with the topic of the intersectionality of migration, media and sexual minorities (Smrdelj et al., 2021). While most researchers have focused on migrating *Muslims* (Tausch, 2019) – only rarely do social scientific researchers specifically consider *Christian* migrants settling in Europe. We intend to productively contribute to these rare studies with the analysis presented in this article.

The gravitational centre of Christianity has shifted southwards in recent decades (Johnson & Ross, 2009, 58–65). At the beginning of the 20th century, North America and Europe were centres of Christianity in demographic terms – over 80 percent of all Christians were living there. Nevertheless, one century later, the proportion of all Christians living in the Global North has plummeted to below 40 percent – with the majority of Christians now living in sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, and Latin America (Johnson & Ross, 2009, 8). The social scientific and theological literature has dubbed this phenomenon Global Christianity (Jenkins, 2010). The latter suggests a number of societal ramifications – including the emergence of the "reverse mission" (Burgess, 2011), a contentious concept (Morier-Genoud, 2018) that we examine below. For the time being, it suffices to say that as a social scientific concept reverse mission seeks to describe the attempts by non-European churches to re-evangelise "native Europe",[2] "importing" characteristics of Global Christianity.

The goal of this article is to reflect on the clashing conceptualisations of what Christianity, and hence religion, is. This will be done in three steps. First, we want to critically define the reverse mission notion because it is rarely discussed in social scientific terms, especially in Slovenia. Second, we wish to place the reverse mission movement within the larger framework of charismatic Christianity. Since the Nigerian Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) is a major influence behind reverse mission efforts in Europe, we pay special attention to this church, namely one the best known charismatic Christian denominations in the world (Burgess et al., 2010). Third, while we refer to a few self-reported reverse mission obstacles, our main emphasis is given to the challenges associated with conveying the particular religious practice that characterises Charismatic

Christianity. By conducting a sociological examination of these works, we aim to shed light on the conflicting Christianities and show how the findings could contribute to the development of theoretical conceptualisations of religion in the social sciences. Finally, we briefly discuss the study's limitation before offering potential directions for future research.

The first two sections employ a methodological approach that entails a critical evaluation of relevant scientific and theological literature pertaining to the issue under study. The article's central focus occupies the last two sections and addresses the problem of clashing conceptualisations of religion as derived from, first, a review and, second, a content analysis of theological and missionary materials (Nuendorf, 2002; Nelson & Woods, 2011). These writings take the shape of personal informal blog postings, media appearances and (theological) scholarly studies and presentations, which serve as fruitful objects of sociological study. To the best of our knowledge, we selected the most relevant material that was then critically examined from a sociological point of view in light of the paucity of such missionary and theological publications. Material pertaining to the Catholic Church was excluded from our research due to evident doctrinal and practical differences and we instead concentrated on protestant reverse mission endeavours. Moreover, all writings under consideration pertain to reverse mission operations in Europe, with a further focus on the United Kingdom. Language barriers meant that we focused solely on African reverse mission activities in Europe, excluding Korean (Kim, 2016) or South American ones (Oro, 2014), for example. In summary, the writings in our sample are by Protestant African theologians or missionaries offering their perspectives on the challenges of the reverse mission in Europe.

TOWARDS REVERSE MISSION AS A SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC CONCEPT

Even though research into reverse missions has grown considerably since the 1990s, it remains limited. Despite the fact that both theologians and social scientists have addressed the subject, reverse mission has been imbued with explicit theological and missionary connotations (Burgess, 2011, 432; Newbigin, 1987). From a social scientific vantage point, this holds two major implications. First, reverse mission is essentially a theological, actor-based, first-order concept, which means that it should not be blindly adopted as

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1   The research for this article was made possible by the research programme "Problems of Autonomy and Identities at the Time of Globalisation" (P6-0194) and the training of Junior Researchers. Both are funded by the Slovenian Research Agency (ARIS).

2   In this paper, we understand native Europeans as non-migrant population born in Europe, independently of a person's parent's country of birth, their ethnic or racial background. We realise that this might not be the most conventional definition (albeit definitions of migrants vary; cf. Anderson & Blinder, 2015), but we believe it is useful for our study as we wish to emphasise the differences in success when it comes to reverse mission activities among migrant and non-migrant European populations. This will be made clearer below. In addition, studies of reverse mission typically simply sidestep this issue by speaking of "Europeans" (cf. Währisch-Oblau, 2009).

ANNALES · Ser. hist. sociol. · 34 · 2024 · 4

Igor JUREKOVIČ: GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY *ANTE PORTAS*: REVERSE MISSION AND THE CLASHING CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF RELIGION, 499–512

a scientific concept (Morier-Genoud, 2018). Second, rather than being taken for granted, the missionary and theological literature on reverse mission should be treated as an object of scientific discussion.

From a theological standpoint, the reverse mission is framed in both geographical and theological terms. For example, in an oft-cited definition, Matthews Ojo defines the reverse mission as the "sending of missionaries to Europe and North America by churches and Christians from the non-Western world, particularly Africa, Asia and Latin America, which were at the receiving end of Catholic and Protestant mission as mission field from the sixteenth to the later twentieth century" (Ojo, 2007, 380). Similarly, according to the theologian Israel Olofinjana, "African Christians ministering in the UK are now directly or indirectly a harvest of seeds sown by the early missionaries to Africa" (Olofinjana, 2010, 2). There is namely a direct lineage between the two types of mission, with the target audience of the contemporary reverse mission being "post-Christian Europeans or those who are not members of the church" (Noort, 2011, 12). In this article, the target audience of reverse mission efforts are "native Europeans", with a general Christian background, whether active or passive.

Jehu Hanciles, a scholar of Global Christianity, identifies two historic factors that have contributed to the reverse mission's emergence: first, the above-mentioned shift in Christianity's centre of gravity southwards and, second, the increase in migrations to the Western world (Hanciles, 2008, 178–179). The latter bears a significant social component: the reverse mission is undertaken by economically and politically disadvantaged African migrants. To these, the sociologist Paul Freston adds two religion-specific factors: the worldwide expansion of Protestantism, which is mainly Pentecostal; and, second, the perception of Europe as being "religiously unique" (Freston, 2010, 154). While the first factor is elaborated upon below, it is worth remembering that the article addresses the *Protestant* reverse mission. The ecclesial differences are important in this regard: while Catholic African Christians do migrate to Europe with a missionary zeal, this can only be realised within any given national Catholic Church (Kwiyani, 2014, 123–128). Protestant churches, on the other hand, may be established by anyone, enabling easier evangelisation (Ekué, 2009, 391–392).

In any case, the reverse mission remains underdefined as a social scientific concept. As previously stated, missionaries and theologians concur on two key dimensions: the reversal in the direction of missionary-sending and the reversed direction of "colonization" (Freston, 2010, 155). Beyond this, the usage is ambiguous – in terms of both the intended audience as well as

missionary-sending and -receiving countries. Freston asks: "If reverse mission is to the former colonizer, does that include American or Australian missionaries in the UK? […] If, however, reverse mission is to the former evangelizers, does that exclude Eastern European countries that never engaged in missionizing in the global south?" (Freston, 2010, 156). He continues by questioning the focus on ethnicity: "If 'black-to-white', that would rule out Asians and most Latin Americans. It seems there has to be […] a 'world turned upside down', for there to be reverse mission. But what is included in this 'inverted order'? Is it relative poverty, or colonial history, or skin colour?" (Freston, 2010, 156). In sum, as a social science concept, reverse mission is largely inaccurate due to its naive adoption from missionary terminology. This is especially problematic if the reverse mission is understood as a "discourse on reality" with which migration, evangelisation and "what is proper Christianity theology and praxis" are debated (Morier-Genoud, 2018, 185). Social scientific research has accordingly become more aligned with "the interests of certain actors in the religious field" (Morier-Genoud, 2018, 185), failing to adequately address the core of the concept. In other words: analytical precision is lacking when it comes to use of the term reverse mission.

Although a comprehensive conceptual discussion lies beyond the scope of this article, we acknowledge the validity of such concerns. It is nonetheless a fact that churches from the Global South continue to send missionaries to convert Europe. The reverse mission is not merely a discourse, even though it may more accurately describe *intentions* – not results. Given that systematic social scientific research on the reverse mission is scarce, for the sake of this article we define it as follows: The term "reverse mission" refers to protestant African missionaries' deliberate efforts to convert Europe's non-immigrant populace to Charismatic Christianity.[3]

REVERSE MISSION AND CHARISMATIC CHRISTIANITY

The topic of reverse mission is inextricably linked to the emergence of Charismatic Christianity in the Global South. Harvey Kwiyani, a missionary and theologian, identifies four strands of African immigrant Christianity engaged in reverse mission endeavours in Europe (2012, 110–134). Among the four streams, according to Kwiyani, "the largest group consists of Pentecostal and charismatic Christians" (Kwiyani, 2012, 110). This claim is corroborated by other missionary and scientific literature (Burgess, 2020; Hanciles, 2008; Asamoah-Gyadu & Ludwig, 2011; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2012).

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3   In this case, Protestant churches also include AICs – African Initiated Churches or African Instituted Churches (Kwiyani, 2014, 128–132). We shall focus on the African reverse mission as it is both the most numerous and most research reverse mission in Europe.

ANNALES · Ser. hist. sociol. · 34 · 2024 · 4

Igor JUREKOVIČ: GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY *ANTE PORTAS*: REVERSE MISSION AND THE CLASHING CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF RELIGION, 499–512

Charismatic Christianity is hard to define, with no agreed scientific definition of the concept existing (Anderson, 2010, 13–15). Further, scholars do not agree on the term itself – some authors insist on referring to it as Pentecostalism, Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity, or Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity. We find the label Charismatic Christianity to be the least problematic and use it as an umbrella term to refer to three types of Charismatic and Pentecostal communities or *waves*.[4] First, there is Pentecostalism, a protestant movement, usually traced to the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles in 1906. Second, the 'Pentecostalisation' of traditional Christian churches gave rise to the Charismatic renewal of the Catholic, Orthodox, and other protestant churches, too (Gooren, 2010). Pentecostalisation implies the gradual transfer of certain doctrinal and, especially, worshiping aspects, characteristic of Pentecostalism. Finally, there are neocharismatic communities, which in terms of organisational structure are not tied to either the protestant Pentecostal or any other historical Christian church (Anderson, 2010, 22–23). Some researchers additionally state that the key characteristic of neocharismatic churches is the propagation of prosperity gospel (Garrard-Burnett, 2012). All three types or waves of Christian Charismatic share a certain theological emphasis on the workings of the Holy Spirit, manifested through 'gifts of the Spirit' (or *charismata* in Greek). The most frequent gift is speaking in tongues, while others include faith healing, vision, and prophecy.[5]

The exact number of Charismatic Christians is difficult to determine. Scientific estimates range from nearly one-quarter of all Christians (Anderson, 2014, 307), or about 1 billion of people, to roughly 680 million adherents or 27 percent of all Christians according to the latest estimates (Pew Research Center, 2011). In any event, it is considered to be the fastest-growing religious movement in history (Berger, 2014, 24). Charismatic Christianity is predominantly a religion of the Global South and of social deprivileged peoples. Thus, it is not surprising that the majority of scientific work has concentrated on themes of material deprivations (Chesnut, 1997; Willems, 1967) and theories of a contemporary elective affinity of Charismatic Christianity with capitalist modernisation (Barker, 2007; Hollenweger, 1984). Still, owing to advances in the cognitive science of embodied religion (Soliman et al., 2015, 854) and the material turn in religious studies (Hazard, 2013), scholars have lately started to pay greater attention to the *experiential* nature of Charismatic Christianity.[6] Propelled by the rejection of the protestant bias (Meyer

& Houtman, 2012), a theoretical tendency to see religious beliefs as primary and religious rituals as mere expressions of those beliefs, such studies demonstrate that being a Charismatic Christian entails cultivating a specific body logic (Brahinsky, 2012) or adhering to a kind of bodily regime (de Witte, 2011, 497). According to the anthropologist Marleen de Witte, the charismatic bodily regime "values expressive, emotional modes of worship"; it is a regime that "authenticates the body as a primary medium of interaction with the spirit world" (de Witte, 2011, 497). Further, de Witte, who studied African Pentecostalism, goes on to describe how such corporeal, sensual regimes are "remarkably close to models of religious transformation in African traditional practice" (de Witte, 2011, 497). Josh Brahinsky, an American anthropologist, came to similar conclusions while studying American Christian Charismatics, stressing the cultivation of a distinct sensorium, a specific body logic (Brahinsky, 2012, 217).

This particular *bodyness* of Charismatic Christianity is what sociologist Manuel Vásquez sees as the key explanation for its portability in the transnational mission field (Vásquez, 2009, 275–278). Vásquez (2009, 276) conceptualised the doctrinal construction of the Charismatic bodyness as pneumatic materialism. The concept encompasses those forms of Christianity that "make the Holy Spirit central to the experience of sacred" (Vásquez, 2009, 276),[7] demonstrating that African Charismatic Christianity is "thoroughly materialist in a sense that they reject the European, Cartesian dichotomy between soul and body and the denigration of the latter" (Vásquez, 2009, 276). As a result, the traditional sociological Durkheimian definition of religion does not apply to Charismatic Christianity – there is no clear boundary between the sacred and profane, between the supernatural and the natural. As Vásquez (2009, 276) puts it: "Spirit and flesh are constitutively intertwined, as are transcendence and immanence". This point holds significant implications and will become relevant for the proceeding discussion. Yet, for now, it suffices to acknowledge that the Charismatic Christianity, brought to Europe by African immigrants, is an especially *experiential* form of Christianity that calls for a believer to accept a particular body logic (Brahinsky, 2012) – rather than to adhere to carefully thought-out theological propositions.

Before continuing, we briefly present the reverse mission activities of African Charismatic Christian churches in the Global North by focusing on the Nigerian Redeemed Chrisitan Church of God (RCCG), the biggest Nigerian Christian Charismatic church (Adeboye, 2007).

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4 The terminology of waves should not make us think that these communities do not coexist spatially and temporarily.
5 For a detailed introduction to Charismatic Christianity, cf. Anderson (2014).
6 This was originally proposed, although only briefly, by one of the pioneering studies of Pentecostalism in Latin America. David Martin wrote in *Tongues of Fire* (1990) how a particularly bodily experience of the sacred might be more important to the Pentecostals rather than the correct "grammar of faith" (Martin, 1990, 52).
7 The Greek word pneuma literally means "breath", while when used in the context of Christianity it usually refers to the (Holy) Spirit.

ANNALES · Ser. hist. sociol. · 34 · 2024 · 4

Igor JUREKOVIČ: GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY *ANTE PORTAS*: REVERSE MISSION AND THE CLASHING CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF RELIGION, 499–512

THE REDEEMED CHRISTIAN CHURCH OF GOD

The RCCG is a useful example of a reverse mission, especially due to its popularity, which gave rise to several theological (Kwiyani, 2014, 115–117) and social scientific analyses (Adeboye, 2007; Burgess et al., 2010; Burgess, 2011) that prove beneficial in our case. The Redeemed Christian Church of God traces[8] its beginnings to Josiah Akindayomi, a Yoruba farmer born in 1909. At first, he was converted by the Anglican Church Missionary Society, but subsequently became a prophet of the Cherubim and Seraphim church, one of the first Aladura churches in Nigeria (Adeboye, 2007, 31–36). In 1952, he founded a new church – the RCCG – after he had received a 'divine revelation'. Establishing a covenant with God, Akindayomi was promised that the church would "spread to the ends of earth before the Second Coming of Christ" (Burgess et al., 2010, 101). The worldwide expansion of the RCCG is thus incorporated into the very foundation of the church.

The following history of the church can be divided into two phases (Adeboye, 2007, 36–48; Burgess et al., 2010, 101–103). The first phase (1952–1980) was marked by a traditional Pentecostal anti-materialistic lifestyle, strict dress codes and worshiping services, which were mainly conducted in Yoruba (Burgess et al., 2010, 101). Up until his death in 1980, Akindayomi managed to establish 39 branches with membership of up to 1,000. The churches were mostly located in southwestern Nigeria – none were present in any other country (Burgess et al., 2010). The accession of Akindayomi's successor, Enoch Adejare Adeboye, marks a major turning point in the RCCG's history. The ensuing global expansion was rapid. Relaxing some of the moral rules, he nevertheless sticked to the holiness doctrine, while emphasising prosperity theology and the power of miracles (Ukah, 2008). By adopting prosperity theology, he brought the church in line with the worldwide Charismatic trend that highlighted health and wealth (Coleman, 2000). Moreover, theirs is a "holistic concept of salvation" (Burgess, 2020, 255), which included emphasis not only on prosperity, but on healing and holiness as well. As Burgess notes, the appeal of these theologies is clear in a precarious economic environment like sub-Saharan Africa where "access to medical facilities and to state funds is severely restricted" (ibid.). A new model of parish system aimed at attracting "young, urban professionals" was vital for the national and, eventually, transnational expansion (Burgess et al., 2010, 102). Today, the RCCG is the biggest Pentecostal church in Nigeria – one of its megachurches, an auditorium at the Redemption camp near Lagos, can accommodate up to 3 million worshippers. The RCCG is also among the biggest Charismatic churches in the world – including Europe (Burgess et al., 2010).

The church is heavily involved in reverse mission. Although there are RCCG churches in North America (Jemirade, 2017), the main thrust of its reverse mission activities is in Europe, notably in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Germany (Burgess et al., 2010, 103). The RCCG's mission policy (2018) states that the church's vision is "to spread the Word to the Ends of the Earth" (RCCG, 2018, 1), an ambition that has existed ever since it was founded in 1952. The mission statement includes the intention "to make heaven; to take as many people as possible with us; to have a member of RCCG in every family in all nations", adding that, in order to accomplish the first goal, "holiness will be our lifestyle" (RCCG, 2018, 1). While the latter is certainly pertinent for our discussion that follows, here we wish to focus on the missionary zeal of the RCCG. The mission statement also says that the RCCG "will plant churches within five minutes walking distance in every city and towns of *developing* countries and within every five minutes driving distance in every city and town of *developed* countries" (RCCG, 2018, 2; emphasis added). In this respect, the RCCG prides itself on having 35,000 parishes around the world and a presence in 197 countries. The document goes on to explain the role of the missionary, the missionary strategy, the organisation's structure, and the emphasis of Chrisitan social responsibility. The RCCG's policy on the latter includes, among others, the following activities: leadership training; family, marriage, and juvenile counselling; food banks and the provision of clothes, shoes and hats; cultural integration activities and prison evangelism (RCCG, 2018, 11). Although this is considered in the next chapter, it must be noted that evangelism is important in terms of measuring the effectiveness of the reverse mission (Burgess et al., 2010; Olofinjana, 2019, 7–8).

It would be an understatement to describe the RCCG's mission in Europe as well-organised. According to the official website of the RCCG's mission in Europe (the RCCG's "Europe Mainland Mission" or EMM), the organisation was established in 2002 with "only a few parishes in five countries" (RCCC EMM, 2023). However, today the European Mainland Mission (EMM) covers 46 countries – including over 230 parishes – excluding the United Kingdom. The website states that for administrative purpose the EMM is further divided into three regions (RCCG EMM, 2023). Region 1, overseen by pastor Dele Olowu, is further divided into five provinces, each overseen by a separate pastor. The website provides a detailed structure of provinces and parishes in Region 1 (RCCG EMM, 2023). The countries included in Region 1 include France and Benelux countries

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8   Here we briefly sketch out the RCCG. For a more detailed analysis of its history and its present condition, cf. Adeboye (2007); Burgess et al. (2010); Ukah (2008).

ANNALES · Ser. hist. sociol. · 34 · 2024 · 4

Igor JUREKOVIČ: GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY *ANTE PORTAS*: REVERSE MISSION AND THE CLASHING CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF RELIGION, 499–512

together with Central European countries and ex-Yugoslav republics, including Slovenia (RCCG 2020). According to the document, there were 89 parishes in Region 1 in 2020, with Austria (13) having the highest number of parishes. Interestingly, the document claims that there is at least one parish in Slovenia (RCCG, 2020). Region 2 of the EMM is overseen by pastor Leke Sanusi, a barrister and solicitor, living in Kent in the United Kingdom (RCCG EMM 2023). Region 2 includes 17 countries,[9] including most of the countries from Portugal across to Georgia, skipping over Eastern European republics. Finally, Region 3 of EMM includes Scandinavian and Eastern European countries as well as the Baltic republics. Region 3[10] is led by pastor David Sola Oludoyi, a "qualified medical doctor" living in the UK (RCCG EMM, 2023).

The impressive administrative structure aside,[11] the question is whether the RCCG – as well as other Charismatic churches – has been successful in its bid to convert Europe using the ways of African Charismatic Christianity.

IS EUROPE BEING CONVERTED?

"Out of the spotlight, an extraordinary re-evangelisation of Europe is taking place!" claimed an article posted on the official website of the Lausanne Movement (Memory, 2021). The latter is a platform that provides communicative tools and missionary resources for those actively involved in mission work across the world. While such enthusiasm is to be expected of a missionary organisation, one should not take its assertion for granted. Are reverse mission efforts truly effective in re-evangelising native Europeans?

The answer depends on how success is construed. If success is defined in a narrow sense, that is, in terms of converting native, non-immigrant Europeans, then the answer is a resounding No (Kwiyani, 2017; Ola, 2019; Währisch-Oblau, 2009).[12] Both social scientists

and missionaries agree on this point. For example, according to the Dutch scholar van der Laan, "the native Dutch […] do not respond to their [reverse missionaries'] evangelistic efforts" (van der Laan, 2006, 55) and Währisch-Oblau says that "even large very international churches have relatively few German members" (Währisch-Oblau, 2008). Such churches are then referred to as migrant churches (Währisch-Oblau, 2009, 33–36), namely, "churches and congregations which have been founded by people with a recent migration background, are led by them and have a majority of members from such a background" (Währisch-Oblau, 2009, 36). As such, these churches – and reverse mission efforts in general – have been dubbed "asylum Christianity" (Ukah, 2009).

Yet, if we define reverse mission more broadly to encompass the general societal impact, then the reverse mission endeavours are becoming a definite "social force in Europe" (Burgess et al., 2010, 116). Based on research done on the RCCG in the UK, Germany and the Netherlands, Burgess and his colleagues concluded that the social impact may be observed on three levels (Burgess et al., 2010, 100–116): the social impact of religious organisations and individuals' civic activities such as community health organisations, nurseries and food banks; the social impact of integration processes, which the RCCG encourages, influencing socio-economic mobility, guiding social interaction and motivating civic activity; and, finally, the de-privatisation of religion by appearing in the public eye through the use of media, religious events and recognition by the government.[13] As an outcome, the RCCG constitutes "a challenge to the secularization thesis and the notion that religion is losing social significance for public and/or private life" (Burgess et al, 2010, 116).[14]

Putting these undoubtedly important impacts to one side, we are more interested in the narrow sense of reverse mission. In this light, it is appropriate to ask why reverse mission attempts have been unsuccessful.[15] Missionary and social scientific literature

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9   It is worth noting that the information provided by the official website is somewhat inaccurate. For example, the administrative Region 2 supposedly includes Serbia, Kosovo and Albania, yet these very countries are listed within Region 1 as well.

10   Here, too, there seems to be a mistake with Slovenia being named within this region as well as Region 1.

11   The RCCG's mission in Europe includes the production and promotion of magazines and newspapers as well as an array of digital media platforms. In this respect, research of reverse mission should also consider the dynamics of digital media (Smrdelj & Pajnik, 2022) and cyber space (Lenarčič & Smrdelj, 2020).

12   One glaring exception is the Ukrainian church Embassy of the Blessed Kingdom of God for All Nations, which is led by its Nigerian founder Sunday Adelaja. The church is mainly attended by native Ukrainians. A discussion of its specifics is beyond the scope of this article. For a detailed discussion, cf. Asamoah-Gyadu (2006; 2010); Adogame (2008); Freston (2010, 167–170).

13   For example, the then prime minister of the UK, David Cameron, attended the RCCG's Festival of Life in London in 2015 (The Guardian, 2015). Burgess and colleagues add that the then mayor of London, Boris Johnson, also visited Jesus House, an RCCG church in London, as did Prince (at the time) Charles (Burgess et al., 2010, 115).

14   This is not surprising given the afore-mentioned activities conducted within the RCCG's mission efforts.

15   Understanding the obstacles to the reverse mission, theologians and missionaries form cross-denominational organisations seeking to aid such a mission. One such example is the Centre for Missionaries from the Majority World, which "aims to help British indigenous Christians and Churches and Majority World pastors and missionaries work together in mission" (Centre for Missionaries from the Majority World, 2023). Both Israel Olowule Olofinjana and Harvey Kwiyani, who we often cite, are members of this centre.

ANNALES · Ser. hist. sociol. · 34 · 2024 · 4

Igor JUREKOVIČ: GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY *ANTE PORTAS*: REVERSE MISSION AND THE CLASHING CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF RELIGION, 499–512

lists several reasons why Charismatic Christian churches from the Global South have not been successful in converting "the dark continent of Europe" (Olofinjana, 2010). From missionaries' point of view, we may divide these into two categories: socio-demographic and theological, pertaining to religious practice. There are two major socio-demographic barriers to the reverse mission: the economic and political disadvantage of reverse missionaries and racial prejudice (Kwiyani, 2014, 175–185; Ola, 2019). Reverse missionaries come from politically and economically disadvantaged backgrounds, which means they lack immediate material resources to engage in missionary work. They are also frequently affected by immigration laws, with both pastors and members often facing deportation (Kwiyani, 2014, 183–184). This is of course interconnected with racial prejudice, as frequently faced by reverse missionaries. For example, Matthew Ashimolowo, the Nigerian leader of the Kingsway International Christian Centre, the UK's biggest Pentecostal church, declared that "we are seen as a black thing and not a God thing" (cf. Jenkins, 2009, 89). Kwiyani describes his experience in such a way: "For most people in the West, even well-wishing Chrisitan leaders, to be black is still to be suspicious. To be an African black is even worse" (Kwiyani, 2014, 175). He pessimistically adds "you can never belong […] you have to be of the right colour, subscribe to the right theology, wear the right clothes, speak with the right accent" (Kwiyani, 2014, 175). Along these lines, the pioneer of Pentecostal studies, Walter Hollenweger, remarked: "Christians in Britain prayed for many years for revival, and when it came, they did not recognize it because it was black" (Hollenweger, 1992, ix).

In this paper, we focus on theological obstacles, which may loosely be described as "obstacles of contextualisation and they mainly point to the differences in religious practice" (Kwiyani, 2014, 175–182; Ola, 2019, 59–65; Olofinjana, 2010, 57). These refer to the "contextual ignorance" as reverse missionaries are "struggling to understand their context in order to formulate an intentional mission strategy and an ecclesiology that fits their situation" (Ola, 2019, 59). Contextual ignorance manifests itself in disagreements on what a 'church' or a 'pastor' should be (Ola, 2019; Währisch-Oblau, 2009) and discrepancies in "worldviews of the Western world and Africa" (Ola, 2019, 63). The latter include differing views on the role of women in church, and homosexuality (Verstraelen, 2007, 111). In addition, missionaries referring to witches, demons, end times and curses are considered as being "unpalatable to Europeans' sensibilities" (de Oliveira, 2021, 3). In this regard, Dutch theologian Gerrit Noort underscored that one of the challenges to the reverse mission is a "true dialogue with migrants' theologies" (Noort, 2011, 13). According to him, anchored in "theological post-Enlightenment reductionism", Dutch protestant churches have difficulty conversing with "the biographical and narrative theologies of many migrant Christians" (Noort, 2011, 14), who stress Pentecostal theologies of healing, for example. Dutch protestants view such theologies as "pre-Enlightenment", as something "we believed in the fifties" (Noort, 2011, 14). Further, one of the major theological hurdles is prosperity theology, which is thought to be inappropriate in the relatively affluent societies of Europe (Olofinjana, 2010, 54–55).

Yet there is also a clash of *religious styles*, in particular, of the religious bodies. This is an aspect that social science literature only rarely picks up on, while missionary and theological reflections mention it more in passing. Nonetheless, they state that missionaries should "reduce noise levels" (Währisch-Oblau, 2009, 306) or minimise "lively expressions introduced into worship and meetings of European Christians" (Verstraelen, 2007, 110). Indeed, missionaries told Kwiyani that "it is too difficult to reach out to Europeans" because it "forces us *to do* things differently, and that is too uncomfortable" (Kwiyani, 2017, 45; emphasis added), such as having shorter and quieter worship services (Paas, 2015, 15), with less fervent and long-sustained prayer, which are dismissed as "extreme, unnecessary, and 'African'" (Kwiyani, 2019, 87).[16] In a similar spirit, Burgess quotes a missionary who claimed that to be an effective missionary in Britain, "you must de-robe yourself of your own culture" (Burgess, 2011, 443). According to Währisch-Oblau, the emphasis on charismatic worship (including the above-mentioned Charismatic body) does not lead to a revival, but to "embarrassment and anger" (Währisch-Oblau, 2009, 303), which explains why migrant pastors "tone down their message and manage without rituals that they know would be alienating" (Währisch-Oblau, 2009, 303). This is due to the fact that African Christianity, when brought to Europe, will, in Kwiyani's view, "*look* and *feel* different from Western Christianity" (Kwiyani, 2014, 80; emphasis added). In the eyes of Westerners, this *style* of Christianity may appear "as an inferior type of Christianity compared to the Western Christianity" (Kwiyani, 2014, 107). We argue that it is this notion of *looking* and *feeling* different that is crucial in our further analysis since it refers to a different conceptualisation of the role of religious materiality. While European Christians see religious materiality – the use of bodies and music for instance – as expressions of something prior, not paying as much attention to it, the Christianity of the reverse mission appears to ascribe a high value to these aspects.

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16 Note that these characteristics are key in cultivating the Charismatic bodily regime as explained above.

ANNALES · Ser. hist. sociol. · 34 · 2024 · 4

Igor JUREKOVIČ: GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY *ANTE PORTAS*: REVERSE MISSION AND THE CLASHING CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF RELIGION, 499–512

FROM CLASHING CHRISTIANITIES TO CLASHING CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF RELIGION

Reflecting on the difficulties reverse missionaries face while attempting to evangelise Europe, Harvey Kwiyani speaks of a "clash of Christianities" (Kwiyani, 2014, 145). The latter is a concept used to describe the initial encounter of different *styles* of Christianity. In Chrisitan missionary and theological literature, this type of collision is characterised as "the Ephesian moment", a term coined by Andrew Walls (2002, 78). The Ephesian moment highlights the early church experience of Antioch, marked by a "social coming together of two or more different cultures to experience Christ" (Kwiyani, 2014, 85). Still, the theological notion of clashing[17] Christianities should not simply be used by social actors, reflecting on their own experiences of reverse mission. We argue that the notion of clashing Christianities holds substantial implications on the levels of sociological theory and empirical research. In the paragraphs below, we claim that a culturally situated understanding of religion, derived from the milieu of Charismatic Christianity, yields a more analytically accurate concept of religion compared to traditional sociological concepts of religion.

It is generally accepted that (social) science cannot produce a pure, objective concept of a given (social) reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1988). Scientific concepts, especially those used within the social sciences, are social constructions – products of certain scientific paradigms (Kuhn, 1998) and thought collectives (Fleck, 2022). They may nonetheless be more or less effective in explaining (social) reality. The concept of religion is no exception. The modern concept of religion, marked by the protestant bias that privileges belief over religious materiality such as ritual (Muir, 1997, 147–228; Roper, 1994, 171–199), was forged in the theological and intellectual legacy of the Protestant Reformation (Keane, 2007, 84–97; Orsi, 2016, 12–47). While a comprehensive discussion is beyond the scope of this paper, it should be noted that the key feature of this process is the *somatophobic* inclinations which the concept was endowed with. The privileging of belief over matter was the result of the discursive symbolisation of religion. Coined by the sociologists Phillip Mellor and Chris Shilling (1997, 98), discursive symbolisation marks the radical Protestant transformation of the Christian God. No longer would it be immanent, available to one's immediate senses; rather, the relationship between an individual believer and God was to be established purely on the conscious reflexivity of that believer. In other words, in such a theological constellation, God was to become a transcendental entity, one in which a Christian *believes* in – only secondly do they *feel* it (Mellor & Shilling, 1997).[18] This theological, social and intellectual milieu that gave rise to first scientific notions of religion, which posited the primacy of beliefs and subordinated religious materiality – objects, rituals, body postures – to the role of their manifestation (Keane, 2007, 84–97; Orsi, 2016, 25–37).

Such notions of religion persist today in terms of both a social consensus (Jurekovič, 2023, 40–46) and on the level of social scientific theory. The latter is best demonstrated by rational choice theories of religion, one of the most popular research programmes in sociology of religion. In terms of larger societal implications, the modern disenchantment gave rise to a certain type of embodiment (Mellor & Shilling, 1997, 4), which the philosopher Charles Taylor famously labelled the "buffered self" (Taylor, 2007, 27). Taylor went on to describe the overall effect of the Reformation as an increasing "excarnation, the transfer of religious life out of bodily forms of ritual, worship, practice so that it becomes more and more to reside 'in the head'" (Taylor, 2007, 613). In a similar manner, Mellor and Shilling speak of a "protestant modern body" (Mellor & Shilling, 1997, 8). Such assessments point to the similar modern development of an embodiment that may be found in contemporary European societies.[19] In essence, this type of embodiment is denoted by a high degree of rational control over one's body and sensuality, a control forged through the historical civilising process, as described by the sociologist Norbert Elias (2000). Indeed, such embodiment goes hand in hand with the Cartesian subject distinguished by a fundamental split between mind and body (Vásquez, 2011, 36–41).

Returning to the topic of the reverse mission, it is precisely this type of Christianity – and societal form of embodiment – that contemporary African missionaries encounter in their efforts to re-evangelise Europe. As noted above, the Christianity they bring looks and feels different from the Western Christianity. This is why self-reflecting missionaries observe that one of the problems of African-led churches in Europe is the "importation of African Christianity without contextualisation […] In essence: lack of indigenising Christianity amongst the British populace" (Olofinjana, 2010, 57). Such observations are not limited to the clashing religious beliefs or political views between Northern and Southern Christianity. Instead, they speak of the clashing place of religious

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17 We do not wish to imply that this coming together of different kinds of Christianities is in any way violent. Still, we find it useful in this instance to follow first-order phrasing, as used by missionaries themselves (Kwiyani, 2014). In addition, as some missionaries report moments of embarrassment and anger, it seems worthwhile to think of this coming together as not too pleasant for either side.

18 This was famously described by Max Weber under the rubric of disenchantment (Weber, 2004, 30).

19 Although Mellor and Schilling speak of a "baroque modern body" while describing contemporary embodiment. The baroque modern body combines features of the "medieval body" and the "protestant modern body". That is, the baroque modern body is marked by both high levels of modern rationality as well as a greater tendency for sensuous, bodily interactions (Mellor & Shilling, 1997, 161–189).

ANNALES · Ser. hist. sociol. · 34 · 2024 · 4

Igor JUREKOVIČ: GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY *ANTE PORTAS*: REVERSE MISSION AND THE CLASHING CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF RELIGION, 499–512

materiality – music, dancing, shouting – in Christianity itself, albeit that is not always explicit. For example, Kwiyani writes that the "African theology developed in a very spirit-oriented culture, where the *spirit and the material intertwine* on a regular basis" (Kwiyani, 2014, 180, emphasis added). For Kwiyani, the problem lies in the clash of Western theology, "influenced by science and reason" (Kwiyani, 2014), and African theology, marked by the "immediacy of the presence and power of the Spirit" (Kwiyani, 2014, 182). Namely, missionaries argue that there is a clash between European, non-charismatic religious expectations and African charismatic theology (Kwiyani, 2014). While we concur with the theological analysis, social scientists should look beyond theology as the barrier in itself. Rather, we are witnessing a clash between a non-charismatic and charismatic way of *doing* religion – it is not a doctrinal clash so much as a *practical* clash. It is in this light that we claim that social scientists should move beyond certain beliefs that may be hard to grasp for the secularised Europeans. That is, in this article we wish to move beyond obvious theological differences. It is not the secularised mind that is in the way – it is the secularisation of the body (Turner, 2008, 38).

Kwiyani explicitly states that the spirituality of the reverse mission is "holistic […] a matter of mind and the heart" since it "involves the whole of the person's being" (Kwiyani, 2014, 160). In this regard, African Christianity is thoroughly non-dualistic, understanding the negative impact of a "material-spiritual, holy-profane and religious-secular" perspective (Besha, 2021, 1). Thus, Kwiyani writes that "in celebration or in worship or any other religious activity, the participant's *entire body* […] engages in the process, *singing, dancing and more*" (Kwiyani, 2014, 160; emphasis added).[20] Namely, in Taylor's terms, the African Charismatic Christianity is marked by the "porous self" (Taylor, 2007, 38). Describing European Christianity in a similar manner to the buffered self, Kwiyani states that "for the past 300 years, a strong cultural bias in Europe towards science, reason and logic created a *dualism that pits the material world that we see against the spiritual world*" (Kwiyani, 2019, 82; emphasis added). Further, reflecting on failures of the reverse mission, Kwiyani expressly discusses Taylor's distinction between the buffered, European self and the porous self of the reverse-mission Christianity (Kwiyani, 2019, 83–85). This point also echoes Vásquez's above-mentioned notion of pneumatic materialism.

It is not surprising that African Charismatic missionaries are able to identify the significance of religious materiality, notably the body, for their Christianity and as an obstacle in the re-evangelisation of native Europe. We also contend that it is just as unsurprising that social scientists of religion rarely pay fair due to the religious materiality and its role in reverse mission attempts. Working within the above-described modern paradigm of religion, they regard the matter of beliefs (or worldviews) as primary reasons[21] why African Christians are unable to convert native Europeans. In other words, beyond a clash of Christianities, there is a clashing conceptualisation of what religion is. In particular, it is a clashing conceptualisation of the role of religious materiality – especially the body – in the constitution of religion as a social phenomenon. Once researchers move beyond the modern, Protestant reduction of religion to belief, we can better appreciate religion as an embodied phenomenon – and study it accordingly.

One such researcher is the anthropologist Tanya Luhrmann who has done extensive work on Evangelical and Charismatic Christians (Luhrmann, 2020). Her work is based on a different assumption to those of traditional concepts of religion. Instead of seeing belief as primary and ritual (worship) as secondary, she asks "whether people believe *because* they worship" (Luhrmann, 2020, x; emphasis added). In her *How Gods Become Real* (2020), she focuses on acts of "real-making", a concept through which she sees rituals as tools to "help people to shift from knowing in the abstract that the invisible other is real to *feeling* that gods and spirits are present in the moment" (Luhrmann, 2020, x). She adds that "the task of the person of faith is to believe not just that gods and spirits are there in some abstract way, like dark energy, but that these gods and spirits matter in the here and now" (Luhrmann, 2020, xi). We argue that the concept of real-making helps further understand the pitfalls of the reverse mission. Namely, the real-making includes "microprocesses of attention", using the mind and body which "kindles the divine presence for a person of faith" (Luhrmann, 2020, xi). Importantly, Luhrmann notes that, first, these processes are *crucial* for any religion and, second, that these processes are socially shaped and locally specific. With this in mind, her basic claim is "that god or spirit – the invisible other – must be made real for people, and that this real-making changes those who do it" (Luhrmann, 2020, xii).

We contend that this is a useful way of sociologically thinking about the clash of Christianities in Europe. In essence, this clash constitutes a clash of different kinds of real-making, of different kinds of kindling events that are necessary for a given group of Christians. Generally speaking, one Christianity calls for the use of loud, fervent and long-lasting worshipping sessions, combined with a network of religious materiality, while the other prefers toned-down, calm reflections of faith. That is, we are witnessing a coming together of opposing religious body regimes – opposing constructions of the Christian

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20   Using more plain language, Kwiyani says that the reverse mission will demand a conversion, however "not to a religion but to *a new way of life* under the lordship of Christ" (Kwiyani, 2019, 80; emphasis added).

21   Besides the undoubtably important social issues of racism and xenophobia.

ANNALES · Ser. hist. sociol. · 34 · 2024 · 4

Igor JUREKOVIČ: GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY *ANTE PORTAS*: REVERSE MISSION AND THE CLASHING CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF RELIGION, 499–512

body. By this, we wish to emphasise that even though European, non-charismatic Christianity is marked by a distinct lack of expressive, intense body styles, this does not mean that the religious body of such Christianity does not play a role. One of the great discoveries of contemporary research on the cognitive study of embodied religion shows how – no matter the type of the religion – the body style plays a significant role in the forming of particular beliefs (Soliman et al., 2015). Namely: how we *do* religion is intrinsically linked to what we believe in. For example, the work of the psychologist Patty Van Capellen and her colleagues reveals how particular body postures are characteristic for certain types of Western Christianities (Van Cappellen & Edwards, 2021a; 2021b; Van Cappellen et al., 2021). As we have seen above, Charismatic Christianity of any kind – but particularly so African – is denoted by distinct body logics or bodily regimes that require a reordering of one's sensuousness. This includes an interaction of many a religious materiality – worshiping music, singing, body movement, worshipping lighting. As we have seen from the missionary and theological reflections, these elements of African Christianity are often brought up as obstacles to evangelisation campaigns in Europe.

Paying attention to the struggles of the reverse mission and of the clashing Christianities, social scientists of religion have much to learn about their own theoretical and analytical tools. We believe that studying the self-perception of (African) Charismatic Christians and their view of Christianity and reverse mission struggles can help sharpen the core concepts of our scientific endeavours. As we noted – there is no *pure* social scientific concept. Still, this does not mean that such concepts are all equally lacking in analytical thrust. We have shown that scholarly dependence on the modern concept of religion blinds researchers from the vital role that religious materiality might play in attempting to explain reverse mission failures.

CONCLUSION

Reverse mission is a concept used by both theologians, missionaries as well as by the social scientific community. It principally describes the aspirations of missionaries and theologians who wish to re-evangelise Europe by means of Global Christianity, in particular, Charismatic Christianity. It is, as Burgess points out, a category of *empowerment* for non-Western Christians (Burgess et al., 2010, 153). Following from this, and in terms of social scientific approaches, reverse mission is chiefly a first-order discourse used to "discuss issues of

migration the evangelisation work of foreigner Christians, and what is proper Chrisitan theology and praxis" (Morier-Genoud, 2018, 185). That is, reverse mission is a discourse that, on the ground, primarily describes those migrant churches that have become migrant sanctuaries (Adedibu, 2013). Nevertheless, reverse mission does describe the genuine attempts of African Charismatic churches to re-evangelise Europe – however successful they might be.

The key question considered in this article is why African Charismatic Christians have been unsuccessful in converting native Europeans. Although obstacles that missionaries themselves report include social characteristics and theological particularities, we sought to shed light on the religious materiality that may be hindering the re-evangelisation of Europe. While thinly veiled racism as well as doctrinal differences no doubt play an important role, the core argument is that empirical research must focus more on religious *doing*. In particular, we believe that the religious body, as constructed by African Charismatic Christians, plays a vital role as a barrier to an effective reverse mission. In effect, the clash of Christianities is a clash of competing body regimes. As we have shown, the clashing religious styles – including 'inappropriate' loud music, dancing, shouting – is something that is self-reported by missionaries themselves, yet missing from the social scientific reflections on reverse mission.

We believe that taking the religious body into account while approaching the topic of reverse mission is not an end goal in itself. Instead, paying close attention to the missionary reflections enables social science researchers to rethink their core concept – religion. Even though religion has traditionally been thought of as mostly a matter of belief, which was then manifested through religious rituals conducted by religious communities (or privately), contemporary research in cognitive and social science is pushing us towards a new conceptualisation of religion. While the traditional concept of religion rested upon a particular European, Protestant basis, contemporary conceptualisations might be more in line with the Charismatic understanding of religion. Hence, the clash of Christianities convincingly shows the clash of competing social-scientific definitions of religion, showcasing the cultural specifics of defining the core concept of religious studies. Nevertheless, we wish to acknowledge the limitations of our research. We propose a theoretical reorientation, based on the analysis of theological and missionary writings. Although valid, such an approach requires further testing in terms of thorough fieldwork.

ANNALES · Ser. hist. sociol. · 34 · 2024 · 4

Igor JUREKOVIČ: GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY *ANTE PORTAS*: REVERSE MISSION AND THE CLASHING CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF RELIGION, 499–512

GLOBALNO KRŠČANSTVO *ANTE PORTAS*: POVRATNI MISIJON IN TRK KONCEPTUALIZACIJ RELIGIJE

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POVZETEK

Gravitacijsko središče krščanstva se je prestavilo na globalni jug, kar je privedlo do pojava tako imenovanega globalnega krščanstva. Slednje nosi številne posledice, med katerimi najdemo tudi pojav tako imenovanega povratnega misijona, kateremu se posvečamo v besedilu. Povratni misijon predstavlja teološki ter misijonarski koncept, ki opisuje prizadevanja neevropskih, krščanskih cerkva za novo evangelizacijo Evrope. Večina teh cerkva je protestantskih, ter sodi v karizmatično krščanstvo, za katerega je značilna določena religijska telesnost. Navkljub misijonarskim prizadevanjem, tako teološka kakor tudi družboslovna literature ugotavljata, da je povratno misijonarstvo neuspešno pri spreobračanju nepriseljenih Evropejcev. V prispevku se osredotočamo na vzroke, ki jih izpostavljajo raziskovalci ter misijonarji. Oboji med razloge za neuspešnost povratnega misijona uvrščajo rasizem, šibek družbeno-ekonomski položaj misijonarjev ter nasprotja v doktrinarnih prepričanjih. Toda misijonarji k razlogom pogosteje prištevajo tudi poudarjene značilnosti religijske telesnosti, ki naj bi jo Evropejci stežka sprejeli. To opažanje predstavlja ključni predmet analize tega prispevka. Pokažemo, da tako imenovani trk krščanstev ni zgolj trk različnih doktrinarnih prepričanj, temveč je predvsem trk različnih opredelitev religijskega telesa. Trdimo, da ima to opažanje pomembne posledice za sociologijo religije, saj je moderni koncept religije nastal v kulturno-religijskem okolju, ki je religijsko materialnost postavljal v podrejen položaj v odnosu z religijsko idejnostjo. Globalno, karizmatično krščanstvo, ki ga misijonarji povratnih misijonov prinašajo v Evropo, je v trku ravno s tovrstnim razumevanjem krščanstva – in religije. Pokažemo, da bi koncept religije, izpeljan iz karizmatičnega razumevanje krščanstva, lahko natančneje pojasnil težave povratnega misijona.

Ključne besede: religija, migracije, globalno krščanstvo, karizmatično krščanstvo, povratni misijon, telo, sociologija religije

ANNALES · Ser. hist. sociol. · 34 · 2024 · 4

Igor JUREKOVIČ: GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY *ANTE PORTAS*: REVERSE MISSION AND THE CLASHING CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF RELIGION, 499–512

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ANNALES · Ser. hist. sociol. · 34 · 2024 · 4

Igor JUREKOVIČ: GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY *ANTE PORTAS*: REVERSE MISSION AND THE CLASHING CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF RELIGION, 499–512

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ANNALES · Ser. hist. sociol. · 34 · 2024 · 4

Igor JUREKOVIČ: GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY *ANTE PORTAS*: REVERSE MISSION AND THE CLASHING CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF RELIGION, 499–512

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