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## ***Pentecostalism in Nigeria: Exploiting or Edifying the Masses?***

### **Introduction**

What began as an innocuous charismatic fervour in African Churches in the early 1980s had its humble origins in the university Christian study groups of the preceding decade. The growth of Pentecostalism in Nigeria was bred by the critical perception of young Christian students in most Southern Nigerian universities that the main-line churches such as Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, Catholic, etc., which had had tremendous influence on their upbringing had become too cold, docile, and devoid of the resurrection power that the Apostles of old received in the upper room in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. Thus, the new age Pentecostalism which was initially confined to campuses began to grow in leaps and bounds, first in the consciousness of their converts or proselytes on campuses, and later extended beyond the limited confines of the country to other parts of the world.

The expansion of the reach of Pentecostalism was facilitated by the economic and political crises of the 1980s, which naturally and psychologically created adherents who were drawn from the pool of frustrated and marginalised people in the larger Nigerian society. The claim to 'power' by Pentecostal outreaches across the country was attested to by the numerous reports of instant miracles and wonder turnarounds experienced by several attendees, devotees and testifiers. It was indeed the harvest of miracles that served as the trump card of evangelisation which attracted large followings to the pentecostalists of different hues.

The veracity or otherwise of the miraculous feats of healing and restoration in some Pentecostal churches in Nigeria has remained a sore point in the discourse on the phenomenon over time. There had been instances when exposés were published by journalists on some fake Pentecostal pastors who utilised magical powers and cultic mediums to manipulate and cajole their credulous adherents. As many were exposed, and became obscure and cast into oblivion, several others often emerged to fill the gap.

Today, Pentecostalism has become a booming trade mark of a Christian evangelistic crusade in Nigeria. The messages of healing, miracles and prosperity have often received wider acceptance among the populace that had seen the hope of the oil boom collapse into the spiral of economic decline, social and political decadence. Pentecostal churches in the country have continued to feast on the psychology of the masses who genuinely are desirous of relief from their sordid existential realities. True, while there may be some

faithful Pentecostal pastors who are committed to the course of promoting God's kingdom on earth, several others have continued to pursue their pre-occupation as a commercial venture, and utilise any means to accumulate profits.

The onslaught by the Nigerian State against the menacing phenomenon of advance fee fraud and allied crimes seems not to have impacted on the new age 'Hollywood Pastors' in Nigeria, who in their haven of least resistance – religion, with all its emotive appeals – utilise extortionate and immoral means to milk or exploit their unsuspecting adherents. Recently, the National Broadcasting Commission in Nigeria (NBC) clamped down on the broadcast of unverified miracle claims by some Tele-Evangelists, in an effort to sanitise the airing of Christian religious programmes on the country's numerous television stations. The action, NBC explained, was to protect innocent Nigerians against extortion by some notorious evangelists whose deception may have become public knowledge.

From the foregoing, it is clear that putting the phenomenon of Pentecostalism in Nigeria under the searchlight would be a worthwhile exercise. This paper will analyse the genesis of Pentecostalism and its interface with the socio-economic and political conditions in the country, drawing inferences from historical accounts of the conduct, crises and collapse of some Pentecostal churches and the growth and expansion of some others, with the overall objective of establishing the prospects of the widening pool of Pentecostal churches in contemporary Nigeria.

### **The Character of Pentecostalism in Nigeria**

It is beyond the scope of this paper to prove the veracity or otherwise of claims of the miraculous feats claimed to have taken place in the numerous Pentecostal churches that are mushrooming in the landscape of Nigeria. However, there have been several reports regarding the doubtful intentions and machinations of some dubious Pentecostal pastors who engaged in magical acts to delude and mollify their unsuspecting devotees. Pentecostalism may have become so entrenched in Christian circles in Nigeria, to such an extent that prospective planters of churches utilise the Pentecostal identity for galvanising popular followings. The psychology of Nigerian Christians is one that attributes importance and legitimacy to the Pentecostal label on the grounds that it indicates purity and the whole truth exemplified by the Bible. Little wonder that Pentecostal churches enjoy immense recognition as many Christians openly identify with programmes organised or anchored by Pentecostal churches or pastors. The power of evangelisation in Pentecostal outreaches has often hinged on the demonstration effect of miracles which were claimed to have been wrought by some so-called 'powerful men of God'. The attribution of the miraculous to some soon began to create an aura of omnipotence and supremacy around the personality of these men. Thus, any open crusade organised by any of the

acclaimed 'miracle-working pastors' – and there are so many of them in Nigeria – has often evoked a tumultuous reception which cut across several of the Christian denominations that pervade the country. The mixed multitude that characterised the Pentecostal assembly in Nigeria could be a reflection of the liberal outlook of the adherents of Christian faith in the country who are only desirous of definite and prompt solutions to their myriad problems of socio-economic survival in a country that has continued to slide precariously since the 1980s towards the abyss, where life has become solitary, brutish and short.<sup>1</sup>

The growth of the Pentecostal churches can be explained variously. Aside from the spiritual rebirth experience by those who were swayed to turn from their confessed evil ways, several others were enticed to Pentecostalism by the appealing and soothing messages that portrayed prosperity, holiness, and blissful living as attainable heights in Christendom. Thus, through the vehicle of Pentecostalism, adherents expected to realise their cherished dreams, which in essence means that most pentecostalists pursue their Christian religious obligations in anticipation of not only eternal heavenly rewards but earthly ephemeral ones just as the body consists of flesh and spirit. As the economic adversity of the country began to deteriorate even further, the focus of Pentecostal churches shifted somewhat from the spiritual to the physical needs of their adherents, essentially with the intent of remaining relevant to the aspirations and demands of the numerous underprivileged and dispossessed members of the Pentecostal congregations. The character of class struggle in Nigeria over the years, in which the very rich people who had acquired wealth to the detriment of the ever-widening class of the dispossessed and poor people continues to influence the doctrinaire values and focus of the church.<sup>2</sup> This is not surprising because every socio-cultural institution is embedded in the sub-formations of the country's economy.<sup>3</sup> It is the identification of Christian churches, particularly the Pentecostal assembly in Nigeria, with the socio-economic and political atmospherics that has in no small measure accounted for the expansive growth of Christianity in the country since the 1980s. With umbrella associations such as the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), and the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), Christians in the country have been given a collective voice to challenge government's repressive and exploitative policies – a role in which they have acquitted themselves creditably over the years. While the CAN comprise 'Old Missionary' churches such as Methodist, Catholic, Baptist, Anglican, etc, the PFN is made up of 'new generation' Pentecostal churches. The two associations have been able to instill discipline among their affiliate bodies and to scrutinise the operations of their members with a view to ensuring that the standard of Christianity is neither whittled down nor compromised.

But, unfortunately, because the PFN has very few members and does not enjoy the acceptance of the numerous independent Pentecostal churches which

resent its hegemony, it is not in a position to regulate the practices and conduct of non-members. And it is from the expansive pool of non-members of PFN that striking aberrations are often observed.<sup>4</sup> Two frontline non-members of the PFN are Christ Embassy, and the Synagogue of All Nations. These two have in recent times gained prominence through their utilisation of broadcast media to popularise their programmes and miracle claims. The Christ Embassy Ministries with its headquarters in Lagos has Pastor Chris Oyakhilome as its General Overseer. The Atmosphere for Miracles which airs on nearly 60 local television stations across the country, almost on daily basis, is anchored by Pastor Chris Oyakhilome. In the programme, video clips of miraculous feats are shown in a manner depicting the Pastor as an embodiment of God's power.<sup>5</sup> In a similar vein, prophet T.B. Joshua has a half-hour Synagogue of All Nations Programme, which is widely televised across the country. We shall return to the orchestrated use of the broadcast media by the enigmatic and suave tele-evangelists in the country. But the point to make in this section is to note that the Pentecostal field in Christendom in Nigeria is being mined by men who through the utilisation of business principles in discharging their pastoral responsibilities have an intense interest in profit-making. Understood that way, it then becomes clear why the tele-evangelists have advertised themselves to the world at great cost, since they are confident that their investments in religious advertisement would yield tremendous dividends in pecuniary terms in the immediate future. The unbridled interest in profit-making could itself be explanatory of the zeal the tele-evangelists display in evangelising the gospel for the enlargement of their congregations.<sup>6</sup>

The foregoing does not reveal the whole character of Pentecostalism in Nigeria but is a critical perspective on the phenomenon. There are indeed some other Pentecostals who are self-effacing and whose miraculous feats are not self-publicised in a manner that conjures up an image of self-glorification. The publicity of miracles in this category of Pentecostal assembly is carried out by a retinue of the recipients of miracles who unconsciously do the foot work to testify to non-members about the presence of God's power in their assembly. It is in this category that the sincere Pentecostal fellowship, in consonance with the standards of the Bible, could be situated. The Bible in its account of miracles wrought by Jesus Christ, states that Jesus was particularly opposed to publicity, and had to warn the recipients of miracles not to publicise their miracles, but to give glory to God, who had used him to dispense the miracles to them.<sup>7</sup>

It is between the two groups of 'publicity-seeking Pentecostal pastors' and the 'self-effacing, publicity-shy pastors' that the Nigerian Pentecostal ministry finds its character. The dominant global perception of Nigeria's Pentecostalism, in this regard, is a function of the ability of each of the groups to authenticate and legitimise their professions in the light of the requirements and

prescriptions of the Bible, which is the only common instrument of evangelisation available to the two groups.

### **Explaining the Spread of Pentecostalism**

Although there are three broad categories of religious inclinations in Nigeria – Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion – the advent of the Pentecostal revolution in the country has succeeded in expanding the frontiers of Christianity in regions that hitherto were dominated by Islam or African Traditional Religion. The following are some of the reasons for the growing influence of Pentecostalism in Nigeria:

#### ***Nigerians are Religious***

The progressive expansion of poverty, ignorance, hunger, disease, unemployment, exploitation, alienation, oppression and dispossession in Nigeria since independence has continued to influence the resort of Nigerians to a search for the spiritual essence of their being. The socio-economic and political adversities in the country provide a fertile ground for the planting, germination, growth and balkanisation of all forms of religion<sup>8</sup>. The zeal of Nigerians for religion, like wine, waxes very strong with age. Thus, forty-four years after independence, the only sector that has been experiencing growth and expansion is the religious sector. Churches and mosques are widely to be found on street corners, and are drawing new converts and adherents regularly. Although it is often said that Nigeria is a secular country, its constitution explicitly provides for the right of Nigerians to freedom of worship as contained specifically in section 38 (i) of the 1999 constitution, which declares that ‘every person shall be entitled to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching practice and observance’<sup>9</sup>. The constitution is an attestation to the propensity of Nigerians to religion. Religion, to most Nigerians, is a means of inviting the intervention of the divine and celestial in the affairs of humans.<sup>10</sup> This helps explain why religion – whether traditional, Christian or Islamic – occupies a central domain in the consciousness of Nigerians. In the periods of military dictatorship, Nigerians trooped to the churches and mosques and other prayer houses to seek help from God. Christianity, in particular has raised an active voice against military dictatorship in Nigeria. The Pentecostal groups were more overt in their call for spiritual liberation of the country from the hold of satanic forces that had continued to derail the course of development and truncate the destiny of the country. The challenge for the Pentecostals during those dark days of military rule was to break the yoke of military dictatorship, and sensitise and raise spiritually and politically conscientised Christians to fulfill the task.<sup>11</sup> No doubt, the emergence of several Pentecostal churches in seasons of anomie, as in the case of Nigeria in periods preceding the advent of democratic rule in 1999, played a

positive role in the sense that the development facilitated the maintenance of order and stability in the face of extremely depressed economic conditions in the country.<sup>12</sup> Thus, rather than spur the people to revolutionary action against their perceived oppressors, the Pentecostal Christian spirit that was sweeping through the country, melted the stony and dormant religious consciousness of the oppressed and converted them to spiritually active Christians whose focus changed from the ephemeral and mundane affairs of this world to the heavenly kingdom.<sup>13</sup>

Today in Nigeria, the expansion of Pentecostal outreaches has not abated. There are more Pentecostal churches in the country than schools. But, ironically, the crime rate has been soaring with almost the same percentage as the growth rate of Pentecostal churches. So worrisome has been the incidence of crime that even churches with their hallowed sanctity have not been spared. Cases of church attendees losing their valuables to armed robbers within the precincts of the church have been reported. Thus, Pastors often warn devotees on Sundays and during weekly services to secure their belongings in order not to be dispossessed of them in the church by unscrupulous and pretentious attendees. It sounds paradoxical that Pentecostal pastors who are presumed to be imbued with awesome power would preside over churches where miscreants and criminals could easily infiltrate. This situation is the reality that stares most Christian assemblies in Nigeria in the face; and it explains vividly the obvious fact that within the growing number of Pentecostal churches is the increasing number of 'anti-Pentecostal people', who are 'resident members' of the churches. In that regard, it is necessary to distinguish between those who are religious – and many Nigerians are – and those who are faithful Christians. The Pentecostal revolution of the 1980s began with the vision of building and expanding the horizon of faithful Christians who would create the platform for the transformation of the country. The fiery evangelistic fervour of the 1980s which rigidly stressed holiness, sanctification, purity and other Christian virtues, soon gave way in the late 1990s to diluted teachings tolerant of the excesses of the social system. Today, the focus is on prosperity, restoration, healing and family life, which are seen as dividends of the kingdom of God here on earth. This paradigm shift, unknown to the Pentecostal pastors, is aligning the world view of their churches with the main-line churches.

In all, the religiosity of Nigerians is not in doubt. The problem of religion has been the conversion of the hearts of men from evil works to heavenly values. In an attack on the churches in Nigeria, the renowned playwright and novelist, Onuorah Nzekwu stated that:

the churches have failed this nation. I don't think there is any nation in the world that has the same number of churches as Nigeria. But it is unfortunate that the more the churches multiplied, the more evil we become.<sup>14</sup>

Pentecostal churches remain in Nigeria the habitation of the good, the bad and the ugly. Expectedly so, because the churches reside in Nigerian society, and can not be completely impervious to the influences that derive from the structure and character of its operational milieu.

### *The globalisation of Western Values*

Following the demise of socialism evident in the collapse of Soviet Union and the ascent of the United States of America to the pinnacle of world affairs, there emerged an institutionalised process of globalisation which has succeeded in implanting western values and systems in other parts of the world.<sup>15</sup> The emergence of a global cultural system which is the consequence of a variety of social and cultural developments, can to a large extent explain the growth of Pentecostalism in Nigeria. True, Pentecostalism connotes spiritual rebirth and its origins are traceable to the stimulating influence of the Holy Spirit, while the expansion of its outreaches and spheres of influence can be explained by a recourse to extra-spiritual factors. In fact, the Pentecostal movement in Nigerian universities in the 1980s most certainly must have been greatly influenced by a similar development in Western Europe and the United States.<sup>16</sup> In a sense, the tide of Pentecostalism filled the void created by the exit of socialism from the lexicon of world politics, subsequent to the fall and balkanisation of Soviet Union. In this regard, there is a sense in which the 'born again' ideology of Pentecostalism could be said to be a substitute for the socialist ideology which has continued to compete with other value systems for the souls of men. Thus, the global wave of Pentecostalism is providing the ideological underpinnings for the consolidation of the capitalist order which has emerged as the dominant mode of production in the world system. This linkage between religious morality and the prevailing socio-economic order has been found to be a vital feature in epochal changes, since religion is required to legitimise the emergent social order.<sup>17</sup>

What remains to be proved is the degree of influence of the western world on the rise and spread of Pentecostalism in Nigeria. It is incontrovertible that the development of a similar phenomenon in Europe and the United States in periods preceding the 19<sup>th</sup> century was exemplary and influential. But as it impacted on other parts of the world, the expansion of Pentecostal churches and their outreaches, has been far in excess of the influence wielded by the same phenomenon in contemporary United States and Europe. The level of external funding and patronage enjoyed by Pentecostal churches in Nigeria is unknown. What is visible is the obvious cultural influences of western values and traditions as demonstrated by the taste and style of Nigerian Pentecostal pastors and their flocks. Regarding the corrupting influence of the western world, an internet source observes that:

Sadly, in Africa and other parts of the Third World, there has arisen especially in the 1990s some groups who have copied the sin-compromising attitudes of those western churches

who preached easy believism and cheap grace. Such third world groups are usually great boosters of their 'revivals' also. Such 'revivals' are only imitations of the real thing.<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, if Nigerian Pentecostalism is to be considered a reflection of the authentic requirements of heaven-bound spirituality, as enshrined in the Bible, then there is an urgent need for revival in most of the Pentecostal churches in the country. The failings of some so-called Pentecostal churches evident in the worldly and carnal dressing of the womenfolk in those churches, and the loose and unethical social conduct of most church attendees, are a lurid manifestation of the reckless imitation of western cultures in an African setting. The point to make here is that while globalisation continued to assault the cherished and sacred values of Africans, the Pentecostal churches intent on attracting large following also were obliged to compromise, in most cases, their standards to align with the dominant world values. It is this compromise that has robbed the Pentecostal churches of their power, and has reduced most of the Christian assemblies to mere social gatherings. To purge the churches of carnalities is to return Christianity to the pre-globalisation era where Christian ethical standards and African morality were mutually reinforcing.

### *Style and Comportment of Pentecostal Pastors*

The mode of presentation adopted by most Nigerian Pentecostal Pastors in advancing the cause they are championing and in popularising their ministries to their ever-increasing audience, can show an attractive face. Their style of language-use, phonetics, dressing and mien portray them, at face value, as the epitome of modernity and decency. Reuben Abati captures the approach and appeal of the new age Pastors in Nigeria in the following words:

The new generation pastor is a spellbinder; he dresses well, he rides very flashy cars, he even carries a gun, just in case; he is a part-time businessman. He doesn't need to have attended any Bible College, as long as he can quote passages from the Bible and report to a bewildered congregation about what his Daddy told him in the night, he would get a captive audience.<sup>19</sup>

The Nigerian Pentecostal pastors in a bid to capture the attention of their audience, seem to have perfected the art of public communication. They are effervescent orators radiating with an audacious air of sophistic erudition.<sup>20</sup> Most of them are products of Nigerian Universities with sound backgrounds in the academia. The experience they garnered in the course of their training has become an asset they have found useful in their evangelistic pursuits in a country where the literacy level is still very low. No doubt, the educational attainment of pastors has a direct influence on their perspectives, as much as their level of acceptance. The perception by the leadership of the requisite steps for promoting the growth of the church is a function of the level of exposure, experience and the personal ambition and vision of the overall head of the



church. But the vision of the leadership has much to do with the insights and knowledge-acquisition of the pastors.

In this regard, the Nigerian Pentecostal pastors seem to be gifted in the management of their outfits for effecting maximum impact on the society and promoting durability and institutionalisation of their outreaches. The adoption of business-like principles in which the dividends are ploughed back into the business has led to the meteoric expansion of many Pentecostal churches in Nigeria. In this category of rapidly expanding congregations are the Living Faith Church, Redeemed Christian Church of God, Deeper-Life Bible Church, Apostolic Faith, Mountain of Fire and Miracles Latter Rain Assembly, etc. These churches are now venturing into purely business concerns such as the establishment of Universities, Secondary and Primary Schools, Medical Centres, Banks, and Conference Centres, with the intent of generating additional resources, perhaps, for the purpose of impacting on Nigerian society in all its ramifications.

Explaining the rationale for the establishment of Covenant University – a private university, licensed by the Nigerian Government on 2 February, 2002 – the presiding Bishop of the Living Faith Church, Dr. David Oyedepo, said the university was designed to be a departure from Form to Skill; a departure from figures to future-building; a departure from legalism to realism; a departure from points to facts; a departure from ‘mathematics’ to ‘life-matics’.<sup>21</sup> Of course, several other Pentecostal pastors would also justify their foray into extra-religious concerns. The objective of diversifying the sources of income of the church, as plausible as it sounds, may in the long-run expose the church to the carnal world and its negative influences. The tendency exists that the church may become profit-oriented at the risk of undermining the original anthropocentric and celestial concerns of its leadership. With the emergence of extra-religious institutions, the responsibilities of the leadership become divergent, daunting, and indeed distracting. The original focus, with its spiritual essence, may give way for the new and more-mundane agenda, with the possibility of whittling down the communion between the church leadership and God.

The factors we have discussed in the foregoing sections may not be exhaustive but they are explanatory of the growth of the Pentecostal churches in Nigeria. The growth is evidently more physical than spiritual, and this could be the resultant effect of the observable shift in the focus of the leadership of the Pentecostal churches. However, where the focus is intact without any diversification, it may be so because the church lacks the wherewithal to pursue distracting ventures. The growth of Pentecostal churches ought to be evident in the number of people whose lives have been positively impacted; manifold testimonies of deliverances and healings, wonder turn-around and transformations; etc. But the situation in most Pentecostal churches is that many people are thronging to services but very few are actually touching the Power of God.

## Exploitation or Edification?

It is a difficult question to ask whether or not the Nigerian Pentecostal churches have been exploiting their members. This is so because the Pentecostal churches are diverse in their orientations, doctrines, and leadership structures. As we have noted in the preceding sections in this article, the adoption of the Pentecostal label by most church planters to describe the focus and essence of their ministries was, in most cases, a ploy to cajole, or deceive the unsuspecting devotees into believing that their churches were built on the pillars of righteousness, holiness and other Christian virtues that would edify them and prompt the manifestation of God's power in their lives. The attendees of Pentecostal churches are full of expectations that the miraculous would continually manifest itself in their assemblies. To determine therefore whether or not the 'masses' – and these consist of both the rich and poor attendees in the churches – are exploited or edified by the ministrations of their pastors, requires finding out whether their expectations have been fulfilled or are being fulfilled. Opinions are bound to vary from one person to another, and from one church to another.

It is apparent that any enquiry regarding the benefits derivable from the attendance of Pentecostal churches broaches the responsibility of both the church leadership and the attendees. The issue raises matters such as the funding of the church by attendees, and the power possessed by the pastors to minister to the spiritual and physical needs of their flocks.

On finance, the Pentecostal pastors emphasise the importance of sowing 'seed faith' to their flocks during ministrations. The emphasis placed on the financial obligation of the Pentecostal devotees to 'God's work' contrasts sharply with what obtains in the main-line churches. The biblical injunction in Malachi 3:10 has become trite and jaded:

Bring ye all the tithes into the store house, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing.

The pastors anchor their request for monetary assistance on the above scripture which is portrayed as a non-negotiable financial obligation of the devotees. The obligation is known as the 'tithes' – which means 10 percent of the income of each devotee. In most Pentecostal churches in contemporary Nigeria, the pastors have designed other means of increasing church finances in addition to the receipts from tithes. Levies for church building, procurement of musical instruments, welfare for the needy, church planting within and outside Nigeria, and so on, have often served as complementary sources of generating funds.

The cupidity of Pentecostal pastors is not confined to their churches alone, even on crusade grounds – where there are mixed multitudes with different orientations and perspectives, – the pastors are not discreet in their urge to amass wealth. At a crusade in Lagos, in November, 2002, where thousands of

Christians converged at the crusade ground of Victory Holy Ghost Mission, to receive miracles and deliverance from satanic bondage, the ministering Evangelist, and renowned tele-evangelist, and a respected Pentecostalist who enjoys acclaim and recognition in Pentecostal circles, Uma Ukpai, was quoted to have admonished the congregation to come forward to sow 'seed faith' as a necessary condition for divine blessings from God. Ukpai warned that those who refused to sow seed faith would not prosper, and he exclaimed: 'If you are not a giver today, you shall be a beggar tomorrow'.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, half the worshippers at the crusade ground – estimated to be about 20,000 – were reported to have responded by trooping out to sow seed faith.<sup>23</sup> This trend has become an institutionalised style in Pentecostal assemblies across the country. The urge to accumulate wealth to support the high tastes and extraordinary sophistication of the pastors has continued to mean that the business of soul-winning, which ought to be the primary concern of Christian evangelistic mission, is actually a profit-making venture. Perhaps, the pastors are desirous of building financial empires here on earth – where moth and rot consume to the detriment of their flocks who had built undue dependence on them.

The second level of analysis, is to determine the claim to power by Pentecostal pastors, on the basis of the degree of the occurrence of the miraculous in their congregations. Opinions vary regarding the perception of the role of the urge to power and authority of Pentecostalism in Nigeria. There are those who believe that the version of Christianity exported to Nigeria through the missionary exploit of the Europeans, was devoid of power, because as they claim, the traditions and values in which the power of the religion lies were lacking. The proponent of this school of thought believe that the deletion of the 7<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> books of Moses from the Bible and their banning as 'apocryphal' emasculated African Christianity in its entirety. Arguing along these lines, Justice Adewale Thompson read a racial meaning in the actions of European missionaries who brought an incomplete and distorted version of Christianity to Africa. He noted that the books of Moses which were deleted from the Bible are in special places in Europe where they are being gainfully utilised. According to him:

These books have been banned by canonical order only. They existed as part of the original bible and are still available in their purest forms in the proper places ... African Christianity as is being practised in Africa would only sustain a peaceful condition. In times of crisis, the African must look elsewhere and his Ogun, Obatala, Sango, Yemoja, Orunmila, Oshun, Obaluwaye, Aja, Esu are to fight on his side.<sup>24</sup>

Expatiating on the powerlessness of African Christianity, and the resort of some Pentecostal pastors to the utilisation of occult powers in order to stay relevant to their congregations, Onuorah Nzekwu remarked that:

...the pastors are another case entirely. Several have communion with the devil. Some went to herbalists to request for medicine they will use to draw people to their churches.

Under such circumstances, how much work do you think the Holy Spirit will be able to do.<sup>25</sup>

There have been several exposés on some miracle-working pastors who were indicted for being neck-deep in occultist practices and rituals. Such names as Primate Olabayo, (Evangelical Church of Yahweh), Prophet T. B. Joshua (Synagogue of All Nations), Pastor Chris Oyakhilome (Christ Embassy), and the late Pastor (Founder) S. B. J. Oschoffa (Celestial church of Christ), etc. had been linked to occultist practices.<sup>26</sup>

In a recent edition of *Newswatch Magazine* with the cover page captioned 'Lies, Miracle Lies NBC clamps down on Pentecostal pastors', the dangers of the unregulated broadcast of miracle claims by some notorious pastors who use the electronic media to deceive the public were analysed.<sup>27</sup> The National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) must have decided to 'stop broadcast stations across the country from airing religious programmes with unverified miracle contents in them, on the basis of the reports it received'.<sup>28</sup> True, there are numerous testimonies about the miraculous which assault the intellect, and which are often shown to deceive the simple and gullible public. The intention of those 'miracle-working pastors' is to attract large followings and resources to themselves. But since the pronouncement of the clampdown order on March, 30, 2004, which understandably was aimed at sanitising the presentation of Christian religious programmes on the country's numerous television stations, the NBC has taken a dive into controversial waters, a development that has ranged it against most of the Pentecostal pastors.<sup>29</sup>

The President of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), Bishop Mike Okonkwo, expressed disappointment when he said that the PFN was worried about the infiltration of those 'who have modernized occultism by injecting the name of Jesus Christ into their largely unbiblical practices into the PFN fold'.<sup>30</sup> It is the infiltration of the anti-Pentecostal pastors that has continued to delegitimise the claim of Pentecostal churches to Christ-like righteousness, holiness, and sanctification, through their mis-representation of Pentecostalism.

### **Concluding Remarks: The future of Pentecostalism in Nigeria**

From the foregoing, it is clear that Pentecostalism as the driving force of Christian revival in Nigeria has been fraught with misrepresentations and human frailties. Many church planters had used the identity of Pentecostalism to mobilise followers and attract immense financial resources to themselves. Some, on the other hand, had used it to build a body of radical Christians who are less concerned about the affairs of the world. In this category, however, are very few churches. We noted that a good number of large Christian Pentecostal assemblies in Nigeria today are more concerned about life here on earth with little attention to the hereafter. The shift in the focus from heaven-bound indoc-

trination to prosperity on earth may not be unconnected with the globalisation of capitalism and western values, which have had a tremendous impact on the consciousness of the Pentecostal pastors in the country.

The future of Pentecostalism in Nigeria is dependent on the effectiveness or otherwise of the Pentecostal churches in attending to the spiritual and physical needs of their flocks. Many are in church today because they either desire relief from the socio-economic miseries of their existence or deliverance from some demonic forces. The Pentecostal churches that wish to remain relevant beyond the present era are those presently investing in the tutorship of their followers regarding the eternal value of Christian virtues, not on miracles and mundane rewards, but on immortal existence beyond the physical one.

What becomes of Pentecostalism can not be divorced from the forces of post-modernism which apparently have held sway in virtually all areas of human endeavour, in which there is no absolutism but relativism, and truth is regarded as an opinion that can be challenged. It is these forces that have continued to influence religion with their syncretic perspectives. The visible syncretism and apostasy that seem to pervade some Pentecostal assemblies in the country, if history is a good guide, would end up the way its forebears ended – cast into oblivion. Since the demise of Pastor Oschoffa of the Celestial Church of Christ, this institution, which had grown to world acclaim, soon became dismembered in the face of seemingly interminable crises. Primate Olabayo of the Evangelical Church of Yahweh (of the Taborah Fame) who launched himself to prominence through his yearly predictions and his claim to the possession of the Holy Spirit, has since vanished off the scene since late 1990s as a result of his confinement to a wheelchair. Time will legitimise or delegitimise the Pentecostal pastors and their ministries, on the basis of their sincerity to the cause they profess. Until that happens, the two-faces of pentecostalism<sup>31</sup> – Holy Spirit-filled, and demon-inspired – may still continue to blossom.

## Notes

1. The position is contrary to the one held by Albert Faluyi's 'In defence of the Pastors', *The Guardian*, Sunday, November 18, 2001 p.45.
2. Poverty, unemployment, and corruption have increased over the years, and the people were driven to resort to the spiritual realm for solutions to their physical and human problems.
3. This is an adaptation of Gabriel Almond's argument in respect of the centrality of culture to the political system.
4. *National Standard*, May, 2004, pp. 24-26:
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid*, pp. 28 - 29.

7. Jesus Christ did not publicise his miracles, rather their beneficiaries publicised him and his works.
8. O. B. C. Nwolise, 'Awolowo and Religion in Nigeria', in Olasope E. Oyelaran, Toyin Falola, Mokuwago Okoye, and Adewale Thompson, (eds.), *Obafemi Awolowo: The End Of An Era* (Ile-Ife, Nigeria, Obafemi Awolowo University Press Ltd., 2002) p.850.
9. 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.
10. Iyorwuese Hagher, *Leading Africa out of chaos: A God-centred Approach to Leadership*, (Ibadan, Spectrum books Ltd, 2002), p. 72.
11. Ibid p.73.
12. Emile Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (London, London Press, 1951).
13. The argument here is that the shifting of the focus away from the physical realm robbed the people of the consciousness to challenge the system, and transform their environment. Karl Marx wrote that 'Religion is the sign of the oppressed creatures, the sentiment of a heartless world...'
14. Excerpt from an interview he granted Matthew Irekiigbe, *The Sun*, Saturday, July 26, 2003, p.24.
15. Oni A. Adesoji, 'Globalization: A menace of African values and education?', *African Quarterly*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2002, pp. 2-3.
16. Pentecostal churches in the United States and Western Europe had been in existence several decades before the wave of Pentecostalism reached Africa.
17. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of capitalism*, (London, Routledge 1992); E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, Penguin 1980); Paul Gifford, *African Christianity* (London, Hurst and Company, 1998) p. 26.
18. [http://www.Internetbiblecollege.net/lessons%..... inspiring quotes from Pentecostal-leaders](http://www.Internetbiblecollege.net/lessons%.....inspiring%quotes%from%Pentecostal-leaders). At page 2 of 20.
19. Reuben Abati, 'The clash of the Pastor-Generals', *The Guardian*, Sunday, November 11, 2001 p.10.
20. Bisi Alabi-Williams, 'My Grouse with Oyakhilome, By Okotie', *The Guardian*, Sunday November 11, 2001, p. 30.
21. Keynote address delivered by Bishop David Oyedepo to the National Universities Commission (NUC) verification team.
22. <http://www.newswatchngr.com/editorial/allaccess/2002>.
23. Ibid, p. 2.
24. Adewale Thompson, 'The influence of Religion on Awo: An Insider's view', in Olasope O. Oyelaran, et.al., (eds.), *Obafemi Awolowo: The end of an era*, op.cit p.916.
25. *The Sun*, Saturday, July 26, 2003 p.24.
26. See Pastor Chris Okotie's exposé on Prophet J. B. Joshua and Pastor Chris Oyakhilome in *THIS DAY, The Sunday Newspaper*, October 28, 2001, p.43.

27. *Newswatch*, April 19, 2004.
28. Geoffrey Ekenna, 'Miracles or Magic?', *Newswatch*, April 19, 2004, pp. 12-13.
29. *Ibid*, p.14.
30. *Ibid*.
31. This view was adopted from the publication entitled *The two faces of Christianity* to buttress the point that Pentecostalism could take either a positive or negative character. See D. Richard Obasuji, *The two faces of Christianity*, (Benin, Nigeria, Christian Living Publishers, 1997).

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