

The Manhattan Declaration, an Oblate Connection

For most Oblates of a certain age, "Manhattan" means either the island borough in N.Y. City, or the "project" which developed the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. But on Nov. 20, 2009, an ecumenical group released a statement pledging their commitment to defend human life, traditional marriage, and the rights of conscience.

The "Manhattan Declaration" is actually the eighth statement produced by an ever growing group of Christians in which Roman Catholics and evangelical Protestants are the majority. It is easily the most widely publicized and widely endorsed of the eight.

The first, "Evangelicals and Catholics Together for Mission" was released in May, 1994. The original 15 "participants" included Fr. Avery Dulles SJ (who died a cardinal), Bishop Francis George OMI, Diocese of Yakima, Washington (now Cardinal George, Archdiocese of Chicago, IL), and Archbishop Francis Stafford, Denver, CO (now Cardinal Stafford, Vatican City). The statement was signed by 25 more Christian leaders before it was released.

The current statement has been endorsed by over 453,147 as of June 1st 2010. Among the original endorsers is the Anglican Primate of Nigeria, Most Rev. Peter J. Akinola, 11 women (only 1 woman was among the 1994 group), and a remarkable number of evangelical seminary professors. Nine Catholic bishops signed (later expanded to seventeen) including Archbishop John Nienstedt, Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, who had it published in his Catholic newspaper, Dec. 31, 2009. The entire text of 4,700 words is available on the internet. Translations into Spanish, and 13 other major languages are posted.

Liberal and fundamentalist Christian groups are dismayed by the statement. It represents a broad consensus by the three middle groups of Christians (Catholic, evangelical/charismatic and reformed/Vatican II) to confront the more extreme fundamentalist and liberal positions on the role of faith in modern society.

Trumpeting the fact that "through the centuries, Christianity has taught that civil disobedience is not only permitted, but sometimes required," the endorsers recall Martin Luther King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," and conclude:

Because we honor justice and the common good, we will not comply with any edict that purports to compel our institutions to participate in abortions, embryo-destructive research, assisted suicide and euthanasia, or any other anti-life act; nor will we bend to any rule purporting to force us to bless immoral sexual partnerships, treat them as marriages or the equivalent, or refrain from proclaiming the truth, as we know it, about morality and immorality and marriage and the family. We will fully and ungrudgingly render to Caesar what is Caesar's. But under no circumstances will we render to Caesar's what is God's. As the group who wrote the declaration was being formed, Cardinal George was asked to participate. He explained in the Chicago Catholic newspaper Catholic New World (Dec. 20, 2009):

I could not do so, not only because of time constraints but also because, as president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, I cannot sign statements or give endorsements that might seem

to engage the bishops' conference itself. The bishops who head up important committees of the USCCB, however, are able to sign and have done so. I intend to do so in a year, when my term as president concludes.

Just before the critical British National Election, a group of Christians in England published the Westminster Declaration which requests political candidates to pledge to respect Christian beliefs. Both declarations have their own websites and a way of endorsing.

WWW.ManhattanDeclaration.org

WWW.WestminsterDeclaration.org

OBLATE BISHOP CO-AUTHORS STATEMENT WITH EVANGELICALS

Most Reverend Francis George, O.M.I., Bishop of Yakima, Washington, co-authored the important ecumenical and missionary statement "Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium." Appearing in April, 1994, the document caught the attention of the secular press both in that month and in June, when the Southern Baptist Convention endorsed it. Consisting of seven pages of very readable and even inspiring text, the fifteen authors and twenty-five endorsers observe:

"The two communities in world Christianity that are most evangelistically assertive and most rapidly growing are Evangelicals and Catholics."

It would be nice (and neater) if Evangelicals were only those Christians who insist on the born-again experience for adults as being the determining fact of their Christian faith. (Billy Graham and Oral Roberts are examples of evangelicals.) It would be nice (and neater) if Fundamentalists were only those Christians who insist on the five fundamentals (usually considered the verbal inerrancy of Scripture, the deity and virgin birth of Christ, the substitutionary atonement, the physical resurrection of Christ, and His body return to earth) in a very rigid and static way, so that no growth in doctrine is possible. (Bob Jones and Carl McIntire are examples.)

But it is a fact of religious life today in the U.S. that there are Fundamentalists who also call themselves Evangelicals, and some Evangelicals who call themselves Fundamentalists. It is true that since about 1974, when Richard Quebedeaux published *The Young Evangelicals* (Harper, N.Y.), the two groups have been diverging. However, the term continues to be slippery.

(For a free reprint of the statement, send a #10 self-addressed and stamped envelopes to: First Things, 156 5th Ave., Suite 400, New York, New York 10010 and ask for it by title)

OBLATE INTEREST by Bishop Francis George, O.M.I.

Fr. Harry Winter has asked me to write a few paragraphs on my involvement in writing a document encouraging greater cooperation between Catholics and Evangelicals in mission. I was invited to be part of the consultation, which began in September, 1992, because I am an Oblate of Mary Immaculate and had experience of missionary situations around the world.

The conveners called together Evangelicals and Catholics because they were worried about outbreaks of violence in some parts of Latin America between Protestants and Catholics. In southern Mexico, for example, villagers had been physically attacking Presbyterian converts, claiming they were destroying the village's way of life. The idea in calling together American Catholics and Evangelicals was to have us agree on a number of propositions or procedural rules for social peace which have worked in the U.S. and which we might then suggest as useful to our counterparts in newly pluralistic religious situations in Latin America. The conveners were concerned that a worsening of relations in Latin America would mean deterioration of ecumenical relations in the U.S.; they were also interested in setting up rules of engagement for evangelical missionaries going into Latin America for the first time.

Instead of moving quickly from the U.S. to the situation in Latin America, the participants in the consultation ended up staying in the U.S. Around the table were Catholics who were both Hispanic and White and Evangelical Protestants who were the same. It became clear that we would have to discuss our own situation at some length before addressing conditions elsewhere.

The statements speak for itself, and I will not try to synopsise it here. Talking with Evangelicals willing to talk with Catholics was rewarding. The five fundamentals of faith which gave their name to the fundamentalist movement early in this century are truths of faith we share, although with some considerable nuance about Christ's relation to us in the work of salvation and about the inspiration of Sacred Scripture. The biggest problem, as most Catholics know, is over the nature of the Church. Evangelicals tend to attribute to this country a role we would reserve to the Church. The U.S. is not the new Israel nor the visible continuation of God's chosen people; the Church is that.

The difference explains also a difference in the sense of urgency around social problems. In fact, Catholics and Evangelicals are closer on moral issues in many instances than Catholics and Ecumenical or mainline Protestants. The Pope pointed that out some years ago at an ecumenical service in South Carolina when, for the first time, he put a moral issue on the ecumenical agenda: abortion. The unity of the Church is not only a unity of belief; it is also a unity of life. The Church is the Way, and marching Christ's path together demands unity in morals. Watching the U.S. become an increasingly immoral society brings into turmoil Evangelicals' sense of God's Kingdom. It doesn't have the same effect on Catholics, because we know this country is not God's Kingdom and is not destined to last forever. We can watch it fall apart with greater equanimity.

But because of the deterioration of once common cultural norms, of social rules which re-enforced Biblical morality, a united effort by Evangelicals and Catholics becomes desirable. Even with those fundamentalists who suspect Catholics are not really Christians, cooperation around some items is possible, provided the Catholics are not more afraid of being called conservative than they are concerned about the deteriorating social statistics. Sometimes difference in style makes it hard to acknowledge agreement in substance. Sometimes association with Evangelicals is discouraged these days by the witch-hunt against the religious right. With Communism a vanquished foe, fundamentalists are now the enemy of choice for the cultured despisers of religion who run this country and set its tone. The newly created House Task Force on the Religious Right is the direct descendant of the abolished House Un-American Activities Committee. Are you sure that lady next to you isn't really plotting to change Our Way of Life? She could be a card-carrying fundamentalist Christian. She certainly shouldn't be a candidate for political office or the local school board, nor a Hollywood scriptwriter, nor a tenured university professor

Social Agenda aside, Catholics can learn from Evangelicals a few lessons how to put evangelization at the center of the Church's life. Catholic evangelization is different in some significant ways. The Christ we proclaim is a Eucharistic Christ; the methods we employ must respect the work of the Holy Spirit already present in the people we evangelize; the Gospel we implement changes society as well as individuals. But the fervor to introduce people to Christ, the joy in being with fellow believers, the sense of the immediacy of God's action in the world – these lessons we can learn again from Evangelicals. Oblates, above all, should be interested and eager. Be nice to Evangelicals and even Fundamentalists. Often to our surprise and theirs, we have more in common than we had once thought.

Dana Robert Interview

Read more of Betty Rollin's interview about reverse missionaries with Dana Robert, Truman Collins Professor of World Christianity and History of Mission at the Boston University School of Theology and co-director of its Center for Global Christianity and Mission. She is also the author of *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009):

Why are foreign missionaries coming to the United States and building churches?

This has always happened. This is the American way. Every group of immigrants brings their own religion, and we're a nation of immigrants. Swedish Lutherans brought Swedish ministers; Polish Catholics brought Catholic priests, etc., so these immigrants are bringing their own passions with them.

But this is a little different, isn't it? Isn't this a little bigger?

What's different is that since 1965 whole different groups of immigrants have come to the US, so it's more visible because these are not northern Europeans.

Let's talk about the Nigerians first. What's going on there, because it's not only that they're preaching to Nigerians when they come here.

Well, one thing about Nigerians, they're very entrepreneurial. They've spread all over the world, and the Nigerians in the United States are very highly educated. African immigrants are one of the most highly educated group of immigrants, and with the technologies we have today their visibility is partly because we can see them on the Internet. We're in a context of globalization. The means of seeing this kind of immigrant religion is so much greater than it used to be that the visibility is higher.



To what extent are they acting like missionaries? There's a little irony here, isn't there?

We are now in an age where we used to talk about missions to migrants and now it's by migrants, and that's because of the demographic shift in Christianity. Now there are over 450 million Christians in Africa. A century ago there was only 8 million, so the huge growth of Christianity in Africa and Latin America and parts of Asia means that when they come here they think of themselves as missionaries. It's actually the full circle, so it's an irony if you don't know the history of Christianity and recognize that it's always been a migrant religion. Same with Islam.

How have the Nigerians been able to grow to the extent that they have? There are so many churches.

Well, right, for one thing there are a lot of them, and they come from a huge, overcrowded English-speaking country, so they can land with their feet on the ground and get up and running with outreach, churches, building schools, building homes very quickly. They don't have the language barrier many other immigrants have when they get to the United States.

They're preaching not only to other Nigerians, however. What is the attraction for Americans?

I think it's because a lot of new Christians have a live, vibrant faith that takes the supernatural seriously, that takes miracles seriously, that takes changing your life seriously, and North American Christians have gotten old in their faith and complacent and secular, so this refreshing of the Gospel is attractive to a lot of people.

And in what sense are they changing the face of Christianity?

Absolutely, this huge growth of Christianity around the world has occurred in my lifetime at the same time that European Christianity is dying, and so you have this demographic shift where Christians of European extraction are only one-fourth of Christians in the world today. So we're looking at a completely multicultural church that in the early 21st century has roughly the same proportions: Europeans, Africans, Asians, Latin Americans.

Their beliefs are different.

Oh, yeah. One thing we've seen is that Pentecostalism has swept all over the world in the last several decades, so the immediacy of the supernatural, the emotional worship style, the focus on lifestyle and holiness, these are things that American churches have gotten soft on. Maybe in the 1800s there was a lot more exuberant religion, using the church for setting morality and boundaries, but that's what happening in these new churches in the US today.

They believe the devil is behind homosexuality, among other things.

That's why it's a paradox that these are such highly educated people, but their substratum of African traditional religion has a very vigorous spiritual life of spirits, evil spirits, ancestors, and those are real problems for them, so there's a way in which their worldview, their cosmology has to deal with living spirits if only to fight those spirits. That's largely what's happening here, that things that are perceived as evil or negative have to be vigorously fought in the church, and that's consistent with African traditional religion.



It's not the American religious tradition.

Actually, it is if you scratch deep enough. If you scratch it's only been a few generations since North Americans believed in these spirits, and most people today believe in angels, for example. If you take an opinion poll about, I think, 40 percent or so of Americans believe in creation as in the Book of Genesis. These are our beliefs. It's just that they've been driven underground by this veneer of secularism in the last half-century. Another issue is it's the end of secularism. We're now in a postmodern age where we know science is not the answer. Science does not have all the answers, and people are looking within and without for spiritual answers to life's major issues of meaning.

We all read the Bible through our own culture, and if you're from a culture where homosexuality is not spoken of, is underground, is not considered real, then you read the Bible through that lens. Most churches today in the US have divorced ministers or divorced people in the churches, yet the Bible's clearly against divorce. So somehow, somewhere along the way North Americans began to read the Bible in a different way and say, "But divorce is okay, though not great." Well, Africans say, "How can you accept divorce when Jesus was against it but not accept polygamy, for example, when Abraham had more than one wife? Polygamy is in the Bible." In other words, the relationship between culture and politics or the relationship between culture and how you read the Bible is intertwined.

And can their views of homosexuality succeed in this country?

One thing is that churches are always changing, and I'm a historian, and I never predict the future, so who will win this one I don't know, but most of the major religions in the world don't accept homosexuality. One thing about views of homosexuality preached through the pulpit is that it's the role of the religious professionals to call people to what their ideals are. Whether actual people uphold the various things preached at them from the pulpit is another story. There's always a disconnect between the religious

professional, i.e. the minister whose job it is to uphold the “values” and the activities of the people. If you preach about homosexuality a lot, it may be because you have a “problem” with homosexuality. In other words, practice and rhetoric don’t line up necessarily. The Bible says many things, and all people who are Christians see their values as coming from the Bible. Since they’re against homosexuality, they read the verses that are against homosexuality in a literal way, but they might not read other verses in a literal way. We all pick and choose what in the Bible to read literally, but one thing that’s interesting is African Christian groups are very interested in things like the Book of Leviticus, because it’s got certain similarities with traditional religion. And how many American Christians say the Book of Leviticus is really important? Not that many, but it’s very important for these new African churches.

Because?

Because there are so many purity laws in the Book of Leviticus, and purity is a really important piece coming from African traditional religion that they’re carrying into Christianity.

Why is purity so important?

Because if you come from a primal society, and you don’t do things exactly a certain way, you are not aligned with the spirits or with the cosmic forces, and you can’t succeed in life. This is how Europeans were when missionaries went from the Mediterranean. The very first thing northern European kings wanted was a book of laws. That’s how Latin spread. Monks came and gave them their traditional law written down for them. Purity is essential for dealing with the spirits which are around you and being aligned with God’s will so that you prosper. Purity is what sets people apart from other people. It’s part of your distinctiveness. Think of Orthodox Jews and dietary restrictions. That, for Jews, is a kind of purity. So it can be evidenced by wearing certain clothes, by eating certain things, by not having intercourse during time of menstruation. Purity encompasses many human practices, and it sets you apart as a special people of God against other people. One of the things about the sense of purity is that they’re reading out of the Hebrew Bible or the Old Testament. Purity isn’t actually something that’s a main feature of European Christianity this day and time, but when new groups of Christians get the Bible, they are reading right through the Old Testament where purity to distinguish the people Israel as they’re on their journey is really significant. In a sense, a lot of these African indigenous churches you can see as Old Testament-type churches. It’s actually coming from Judaism, you see. Not current Judaism, but it’s coming from the people of Israel. Jesus violated one purity law after another. Jesus wasn’t into that, I mean in some ways, but the tradition comes right through the whole of the people of Israel right through the Bible. And then it dovetails with African traditions. It sets you apart or feels special, feels that you’re doing God’s will.

Tell me about speaking in tongues.

Speaking in tongues has multiple levels. One is prayer language where you enter not quite an altered state of consciousness but you’re suspending your rational mind and just letting your tongue loose, and there’s a way in which that has a similar sense about it as the Latin Mass, for example. By releasing your conscious mind it lets mystery flow into you. Speaking in tongues is really important for people who are moving from one place to another, who feel linguistically challenged. If you think about it, if your worship service has speaking in tongues, you can be speaking at home ten different languages but still share a common group experience, so it’s both individual and corporate. It’s a way of praying, predominantly, it’s a way of praying. Now some people have believed in the past that people were speaking actual foreign languages for the purpose of evangelization. I don’t know that there is any documentation that that has actually taken place, though it is claimed over and over. But it’s mostly for personal worship and for a kind of sense of personal well being, personal empowerment.



There's something antirational about it—is that the appeal?

It is antirational, but so is listening to music, if you think about it. I think the analogy is if you're caught up listening to music, you're tapping parts of your brain, not the rational part, so those kinds of things throughout the history of our religions are what allow you to let the experience of God come in. We can know about God or we can know God, and you see that experience of knowing God you have to release your own rational mind that's locking you into just your verbal language. I think that's the idea behind many mystical practices, of which speaking in tongues is a fairly easy, accessible, common, group-oriented mystical practice.

Can you explain the entrepreneurial zeal of the Redeemed Christian Church? They want to grow, and they are growing.

They are growing. Growth equals life equals health equals prosperity at its most basic. Religion is about living an abundant life either here or the hereafter. Growth is necessary for that. The other thing is, to put this in the context of immigrant religion, in Boston, a supposedly highly secular city, a new church has been founded every 20 days. Most people don't realize this. They think New England is secular. These are immigrant churches, storefront churches. This is the American way of building civic society, coming together for voluntary groups, helping each other, and then growth becomes a way to be prosperous in this American context of capitalism, competition, and so on.

In order to grow they have to have American followers as well as their own?

Yeah, though I don't have the numbers, but there are hundreds of thousands of Nigerians in the United States, so you can start with Nigerians and work outwards. It can also be a unitive experience among Nigerians of different ethnicities. You have to remember Nigeria is a multiethnic country. So first if you can start with your own ethnic group of Nigerians and then expand outward, you can first build out to other Nigerians and then to Ghanains or people of other West African countries and keep moving out to North Americans.

Is part of their goal to change us?

Part of the goal is to change us, though I think the real goal is they see they are being faithful to God and all—think of Madison Avenue, everyone has a slogan, every church has a slogan, everyone has an advertising campaign. You have to look at a lot of this as their rhetoric. It's also consistent with Jesus' final command to go throughout the world and make disciples. Well, it's very interesting historically that the people who rediscover that command, "go into all the world," are usually people who are already on the move. So if you're an immigrant and you want to be an immigrant, and God tells you to answer that command, "go out to all the world," there's a very convenient alignment of the spiritual, the biblical, and your personal effort to prosper.

Where does all their money come from?

Well, remember these are highly educated people. They tithe. Followers tithe a large percentage of their income, and also many people start poor, and poor people give a much higher percent of their income. I mean the most generous state in the country is Mississippi and Alabama, poor people, and so those northern New Englanders are stingy compared to poor southerners.



What's going on with other immigrant missionaries?

I see where I live in Somerville, Massachusetts, I've got at least six immigrant churches within a block of my house, and they double and triple up in church buildings or community centers. There're Haitian churches. There're Brazilian churches. They go out to the park across the street and have revival services. This is the way immigrants have always organized themselves socially, and the voluntary group is the basis of American civil society. So it's very American to move here and with your own group start your voluntary group around a common purpose. That's how you become an American.

And you try to get other Americans involved?

You can, but that's usually not as easy. That might be the goal, but the actual success is typically with other immigrants of a same or similar culture.

Of all the immigrant groups, which are most attractive religiously to Americans?

I think it is a lot of African Christians because they have this vibrant, outgoing faith that's a compatible personality type with North Americans. Asian Christian groups are more, in some sense, foreign if they don't speak English, but I know people who worship at big Chinese churches, for example, that have an English service and a Chinese service, so I think the African immigrant, because we already have African Americans. I mean, you know, Barack Obama is president of the United States, and an African coming in and spreading Christianity is a very familiar trope in American life. Think of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., think of Jesse Jackson, Al Sharpton. We have a big tradition of African-American leadership within Christianity, so an African coming here doesn't have to cross any boundaries of people's acceptance to be in ministry. That is a familiar thing for North Americans.

The Nigerians we spoke to place a great emphasis on spiritual healing.

Healing is one of the main things that attract people into churches all over the world. It is not just Nigerians. Even mainline churches, you know, Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians, are holding healing services. There are these healing movements of memory. Healing is one thing religion does. That doesn't mean healing is successful. We have to distinguish healing as something fundamental to what faith brings you and being cured. Being healed and being cured are not necessarily the same thing.

Our society is so oriented toward doctors and medicine.

Yeah, well, look who doesn't have health care, and if you look around the world you see these churches spring up where people don't have access to health care, and it coexists with health care. Western health care is expensive, it's impersonal. Now that's changing, but healing has to do with healing your relationships with other people. That helps people recover.

Are there any other immigrant groups you want to describe or points you want to make?

The Chinese immigrants, this is extremely interesting. There are more people worshipping in China than in Europe each Sunday. That's an estimate. Chinese are very evangelistic-oriented and see their movements as moving back along the Silk Road from whence Christianity came to China, and moving back toward Jerusalem, so the Chinese mission movement is absolutely fascinating. The top three Christian countries in the world, in terms of active Christianity, are the US, Brazil, and China.

One thing that's underreported and under-recognized is the role of women in these churches. A lot of these new immigrant churches have a male-female pastoral team, and much of the traditional spirit life of Africa has been carried by women. There are women right at the core of it, and throughout Christianity there are mostly women worshipping. So we see maybe the big man, you know, the big male pastor, but next to him, behind him, underneath, around him are women that make the wheels turn, and so we must recognize that these churches are women's movements.

Immigrant religion today is coming here to evangelize us and then to go back out to evangelize where they're from, so it is two-way traffic, so a lot of people come to the US and then migrate back, so the church founding and the evangelization is part of globalization. It's going in both directions, so these immigrants might stay here today but be back in their home countries tomorrow, so we must look at it as a two-way street. It's not a one-way "I'm going to evangelize America."

They think we're morally weak.

Yes, but, again that's a Christian trope. You know, if there's not something immoral or bad or evil or weak that you're trying to fix, you don't have a reason to exist. Remember the competition. Think of the TV evangelists in the US. They're always pointing fingers at the mainline churches as being bad or evil or wrong or full of Satan. Without that, you don't have a reason to try to fix something.



In what sense is Christian theology changing because of these immigrant groups?

One thing is these churches emphasis holiness and purity. This comes out of their African traditional need for purity and that is not particularly an emphasis of most mainstream churches, personal purity. Another difference in theology is if you come from a culture that has an active life of sacrifice, like you sacrifice a chicken and sprinkle the blood around, the idea that Jesus is a sacrifice for your sins makes a lot of

sense, but for North Americans who are so far away from their rural roots and from those cultural norms, the idea of Jesus as a sacrifice is a lot less relevant to your typical Euro-North American than to the immigrant churches. So we see a reaffirmation of some traditional Christian views and a strengthening of trends that maybe died down or died out in American Christianity.

Are these changes taking hold?

Yeah. Especially one thing that's changing, it's not just new immigrant churches, is the non-Western percentage of mainstream denominations are changing. The second highest ranking [Anglican] bishop in the world below the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Archbishop of York, is named John Sentamu. He's a Ugandan, and his brother is the founder of a big, huge Pentecostal church in Uganda. Now you know then African culture is right there in the mainstream heart of Anglicans worldwide, which are over half African now. So you see the change in theology that causes fighting, it's not some African causing change in the Church, it's when people come and they're part of Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, or whatever, and they're saying, "Wait a minute, you folks are wrong. We're interpreting the Bible correctly." It's the fighting within those churches that's also very interesting.

Who is going to prevail?

Well, it depends on whether you believe that numbers win or you believe the historical cycle—that the child of an evangelical is a liberal, the child of a liberal is a secularist, and the child of a secularist becomes an evangelical. There's a life cycle. Today's conservative begets tomorrow's moderate and so on.

What about the sense of American churches that this is their territory, the sense of competition?

I think the most negative reaction one sees to African churches is from African Americans, because this is their territory that's being impinged on. The African pastor might start in a poor urban neighborhood where the African-American church has been dominant, so one hears about all kinds of tensions in the grass roots, in the urban areas, between Africans and African Americans.

Are they just competitive for business, or is that it that they're theologically different, or both?

There's a theological compatibility, but the immigrant mentality is one of push forward, get educated, progress, and they're entering neighborhoods that have got generations of poor people who haven't been able to climb out of their poverty. Usually immigrants are on their way up, and an African immigrant might look at an African American and say, "Why haven't you moved out of that ghetto after three generations?" And an African American says, "Yeah, but you haven't experienced the racism we've experienced." So you see you get Africans coming in with no racial chip on their shoulder, living alongside and competing with African Americans who have the weight of their communal history which in some respects is dragging them down, and there's tension right on the ground.

And what about the prosperity gospel?

Well, you know, the prosperity gospel is really easy to criticize by middle-class Americans who have a house, and a car, and a job. I don't criticize the prosperity gospel because I recognize how privileged I am, but often groups who are trying to pull themselves up economically have a kind of prosperity gospel. What's offensive about it to North Americans is when they see pastors in designer suits driving Mercedes and their poor parishioners have given them money. That's what bothers North Americans. We're individualists. We think individuals ought to earn what they get, but if you have a more communal mentality, you see the leader representing your group, and of course you want your group to be led by someone in a nice suit with a good car.

