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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ARTS, CULTURE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Volume 3, Number 2, 2013

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CENTRE FOR ADVANCED TRAINING AND RESEARCH

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ARTS, CULTURE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Volume 3, Number 2, 2013

ISSN: 2276 - 8130

Published by Published by Centre for Advanced Training and Research in association with MPYRAA, Buea, South West Region, Cameroon

First Published 2011

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International Journal of Arts, Culture and Sustainable Development is a Journal Published by Centre for Advanced Training and Research in association with MPYRAA Buea, South West Region, Cameroon. All manuscript should be sent to our e-mail: catrjournal@yahoo.com. If you have additional question, please feel free to contact the Managing Editor at the address below: Centre for Advanced Training and Research, Buea, South West Region, Cameroon.

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MATERIALISM IN EARLY AND MODERN PENTECOSTAL MOVEMENTS IN NIGERIA

Mepaiyeda, Solomon Makanjuola
Department of Religious Studies
University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

The emergence of Pentecostal movements within the landscape of Nigeria was characterized with emphasis on second birth, holiness, sanctification, indwelling of the Holy Spirit and possession of the nine gifts of the Holy Spirit by a Christian. This way of life was not only verbalized but adequately demonstrated by the Early Pentecostal leaders. Conversely, there are sufficient evidences that there is a change in focus by modern Pentecostals from holiness messages to "prosperity" message. This trend has affected their psyche to the extent that most Pentecostal preachers in Nigeria seem to be driven by the quest for materialism; a situation that negates the original Pentecostal ideals and principles.

Therefore the aim of this paper is to articulate in strong terms the deviation of the modern Pentecostals and to suggest a revisit of the biblical principles imbibed by the early Pentecostals.

Keywords: Materialism, Early and Modern, Pentecostal Movements, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

From the general definition, Pentecostalism is a movement that attempts "to recapture the ardor of primitive Christianity, believing that the chosen people in the historic Christian churches have become the frozen people of God."¹ It is the most significant religious movement of the 20th century², growing three times faster than Protestants; as a whole, particularly in Africa and also in Latin America where it is the largest protestant denomination³

Pentecostalism, according to Dunn⁴, Ayegboyin & Isola⁵, Fatokun⁶ as well as Budgen⁷, belongs to that stream within Christianity which places emphasis on receiving of certain gifts of the spirit such as speaking in tongues (glossolalia), interpretation of prophecies and healing as a sign of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Pentecostalism which has been considered a movement to Christian renewal stresses the importance of personal religious experience of the Holy Spirit rather than theology.

On the origin of this phenomenon, most scholars hold the view that global Pentecostalism originated at the turn of the 20th century in America. However, the issue of foundership of this movement has become a controversy. Walter Hollenweger, the erudite scholar on the concept, pitched his tent with others like Richardson who favoured William Seymour⁸, the black Holiness preacher. But the works of Jonathan Hill⁹ and Schwarz pointed to the fact that Seymour's preaching on Pentecostalism did not emerge in a vacuum. It was attributed to Charles Parham, an holiness Methodist preacher. Furthermore, the Bible School ran by the latter in Topeka, Kansas emphasised a second baptism in the Holy Spirit and that speaking in tongues was the Bible evidence of this baptism. This position according to Hill had a great influence on William Seymour, one of the students of the school who began his Pentecostal ministry in 1906 at 312 Azusa Street in Los Angeles¹⁰.

In the midst of these arguments, Fatokun seemed to have taken a middle stance by stating that; *Charles Parham can be appropriately considered as the founder of Pentecostalism while Seymour could only be accepted as just its catalyst or first evangelist. Parham was the great teacher and theologian of Pentecostalism while Seymour could be credited as its preacher and evangelist*¹¹.

He concluded by giving the illustration, that Parham laid the foundational doctrine of Pentecostalism giving it its five-fold emphasis of conversion, sanctification, divine healing, Spirit baptism with evidence of speaking in tongues and pre-millenarism, while Seymour heralded it – giving it both national and international popularity¹²

Be that as it may, at this juncture, the historical setting of the phenomenon of Pentecostalism could be traced to the pneumatic and apocalyptic movement known as Montanism.¹³ The fact remains that the charismatic approach that gained prominence among the contemporary Pentecostal features were noticed in Montanism, a Christian movement in Asia Minor in the second and third centuries.

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Montanus, the man after whom the movement was named was a converted pagan Phrygian priest whose teaching bordered on the arrival of the age of the Holy Spirit (paraclete). Therefore he stressed the ideas of new prophecy and possession of recognizable spiritual gifts, while his prophetesses, Maximilla and Priscilla were said to have fallen into ecstasy. Montanism practiced among others, constant fasting abstinence from sin and complete separation from the world.¹⁴ These became the basic tenets of older or classical Pentecostals which include the Church of God in Christ, the Assemblies of God¹⁵ and The Apostolic Faith Church¹⁶.

Although Montanism was one of the movements declared as heretic by the Catholic Church due to abuse of spiritual gift, it was for many Christians a symbol of return to the strictness of the early Christian community, a movement to Christian renewal. Furthermore, the era of pietism – an important movement in Europe in the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries seemed to have a significant influence on the great awakening that produces Pentecostals of the Eighteenth century.

The Moravians' teachings popularized by Christian David and Zinzendorf¹⁷ emphasized on living a Christ – life and playing down the importance of doctrine. Johann Amdt, described as the godfather of pietism, insisted that Christianity is not really about doctrinal rifts but about a personal encounter with Christ that results in individual salvation. Therefore, the community founded by the Pietists known as Hermhut (The Lord's Protection) was based upon a shared experience of the power of God, and self – surrender to the will of God¹⁸.

Concluding this historical survey, it must be noted that most scholars regard Pentecostalism as emerging from the Holiness Movement of the latter half of the nineteenth century¹⁹. Advocates of that revivalist movement followed John Wesley's teachings of conversion & sanctification. The only divergence noticeable between the holiness movement and the Pentecostals was that the former did not stress the concept of baptism in the Holy Spirit evident by speaking in tongues and emphasized by seymour²⁰.

Pentecostalism in Nigeria Context

Strictly speaking, in discussing the history and types of Pentecostalism in Nigeria, one can not ignore the heterogeneity of the movement. Their study reveals doctrinal differences & varying degrees of denominational affiliation.

Gifford traced the difference to social or political context in which they operated. However Pentecostalism in Nigeria could be traced to the indigenous spiritual or charismatic movement of the twentieth century. Fatokun discussed the movement under four categories.

The first was the prophetic – healing revivalist movement founded by Garrick Sokari Braide, an Anglican member from the Niger Delta area in 1915, the second, a prayer movement (known as precious stone society or Diamond society) which took its source from St Saviour's Anglican Church, Ijebu – Ode in 1918 under the leadership of the church's sexton, Daddy Alli (later J.B. Shadare); the third, through the Cherubim & Seraphim society founded in 1925 by an itinerant evangelist Moses Orimolade and the last group which originated in 1930 at Ogere – Remo through the charismatic activities of Josiah Oshitelu whose possession of prophetic & visionary acumen influenced the birth of the church of the Lord Aladura²¹

In addition to these, mention was made of indigenous Pentecostal revival movement in eastern Nigeria, typified by Qua Iboe missionary, Rev J. W. Westgarth and "the messifident Holy Church" among the Ibibios and the Efik people²²; and of course, the Redeemed Christian Church of God that started in South Western Nigeria.

Apart from the indigenous Pentecostal movements discussed above, Nigeria witnessed the infiltration of classical Pentecostal church movements between 1931 and 1955. Matthews Ojo referred to them as denominational Pentecostal churches because of their affiliation with churches from the U.S.A and Britain. These included the Faith Tabernacle, The Apostolic Church, The Apostolic Faith & The Assemblies of God²³. However, the full Gospel (Apostolic) Church and Foursquare Gospel Church²⁴ also fell in this category.

Ojo branded these churches as holiness movement based on their doctrinal stress on perfection, strict personal ethics, restitution, bible inerrancy & baptism in the Holy Spirit. The marked difference between the missions – based classical Pentecostals and the early indigenous (Aladura) Pentecostals is that while the former saw speaking in tongues as evidence of Holy Spirit baptism, the latter placed much emphasis on prophecy and healing.

The last type of Pentecostals is what Ojo referred to as the trans-denominational charismatic movement²⁵. They are otherwise known as neo- Pentecostal Churches. They started as interdenominational students fellowships in Nigerian Universities during the 1960s & early 1970s before their metamorphosis into churches. Majority of them were founded to fill the vacuum created by extremism of the Holiness

Pentecostals. Their attitude towards dressing is of less rigor and many who found it inconvenient to conform to classical Pentecostal tenets resorted to the neo-Pentecostal movements.

The neo-Pentecostals incorporate varying elements of doctrine and practices that identify them with the American and British fundamentalists, evangelists and U.S Pentecostalism. Few of them worthy of note here are Rhema Chapel, Scripture Pasture Christian centre, Latter – Rain Assembly, Living Faith Church Worldwide, All Nations for Christ Ministry and of course Deeper Life Bible Church which embrace the strict holiness doctrine. It has been established that many Nigerian neo – Pentecostals were influenced mostly by contacts with the American Faith Preachers, correspondences, literature and tapes of Faith preachers like Oral Roberts, Kenneth Hagin, Benny Hinn, Paul (now David) Yongi Cho among others²⁶, sharpened their gospel of faith healing and liberation known as “prosperity Gospel”.

In sum, it is pertinent to corroborate Gifford’s view that despite the significant differences between classical or neo – Pentecostals, members of these movements recognize themselves as part of a special or sacred community²⁷ bounded by conversion experience. Born again Christianity is a common term for identifying members of the community and the rallying point of their unification.

Therefore this study goes further to elucidate the concept of community in both the Redeemed Christian Church of God, an indigenous Pentecostal Church and the Living Faith Church Worldwide, a neo – Pentecostal church.

Materialism in Early and Modern Pentecostalism in Nigeria

The essence of discussing the concept of materialism in the early Pentecostalism and the modern or neo-Pentecostalism is to assess the shift in the emphases and teachings of the two Pentecostal groups. In addition, the factors underlying the incorporation of teaching on materialism would be considered in order to determine their agreement or consonance with Biblical principles.

Materialism is defined as emphasis on the acquisition of worldly objects with little or no interest in spiritual values.²⁸ It is no gainsaying the fact that there is a marked departure from the early Pentecostalism by the modern one on the subject matter, which borders on over-emphasis on prosperity gospel or teaching by the modern Pentecostals rather than Christian virtues of holiness and sanctification.

Material prosperity as taught by the modern Pentecostals is premised on the belief that upon the acceptance of the gospel, a believer is automatically ushered into luxuries and all the good things that life can give including academic success, breakthrough in business, robust health and so on. It has been observed that the major factor responsible for prosperity gospel is purely socio-economic condition of majority of Nigerian populace. Hence Dada hinged the popularity of prosperity preachers on poverty that has dehumanized Nigerians.²⁹ The adherents warmly embraced these teachings because of the promise of liberation not only from sickness, demonic forces and ancestral curses, but also from poverty.

Apart from sermon tapes and numerous books available on the concept of material prosperity, seminars and workshops are frequently organized in order to re-engineer the people’s poverty mentality to liberation. A central teaching in the modern Pentecostal circle or trans-denominational charismatic movement as Gifford referred to it,³⁰ is that poverty is an evidence of satanic oppression or affliction. Biblical passages such as Mt. 6:26, 30; Ps 34:10, Ps. 37:25; Phil. 4:19; Haggai 2:8 and of course the much orchestrated passage- 3 John v 2 – “Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health even as thy soul prospereth” are copiously quoted to support their teachings.

The Redeemed Christian Church of God and Living Faith Church Worldwide (a.k.a Winners Chapel) are models of modern Pentecostalism that emphasize materialism. E. A. Adeboye is fond of saying:

*If God is my father and He decides to build mansions for Himself, why should I come into this world and begin to build huts?*³¹

This and many other assertions have the tendency of driving adherents of such churches in engaging in illegitimate means in order to acquire wealth.

In addition, to qualify for material blessings, criteria such as sacrificial giving, selfless living, diligence and tithing are emphasized. In the daily experience of the LFCW, there are reports of sacrificial offering in terms of cars, houses, television and other valuable items. No doubt this teaching is meant to inculcate in members the spirit of giving, but it also has the effect of inculcating wrong doctrine capable of plunging them into get-rich-syndrome.

The materialistic consciousness is at variance with the holiness ideals of the early Pentecostals in Nigeria who emphasized personal religious exercises as basic aids for Christian growth. The lifestyles of Garrick Braide and Joseph Ayo Babalola, just to mention few of them, were characterized with spending long hours in solitary prayers and fasting periodically³², denouncing fetishism, idolatry and worldliness. Many leaders of the early Pentecostalism died without a building of their own because most of them were itinerant

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preachers unlike the modern ones who have built empire for themselves through illegal acquisition of wealth gotten from the following means among others.

First, they arrange crusade of prosperity where people are either coerced or hypnotized to give in order to receive. This has made some of their victims to become impoverished since they have to release (at times) a whole month salary to the church. In addition, begging from the government or individuals of shady characters in the society in another strategy. This has negatively affected the integrity of the church (in general) in Nigeria, because having released some substantial amounts to assist the church execute her legitimate or illegitimate projects, she has no moral justification to denounce the evil of mis-governance.

In addition, Pentecostal Christianity has been so commercialized today that proliferation of churches is at alarming rate. Religion has been manipulated for selfish and materialistic ambition. No wonder unhealthy rivalry has resulted from the establishment of churches in Nigeria. In a street for instance, churches are unreasonably planted few meters to each other to the embarrassment of people in the neighbourhood. Snatching of members, indoctrination, unrealistic teachings and unnecessary generation of noise are some of the evils of this practice. Therefore, majority of the leaders of the modern Pentecostals could be described as "business pastors on the pulpit".

Negative criticisms have continued to trail the materialism teaching of modern Pentecostals. Some Nigerians see them as commercial ventures. In the opinion of Baffour Ankomah of "New African" magazine, he expressed the extortion in modern Pentecostals thus:

*Not all the new Pentecostal and so called Charismatic churches are genuine. Many are frauds. Many are gigantic money-spinning machines ripping off their unsuspecting members of their hard-earned tithes.*³³

His Eminence Sunday Ola Makinde corroborated the view above by stating that the modern day pastors go into the business of establishing churches having seen it as a lucrative venture by which one can become a millionaire overnight.³⁴ Hence "THE GUARDIAN" described them as charlatans who capitalize on the pervasive poverty of ordinary Nigerians and entice them with a promise of unlimited prosperity.³⁵ Unfortunately, after draining their energies and resources, their victims become disillusioned.

Critically examined, as much as this paper does not intend to associate Christianity with poverty (either material or spiritual poverty), because of its harmful effects on individuals and the society, over-emphasis on materialism by the modern Pentecostals is even worse because it not only negates Christian ideals, it dehumanizes the society. Abogunrin corroborates this view when he said:

*The problem of poverty in most of the third world is due mainly to the unjust conditions in the society over which the ordinary man and woman have no control. The rich and the powerful create structure of human relationships that serves to protect their wealth and political power, and thereby deny the poor any access to the resources of the nation*³⁶

It is also observed that emphasis on abundance rhetorics, message of prosperity and sacrificial giving which Kuponu describes as "ritual",³⁷ built in members of the churches under review, survival mentality rather than a desire for significance. That is why some highly placed Christians in public service find it convenient to defraud. While corroborating this view, Israel Emmanuel³⁸ submits that they engage in such act because of the negative impact that the survival mentality has on them.

Further still, Michael Crosby noted that "whenever any person, group or nation has more than enough, it not only denies basic resources to others, it becomes less human"³⁹. This suggests that Christians in Nigeria should not involve in a system that impoverish others. They should detach themselves from the ethic that proclaims "the more the merrier".

CONCLUSION

This paper has so far articulated the paradigm shift in communicating the gospel message by the Pentecostals in Nigeria. While the early group tries to balance their message by encouraging their members to focus on moral and ethical issues that have eternal values, the later group seems to have muddled up Christian teachings with emphasis on prosperity gospel which is capable of destroying the ideals of holiness, sanctification and moral living which Christianity stands for.

The modern Pentecostals should take a stock and have an inward assessment to see if their stress on material prosperity has benefited the society, because as long as such emphasis persists, we shall continue to experience the present astronomic proliferation of churches without its positive impact on national cleansing. People are religious but without the fear of God or respect for human dignity. The modern Pentecostals should also note that through their teachings, individuals are prone to individualistic lifestyle which is

inimical to the wellness of African society; and a remarkable departure from the ideal of communalism as taught by the early Christians.

OBSERVATION AND RECOMMENDATION

Materialism teaching is a phenomenon that cuts across denominational barriers. It can be found in varying degrees among the Protestant, Pentecostal and Charismatic churches assuming different terms as noted by Okanlawon such as the "health and wealth gospel", the "gospel of success", the "prosperity gospel" among others⁴⁰. The common denominator among materialism or prosperity preachers is the problem of interpreting the scripture correctly within the context of Africa. Bonino lends credence to this assertion when he states thus:

*The scriptures have largely been interpreted in Africa (Nigeria) on the awareness of the situation in which people are living in the continent (country), not on the basis of any theory of interpretation*⁴¹.

Whatever may be the basis for such theology of prosperity or glory, it is observed that it negates the theology of the cross as taught by Jesus Christ⁴². The preaching that promises financial breakthrough and emphasizes that God will make everyone materially rich without addressing the concern for salvation from sin is not a total gospel but adulterated, diluted and imbalance gospel. The advocacy of Gbolahan Oniya is germane when he opined that rather than hammering on prosperity message, Christian community should embark on poverty alleviation programmes in order to cushion the effects of poverty on Nigerians.⁴³

In addition, rather than dissipating efforts on prosperity message especially by modern Pentecostal preachers, they should balance their message with Jesus' teachings of poverty in spirit and kingdom seeking as exemplified in Matthew's Gospel 5 v 3 and Mt. 6:33 respectively. These teachings emphasize a new style of life that is anti-consumerism.

In tackling the socio-economic problems in Nigeria, messages that drive people to be materialistic conscious should be de-emphasized while those that help them to detach from greed, possessiveness and wastage should be emphasized. By this means, Christian teachings would be in tandem with the principle of self-emptying and simple life in imitation of Jesus Christ.

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