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|-------------------------------|--|
| 89 Editorial | <i>Controversy in Politics, Ideology, Theology and the Church</i> |
| 91 Judith L. Hill | <i>The New Testament and Political Democracy</i> |
| 105 Timothy M. Njoya | <i>Church and Politics: With Aspects Relating to Governance, Public Policy and Ethnicity</i> |
| 115 Joseph B.O. Okello | <i>The Pastors, Politics and People of Kenya</i> |
| 123 Patrick U. Nwosu | <i>The Ideal State in Jesus' Ministry and Contemporary Nigeria</i> |
| 131 Tersur Aben | <i>Is Postmodernism Coherent?</i> |
| 139 Mark Olander | <i>Creative Teaching Methods in Theological Education</i> |
| 145 Danny McCain | <i>Pentecostals and Others: Challenging and Learning from Each Other</i> |
| 171 Book Reviews | |
| 176 Books Received | |

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Pentecostals and Others: Challenging and Learning from Each Other

by Danny McCain

Introduction

Christianity is not a faith that has been practiced in exactly the same way by every adherent. Family, culture and even personality have influenced Christian worship and practice to some extent. For example, in the early church, many Jewish Christians believed that all Christians should be circumcised if they wanted to be true worshippers of God. Gentile believers did not think that was necessary. The Jerusalem Council resolved this issue in Acts 15 where Peter gave those memorable words: *“He made no distinction between **us and them**”* (15:9). However, that decision did not automatically change the minds of some who believed this so strongly. It did, however, stop them from requiring circumcision of Gentile believers. The issue of circumcision for Gentiles was a theological issue that had a “right or wrong” answer.

On the other hand, Romans 14 talks about other disagreements. The Apostle Paul wrote that some people observed one day as more important than another while others believed that every day was the same (Romans 14:5). Some Christians ate only vegetables while others ate meat and other things (14:6). These were cultural issues that did not have a right and wrong position though those who believed such things no doubt appealed to sacred scriptures and used other religious arguments to support their own positions.

Movements within Christianity

Church history has been filled with other disagreements. Some were serious theological issues and others had more to do with lifestyle or method of worship or ministry. Most involved some combination of the theological issues and practical issues because most people support their divergent lifestyles or worship issues with theological arguments.

In reflecting about the various movements of Christianity throughout church history, I am convinced that most of these began because their founders had rediscovered a truth that had been neglected or forgotten and it became their objective to restore that truth to the Christian faith. Perhaps the best example is the Protestant Reformation itself. Martin Luther and other reformers re-discovered the doctrine of justification by faith and related doctrines and thus the Protestant Reformation was born.

Even within Protestantism, movements have developed to address some real or perceived theological weakness. John Wesley was primarily an evangelist but also stressed holiness and out of his teachings the holiness movement was born. George Fox gained insight into the “inner light” and the

Quaker movement was born that stressed the importance of hearing from God personally. While doing evangelism, William Booth observed the great needs around him in London related to poverty and privation and started an organization that eventually became the Salvation Army, the predecessor to hundreds of organizations that focus on the physical and emotional and health-related needs of people.

I have also observed that as most of these movements grow, they so emphasize their particular discovery that they often go too far and get out of balance. The overemphasis of a truth can be almost as perilous as underemphasis. Thus many parts of the holiness movement have become so enamored with holiness that they ignore evangelism, social justice and other important issues. The Salvation Army has become so involved in social issues that, in some parts of the world, it has largely neglected evangelism that was the motivating issue of its founder. However, in their overemphasis, these movements tend to help pull the rest of the body of Christ back to a more balanced view of the doctrine or practice being emphasized.

The Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements

It is my conviction that the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements that have developed within the last century have re-discovered and re-emphasized an important doctrine that had been largely ignored in many mainline churches - the doctrine and ministry of the Holy Spirit. The spontaneous speaking in tongues in Topeka, Kansas in 1901 and in Asuzu Street Revival in Los Angeles, California in 1906, convinced the participants that the Holy Spirit could be personally appropriated in our day and could manifest himself today in the same way he did in the Acts of the Apostles. This movement slowly developed with the creation of various Pentecostal denominations, like the Assemblies of God and others.

In the 1960's a parallel movement began to develop that became known as the Charismatic Movement. The focus of this movement was on a broader application of the ministry of the Holy Spirit to include other gifts that had not been stressed as much in the earlier part of the Pentecostal movement. This movement stressed healing and prophecy and spiritual deliverance. It also attracted adherents from a much broader demographic background, including practically all denominations and all social classes.

The early Pentecostals faced scathing ridicule and severe opposition by the secular press as well as other Christians. They were accused of being a cult and some believed their activities were inspired by the devil. However, it appears that the attitude of the non-Pentecostal world has largely moved beyond that point now and, as a general rule, Christians from most traditions extend a warm hand of fellowship to the Pentecostals and Charismatics.

Others have documented the history of Pentecostalism in Nigeria so I will not attempt to do that. I will simply say I see Pentecostalism as a growing

mighty river coming to Nigeria in three separate streams. First, there was the indigenous wave of charismatic leaders who stressed prayer, prophecy and healing, that included people like Garrick Braide, Joseph Babalola and others. As far as we know, these men had no contact with Charles Parham or William Seymore, the Americans who are considered the founders of Pentecostalism. This led to an indigenous movement stressing prophecy, divine healing, and other miraculous practices later associated with Pentecostalism. Second, there was a flow of Pentecostalism from the Western world, often invited by Nigerians who had been associated in one way or another with the earlier indigenous movement. These included the British Apostolic Church, the Assemblies of God and the Foursquare Gospel Church. This part of the movement has been known as classical Pentecostalism. And, third, there was the burst of revivalism that swept across the universities of Nigeria in the early 1970's that had a distinct Pentecostal flavor and has been sometimes called "Neo-Pentecostalism." There are distinct elements of those movements still present but it seems to me that those movements have merged or are merging into one big mighty bubbling Pentecostal river. Regardless of their roots, the Christians from these backgrounds are looking and acting more alike.

However, that is only one part of the Pentecostal story. Another result of the 1970's Neo-Pentecostal movement was an awakening Charismatic movement within the mainline churches. Through such organizations as the Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship International, people at the higher social levels of society and people from mainline churches became attracted to the Charismatic message. Some moved over to Pentecostal churches but many remained in their own denominations and helped to spread the Pentecostal fire in them. Because of the influence of these Pentecostals or Pentecostal sympathizers within the congregation and a greater amount of interaction with Pentecostal leaders, the attitude toward Pentecostalism has gradually shifted in many of the mainline churches from something negative to something at least neutral and more often than not a positive thing today.

The last 40 years have seen Pentecostalism grow from a small percentage of the church to a significant number, somewhere between 30 and 50 percent. Although the line is becoming more blurred between Pentecostals and non-Pentecostals, as a general rule, believers and churches still identify themselves as Pentecostals or non-Pentecostals.

Key Issue: Learning and Challenging Each Other

The key question that I would like to address in this paper is this: What have these two groups learned and what can they learn from each other and what can they teach each other? Obviously, there has been a lot of mutual learning and some challenging and there will continue to be more in the future. The new Pentecostal movement probably agrees with mainstream Christianity in 90 percent of what it believes and practices. Because it grew out of mainstream Christianity it will forever be inseparably linked with that

movement. On the other hand, mainstream Christianity has been observing Pentecostalism for many years now and, though at times it has been grudging, mainstream Christianity has learned from the younger movement and has even adjusted some of its practices and emphases based upon its observations of and interactions with the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements.

The issues of comparison and relationship between these two movements that will be examined in this paper are not clear-cut issues where one side has always been right and the other side has always been wrong. Rather, the issues addressed herein reflect degrees of emphasis and perhaps degrees of accuracy. Like most movements, the various emphases developed within the movement have often been extreme but they have contributed something valuable to the outsiders. They have forced the broader body of Christ to re-evaluate its attitudes and beliefs about these issues and often move back closer to the truth.

What Can the Rest of Christianity Learn from Pentecostals?

We will now look at what the mainstream churches and denominations have learned and need to learn from the Pentecostals and Charismatics.

1. Authentic Worship

Perhaps the most obvious thing that mainstream Christianity has learned and borrowed from Pentecostalism in the last 30 years or so has been related to worship. When the missionaries planted the church in Nigeria, they tended to reproduce the kind of Christianity that had been practiced in their home countries and in their home churches. This was perfectly normal because they perpetuated what they understood and what they had experienced. Therefore, missionaries built church buildings with crosses on them like those “back home.” They brought and had made clerical garments that looked like those that were used where they were raised. They translated the songs and hymns into local languages but used the tunes for those songs that were common outside Africa. The order of the services was often a carbon copy of what they had practiced elsewhere.

In addition, the missionaries tended to frown on those cultural things that they did not feel comfortable with.¹ Traditional African instruments were not allowed because first, the missionaries associated them with traditional

¹ This paper is not intended to criticize the missionaries who came to Africa. There may have never been a more successful generation of Christian missionaries than those who planted the church in Africa because the church has grown more rapidly in Africa than perhaps any other part of the world. In addition, the weaknesses of the missionaries were not unique. Most missionaries doing cross-cultural ministry tend to reproduce themselves, including our modern Nigerian and African missionaries. Though we do not seek to criticize missionaries, we certainly can learn from them, from both their positive and negative contributions.

religions and second, drums were not used in worship where the missionaries came from. Although Africans love to sing and had developed a natural rhythmic movement of the body with their singing, this was not tolerated because dancing was inconsistent with the dignity of the European church, and it was considered worldly and sensual by many of the churches that had sponsored the missionaries.

When Pentecostalism came to Nigeria and particularly the third phase, that of the post-Civil War revival in the universities, it came to those who already had a Christian background and had some understanding of the Bible and the Christian faith. However, when these people began to experience the fresh fire of the Holy Spirit, they were not like their illiterate grandparents who had first received the gospel. These were well-educated thoughtful young people who were not intimidated by white missionaries or church precedent and thus began to put their own stamp upon the new wave of Christianity they had embraced. And one of the things that began to change was their style of worship. They began to sing more choruses. They raised their hands in worship. They resurrected and sanctified not only their traditional instruments but their traditional dance movements and brought them into the church and used them to worship the Lord. The mission planted churches had focused on a style of worship that was consistent with their rational, calm, non-emotional European worldview. However, these young people who had recently had such liberating experiences with the power of the Holy Spirit, expanded that liberty to their worship and soon began to be much freer and expressive in their worship, more consistent with an African way of doing things.

It should be noted that the style of worship that has developed in Africa is not entirely unique to Africa. Singing with emotion and enthusiasm and lifting hands in worship was characteristic of the holiness movement out of which the Pentecostal movement developed well over 100 years ago. In addition, the style of worship in most Pentecostal churches is not purely African. Although Pentecostals did help open the door for Africa instruments to come back to the church, in nearly all African Pentecostal churches worship is led by musicians using western instruments, including guitars and western style drums. And many of the songs and choruses come from outside of Africa. However, when the freer style of worship came to Africa, it met a community ready to embrace it because it fit the African context better.

When this freer and more intense style of worship entered the Pentecostal churches, it was warmly embraced especially by the younger generation. This was a way that they could worship God in an enjoyable manner. Worship was no longer boring but exciting. And as young people in the mainstream churches began to see the excitement of the worship in the Pentecostal churches, they began going to them. Thus the growth of the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches has been primarily among young people. Pentecostal churches are still filled with young people. In research recently conducted by

my colleagues, they discovered that 61 percent of those who attend Pentecostal churches are between the ages of 18 and 32 and that only 13 percent of the typical Pentecostal congregation is above the age of 43.²

Mainstream churches responded in two different ways. At first, they criticized. The loud and boisterous type of worship was not consistent with what they were accustomed to. They had partially absorbed the philosophy of dignified worship from the missionaries. They also were not happy to see their young people leaving their churches. This seemed like apostasy. However, complaining did not help. The young people kept leaving. We have a proverb in my country that says, "If you cannot beat them, join them." So, after a while, many mainstream churches started getting band sets, creating worship teams and allowing and even encouraging a more open and free style of worship.

And what has been the result? First this new type of worship has slowed down the departure of the youth from the traditional churches.³ Second, livelier and more interactive worship has been a blessing to those mainstream churches. Their people are enjoying worship more. Even the older people have largely become accustomed to the new style of worship and are enjoying it. And more genuine personal worship is one of the best tools for providing spiritual vitality for the individual believer. A worshipping person is a growing person and a happy person and a person who will overcome the temptations of life. More genuine worship also helps to build up the church. In addition to keeping the members happy and growing, genuine worship impresses unbelievers who may visit the church and causes them to recognize that God is truly among us (1 Corinthians 14:24).

Even though it is not purely Africa, why has the more Pentecostal style of worship been received so well? First, it is more holistic. Jesus taught us that we should "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength*" (Mark 12:30). If we are to love the Lord that way, then we should also worship the Lord with our heart, soul, mind and strength. Western worship tends to appeal to the mind. Charles Wesley's hymns are almost like lectures in systematic theology. Certainly we must have our minds involved in worship but worship must not stop there. The "*heart and the soul*" represent the emotions. Worship has always been emotional to some extent but the Pentecostals have helped to demonstrate that one can express emotions publicly without shame or embarrassment.

² K.A. Korb, and S.K. Kumswa, *Preliminary Report of Pentecostal Churchgoers in Northern Nigeria: NPCRC Technical Report #N1103*. Jos: Nigeria Pentecostal and Charismatic Research Centre, November 2011, p. 5.

³ I spoke in a Youth Convention of the Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (Church of the Brethren in Nigeria – EYN) in Abuja on 17 June 2011. The singing and dancing and excitement of that service could not be distinguished between a similar group of Pentecostal students. The EYN leaders present seemed to be very happy with the enthusiasm and intensity that these EYN youth demonstrated.

Worshipping the Lord with the body is something Africans were forbidden to do for a long time. However, now that Pentecostalism has helped to remove that barrier, Africans are showing the world how to worship the Lord with the body. David danced before the Lord (2 Samuel 6:14) and African Christians are now doing the same thing.

I am convinced that the Pentecostal style of worship that has developed in Nigeria is consistent with African styles of communication. I speak specifically of the frequent use of simple choruses in Pentecostal churches. These are short songs with only a few words that make one simple point. Obviously, Africa is not the only place where such choruses are used. In addition such courses were sung to some extent before the coming of Pentecostalism. However, these kinds of choruses have been greatly utilized by the Pentecostals and they have taken deep root in Africa. Why? It is an undisputed fact that one of the most important ways that Africans have communicated information from one generation to the other is through proverbs. A proverb is a short memorable statement that teaches some point of wisdom. Therefore, traditionally Africans have taught and learned best through short bite-size pieces of information. The modern choruses that are sung in most churches today take advantage of that learning style. Unlike many of the traditional hymns that helped to teach doctrine, these choruses contain one piece of information and that one truth is something with which one can truly worship.

For example, I recently heard a Pidgin English chorus that says:

Dis kind God-o.

I never see his kind-o.

Dis kind God-o.

Blessed be his holy name.

The simple point that the song makes is that God is unique; he is one of a kind; there is no other God like this God. This is consistent with such scriptures as Isaiah 40:28 which says: *“Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.”*⁴ This is also consistent with songs like Don Moen’s adaptation of Ex. 15:11,

Who is like unto Thee

O Lord among the gods?

Who is like unto Thee

Glorious in holiness

Fearful in praises

Doing wonders

Who is like unto Thee?

⁴ This theme is especially stressed in the Wisdom Literature. For example, Zophar asks Job: *“Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty?”* (Job 11:7). See also Job 5:9, 33:13, 37:23 and Ecclesiastes 3:11, 8:17.

Though in less elegant words, this course expresses the same awe and worship of God, as Isaac Watts glorious hymn that declares:

*I sing the mighty power of God, that made the mountains rise;
That spread the flowing seas abroad, and built the lofty skies.
I sing the wisdom that ordained the sun to rule the day;
The moon shines full at His command, and all the stars obey.*⁵

However this simple little course fits into the African way of making one point in a simple memorable manner. It has in essence become a musical proverb and, as such, is a very effective communication tool in Africa.

Because this kind of music and worship is appealing to most Africans, these Pentecostal songs have spread from Pentecostal churches to nearly all churches. This merger has taken place fairly naturally to the point that most youth in non-Pentecostal churches would hardly remember that their churches did not worship like this in their father's generation. All Christians should be grateful to the Pentecostals for helping to make worship more enjoyable, more meaningful and more personal.

2. Optimistic View of Life

One of the major characteristics of Pentecostals is their belief that Jesus is just as capable and willing to work miracles today as he was in the apostolic era. Most Pentecostals have a strong conviction that God can use their simple faith to accomplish mighty things. If this is true, then nothing in this life is too difficult and all things are possible by faith.

Although my brother is desperately sick, faith can make him well.

Although we have no money for this project, we will start it anyway.

Although this community has resisted the gospel, God will change them.

These are typical attitudes and responses of the Pentecostals. Such faith creates an optimistic view of life and ministry and this, in turn, encourages the belief that we do not have to accept the barriers to success and blessing in our lives; we can overcome them by the power of God.

2.1 The Success of Faith

This kind of faith encourages people to engage in projects that wise administrators would discourage because they violate good principles of management. And as a result of this faith, amazing things often happen. For example, Gbile Akane sponsors several conferences and workshops every year at the Peace House in Gboko, Benue State. He invites and provides accommodation and feeding to the thousands of participants. Amazingly, he says nothing about money publicly and does not even take up an offering. His view is that if God has called him to do this ministry, no matter how impossible it seems, it will be accomplished by faith in the power of God. He does not

⁵ Isaac Watts, "I Sing the Mighty Power of God" in *Worship and Service Hymnal*, Carol Stream, Ill.: Hope Publishing Company, 1952, Hymn 19.

allow the difficulty in raising money to interfere with the ministry God has called him to do. His eye of faith is able to see past the temporary problems to the successful ministry that will be accomplished and he is able to move forward with optimism and joy.

This belief and practice has obviously led to some painful disappointments by some. I have heard of at least one experience in which a person felt that God had called him and his family to go overseas to do missions work. Even though he did not have money, he exercised his faith and went to the airport anyway. There was no miracle at the airport so he was disappointed and had to return home embarrassed and chastised that he had apparently not correctly heard the voice of God.

However, in spite of disappointments and abuse of this system, the optimistic view of life that is produced by a robust faith is a positive thing. Many people are willing to accept the status quo because it seems impossible to change things. It is the optimists who can see opportunities in problems. It is only those who are willing to take risks that will see great things accomplished. Optimistic faith is the starting point in seeing mighty things accomplished for the kingdom of God.

2.2 “Positive Confession”

One of the specific manifestations of this optimistic attitude in Pentecostal circles is what is called “positive confession.” This means that even when a person experiences some real problem such as being diagnosed with cancer, that person must continue to confess that he or she is well and must not confess anything negative even what appears to be the truth. The belief is that our words have power and we will become and we will experience what our mouth confesses. I personally believe that this belief is obviously a misunderstanding of the principle of faith. Faith does not deny reality. Paul confessed a whole lot of negative things he had experienced in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28 and he anticipated that we would all face “*trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword*” (Romans 8:35). However he also believed that God’s grace was sufficient to make us “*more than conquerors*” (8:37). To refuse to acknowledge reality is a denial of truth. Dishonesty and deception are somewhere near the heart of all sin (John 8:44). However, the eye of faith can look beyond the current real condition to a better future that is seen by optimistic faith.

Though I personally reject the teaching of “positive confession” as it is commonly presented in Pentecostal circles, there is a small grain of truth in it. The Christian doctrine of hope is one of the most neglected doctrines in the Bible. The Apostle Paul referred to hope 55 times in his epistles and declared that it, along with faith and love were three of the greatest concepts in the world (1 Corinthians 13:13). Hope does not deny reality but it does deliberately choose to look on the positive side of reality. One of the most powerful and convicting passages of Scripture in the Bible is Philippians 4:8: “*Finally,*

brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” Faith is able to remember that God can work all things out for the good of those who love him (Romans 8:28) and chooses to endure pain and suffering joyfully until there is relief and success.

Whereas I encourage our Pentecostal brothers to make correctives to the abuses of the positive confession theology, I encourage my non-Pentecostal brothers to focus more attention on the doctrine of hope. The ultimate positive doctrine is the resurrection of the dead. If God can raise the dead, God can reverse any negative situation that needs to be reversed and should he choose to use a specific negative thing in our lives, as he often does, he will give us the grace to face it with hope and joy.

One specific manifestation of this optimistic view of life has been the engagement of Pentecostals in politics. Many Christians within the mainstream have viewed politics as a black hole that corrupted everyone it touched. Therefore, if a person cherished his spiritual life he would stay away from politics. Engaging in politics was evidence of backsliding. However, Pentecostals with their optimistic outlook on life have decided to engage. They believe that the light of the gospel is greater than the darkness of corruption and therefore, many have chosen to become involved in politics. For example the present Secretary to the Federal Government and former president of the Senate is a Pentecostal. Anyim Pius Anyim is a thoughtful Pentecostal and a member of the Assemblies of God. This kind of optimistic faith is contagious and should indeed be imitated by all God-fearing Christians.

2.3 Summary

The western mind often reacts negatively when it hears a Pentecostal leader declaring that a certain thing will happen. In interacting with some international websites discussing the issue of the prosperity gospel, one of the frequent complaints was that African Pentecostals promise too much. They speak as if a need had already been fulfilled rather than speaking as if it might be fulfilled. However, my reaction to those comments is that it is not only the African Pentecostals who do this. Many if not most Africans tend to speak in absolute terms about all areas of life. The West African hyperbole, known worldwide, is simply a linguistic way of presenting a positive view of life and particularly specific projects. Though this can certainly be abused, as a general rule such rhetoric is not intended to deceive and is not interpreted as a guarantee that what is requested will happen. It is a positive declaration of what is hoped for. It is a prayer to God that the positive statement will become a reality.

Therefore, though we should always use a little sanctified common sense, the larger body of Christ should be challenged by the faith of the Pentecostals. Christians should not be daunted by corruption and evil in society and should engage the world. The realistic Western worldview should not discourage

believers from attempting and expecting great things from God. And we must not defeat ourselves by anticipating the negative responses of others.

3. Relevance

One of the interesting phenomena of Nigeria's Neo-Pentecostalism in the last 30 years is that it has largely been led by leaders with little or no theological education. The current leaders of Pentecostalism include architects (Paul Adefarasin and Sam Adeyemi), academics (W.F. Kumuyi, Enoch Adeboye and Daniel Olukoya), management experts (Wale Adefarasin) medical doctors (Tony Rapu), businessmen (William Okoye), and other professions. Although not everyone is agreed that this has been a positive thing, one result that has come out of it is that these modern Pentecostal leaders have tended to have more of a practical needs-based ministry than a ministry based purely on theology. That means that, since many of the modern Pentecostal leaders have spent at least part of their adult lives in the "real world", they tend to be more in tune with contemporary issues and therefore try to make their ministries more relevant to modern needs and problems.

The early missionary-based Christianity focused largely on evangelism to produce people who would be prepared to experience eternal life in heaven and personal holiness and integrity in this life. There was not as much focus on responding to the discouraging and degrading problems that people faced. The willingness of the missionaries to make sacrifices to leave their homes and come to Africa motivated them to try to see those same qualities reproduced in their converts. Life was not intended to be easy or fun. Life was serious and that implied overcoming life's difficulties with faith and discipline and commitment. Thus, privation and sickness and mistreatment and discrimination and persecution and other difficulties of life were to be accepted with stoical determination and commitment. Obviously the missionaries encouraged sanitation and built hospitals and started schools and did other things that would in a general sense elevate the standard of living. However, there was a general acceptance that life would normally be difficult on a personal basis.

Interestingly, the Pentecostals, and particular the neo-Pentecostals who began to spring up in the seventies with their optimism and faith believed that the life on this earth here and now could and should be better because of the gospel. They stressed the words that Jesus read from the Old Testament in the synagogue in his hometown: *"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor"* (Luke 4:18-19). In that scripture, several of the key problems of Nigerian society are outlined, including poverty, spiritual bondage and oppression, sickness and physical disabilities. This message resonated well with these Pentecostals who had been baptized with an optimistic message of faith and hope. I will now focus

on three of these problems that many Pentecostal leaders have attempted to address.

3.1 Poverty

Unfortunately, much of Africa has been bound up in perpetual poverty for generations. The massive ongoing migration from the rural areas to the cities has created conditions that have encouraged disease and crime and a loss of traditional values such as honesty, hard work and good neighborliness. The end result is that the vast majority of people have simply eked out an existence and there has been little hope of breaking this cycle of poverty. Though this is oversimplified a bit, the traditional missionary Christianity presented a message that Christians should be willing to deny themselves, take up their cross and follow Jesus, who also lived in poverty. However, the new Pentecostals came up with a different message. They took comfort in the words of Jesus that he had come to bring good news to the poor and they did not spiritualize the word "poor." In addition, they discovered the words of 3 John 2 and religiously claimed them: "*Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth*" (KJV). Jesus' promise to provide good things for the poor and this prayer for prosperity encouraged them to search all over the scriptures to find verses that would support the teaching that God wanted his people to live healthy, wholesome and prosperous lives in this world.

This message obviously came as a breath of fresh air to people who had suffered in demeaning poverty for generations. And when these poor people saw their leaders beginning to be lifted out of poverty and, in fact, living in extravagance at times, this gave them hope that they too may one day be lifted out of poverty.

The first question that would come to the mind of a thoughtful person is: Does it work? Were the Pentecostals indeed lifted out of poverty or was this some kind of ecclesiastical Ponzi scheme to provide money to the leaders at the expense of the poor? It is certainly true that the message has not worked as hoped. The average income of those who identify as Pentecostals is not impressive. Over 50 percent of the Pentecostals in Nigeria make less than \$5 per day. Less than 10 percent of Pentecostals could be considered to be in a middle class. The following chart shows the monthly income of Pentecostals.⁶

No	Amount in Naira	Percentage
1.	0 – 9,999	25%
2.	10,000 – 19,999	40%
3.	20,000 – 49,999	25%
4.	50,000 – 99,999	5%
5.	100,000 +	5%

⁶ Korb and Kumswa, *Preliminary Report of Pentecostal Churchgoers in Northern Nigeria*, p. 7. The exchange rate in August 2011 was about 155 Naira to one US dollar.

If the message has not necessarily produced universal wealth for Pentecostal members, why has this message continued to be preached and continued to be popular? Are all of the prosperity preachers really crooks who just manipulate people to get money? There is no doubt that some are indeed crooks, but I do not believe that is the whole answer. At least part of the answer is related to the doctrine of hope that I mentioned earlier. If I am living in oppressive poverty but I have some hope that things might get better, that gives me the courage to continue living and trying to overcome. In addition, when we see people - our people who are indeed enjoying the good life, that provides a kind of vicarious fulfillment. Perhaps I am not prosperous but I can at least see the prosperity has reached some people. All of this produces hope and *"hope does not disappoint us"* (Romans 5:5).

In addition, there has been a slow shift of emphasis in the prosperity message at least in some Pentecostal circles. There has been a shift away from a prosperity based upon divine right and appropriated by personal faith to a prosperity based upon hard work, integrity and faithfulness. Prosperity does not just come to those who have faith; it comes to those who are diligent and those who are smart enough to prepare themselves. Therefore, many of the thoughtful Pentecostal preachers are not just preaching prosperity, they are sponsoring seminars and workshops and writing books that help their people be more marketable and better able to utilize the financial resources that they accumulate.⁷ In other words, these people are not just preaching an optimistic message; they are helping their people to directly confront poverty through old-fashioned work.

The lesson for non-Pentecostal is the issue of relevance. Pentecostal preachers have tackled the issue of poverty head-on. We may not like the way some have attempted to solve it or their theological foundation. However, at least they are doing something. At least they are offering people hope. At least they are addressing the common problems people are facing today. That must be a challenge to all who are in positions of Christian leadership.

3.2 Barrenness

It is unlikely that the western missionaries who planted the church in Africa could fully appreciate the value that Africans place on having children and the great grief and shame that barren women face in Africa. Again, the typical western approach to this would be to provide a theological answer. God is a

⁷ One of the best examples of this is Sam Adeyemi, pastor of the Daystar Christian Centre. One of his books is *The Parable of the Dollars: Proven Strategies for your Financial Success*, Lagos: Pneuma Publishing, 2003. In addition, Adeyemi is the president of *Success Power International*, an organization that sponsors workshops and seminars to help better prepare Christians for the workplace. His website says, "He has the God given mandate to teach scriptural Success, Leadership and Financial principles through seminars and the media."

<http://www.successpower.org/brandnewportal/profile.asp>

sovereign God and can and will give children to whomever he wishes. If a woman is unable to conceive, then she and her husband have to simply accept that as one of the unfortunate facts of life and just live with it. God will give them the necessary grace to endure the grief and shame.

Unfortunately, this answer has not always satisfied African Christians. Many African Christians have either divorced their barren wives or taken a second wife in order to be able to produce children. This reaction was a source of embarrassment and frustration to the missionaries and continues to be a problem for modern African Christian leaders.

When the Pentecostals came along, they were not satisfied with either the theological answer of the missionaries or the compromise of those who reacted in a sinful manner. They attempted to confront this issue directly. Most of the time, Pentecostal and Charismatic pastors have attempted to resolve this issue spiritually, through fasting and prayer and deliverance ceremonies. And there are abundant testimonies of women who have gotten pregnant shortly after these special prayers. Again, the non-Pentecostal may not like the way that this issue has been addressed. However, Pentecostal leaders have attempted to bring the gospel to bear on this important social problem. They have attempted to make the gospel relevant. Other Christian leaders can learn a lesson of relevance from this example.

3.3 Witchcraft

Another major social and cultural problem that has caused much grief in Africa is the issue of witchcraft. This is the attempt to manipulate and take advantage and harm other people using traditional spiritual forces. Many earlier missionaries simply viewed such activities as superstitions that did not fit within a Christian worldview. Therefore, people suffering from supposed witchcraft activity were viewed as either having physical, emotional or psychological problems. Unfortunately, this did not satisfy many African Christians. Even with the best western education, many Africans continue to believe that there are spiritual forces that affect us that must be neutralized.

When Pentecostalism emerged in Nigeria, it brought along a worldview that was very open to the activities of evil spirits and more willing to view such problems as spiritual and not just physical or emotional or psychological. In light of the fact that Jesus spent a good bit of time casting out demons and there often was an overlap between physical sickness and demon possession in the accounts of his healings, many Pentecostal Christian leaders have developed deliverance ministries to *"release the oppressed"* among their people.

Whether or not the Pentecostals have gotten their theology right or not on this issue, they have not ignored the problem; they have indeed attempted to address a perceived problem with a Biblical answer. And, once again, the time and attention devoted to this problem is another example of being relevant in

society. This issue like those mentioned earlier is an example of the holistic nature of Pentecostal faith and their willingness to tackle any problem with the optimistic conviction that it can be solved.

4. Revival

Perhaps the single most important thing that Pentecostalism has done for the body of Christ in Nigeria has been to bring more energy and spiritual life back to the church. One of the early accusations against the mainstream churches by those who came to Christ in the seventies was that the church was “dead.” The church was carrying on with the doctrines and ceremonies and rituals of the church. There was a good bit of discipline and loyalty in that people were attending church. Church members were even willing to give enough money to build church buildings and keep the activities of the church running. However, the real heart of the faith was often missing. This opened the way for the “born again” movement. Those who were born again experienced a personal encounter with Christ and this changed their lives and gave them a level of commitment and joy that they had not experienced before.

This renewal movement manifested itself in several ways. We have already talked about a fresh way of worshipping that was more meaningful. In addition, there was a new emphasis on prayer. Churches started having prayer meetings and night vigils that were meaningful and fulfilling. Families started praying together. The church began to see she could influence the direction of their communities and nation through prayer. Though it is impossible to prove, many Christians firmly believe the demise of the former Nigerian head of state, Sani Abacha, was a direct result of the fervent and persistent prayers of God’s people. Bible studies became important. W.F. Kumuyi encouraged a phenomenon when he created a Bible study movement on university campuses that involved thousands of youth. Kumuyi’s efforts spilled over into other campus ministries so there are now hundreds of thousands of students engaged in Bible studies on Nigerian tertiary campuses at the present time. The engagement in evangelism and other forms of outreach have taken a positive turn since the onset of Pentecostalism. Out of the one hundred and ten member organizations in the Nigeria Evangelical Missions Association, well over half of those ministries are Pentecostal.

Although scholars may argue about the exact cause of this, it is interesting that the steady growth of evangelicalism within the Anglican Church over the last 30 years is parallel with the growth of Pentecostalism. Anglican churches, while preserving their ritual and ceremony, have become much more alive and much more engaged in evangelism than before. To what extent Pentecostalism has contributed to this I do not know, but it is certainly worthy of note that it has been happening at the same time the influence of Pentecostalism has grown.

5. Summary

Any objective observer would have to say that Pentecostalism has had an impact upon the church in Nigeria and much of it has been positive. Obviously there is still disagreement over theological issues and skepticism about some practices that appear to be strange within the church, and there is still a bit of underlying resentment over church members who have left their churches for Pentecostal churches. However, there is less suspicion and resentment and, in fact, a growing respect and appreciation for each other. The mainstream churches must continue to interact with and study the Pentecostal churches around them to see what good things they can learn and incorporate into their churches. To fail to do so would be irresponsible. To reach out to these brothers, many of whom have left the mainstream churches, would be an act of love and unity that may someday fulfill Jesus' last prayer that his disciples would be one (John 17:11, 21, 22).

What Can Pentecostals Learn from Non-Pentecostals?

Although we are grateful for the movement of Pentecostalism that has contributed much to the body of Christ as a whole, Pentecostalism has not arrived at the finish line yet. Pentecostalism is strong in Nigeria but it is still young in many ways and there are many things that this movement can learn from the mother church. Although the mainstream churches may be tired and weak in some areas, there are still many things that the mainstream body of Christ can teach those who are part of this more recent movement.

The writer of Hebrews says, *"Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith"* (Hebrews 13:7). By leaders here I think the writer included those Christians that were in the faith before them and who brought them up in the faith. Pentecostal leaders must not abandon those positive things that were part of the church before Pentecostalism and are still part of mainstream Christianity. Though there are others, I will focus only on three specific issues.

1. Biblical Authority

Nearly all Pentecostals have a high view of scripture. They believe that the Bible is inspired and inerrant in the original autographs. As such they stand within the tradition of theological orthodoxy. However, there are some things within Pentecostalism or associated with Pentecostalism that tend to weaken its commitment to Biblical authority. The following are three of them.

1.1 Leadership Infallibility

There are literally hundreds of Pentecostals churches and denominations that are led by founder/presidents. The founders of these churches naturally place their own stamp upon the ministry they create. And because of their charismatic leadership style, coupled with the traditional respect for elders within the society, there is a tendency to blindly follow the leader and accept his word as final. It would be almost unheard of to challenge or even disagree

with the leader of an organization. This places enormous and unnatural responsibility and expectations upon leaders and puts the members of the congregation in a position of finding it difficult to do independent thinking.

One of the key issues the reformers stressed, which had been completely neglected by the Catholic Church of that day, was the priesthood of the believer and the related doctrine known as perspicuity of scriptures (the Bible can be understood by the common person). These doctrines taught that average Christian laypeople could understand the scriptures clearly, and that one could go directly to God without the aid of a priest. This is a very high, and in my opinion correct, view of humanity. This view of humanity's relationship with God is what enabled Paul, who was younger and newer in the faith, to stand up to Peter and correct him when he refused to eat with Gentile Christians in Antioch (Galatians 2:11-13).

In light of this doctrine, Pentecostal leaders must not perpetuate the myth that they are infallible. They must encourage their followers to make the Bible the final authority and they themselves must be willing to submit to the authority of Scripture when it is clearly explained to them, even by a subordinate. They must not be so intimidated or insecure that they refuse to allow divergent opinions within their subordinates. They want to have leaders under them who are reading the Bible also and who are not afraid to speak up when they believe someone is misunderstanding or misrepresenting the Scriptures. Pentecostal leaders must make sure that they are reading the Bible more than they are reading fellow Pentecostal writers, and that they are developing their theology based upon the Bible and not upon peer pressure. Leaders have enormous influence and authority, but they also run enormous risks of misleading people. Therefore, they must publicly and personally make sure that they are submitted to the authority of God's Word.

1.2 Spontaneous Prophecy

One of the common practices within Nigerian Pentecostalism is prophecy. This is a practice whereby a person, often a person in the congregation, receives a special message from God and stands up and gives that message publicly to the rest of the congregation. Normally, the prophecy is in the first person, as if God himself were speaking through the person. It will sometimes begin with words like, "O my people, O my people, Listen to me. I am coming soon ..." and then specific exhortations are given that encourage the congregation or certain individuals or groups within the congregation to do specific things.

Certainly, God can continue to speak through his people today and he can use any means that he chooses. However, if God himself has chosen to come down out of heaven and speak through that person, then that is a very sober occasion, not less serious than God coming down and meeting Moses on the mountain (Exodus 19:3ff.). Such a divine visitation also places upon that church a very serious responsibility, again not less than the responsibility that

was placed upon Israel who received the message of God through Moses. I am afraid that most Pentecostal churches or leaders do not have that understanding of the significance of God speaking to them through what is understood as modern prophecy. On the other hand, if God has not spoken through that person, and he or she has just stood up and made comments similar to what he or she has heard others make, that is also a very serious situation. That person has been guilty of trying to impersonate God and is a false prophet. This would seem to me to be no less serious than the “strange fire” that was offered by Nadab and Abihu (Numbers 3:4). Pentecostal pastors must guard their congregations very carefully from those who would attempt to represent God, even if they are doing so innocently.

Perhaps the most serious problem with the frequent use of prophecy in Pentecostal and Charismatic churches is that it tends to weaken the authority of the Word of God. We Christians have always believed that the Bible is a complete revelation and there is nothing new that needs to be added to it and there is no general problem that a person could face that is not addressed at least in principle by the Bible. However, who needs the Bible if God is going to come to church every week and tell people what to do? The Bible was given as a written revelation because divine revelation was not a common occurrence even during the time of the Bible. Therefore, we should be seeking for divine wisdom and guidance primarily from the Bible and not from those who purport to be speaking on behalf of God.

It appears that God has given to certain people the gift of a sensitive spirit. That person has the spirit of discernment. Such persons are able to sense things in the spirit world better than most people. They can often hear the voice or at least detect the will of God in a certain situation and when they do discern such things, they have a responsibility to share those in an appropriate way with God’s people. We should respect and appreciate such people. However, we must always remember that even such people are fallible. A person with the gift of evangelism does not successfully lead every person to Christ he or she meets. A person with the gift of healing does not heal everyone he prays for. And a person with the gift of discernment does not always interpret the message of God perfectly every time.

In light of that, we must be very careful to make the Word of God the highest authority in our lives, our ministries and our churches.

1.3 Superficial Exegesis

One of the most common criticisms of Pentecostals, even from within their own ranks, is that though they have great personal faith they tend to have a limited understanding of the correct way to interpret the Bible and to develop theology. In the early days of the post Civil War revival, the university students and graduates had a negative attitude toward seminary education. They felt that the seminaries were more like cemeteries and contributed to the deadness of the church. Therefore, the kind of things that were studied in the

seminary was not appealing to these early firebrand type evangelists. The leaders of this movement frequently reasoned that the level of study that they had in Scripture Union and other Bible studies was all that they needed to build God's kingdom on earth. This led to not only a neglect of theological studies, but also a negative attitude toward the study of theology and the discouraging of their members from pursuing a theological education.⁸

I have been teaching Pentecostal students for the past 23 years. I currently teach on an adjunct basis at West Africa Theological Seminary, Lagos (WATS) and Evangel Theological Seminary, Jos (ETS), both of whom enroll primarily Pentecostal students. I have found them to be very eager students and often very good students but as a general rule, I have found them to have less general knowledge about theology and hermeneutics, in particular, than their counterparts in the mainstream churches. Fortunately, this is slowly changing.

Because of this limitation, there is a tendency within Pentecostal churches to preach textual sermons in which the preacher focuses on just one phrase of Scripture. There is also a tendency to preach allegorical type sermons based upon the stories in the Bible in which the parts of the story generate multiple points of application. Both of these practices make good communication devices but tend to ignore the big picture presented in the Bible and tend to read into the passages what one wants them to say rather than extracting from them what is actually there. There is also a tendency within Pentecostal circles to overuse the King James Bible by building doctrine out of old English phrases that do not now mean what they did 400 years ago.

Theological beliefs and ecclesiastical practices must be based upon solid exegesis that extracts from a text of Scripture the communication that was intended by the original writer. The principles of hermeneutics are well worked out and are fairly straightforward. Mainstream seminaries have people in them who have faithfully and carefully taught exegesis and theology for many years. Therefore, Pentecostal leaders would do well to send their pastors and church workers to some of these mainline denominational seminaries for training. I

⁸ My personal encounter with this philosophy of theological education revolved around one of my students, Leo Bawa, who came to a university programme I had started. He was a missionary with Calvary Ministries (CAPRO) and introduced me to it. In my subsequent interaction with their leaders, I learned of the typical negative attitudes toward seminary education. This is illustrated in the fact that in 1992 the CAPRO School of Missions at Gana Ropp in Plateau State did not have a single course in hermeneutics, theology, church history or the Bible in their one year preparation course for missions. After some urging, to their credit, the leadership of CAPRO eventually added theological courses so that now students at Gana Ropp spend several months studying the Bible and theology. This attitude is slowly changing but there are still many Pentecostal leaders who believe that a year or two of Bible study is all that one needs to be successful in his or her ministry.

am grateful that many Pentecostal denominations are doing exactly that, and I am equally grateful that most mainstream seminaries welcome Pentecostal students. Pentecostal leaders would also help themselves and their ministries by critiquing and correcting one another when one strays too far from proper hermeneutic rules or comes up with interpretations that are strange and indefensible.

There is no greater authority in Christianity than the Bible. Our Pentecostal brothers must make sure that they give to the study and interpretation of the Bible the same degree of loyalty and professionalism that they profess to have by recognizing it as the divine Word of God. To fail to do so leaves persons on a sea of subjectivity and personal opinion. Such a foundation will not sustain the future of any church or organization. It is truth that sets us free. The primary source of truth for the Christian believer is the Bible. However, that truth will remain locked up in the Bible until one learns how to properly extract it. This is what our Pentecostal brothers must be encouraged and aided to do.

2. Organizational Integrity

Thousands of Pentecostals organizations have been created in Nigeria in the last 40 years. Most of them follow sound organizational principles and function well. And, in fact, many of these Pentecostal leaders have used their secular training to create outstanding organizations that are models for any church or denomination to emulate. However, there are things that the mainstream churches have learned over hundreds of years of ministry that the younger Pentecostal churches would do well to observe and learn from. I will mention only three specific issues.

2.1 Leadership Diversity

Because most organizations start very small, with a visionary leader, the common practice in the early days is for the leader to control everything about the church. That works fine as long as there is just one small congregation. However, having that kind of control does not work very well when the organization grows. The leader has to grow with the organization and a part of his growth is the appointing of officers or creating of departments that can deal with various issues. The apostles learned this lesson fairly quickly. They had assumed responsibility for the distribution of the food to the widows but soon realized that their many other duties had kept them from doing this job effectively. Therefore, they got others involved in this particular ministry of the church (Acts 6:1-6).

I have personally served as an educational consultant to one of the main Pentecostal churches in Nigeria. We developed a good plan for training pastors and church leaders. However, our plan never really materialized because the leader had to make every decision related to this school himself. Because he was so busy and could not give the attention that was needed to the school and was not willing to delegate that responsibility to others, the project suffered.

In addition to the inability to delegate authority, some church leaders have had unfortunate experiences with some of their junior leaders who had tried to appropriate too much responsibility and, in some cases, tried to dethrone the person at the top. Therefore, some Pentecostal leaders do not want to give their subordinates too much responsibility. They move them around from place to place so that they will not gain too much loyalty in any one place. This is not a good way to build or lead an organization. No person is indispensable, including the person at the top.

One of the most amazing positive illustrations of leadership reorganization occurred on the first missionary journey. The Lord spoke to the church and told them to set apart *“Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them”* (Acts 13:2). A short time after that *“Barnabas and Saul”* arrived in Cyprus where they began their ministry. However, an interesting thing happened to the ministry team on the island. We read that *“Paul and his companions”* departed from the island and every time thereafter except one, the missionary team is referred to as *“Paul and Barnabas.”* What happened on the island of Cyprus? Barnabas recognized that Paul had better gifts to lead an evangelistic team and therefore, he voluntarily stepped aside to allow Paul to take over the leadership of the evangelistic team. This is a good model for all leaders to note and imitate. When we find someone who is more gifted than we are in doing a specific thing, we must be willing to yield over that responsibility to that person.

Most mainline churches have existed a long time and have developed organizational structures that do not overwork the top person and help to build up and prepare junior leaders for advanced leadership roles. I urge Pentecostal leaders, particularly the founder/presidents of various ministries to learn a lesson from the churches from which they came. No person, no matter how gifted he or she is, can do all the work or have all the responsibility. And even if they could, there is safety in the *“multitude of counselors”* (Proverbs 11:14). Therefore, the leader must learn to train junior leaders and delegate real responsibility to them.

2.2 Financial Accountability

One of the specific areas where leaders tend to maintain too much control and even ownership is the finances of their ministries. Some Pentecostal leaders (and non-Pentecostal leaders as well) view their church as a business, and the offerings and other income are the profit on the investment they have made in the church planting industry. Obviously, this is an extreme position. More common is the practice of the leader controlling all of the money and distributing it as he or she sees fit.

There are very few things that can undermine a leader's authority quicker than poor stewardship of financial resources. This was one of the things that led to the undoing of Judas (John 12:6). When Paul took up money from the churches in Macedonian and Achaia, he was so committed to transparency

that he spent extra money to take representatives from those places with him to Jerusalem so that they could see that the money went to those for whom it was collected (Acts 20:4-5). Paul declared that the love of money is the *“root of all kinds of evil”* (1 Timothy 6:10a). He followed up that statement by saying *“Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs”* (6:10b). The writer of Hebrews made a similar comment: *“Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have ...”* (13:5). Although all human beings are subject to temptations about money and material things, those who often preach on prosperity are even more vulnerable to such temptations - to take advantage of their position as leaders to help God answer their prayers for financial prosperity.

Older churches and organization have worked with finances for centuries and have several simple common sense principles to teach younger Pentecostal churches. First, for accountability, there needs to be several people involved in the financial part of the church. Multiple people encourage accountability and accountability encourages honesty and efficiency. Second, mainstream churches have learned the value of creating specialists in dealing with certain jobs. Most pastors are not accountants. Therefore, they must be willing to turn over the management and accounting of money to those who have been called and trained to do this. Third, as an organization grows, it needs to learn to function on a budget that is a spending plan that becomes the legal disbursement guide for the organization. When a church or other organization has an approved budget, it releases the person at the top from the responsibility of having to approve every expenditure. Mainstream churches have learned a lot about financial accountability. Our Pentecostal brothers would do well to learn from them.

2.3 Succession Methodology

One of the most serious administrative flaws that I see developing in some of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches is little or no succession planning. What will happen to the church when the founder goes to be with the Lord? Already several major Pentecostal leaders have died what many would consider premature deaths. For example, Archbishop Benson Idahosa, often considered the father of Pentecostalism in Nigeria, the founding president of Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) and unquestionably the most popular Pentecostal leader in Africa in his day, died at the age of 59. I think it is fair to say that his church, the Church of God, Mission, was not prepared for his departure and the lack of a clear succession plan created serious problems for the church. Many other top Pentecostal leaders who were founders of their organizations are well above that age and are all facing the end of their ministries in the next few years. The organizations that God has given to Pentecostal leaders are gifts from God and must be treated like any other asset. They must not be weakened by failure to prepare for the founder's

departure. Hence it is a duty for all Pentecostal leaders to make adequate preparation for the time when they may no longer be able to lead the ministry.

Most mainstream churches have existed through many generations and have worked out the succession issues quite well. If the Anglican prelate or moderator of the Presbyterian Church or the president of the Nigerian Baptist Convention dies in office, it would be a painful thing for that organization but there are structures in place that would guide the organization in what to do next. I am afraid that many Pentecostal churches do not have such structures in place and should their leader pass away in the near future, they would leave their churches in a vulnerable position that could be devastating if not fatal. Pentecostal churches do not necessarily have to follow the exact patterns of succession that mainstream churches have used. However, they should develop some professionally recognized and legal succession plan so that their ministries will not be disrupted by the death of a founder.

3. Personal Humility

Unfortunately, many people outside the Pentecostal movement believe Pentecostal and Charismatic leaders represent a growing personality cult that displays pride and arrogance and sometimes makes leaders look foolish. Obviously there are remarkable exceptions in people like William Kumuyi and Gbile Akanne, both of whom are the epitome of humility. The Old Testament is filled with warnings about pride. Jesus came into this world as the only person who had a legitimate right to be proud, and yet he is described as being "*gentle and humble in heart*" (Matthew 11:29). Throughout the epistles, we are warned against pride and encouraged to develop a humble attitude.

Although we must not have a judgmental spirit and we must grant people the freedom to express their personalities in ways that we might not be able to, I fear that many Pentecostal leaders have exceeded the freedom that should be given to them and have indeed become guilty of pride. Note these three examples of different aspects of the sin of pride.

3.1 Superiority Attitudes

Because Pentecostal and Charismatic leaders have often re-discovered something in the Bible that had been overlooked by others, this sometimes causes them to think that they are more clever or better able to interpret the Bible or have more knowledge about God's ways than others. Such leaders often teach with dogmatic certainty the meaning and application of certain passages that have been debated for centuries by the best scholars. They may demonstrate arrogance when it comes to interpreting the Scriptures. As a general rule, education tends to open one's eyes to the vast knowledge available. Therefore, dogmatism and inflexibility are often the first marks of ignorance and are certainly indicators of intellectual pride. Pentecostal leaders would do well to realize that God has been and is still working through many people in this world. Therefore, they should respect those who have gone before them and those who are coming after them.

3.2 Extravagant Lifestyles

Some parts of Pentecostalism have developed the “king’s kid” philosophy - “I am the son of a king. Therefore, I should live like it.” This thinking has often led to an ostentatious display of wealth that is viewed by some Pentecostals as a demonstration of faith. The few Pentecostal leaders who have become prosperous sometimes have fallen into the trap of living an extravagant and pompous lifestyle. One of the attractions of wealth is that it feeds one’s pride and gives to people an elevated sense of importance. The expensive vehicles and expensive clothes and the public display of wealth and position are evidences of this. Some Pentecostal leaders have developed almost a rock-star image, only appearing with robust bodyguards and having little time for the common people. The imitation of the wealthy and affluent in life often makes these religious leaders look foolish. I once saw a Pentecostal preacher, who had come to see my neighbor, struggle to get into the back right seat of his vehicle. This man knew where the owner’s seat was but as a very fat man he had to seriously struggle to get into the back of his Volkswagen Beetle.⁹

3.3 Acquisition of Titles

Titles have been important to Africans throughout history. Titles were given to individuals when they reached certain stages in life or had achieved certain accomplishments. The society set title-holders apart from ordinary people. Today, we have continued to perpetuate the use of titles. Some Pentecostals have borrowed ecclesiastical titles from mainstream churches and demand to be addressed as “Bishop” or “Archbishop.” Some have gone back to the Bible and used titles that mainstream churches have abandoned because of certain theological implications. These include “apostle” and “prophet.”¹⁰ In addition, in some circles there is a craving for educational titles. Many Pentecostals leaders have either gotten honorary doctorate degrees or degrees from some non-accredited diploma mill so they can be addressed as “Rev. Doctor” or even “Rev. Professor.” There is nothing improper about giving a person the respect that he or she has earned. It is a Biblical concept (Rom 13:7; Eph 6:2; Phil 2:29; 1 Tim 5:17; 1 Peter 2:17). But using titles that one has not earned is not only a mark of pride but also a compromise of integrity.

Mainline Christian leaders are not exempt from pride, but the long process of becoming an Anglican or ECWA church leader encourages a dignity, humility and professionalism that Pentecostals would do well to emulate.

⁹ I once participated in a thanksgiving service where a Pentecostal preacher was asked to speak. He arrived late, pulled up right to the front of the hall and with great fanfare and obvious pride, got out and made his way to the platform. This young pastor, who probably did not have 100 members in his congregation, had his own personal ADC who stood up and sat down at the appropriate point behind him during the programme.

¹⁰ I have no personal objection to using either the ecclesiastical titles or the Biblical titles but I am concerned when these are used merely as a demonstration of pride.

Conclusion

In Khartoum there are two mighty rivers that join together - the White and Blue Nile. The White Nile is more of a chocolate color and the Blue Nile has clearer water. In Khartoum you can easily see where the two join. It seems that for a long distance, the two rivers run side by side. Eventually a section of chocolate water bubbles up on the clear side of the river, and then another one. After a while, the distinctions between the two bodies of water are only at the extreme edges because the middle of the river is mixed. After a few more kilometers, the whole river looks the same. There is no longer the Blue Nile and the White Nile. There is just the Nile River and it continues to flow like that all the way to the Mediterranean Sea.

The river of Christianity has been flowing down through history for two thousand years. Various streams of theology and ecclesiastical practice have entered the body and have left their mark. As I have demonstrated, in the last hundred years three significant streams have entered this river of Christianity in Nigeria. They have been flowing side by side for a long time. However, we are already beginning to see bubbles of Pentecostalism and charismatic manifestations springing up in the mainline churches. We are also seeing the titles and vestments of the mainstreams surfacing in the Pentecostal churches. And in some places the lines between the new and the old have become pretty blurred. Whether we like it or not, the river of Christianity is adapting and absorbing all those who claim to be followers of Jesus and each of these is making a small impact on the body as a whole.

It is my prayer that those doctrines and practices of Pentecostalism that bubble up on the non-Pentecostal side of the river will be the parts of the movement that make Christianity stronger and better. It is also my prayer that when the lines further blur between the two streams of Christianity, those precious traditions and valuable practices that the mainstream body has preserved will not be ignored by the new movement called Pentecostalism. When we borrow from each other and we learn from each other and we interact with each other and we challenge each other and we love each other, we believe that soon the whole body of Christ will become “*a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless*” (Eph. 5:27).

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