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African Christianities: Features, Promises and Problems

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African Christianities: Features, Promises and Problems¹

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Introduction

In contemporary times, the most widely known things about Africa seem to be the “breaking bad news” that the global media disseminate about the continent and its many peoples. Africa is a continent of poverty, disease, corruption, wars, and political instability. Some know of portions of Africa as objects of tourist curiosity. Indeed, very few know that Africa is the land with the largest amount of natural resources and the continent with the largest numbers of practising Christians. Africans are a deeply religious people, where there are many religious traditions, the three most important being indigenous religions, Christianity and Islam. These religions fuse in creative ways to produce rich and innovative religious cultures and lifestyles for the diverse populations of the continent. For many Africans today, religion provides significant identity resource; more significantly, in the period of rapid social change with unprecedented distortions to economic, social and political lifestyles, religion offers a veritable means of anchor and stability and a pathway to meaningful social existence. It is estimated in 2005 that Christians constitute 46% (or 400 million) of the total population of the continent of nearly 890 million, a rise from 9% in 1900.² Africa represents the fastest increase in Christian population worldwide. Significantly, this increase is witnessed among young, educated, urban, upwardly mobile segments of the population. As we shall see, African Christianity is dynamic, vibrant and multifaceted. Increasingly, scholars have come to accept as a basic religious revolution of the twentieth century the “shift in the centre of Christianity” from Europe and North America to the poor South of Latin America, Asia and Africa.³ Elizabeth Isichei is right when she writes that “Christianity in Africa is of global significance, and the directions it takes are of importance to Christians everywhere”.⁴

¹ Vortrag gehalten am 17.06.2007 im Rahmen der Ringvorlesung “Afrika”, am Institut für Ethnologie und Afrikastudien, Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz.

² Source: *World Christian Encyclopedia* (2001) & *World Christian Database* (2006), see <http://pewforum.org/surveys/pentecostal/africa/> (accessed 05.06.2007).

³ Andrew F. Walls, “Towards Understanding Africa’s Place in Christian History”, in J. S. Pobee (ed.), *Religion in a Plural Society* (London: Brill, 1979), p. 180.

⁴ Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa from Antiquity to the Present*, London: SPCK (1995), p.1.

Christianity is both old and new in Africa. It is old because its first contact with the continent was soon after the disciples of Jesus dispersed from Jerusalem after the events of Pentecost. It should also be remembered that the gospel of Matthew narrated that Jesus and his mother were refugees in Egypt, a story that was dear to the hearts of Coptic Christians of Egypt.⁵ Further, the Copts of Egypt cherish the ancient tradition that it was St. Mark who brought Christianity to them. Coptic Christians in Egypt, Ethiopia and the Sudan constitute the oldest traditions of Christianity in Africa today. The theologians produced by the Egyptian church defined Christian doctrines and dogmas, inventing such theological concepts as “the trinity” (coined by Tertullian of Carthage, 160-220 CE), “the original sin” (coined by Augustine of Hippo, 354-430 CE, born in what is today Algeria). By the 11th century, however, much of what was “Maghrib Christianity” had clearly been wiped out by the relentless expansion of Islam such that, in 1317, the Dongola Cathedral in Nubia was converted into a mosque, signalling the eclipse of the first of phase of Christianity in the continent.⁶

Diversity of African Christianities

There is a significant amount of diversities in what is generally called “African Christianity” that I would rather adopt the plural of the term “African Christianities” to emphasize these different strands or traditions that may or may not be compatible one to another. The differences often illustrate the degree of vitality and innovative approaches to local appropriation of Christianity. The debate still rages on if one or the other strand could be regarded as a branch of Christianity or a different religion altogether. Considering the complex histories, organization structures and dogmas, and to emphasize the divergences rather than the convergences, the use of “Christianities” needs to remain, at least for the moment. For the sake of simplification, there are three broad types⁷ of Christianities practised in Africa, each internally variegated, namely:

- i) Mission Christianity;
- ii) African Initiated Christianity; and
- iii) African Pentecostalism.

⁵ Bengt Sundkler & Christopher Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 7.

⁶ Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa*, p. 45.

⁷ For a related taxonomy of Christian Churches, see Deji Ayegboyin and Asonzeh Ukah “Taxonomy of Churches in Nigeria: A Historical Perspective”, *Orita: Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies*, vol. XXXIV/1-2, June & December, 2002: 68-86.

i) Mission Christianity

The first category, Mission Christianity, represents those churches established by Christian missionary agencies from Europe and America in Africa during the 18th and 19th centuries. Usually, these churches came with the advent of European colonialism, although there are some exceptions, for example, in Nigeria, where the first contacts between the indigenous peoples and European missionaries was in the 16th century when Portuguese Catholic priests visited the Kingdoms of Bini (1485-1707)⁸ and Warri (1574-1807).⁹ Although the type of Christianity planted in these areas later died out because so many reasons, there were cultural traces still existing till this day as a result of this early encounter. The Portuguese missionaries resorted to “a church – state” model of planting Christianity by targeting local chiefs and hoping that once these chiefs have converted, their people will follow suit. Because the new faith did not issue from the people’s religious conviction, and because the Portuguese were more concerned with commerce than missionary duties, Christianity did not take deep roots. In 1733, for example, the local chief in Warri reverted to indigenous religion and with him his people because the new religion failed to end a spell of drought; they smashed a statue of Jesus to display the failure of Christianity to be of practical benefits to them in their search for a meaningful and reciprocal relationship with the divine.¹⁰ The Portuguese were the first Europeans to take away slaves from the West Coast of Africa to Europe; they popularised the shameful slave trade.¹¹ And this was perhaps the strongest reason why the Christian message they purported brought was scorned and therefore ineffective. Also the first contact between European missionaries and what is today Ghana was in the 15th century when Portuguese Catholics visited the Coast. But interest in trade superseded the evangelical imperative, and also the harsh climatic conditions made European survival immensely difficult, particularly as quinine, the anti-malarial drug, was yet to be discovered about this time.¹²

⁸ A.F.C. Ryder, “The Benin Missions”, *Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria*, II/I (1961), p. 231-257.

⁹ A.F.C. Ryder, “Missionary Activity in the Kingdom of Warri to the Early Nineteenth Century”, *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, II/I (1960), p. 1-24; Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa*, pp. 61-63; Jude C. Aguwa, “Christianity and Nigerian Indigenous Culture”, in Chima J. Korieh & G. Ugo Nwokeji (eds), *Religion, History, and Politics in Nigeria: Essays in Honor of Ogbu U. Kalu* (New York: University Press of America, Inc., 2005), p.14.

¹⁰ Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa*, p. 62

¹¹ Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade: The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997; Emmanuel Akyeampong, “Africans in the Diaspora: The Diaspora and Africa”. *African Affairs*, vol. 99, April (2000), pp. 183-215.

¹² Quinine is an alkaloid derived principally from the bark of the cinchona tree. It is an efficient *antipyretic* (fever-reducing agent) and is used to reduce fever in many diseases. It was the only known remedy for malaria until the development in recent years of synthetic drugs. Jesuit missionaries in Peru, who introduced the drug into Europe in about 1640, probably discovered the efficacy of quinine.

The second attempt to introduce Christianity in Nigeria came in September 1842 when ex-slaves from Sierra Leone, led by the Methodist missionary, Thomas Birch Freeman, reached Badagary near Lagos.¹³ In South Africa, by the 1820s missionary Christianity has been introduced in some remote areas by the Congregationalist of the London Society (CLM).¹⁴ Missionary Christianity, exemplified by such organisations as the Catholic, the Anglican, the Presbyterian Churches, the Methodists and so on, expanded slowly but steadily, making itself attractive not just by preaching the gospels, but more importantly, by bearing other valued goods, technical skills and the superiority of their guns over spears, bows and arrows.¹⁵ Africans belonging to this strand of *mainstream* Christianity constitute more than one half of the total Christian population. African Catholics *alone* make up 17% of the Christian population of the continent, for example.¹⁶

There are some discernible features of missionary Christianity in Africa. Although it came in varied denominational incarnations, they all carried with them, Euro-American **formalised theology**, liturgy and method. Because of their long historical traditions of theological articulation and systematisation, doctrines and ways of worship came cast in thought categories alien to the people. This formalised structure of dogma increasingly alienated the indigenous peoples to whom it was directed. What further accentuated this feeling of religious alienation was the use of **foreign language** in the transmission of teachings. Because the whites could not speak the language of the people, they were compelled to hire the services of locals such as catechists and translators who, in many cases, did much of the work but also introduced distortions and confusion. Furthermore, because missionary Christianity came with the baggage of Euro-American culture, the feeling of superiority by the missionaries inadvertently caused them to **demonise indigenous cultures** and everything African. The missionaries viewed Africans as ‘savages’ who needed western/missionary intervention in overcoming their ‘barbaric stage’ of development and access ‘civilised stage’ which the missionaries represented.¹⁷ While there were some exceptions to this practice such as was evident in the works of the Anglican Bishop Colenso of South Africa who was pro-Zulu

¹³ Sundkler & Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa*, p. 224.

¹⁴ Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, “Christianity and Colonialism in South Africa“, *American Ethnologist*, vol. 13, no. 1 (1986), p. 3.

¹⁵ J.D.Y. Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba*, (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2000).

¹⁶ <http://pewforum.org/surveys/pentecostal/africa/>, (accessed 05.06.2007).

¹⁷ Kristina Helgesson, *Walking in the Spirit“: The Complexity of Belonging in Two Pentecostal Churches in Durban, South Africa*, Uppsala: DICA (2006), pp. 3-4.

culture and suffered so much persecution for it,¹⁸ much of the agenda of missionary Christianity was to eradicate African cultures and replace them with Euro-American ways of living. This is not just true with material aspects of culture but also with non-material aspects such as names, drinks, organisational systems, dress codes, etc. Missionary Christianity was properly engaged with the totality of African ways of life, a reason that soon caused schisms in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in these churches in Africa as we shall see shortly.

Missionary Christianity is an importation from the West; it also had a leadership structure that was dominated by non-Africans. **Foreign leadership** of any organisation is often perceived as authoritarian and exploitative. It was not long, therefore, before such sentiments were translated into action such as agitations for self-governance and self-determination by the local membership of some of these churches. In Nigeria, for example, the first break-away group left the American Baptist Convention in 1888, primarily because local members were dissatisfied with the leadership of Americans.

Because Africans were conceived of as “uncivilised”, one important defining social feature of missionary Christianity was, and still is, its immersion in social services: **education and hospital** works. In some places like Nigeria, the Church of Scotland in Calabar established the first printing press in 1846. Rev. Henry Townsend, a Church Missionary Society missionary in Abeokuta, published the first newspaper in Nigeria, *Iwe Irohin*, on 3 December 1859.¹⁹ Missionary Christianity provide significant strategies of social transformation through the construction of schools and health care facilities in many African cities and towns, thus creating a new cadre of educated African elites necessary to man the new bureaucracy of colonialism. While these projects introduced new forms of learning and knowledge, they further demonised and discredited African indigenous knowledge and medical traditions and systems. What counted as knowledge was the ‘Whiteman’s ideas’ and, in some places, there were legal strictures to stop the people from using indigenous medicines and participating in indigenous religious rituals.

Perhaps the most important image of missionary Christianity was, and still is, its **identification with colonialism**. It was perceived as a religion of “the Whiteman” which

¹⁸ See Jonathan A. Draper (ed.), *The Eye of the Storm: Bishop John William Colenso and the Crisis of Biblical Interpretation*, (London: T & T Clark International, 2003).

¹⁹ Matthews A. Ojo, “Religion, Public Space, and the Press in Contemporary Nigeria“, Toyin Falola (ed.), *Christianity and Social Change in Africa: Essays in Honor of J.D.Y. Peel* (Durham, North Carolina: Carolina Academic Press, 2005), p. 235.

came with the cultural baggage of the Euro-Americans who did not separate the gospel message from western cultural practices and idiosyncrasies. Because colonialism was seen as unjust, oppressive and repressive, Christianity was as well perceived as an ally or collaborator in a system of unwarranted economic, cultural and political exploitation. Such perception not only bred resentment, it soon became one of the most important weaknesses of missionary Christianity. Colonialism was associated with the obnoxious trade in Africans as slaves; this was a basic contradiction in the integrity and sincerity of purpose of the gospel message the same group of White men and women claimed to bring. According to Isichei, “There was a basic contradiction between converting Africans and purchasing them as slaves”.²⁰ Furthermore, colonialism actively produced racism and discrimination based on the colour of one’s skin; many of the missionary churches also had a policy that looked down on the Africans as inferior and incapable of self-management. The above features of missionary Christianity fuelled the emergence of a new strand of Christianity which aimed at rectifying these social, political and religious ills, whether real or perceived.

African Indigenous Christianity

What has come to be called African Indigenous/Initiated/Independent/Instituted Churches (AICs) in the literature on Christianity in Africa are technically those churches which, at the beginning of the 20th century, either broke away from mission churches or missionary/mainline Christianity or were founded independently of European missionary activities and are headed by Africans. It is generally agreed that the movement first surface in South Africa in 1884.²¹ There are so many reasons for the establishment of these churches. As the mission churches expanded and took roots, the bible was translated into indigenous languages and Africans appropriated the message of the gospel according to their local worldviews, often breeding conflicts and disagreements. The African worldview is intensely charismatic and alive; the gospel was interpreted in a lively manner and infused with many culturally relevant elements. There have been long debates²² about finding an appropriate nomenclature for these churches: some times they are called “Separatist Churches”, a derogatory term that is only used by outsiders to signify the “Otherness” of the new churches.

²⁰ Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa*, p. 71.

²¹ Dawid Venter “Concepts and Theories in the Study of African Independent Churches” in D. Venter (ed.), *Engaging Modernity: Methods and Cases for Studying African Independent Churches in South Africa*, London: Praeger, 2004), p. 13.

²² Deji Ayagboyin & S. Ademola Ishola, *African Indigenous Churches: An Historical Perspective* (Lagos: Greater Heights Publications, 1997), p.12-19.

But since not all of the AICs “separated” from mission churches, the term rarely does justice to the complexity of the phenomenon.

Some of the churches, particularly in South and West Africa, seceded from the mission churches for political reasons. Internalising the imperative of Psalm 68: 31 which reads “*Let Ethiopia hasten to raise its hands to God*”, pioneers of the protests against Euro-American domination in the “colonial churches” soon constructed “the self-government of the African church under African leaders” according to Sundkler who first adopted this class of “Ethiopian Churches” in 1948. Ethiopian churches are those who broke away from mission churches primarily on racial ground or as a result of “the struggle for prestige and power”.²³ The first African church to break away from a mission church in Nigeria was in 1888 and the reason was to protest against American treatment of a local leader. There are many such churches in different parts of Africa. As a result, these churches that broke away from mission churches for political reasons are now called “Ethiopian churches”, signifying that they are indigenous initiatives without foreign financial or doctrinal support designed to recover indigenous leadership roles and traditions. They are also completely African in ecclesiology, emphasizing autonomous Christian life and administration. Ethiopianism is a movement of religious and cultural protest against mistreatment of Africans in some mission churches.²⁴

A large group of the AICs in Nigeria is called the *Aladura* (i.e. Praying) movement while in South Africa a similar group is known as Zionist Churches. The Aladura movement in West Africa has its roots in the 1918 outbreak of influenza in Yorubaland in Nigeria. A small group within the Anglican Church resorted to prayers alone to tackle the problem posed by the influenza but soon ran into doctrinal and ritual difficulties with the authorities of the church which kicked them out by 1925. The group emphasized prayer, healing and visionary guidance and grew rapidly in the 1920s and 1930s²⁵ The Eternal Sacred Order of the

²³ Bengt G. M. Sundkler *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* (2nd ed) (London: Oxford University Press, 1961[1948]), pp. 39; 54. Ethiopia was a political and spiritual model for many of the pioneers of Black emancipation movements because the country remains the only African nation that was not subjugated by a colonial western power; its political and religious traditions date back to the Old Testament times when it was known as “Cush”, cf. Is. 18:1; Jer. 13:23; 38:7ff; Acts 8:26-39.

²⁴ There are many examples of “Ethiopian churches” in Nigeria such as United Native African Church, Christ African Church (Bethel), United African Methodist Church, etc.

²⁵ Harold W. Turner, *Religious Innovation in Africa: Collected Essays on New Religious Movements*, Boston, MA: G.K. Hall & Co., 1979: 133-145; JDY Peel, *Aladura: A Religious Movement among the Yoruba*, London: International African Institute, 1968: 91-105; Robert Cameron Mitchell, “Religious Change and Modernization: The Aladura Churches among the Yoruba in Southwestern Nigeria”, PhD Dissertation, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, 1970: 142ff; also, “Religious Protest and Social Change: The Origins of the Aladura Movement in Western Nigeria”, in R. I. Rotberg & Ali A. Mazrui (ds), *Protest and Power in Black Africa*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1970:473-476.

Cherubim and Seraphim movement (C&S) was founded in 1925 by Moses Orimolade and Christianah Abiodun Akinsowon; the Church of Lord Aladura was founded in 1930 by Josiah Oshitelu; the Celestial Church of Christ (CCC) was established in 1947 by Samuel Oschoffa (1909-1985); the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star (BCS) was founded by Olumba Olumba Obu (born ca 1909) in 1958 after a vision. In South Africa, the “Zionist” churches emerged primarily against political and social discrimination against Africans. Because Africans were restricted in terms of residence, labour, association and movement, the adherents of these churches nursed the ambition to construct “Zion”, a land of freedom, a home free from oppression and subjugation. Many of the churches had “Zion” as part of their official names. According to Sundkler, Zionist churches historically have “their roots in Zion City, Illinois, the United States. Ideologically they claim to emanate from the Mount of Zion in Jerusalem”.²⁶ A popular example of Zionist churches is Zion Christian Church (ZCC). There are well over 7000 different Zionist churches in South Africa alone. According to Allan Anderson, 30% of the South African population is made of members of African Zionist and Apostolic churches.²⁷

For both the Aladura and Zionist churches, their three most important characteristics are: i) **self-financing**, ii) **self-governance** and, iii) **self-supporting**. In addition to these are: iv) the emphasis on cultural appropriation of significant themes and practices such as the **use of indigenous music and language**; v) emphasis on the activities of evil spirits such as **witches** and **demons** and the claim by the leaders to have the power to deliver people from the influences of these baneful spirits; vi) active role given to women as some even became church founders. Initially these churches were regarded with great disdain by who ridiculed them by calling them “schismatic movements” and regarding them as syncretistic, and therefore, impure churches. The colonial administrators also looked at them with great suspicion and perceived them as a threat to their colonial agenda particularly as these churches engineered mass revivals in many parts of colonial Africa. In some cases, the leaders of these churches such as Garrick Sokari Braide²⁸ and Joseph Babalola²⁹ were arrested and imprisoned by the colonial authority. As well the leadership of the mission churches disparaged them with ridiculous names such as “white garment churches” or “mushroom

²⁶ Bengt M. Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets*, pp. 54-55.

²⁷ Allan Anderson, “New African Initiated Pentecostalism and Charismatics in South Africa”, *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 35.1 (2005), p. 68.

²⁸ Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa*, pp. 286-288.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 281.

churches”.³⁰ However, it was soon to become obvious that the AICs represented attempts to Africanise Christianity, to make it relevant to the cultural needs to the African people; they were part of incipient efforts to decolonise the continent from external religious, social and cultural influences.

The spread of the AICs has been phenomenal not only in Africa where they constitute more than 10% of the Christian population³¹ but in Europe and North America where they are clearly attractive to a large segment of diasporan Africans.³² As Africans migrant to distant locations in search of work, education and better life, they carry their religious traditions with them. As they face new forms of life crises generated by modernity and its anxieties, these indigenous forms of Christianity become ever more appealing to many Africans whether in Africa or in Europe.³³

African Pentecostalism(s)

Pentecostalism represents the fast expanding sector of Christianity in Africa. This is unarguably the most complex and socially visible strand of religion in Africa, not only because it is still evolving and changing rapidly, but the proliferation of division and innovation is dizzying. Pentecostalism in Africa emerged through many pathways, and perhaps, it may be proper once more to use the plural, *Pentecostalisms*, to denote the many, sometimes mutually exclusive, strands. Three distinct strands may be identified although some of these overlap at significant points: i) Classical/Mission Pentecostal Churches; ii) Indigenous/Independent Pentecostal Churches and, iii) New Pentecostals/Charismatic churches/Ministries

Classical Pentecostalism

In Nigeria, for example, the activity of Garrick Braide which started within the Anglican Church had all the hallmarks of Pentecostalism — such as faith healing, prophecy, exorcism, speaking in tongues, spontaneous prayer, exuberant liturgical expression, stress on dreams,

³⁰ Kenneth Enang, *Nigerian Catholics and the Independent Churches: A Call to Authentic Faith* (Immensee: Neue Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft, 2000).

³¹ Ogbu U. Kalu, 'Ndi Afe Ocha': The Early Aladura in Igboland, 1925-1975', in Toyin Falola (ed.), *Christianity and Social Change in Africa: Essays in Honor of J.D.Y. Peel* (Durham, North Carolina: Carolina Academic Press, 2005), pp. 335-360.

³² Hermione Harris, 'Continuity or Change? Aladura and Born Again Yoruba Christianity in London', Toyin Falola (ed), *Christianity and Social Change in Africa: Essays in Honor of J.D.Y. Peel* (Durham, North Carolina: Carolina Academic Press, 2005), pp. 307-334.

³³ Hermione Harris, *Yoruba in Diaspora: An African Church in London* (New York: Macmillan Palgrave, 2006), p. 39; Mbinglo Nsodu, *Black Angels in the White Man's Country* (Accra: Derisco, 2004).

visions — but was not so called at this early stage in 1915. After Braide died in 1916 soon after his release from prison, his followers constituted themselves into a church, Christ Army Church. Some scholars date the activities of Braide starting in 1914 as the beginning of Pentecostalism in Nigeria.³⁴ Also, the Aladura movement emphasised basically those elements that mark out Pentecostalism as a movement. Because of the troubles which the Aladura groups were having with the colonial administration in Nigeria, a group invited a British Pentecostal church. According J.D.Y Peel, “Pentecostalism first made its appearance in Nigeria in 1930-1931, when the leaders of the Aladura revival ... made contact with the Apostolic Church, a British Pentecostal body” to provide guidance.³⁵ This was the first external counter between indigenous religious groups and foreign Pentecostal churches. Other foreign Pentecostal missions that soon came to Nigeria include the Assemblies of God which came in 1939 at the instance of an indigenous church in eastern Nigeria; the Four Square Church was established in 1941, followed soon after by the Apostolic Faith Church. In South Africa, Pentecostalism made its debut in 1908, soon after the 1906 Azusa Street event.³⁶ Three of the largest Classical Pentecostal churches are the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) established through the direct missionary activities of Azusa Street missionaries; the South African Assemblies of God and, the Full Gospel Church of God. While classical Pentecostal churches in Africa are not North American impositions on Africans, they clearly are products of North American experiences and missionary impulse.

Indigenous/Independent Pentecostalism

There are a number of Pentecostal churches established by Africans between 1920s and 1960s without any relationship with mission Pentecostal churches. While these churches did not achieve tremendous social visibility, they were significant in appropriating the Christian message in a distinctive way that attempted to provide locally meaningful answers to local questions and problems based primarily according to the perspective of the bible as they understood it then. The Christ Apostolic Church was established in 1940 as a fusion between a section of the Aladura revival of the 1930s and the British Apostolic Church.³⁷ The Apostolic Faith Mission (Nigeria) was established by Timothy Gbadebo Oshokoya, an

³⁴ Harold W. Turner, *Religious Innovations in Africa: Collected Essays on New Religious Movements* (Boston, MA: G.K. Hall & Co, 1979), p.121; Matthews A. Ojo, *The End-Time Army: Charismatic Movements in Modern Nigeria*, (Trenton: African World Press, 2006), p.31.

³⁵ J.D.Y. Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2000), 314.

³⁶ See Allan Anderson, *Zion and Pentecost: The Spirituality and Experience of Pentecostal and Zion/Apostolic Churches in South Africa* (Pretoria: University of South Africa Press, 2000).

³⁷ Gbolahan Olukayode Akinsanya, ‘*You Shall Receive Power*’: *The Establishment of the Pentecostal Movement in the Nigerian Context*, PhD dissertation, Drew University, Madison, New Jersey (2000), p. 115-146.

Evangelist from the CAC, in 1944. The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), a Nigerian church founded in 1952 as an Aladura movement, soon became pentecostalist through appropriating the prevailing Pentecostal spirit of the time. It went into affiliation with the South African Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) in 1956 through to 1960. Today, this church is at the forefront of Pentecostal expansion in Africa.³⁸

Newer Pentecostal Churches

There are many reasons to classify differently a group of new churches which emerged since the 1970s in Africa. In most sub-Saharan Africa, this period was marked by increased insertion into liberal market ideology as well as globalisation processes characterised by rapid travels and mass communication. According to Allan Anderson, this newer form of Christianity “is fast becoming one of the most significant expressions of Christianity on the [African] continent, especially in Africa’s cities”.³⁹ In Nigeria, for example, this was a period characterised by post-civil war deprivations and increased spiritual quest for salvation and solutions to social and personal problems. The expansion of education also provided an important infrastructure which facilitated the emergence of an educated elite eager to appropriate what it considered as “the goods of modernity”.⁴⁰ The economic crisis of the mid-1980s which resulted in the adoption of World Bank/IMF designed structural adjustment resulted in the retrenchment of workers, high graduate unemployment, social disorganisation and near economic meltdown. This situation fuelled the quest for spiritual solution to people’s many problems, but also the ready acceptance of religious answers to social and material questions. Gradually, a new class of religious elite with university education and strong appetite for foreign ideas and taste emerged bearing a new religious message.

The new Pentecostals espouse specific doctrines that mark them out among other groups of Christians. They believe they constitute a special people of God who alone are saved and the rest of humanity is doomed to perdition. Theologically, a person is saved who is “born again” and is regenerated or sanctified by an inward feeling of holiness. Sanctification purifies a believer from sin and all forms of pollution. Of special importance is the teaching on the

³⁸ Asonzeh Ukah, “Mobilities, Migration and Multiplication: The Expansion of the Religious Field of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Nigeria”, in: Afe Adogame & Cordula Weissköppel (eds), *Religion in the Context of African Migration Studies*, (Bayreuth: Bayreuth African Studies Series, 2005), pp. 317-341.

³⁹ Allan Anderson, “The Newer Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches: The Shape of Future of Christianity in Africa?”, *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2002: 167.

⁴⁰ Asonzeh Ukah, “Los Expertos en religion Y La Producción de Un Conocimiento (Religioso) Translocal: El Casa De La Iglesia Critiana Redimida De Dios (RCCG), Nigeria”, *Antipoda*, Número 2, Enero – Junio 2006: 179-207.

baptism of the Holy Spirit and external manifestation of speaking in tongues. This is both a spiritual and social marker, setting members apart as God's elected people.⁴¹

This new message promised individuals a comprehensive solution to all their worries on condition that they become born again and give generously to the religious leader in exchange for material and spiritual blessings in the form of healing, wealth, abundant life, success and earthly promotion. This new gospel is known by a variety of names: i) Prosperity Christianity, ii) Health and Wealth Gospel; iii) The Faith Movement; iv) Name-it- and Claim-it⁴², etc. New churches were founded by individuals in the late 1970s and 1980s; they consolidated in the turbulent 1990s and are now witnessing a runaway expansion as they are opening branches in many different countries of the world. The Nigerian pioneers in this brand of gospel influenced similar developments in other African countries through direct training of pastors from these countries, exporting their books, videos, CDs, DVDs, as well as opening branches in such places as Ghana⁴³, Benin Republic⁴⁴, Cameroon⁴⁵, Kenya, South Africa⁴⁶, etc. In Johannesburg alone, there are well over 100 Nigerian founded new Pentecostal churches existing in March 2007.⁴⁷

In these and other African countries, a new form of Christianity has flowered, rapidly changing the social, religious, economic and political landscape. There are certain important social characteristics of the new churches espousing the theology of prosperity and abundance. There is a discernible American influence in both theology and organisational structure and practice in these churches.⁴⁸ The theology of prosperity itself has been widely

⁴¹ On the theology of Pentecostals, see Allan Anderson, *Introduction to Pentecostalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁴² Frederick K.C. Price, *Name it and Claim it! The Power of Positive Confession*, Benin City: Marvellous Christina Publication, 2005.

⁴³ Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalising African Economy*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press (2004).

⁴⁴ Olufunke A. Adebayo, "Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa: The Redeemed Christian Church of God, Nigeria", in Laurent Fourchard, André Mary and René Otayek (eds), *Entreprises religieuses transnationales en Afrique de l'Ouest*, Paris: Karthala (2005), 438-465

⁴⁵ Akoko Robert Mbe, 2002. "New Pentecostalism in the Wake of the Economic Crisis in Cameroon", *Nordic Journal of African Studies* vol.11, no. 3: 359-376.

⁴⁶ Allen Anderson, "New African Initiated Pentecostalism and Charismatics in South Africa", *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 35.1 (2005), pp. 66-92.

⁴⁷ Field research notes, March 2007. Also see Vedaste Nzayabino, "The Role of Refugee Established Churches in the Lives of Forced Migrants: A Case of Study of *Word of Life Assembly* in Yeoville, Johannesburg", MA dissertation, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 2005.

⁴⁸ D. R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel: A Historical and Biblical Analysis of the Modern Faith Movement*, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1987.

regarded by scholars as an “American export”.⁴⁹ While many of the founders of these churches claim divine authorisation for establishing what now seems more like an economic empire than a religious organisation, they unabashedly look to principal prosperity preachers and televangelist in North America as their mentors, often clearly copying what they think to be responsible for the “successes” of these American godfathers. Attempting to understand the new religious landscape of Africa without critically assessing the influence of American preachers and the roots of the message they propagate to Africa is impossible. Gifford is unequivocal about the American roots of prosperity message in Africa even as Ojo insists the prosperity gospel has an African roots.⁵⁰ Ojo is clearly not correct in this respect because many African proponents of prosperity gospel such as Idahosa, E. A. Adeboye of the RCCG, Oyedepo of Winners’ Chapel clearly state their indebtedness to their American mentors.⁵¹ Although indigenous religions in Africa are inherently materialistic, that is, their adherents seek material benefits from the worship of the gods, the prosperity gospel as preached and practised by its principal African exponents does not spring from this feature of indigenous African cosmology. Part of what accounts for the appeal of the prosperity doctrine is the cultural resonance which indigenous religious ideas offer. This certainly does not account for its origin.

There are innumerable examples illustrating the cultural and religious indebtedness of Nigerian, Ghanaian, Tanzanian or even South African prosperity church founders to American televangelists such as Kenneth E. Hagin and his Rhema Bible Training Centre, Kenneth Copeland, Fredrick K. C. Price, T. L. Osborn, John L. Meares, T. D Jakes, etc.⁵²

⁴⁹ S. Brouwer, P. Gifford and S. D. Rose, *Exporting the American Gospel: Global Christian Fundamentalism*, New York, 1995.

⁵⁰ Paul Gifford, “Prosperity: A New and Foreign Element in African Christianity”, *Religion*, vol. 20 (1990), pp. 373-388; Matthews A. Ojo, “Charismatic Movements in Africa”, in Christopher Fyfe and Andrew Walls (eds), *Christianity in Africa in the 1990s* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Centre of African Studies, 1996), p. 106; *The End-Time Army*, p. 208.

⁵¹ Adeboye frequently cites the influence of Kenneth E. Hagin on his orientation towards prosperity message; see Asonzeh Ukah, *The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Nigeria. Local Identities and Global Processes in African Pentecostalism*, PhD. Dissertation, University of Bayreuth/Germany, 2003. Oyedepo also cites the influence of Hagin, Kenneth and Gloria Copeland as well as T.D. Jakes on this thinking and ministry, David O. Oyedepo, *Understanding Financial Prosperity* (Lagos: Dominion Publishing, 1997), pp. 156-157. Also see, Deji Isaac Ayegboyin, “A Rethinking of Prosperity Teaching in the New Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria”, *Black Theology*, vol. 4, no. 1 (2006), pp. 70-86.

⁵² On the connection between Benson Idahosa of Nigeria and his American sponsors, see Rosalind I.J. Hackett, “The Gospel of Prosperity in West Africa” in Richard H. Roberts (ed.), *Religion and the Transformation of Capitalism: Comparative Approaches* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 199-214; E. M. Okwori, *Godliness for Gains: An Evaluation of the Nigerian Version of the Prosperity Gospel*, (Jos: CAPRO Media Services, 1995), pp.35-44. On the links between Ray McCauley, founder/owner of Rhema Ministries in Randburg near Johannesburg, see Anderson, *New African Initiated Pentecostalism*, p.71. On prosperity message among Ghanaian preachers and its roots, see J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current*

African preachers are graduates of some of the American Bible schools; their American mentors are also frequent visitors to Africa where they have superstar statuses among both the African new Pentecostal leader and their followership. Books, audiovisuals of these American preachers are available on sale within the premises of these African churches. Through their educational and media products, these American global Pentecostal personalities maintain significant influence in Africa. One important feature of these churches is their unmistakable “American Heritage” of the prosperity message.

A second important feature of these churches is the emphasis on **faith healing**. In African cultural worldview, religion and healing are inextricably linked. An important function of religion is to bring restoration in the face of brokenness or damage to man’s body, relationships and social and spiritual networks. Deliverance is the second component of prosperity gospel, hence is called “Wealth and Health Gospel”. Healing is conceived as a comprehensive restoration of a believer to superabundant health or status accruing to him/her as a result of what Jesus Christ has wrought on the Cross. Healing is not restricted to diseases alone but to other situations of morbidity or disability – physical, material, mental, financial or spiritual.⁵³ The pastors of these new churches believe that they have been endowed by God to bring physical healing to their followers as a proof of the validity of their preaching. According to Chris Oyakhilome, one of Nigeria’s foremost Pentecostal faith healers,

I have a message that certainly heals people. You can not hear that message and remain sick, poor or dejected. It would bring you hope and life... of a necessity, there will be healing and miracles. [Miracles of healing] are like your credentials. If you preach Jesus Christ and he sent you, he will back up your claims⁵⁴

While some of these churches claim to heal *all* diseases without exception, others make a claim to a particular set of diseases.⁵⁵ Christ Embassy, for example, claims to heal all diseases including economic and financial failures which are interpreted as forms of “barrenness”. It has opened a large “Healing School” at Randburg, near Johannesburg, where people from all over the world experiencing ill-health throng for healing. The Liberty Gospel Church, another

Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana, Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 201-248. On Jakes, see Shayne Lee, *T.D. Jakes: American’s New Preacher*, (New York: New York University Press, 2005).

⁵³ Stephen Hunt “Dramatising the ‘Health and Wealth Gospel’: Belief and Practice of a Neo-Pentecostal ‘Faith’ Ministry”, *Journal of Beliefs & Value*, vol. 21, no. 1 (2000), pp.73-86.

⁵⁴ Christ Oyakhilome, founder/owner of Believers LoveWorld, Inc. A.K.A Christ Embassy, interview, *National Standard* (Abuja), vol. 1, no. 6 (October 2004), p. 25.

⁵⁵ Anthonia M. Essien, *The Goodnews Community International. The Social Significance of Pentecostalism in a Changing Society* (Lagos: African Heritage Publications, 2004).

Nigerian new church founded by Helen Ukpabio, a confessed former witch, specialises in delivering people who are under the possession of witchcraft spirit. The Laughter Foundation, a church in Lagos, claims only to provide barren women with what it calls “fruits of the womb”. T.B. Joshua’s Synagogue of All Nations Church heals only those suffering from HIV/AIDS. Mountain of Fire and Miracles specialises in casting out demons of all specifications. Because of the proliferation of new churches, competition among them is rife and each thus makes effort to carve out a niche that it will service through a well-defined or streamlined set of products. Specialisation enables these churches to cultivate and maintain their respective niches. Healing and deliverance churches form a special strand of Pentecostalism that has endeared itself to a large segment of the African population. Anderson claims, and rightly so, that this feature of Pentecostalism which makes it an alternative of the mission churches, partly accounts for “widespread conversion to Pentecostalism”.⁵⁶

A third significant social characteristic of the new churches is their **firm-like structural organisation**. In order to compete effectively with other churches, and as a carryover of the American influence, these churches are organised as firms or commercial enterprises engaged in the production, distribution and pricing of religious and non-religious commodities with primary motives of making satisfactory profit and maintaining a market share. Their courses of actions are geared toward the achievement of these objectives. They are founded and owned by one person who claims a special divine authorisation with a specific mandate with global ramification. Although there is a Board of Trustees (BoTs) appointed by the founder and registered with the appropriate government agency, the locus of control of the organisation is the chairman of the BoTs, who doubles as President/Chief Executive Officer (CEO). He is a “bank of grace”, a repository of charismata, and a special bridge between his followers and God. He controls both charisma and cash; his word is law. He is an oracular instrument and initiator of doctrines and orientation. He alone holds a special privilege of interpreting the will of God to his followers. While resources such as money, time, and expertise are mobilised aggressively from followers and the general public (believers and non-believers alike)⁵⁷, the control of these is wrested from the contributors and rested solely

⁵⁶ Allan Anderson, “Exorcism and Conversion to African Pentecostalism“, *Exchange*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2006), p.133. Also, Anthonia M. Essien, *Religion and Reproduction Health in Nigeria* (Lagos: African Heritage Publications, 2005), pp. 64ff.

⁵⁷ According to E. A. Adeboye, “Every person who sows [into his ministry] would reap whether he is a Christian or not”. People are poor because of their own attitude to certain principles ... you sow, you reap, you don’t sow, you don’t reap”, *Congress People* (Lagos) vol. 1, no. 2, December 2005, p. 7.

on the founder/owner of the church and his/her spouse.⁵⁸ In Nigeria the three wealthiest religious organisations are Pentecostal mega-churches: the Christ Embassy owned by Chris Oyakhilome, Winners' Chapel of Oyedepo and the RCCG of Enoch Adeboye, in that order.⁵⁹

A fourth feature is that: The role of women in the new churches is both interesting and intriguing; it is nothing close to what obtains in the mission churches although it is closer to how women functioned in the AICs⁶⁰. In the new churches, women receive a great deal of visibility; they are integrated in the decision making processes and exercise a certain degree of power and authority. Some church founders are women and there are cases that wives of deceased church founder/owners have succeeded their late husbands. The spouses of church founders are usually the second-in-command in the hierarchy of power and authority. It has turned out that wives of pastors also serve another purpose in the spouses' ministries: they protect the family's estate and control most financial dealings in the church. Some churches purposely create products that cater to the interests and needs of women in order to proselytise specific segments of the population. Knowing the power of women to attract men into religious organisations, some churches deliberately exploit this in giving women pastoral duties so that men would be drawn into the fold. There are now churches with "Department of family affairs" which cater to the needs of family members particularly women.

Related to the firm structure of churches is another feature which reveals their **economic character**. Their leaders are media savvy individuals who, with the university education background, have introduced commercial practices into their organisation and in the production of religion and other goods. It is now a common feature particularly among the mega-churches, but also medium-sized Pentecostal groups, that they produce a huge array of videos, magazines, CDs, DVDs, books, booklets and pamphlets, stickers, key-holders and other religious memorabilia or ritual paraphernalia (handkerchief, olive oil). The RCCG produces and markets all over the world well over half a million copies of its leader's sermons on DVDs, VCDs, VHS and audio tapes. The church has a media empire called Dove Media which is involved in satellite and Internet television and radio broadcasting as well as the production and sales of home videos. Helen Ukpabio, founder/owner of Liberty Gospel

⁵⁸ Asonzeh Ukah, "Reklame für Gott: Religiöse Werbung in Nigeria", in Tobias Wendl (ed.) *Afrikanische Reklamekunst* (Wuppertal: Peter Hammer Verlag GmbH, 2002), pp. 148-153; "Religiöse Propaganda in Afrika", in Dieter Kramer & Wendelin Schmidt (eds.), *Plakate in Afrika*, (Frankfurt/M: Museum der Weltkulturen, 2004), pp. 83-88.

⁵⁹ *TheNews* magazine ([Lagos], vol. 26, no. 23, 19 June 2006), pp. 20-28.

⁶⁰ Oluwafunmilayo Josephine Para-Mallam, "Faith, Gender and Development Agendas in Nigeria: Conflicts, Challenges, and Opportunities", *Gender & Development*, vol. 14, no. 3, (2006), pp. 409-421.

Church, is also the CEO of Liberty Films and Music Plaza, which has produced nearly 20 home videos many of which achieved record sales of nearly 1.2 million copies.⁶¹ In Tanzania, there are five Pentecostal radio stations.⁶² In addition to the production of media materials, many of the new churches are proud owners of banks, insurance companies, business schools, bookshops, and other profit-oriented enterprises.

A sixth social feature of the new churches is the increasing use of marketing strategies particularly advertising. **Religious advertising**, which constitutes a specific form of religious communication, has increased since the emergence of the new churches in the late 1970s. Different methods of advertisement are used simultaneously, the most popular of which is the poster and handbills, billboards, branded vest, caps, pens, etc. Some mega-churches own television and radio broadcasting stations; others place advertisements on these electronic media as well as in print media of newspapers and magazines. Pentecostal advertisement serves multiple functions of creating and managing positive social visibility and image for church owners in addition to creating public awareness for church events; they also create product differentiation and shorten the searching time for religious seekers.

A seventh feature of African new Pentecostalism in general is the tendency to reconstruct religious geography through the construction of **religious camps**. Particularly in Nigeria and Ghana, these churches buy up large expanses of land, sometimes measuring well over ten square kilometres, and construct a range of facilities such as auditoriums, schools, guesthouses, dormitories, presidential villas (for VIP guests such as politicians), banks, gas stations and hospitals. These camps, which often constitute an “alternative city”, function to showcase a Pentecostal leader’s charismata, authenticate the claim to divine authorisation, and produce his brand of Pentecostalism through a series of weekly or monthly and yearly ritual activities when certain events are held on regular basis. The camps provide the physical venues for commercial companies to patronise the churches by sponsoring some of the religious programmes in exchange for marketing their products and services during the events. Similarly, regional and national politicians pay frequent visits to the camps to

⁶¹ Asonzeh Ukah, “The Local and the Global in the Media and Material Culture of Nigerian Pentecostalism”, In: Laurent Fourchard, André Mary & René Otayek (eds.), *Entreprises religieuses transnationales en Afrique de l’Ouest* (Paris: Karthala & Ibadan: IFRA, 2005), pp. 285-313; “Advertising God: Nigerian Christian Video-Films and the Power of Consumer Culture”, *Journal of Religion in Africa*, vol. XXX/2 (2003), pp. 203-231.

⁶² Päivi Hasu, “World Bank & Heavenly Bank in Poverty & Prosperity: The Case of Tanzanian Faith Gospel”, *Review of African Political Economy*, no. 110 (2006), p.681.

demonstrate their religiosity, consult the pastors and solicit for votes or public sympathy.⁶³ These camps are a veritable structure of Pentecostal subpolitics: attempts by Pentecostal pastors and their followers to influence the dynamics of national politicking and to achieve mutually beneficial ends for both pastors and politicians.

Conclusion

African Christianity is complex in its history, structures, doctrines and practices. Against social science expectations of the withering of religion in modern societies, religion increasingly assert itself in the multiple ways in which Africans engage with the world and with the management of change.⁶⁴ There is an optimistic view that the vitality and diversity of Christianities in Africa hold great promise for global Christianity as a whole as already some Africans have engaged in what is now characterised as “reversed mission”: the sending of missionaries from Africa to proselytise the frontiers of western societies. However, the permeation of liberal market practices and strategies into certain strands of these Christianities, particularly the increasing use of business strategies, excessive recruitment of funds, display of scandalous wealth by the leaders and increase in instances of clergy malfeasance, indicate troubling future for many individuals and groups of Christians both in Africa and outside. It is as a result of these latter features of the latest strand of Christianity that prompts one commentator, a former Pentecostal pastor, to write that “the Pentecostal or Charismatic Church is the only legally and politically accepted movement in the world that is fully and completely based upon systematic fraud, deception and cheating”.⁶⁵ As one Nigerian Pentecostal pastor recently put it, “the merchandising of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ” is “the primary source of all the problems enervating the spiritual life of the church”.⁶⁶ Certainly, this vitiates the transforming power of an otherwise socially and economically visible strong religion.

⁶³ In the days just before the April 2007 presidential elections in Nigeria, Umaru Musa Yar’Dua and Jonathan Goodluck, the presidential and vice presidential candidates of the ruling Peoples Democratic Party, flew from Abuja to the Redemption Camp to consult with E. A. Adebayo, the patriarch of the RCCG. The former president, Olusegun Obasanjo, was a frequent visitor to the same Camp; see “Pentecostalism, Religious Expansion and the City: Lesson from the Nigerian Bible Belt”, in Peter Probst & Gerd Spittler (eds), *Resistance and Expansion: Explorations of Local Vitality in Africa*, Lit Münster: 429-434; Ebenezer Obadare, “Pentecostal Presidency? The Lagos-Ibadan ‘Theocratic’ Class and the Muslim ‘Other’”, *Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 110 (2006), pp. 665-678.

⁶⁴ Stephen Ellis & Gerrie ter Haar, *Worlds of Power: Religious Thought and Political Practice in Africa*, (London: Hurst & Co, 2004), p. 2; cfr. Maia Green, “Confronting Categorical Assumption about the Power of Religion in Africa”, *Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 110 (2006), pp. 635-650.

⁶⁵ Levy Fragell, “Evangelism – A Dangerous Expansion”, *International Humanist News*, August 2005, p. 20.

⁶⁶ John Moyibi Amoda 1997, *Pentecostalism in Chains: The Merchandising of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ* (New York: Civiletis International, 1997), p. vii.