



Pentecostal Millenarianism and Underdevelopment in Africa

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ABSTRACT

Pentecostalism is a 20th century Christian movement characterized by aggressive evangelism and proselytism which is hinged on “holy ghost baptism”. The imminence of Christ’s return is paramount to the evangelistic favour of Pentecostalism. The baptism of the spirit is accompanied by the ability to perform ‘signs and wonders’ in the name of Jesus Christ to authenticate their evangelism. The rapid spread of this phenomenon in World Christianity has engendered debate among social scientists. There is the cultural imperialism thesis, which claims the ‘Americanization’ of the Christian religion in Africa and the World writ large. This paper extends the perspective of these debates. It contends that the capability to create health and wealth is removed from the individual and domiciled at the spiritual realm. This impacts negatively on development efforts in Africa by stifling individual and group initiatives in production. It is therefore seen as one of the structures that perpetuate underdevelopment in Africa.

INTRODUCTION

The origin of the Pentecostal movement can be traced to the 19th century charismatic revival meetings which began with a Prussian guard’s officer, Gustav Von Below in 1817. This phenomenon witnessed rapid growth across Germany and even the Atlantic Ocean during the great German migrations of the 19th century. These meetings experienced manifestations of ‘tongues and prophesy’ which made many people believe that speaking in tongues is a sign of the Holy Spirit baptism. Tongue and prophesy refer to both xenoglossia and glossolalia. Xenoglossia is the speaking of a foreign language by a person who normally has no familiarity with it. Glossolalia refers to that ecstatic speech that is meaningless to the typical listener but believed to be direct communication with God. It is perhaps the significant attention given to the manifestation of ‘tongues and prophesy’ of the

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African-American preacher, William Seymour's Asuzu street revival in 1906 9th April by the Los Angeles press that make all Pentecostal denominations trace their roots to the Asuzu street revival .

Widely found in sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and both South and North America, the growth of Pentecostalism was enhanced by the increased mobility that characterized the post World War 11 era. The emergence of the healing ministries of Oral Roberts and Jack Coe in the 1950s increased interests in Pentecostalism. When Roberts moved on to Television evangelism and the Full Gospel Businessmen Fellowship was formed in 1948 the image of the Pentecostal movement was changed and it was exported to all parts of the world.

Pentecostalism is characterized by aggressive evangelism and proselytism which is hinged on 'Holy ghost baptism'. The imminence of Christ's return is paramount to the evangelical fervour of the movement. It is the belief of Pentecostals that the baptism of the spirit is accompanied by the ability to perform 'signs and wonders' in the name of Jesus Christ to authenticate their evangelism. This is in relation to the 2nd chapter of the Acts of the Apostles in which Peter acted the prophesy contained in Joel 2,

In the last days, God says, I will pour out my spirit
On all people, your sons and daughters will prophesy,
Your young men will see visions, your old men will
dream dreams.

Pentecostalism in Africa

Just as earlier missionary activities opened up Africa for penetration by the colonialists, the incidence of increased Pentecostalism in this era of globalization should not be seen as mere coincidence. Rather Pentecostalism in Africa should be seen as one of the purveyors of globalization, the unbridled spread of capitalist socio-cultural, economic and political ideas and practices from the West to the Third World but especially Africa. It is against this backdrop that the peculiarity in the millenarianism inherent in Pentecostalism can be understood as underdevelopment. This is more so in the light of the phenomenal growth of Pentecostal fellowship in Africa. From a humble beginning in the decolonizing era of the 1950s and 1960s, it is estimated that Pentecostals represent 12% or about 107 million of Africa's nearly 890 million people. (See table 1)

Table 1: Pentecostals and Charismatics in Africa.

	1900	1970	1990	2005
Pentecostals & Charismatics (In millions)	0.9	17.0	93.7	146.3
Pentecostals & Charismatics as % of total population	0.8	4.8	15.2	16.6

Source: Pentecostalism in Africa. Pew forum .org May 6, 2009.

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Though Christianity in Africa experienced such phenomenal growth in the 1900s up to the 1970s Pentecostalism has penetrated such early Christian Churches as the Catholic and Protestant in two main ways. First, early charismatic and Pentecostal elements within these early churches broke away and formed their own revivalist churches. Examples include the Catholic charismatic renewal movement in Nigeria. Secondly, later charismatic and Pentecostal elements within these early Christian churches whose agitation for Pentecostal fervor were not seen as radically detrimental to the doctrines of the church were accommodated within these churches. Examples include the Evangelical Fellowship of the Anglican Communion (EFAC) within the Anglican church in Nigeria and the Catholic charismatic movement within the Catholic church in Nigeria. All these have led to an increase in Pentecostalism in Africa. (See table 2).

Table 2: Christianity in Africa.

	1900		1970		1990		2006	
	In Millions	As % of Total Population	In Millions	As % of Total Population	In Millions	As % of Total Population	In Millions	As % of Total Population
Christians	10	9%	144	40%	276	45%	411	46%
Catholics	2	2%	45	13%	91	15%	147	17%
Protestants, Anglicans, Independents	2	2%	53	15%	162	26%	253	29%

Source: Pentecostalism in Africa. Pewforum.org May 6,2009.

The Millenarianism in Pentecostal Movements in Africa

Being one of the various protestant denominations, Pentecostal movements share general Christian belief systems with other protestant groups. For instance Pentecostal churches are categorized as part of the holiness movement. This is because of the practice of spiritual life which is combined with social engagement as indicative of depth of religious experience. Thus in an attempt to re-enact the New Testament gifts of the Holy spirit, speaking in tongues is used as the evidence of the ‘Holy Ghost Baptism’. Other protestant denominations include

- Anglican
- Calvinist/ Reformed/ Presbyterian
- Lutheran
- Methodist
- Qualcerism
- Unitarian

It should be noted that the above is only a broad categorization. Within these categories tens of thousands of individual denominations or sects exist. The issue at stake here is, if these denominations share Christian beliefs with Pentecostals, what makes Pentecostalism more millenarian than them?

Worsley (1968) defines millenarian movements as movements
 In which the imminence of a radical and supernatural

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change in the social order is prophesied or expected
so as to lead to organization and activity, carried out
in preparation for this event, on the part of the movements
adherents (Haralambos 1983:471)

However, Haralambos specifically mentions religious movements. As he put it,

Millenarian movements are religious movements
promised that the world will be transformed suddenly
And soon (Haralambos 1983:471)

It is this expectation of the imminence of a major change in society after which all things will be transformed “positively” to suit the dreams of members of the millenarian movement that these members look forward to and prepare for. In Christian doctrine in general, the expectation of the second coming of Jesus Christ and the establishment of the kingdom of God is seen as imminent. Christians are implored to prepare for this second coming in order that they may inherit the kingdom of God. That is to say, that there is the millenarian ingredient in all Christian religious whereby a cataclysmic end is expected to destroy the wicked, unjust, corrupt and negative socio-political and economic order and enthrone a purified world in which the true believers will be rewarded.

Pitts (1976:367) identifies five traits common to millenarian movements thus;

- The members assume the knowledge of the secret of a perfect or near perfect social order
- This secret is certain to triumph over the forces of darkness defined as the devil, the antichrist, unbelievers, real and imagined enemies.
- This triumph will take place in the near future.
- The triumph will be as a result of a cataclysmic end of the forces of darkness and unbelieving members of society.
- This will invariably make the members of the movement victorious, saved, assured of positions of leadership.

Though all Christian denominations have in-built millenarian traits arising from the expectation of the imminence of the second coming of Christ and prepare in various ways for this, the quest for the miraculous delivery of health and wealth among Pentecostals particularly in Africa is overshadowing the preparation for and expectation of the second coming of Jesus Christ. This quest for the miraculous delivery of health and wealth relegates the efforts of individuals and groups in the production process to the background, while projecting the Holy spirit as the source of health and wealth and by extension societal wellbeing in general.

UNDERDEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

The concept of underdevelopment is one that has been misunderstood by policy makers, academics and governments alike. Thus in the sphere of technology for instance, it is believed that in order to develop technologically, underdeveloped countries have to “transfer technology” from the developed countries of the world. This view ignores the fact that technology has a cultural base. As Donald Light et al put it

It is a statement of fact that scientific knowledge and the attendant technological breakthrough emerge from a particular social and historical context. Flights of inspiration notwithstanding, scientific discovery is highly social achievement.

The conspicuous absence of both technological and infrastructural development in Africa and the Third World writ large is a manifestation of this underdevelopment. Underdevelopment is therefore that socio-economic and political situation in a country or other geographic entity whereby structures put in place as a result of colonialism, neocolonialism and imperialism lead to the negative manifestation of socio-economic policies in Africa while the same or similar policies promote positive growth in the West. For instance despite the high level of oil production in oil producing African countries, sixty percent of the population live below the poverty line. (See Figure 1) Underdevelopment in Africa manifests in the seeming intractability of the problem of political instability, abject poverty, corruption, overwhelming dependence on the West, ethnicity, religious intolerance and non availability of basic infrastructural facilities.

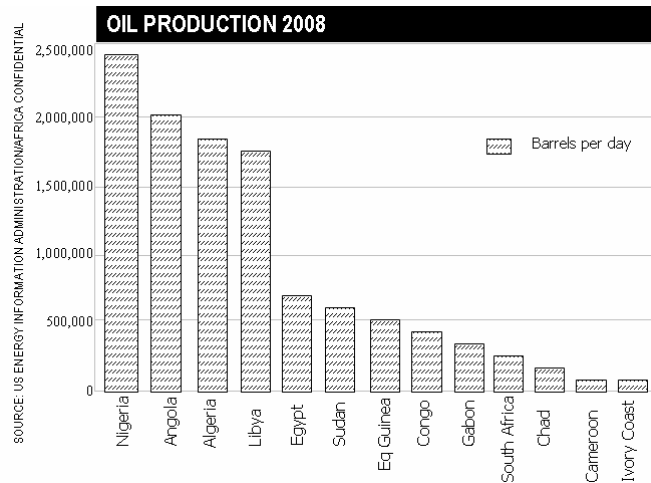


Figure 1: Oil Production in Africa (2008).

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Because Africa remains poor in the midst of abundant human and natural resources, the living conditions of the people continues to deteriorate while widespread hunger is the order of the day (Figure 2). Sanitation in African cities leaves much to be desired and the majority poor are most vulnerable. (Figure 3).

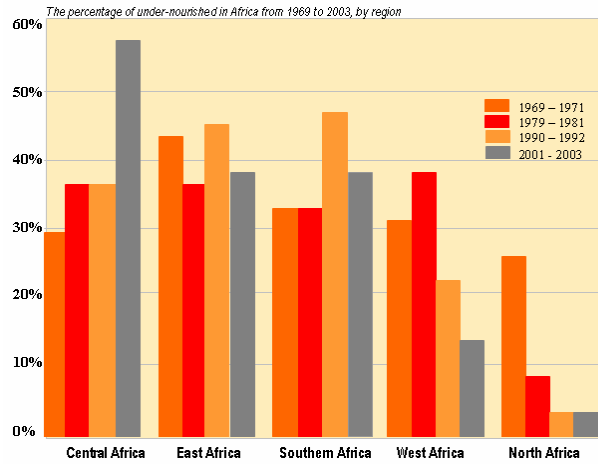


Figure 2: Hunger in Africa.

Source :BBC Focus On Africa VOL.19 NO.3 JULY – SEPT.2008.

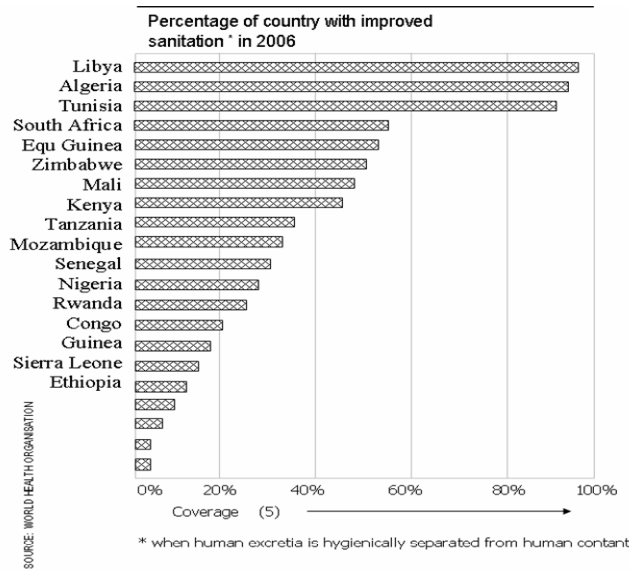


Figure 3: Sanitation across Africa.

**HOW PENTECOSTAL MILLENARIANISM UNDERDEVELOPS
AFRICA**

In order that we may understand how Pentecostal millenarianism underdevelops Africa, it is pertinent that we highlight two important points. First though Pentecostalism in Africa had an initial gradual growth, in recent times this growth has not only been tremendous, it has overwhelmed and penetrated the orthodox catholic, Anglican and other protestant denominations. The point here is that Pentecostalism has affected and influenced majority of the African population. Secondly the quest for the miraculous delivery of health and wealth has become an integral part of Pentecostal belief and theology. This quest relegates the efforts of individuals and groups in the production process to the background while projecting the impact of the Holy spirit as the source of health and wealth in human societies. This is comparable to the expectations of the Melanesian cargo cults who saw the colonial bureaucracy such as the hosting of their National flag and military parades as preparations for the miraculous delivery of goods at the seaports presumably by the Melanesian ancestors. Thus in Nigeria, South Africa and Kenya warehouses which symbolize production are turned into places of worship where Pentecostal preachers promise abundance of health and wealth through miracles.

As Sola Odunfa (2005:4) put it, the Pentecostal faith in Nigeria is a veritable goldmine, judging by the opulence of most of its pastors. It is made even more attractive because incomes of churches are tax – exempt. Nearly all the churches are the private property of their pastors /founders and their immediate families. The point being made here goes beyond the monetary gains of Pentecostal pastors. It is about the influence of these Pentecostal ideas (about the place of the individual and groups of people in the production process with the aim of creating health and wealth.) on a docile non productive society already weighed down by excessive consumerism and low productivity. It is also about establishing and institutionalizing a belief system that removes the ability to create health and wealth from the indigenous people of a geographic entity like Africa endowed with immense human and natural resources and domiciling same at the spiritual realm. Since religious beliefs, *modus operandi* and acceptability do not exist independent of the prevalent socio economic and political situation of any geographic entity, it is safe to extrapolate imaginatively that Pentecostal beliefs as described above, against the backdrop of overwhelming influence of Pentecostalism in Africa will dominate societal actions. This is because

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling Ideas... insofar as they rule as a class and determine the extent and compass of an epoch . Hence among other things rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas and regulate the production and distribution of ideas of their age; thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch (Duncan 1973:126).

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Since Pentecostal millenarianism is taking place in this era of globalization, its external links cannot be ignored. Most Pentecostal churches such as the Assemblies of God, the Apostolic Faith and the Baptist church have their international headquarters in Europe and America. The indigenous Pentecostal churches that have no such links in Europe and America identify with the Western world by inviting “popular” American or European “healing” evangelists. For instance in April 2005 American “healing” evangelist Benny Hinn was invited to Lagos, Nigeria with the promise and assurance that at least six million people will attend his “miracle explosion and business breakthrough” crusade. According to Goffe (2005:11):

Africa is being colonized and Christianized all over again. The colonizers this time are Americans not Europeans, and the brand of belief they are bringing to Africa is evangelical Christianity, a fundamentalist version of the protestant faith that many pentecostalist Baptists have allied themselves with.

It is instructive that Luis Bush, one of the leading evangelical Christians in America and cousin to former American President George Bush is of the view that

Africa is ready for faith...when a person is in that kind of need it makes them much more open to external relief and belief than if you have comfort. Poverty really opens you up to spirituality. (BBC focus on Africa vol. 16 No 3, 2005).

In “The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism” Max Weber articulated how the protestant doctrine shaped the personalities of the early European entrepreneurs which gave capitalism a distinct character and rapid growth to the European economy. The ideals of early protestant doctrine but especially Calvinism and the psychology of entrepreneurship is summarized by Broom and Selznick (1977) and couched under three categories;

- Self disciple and hard work
- Initiative and acquisition
- Individualism and competition

The salient issue here is that the Calvinist orientation advocated strict self discipline, righteous success in ones worldly endeavor through hard work and the rejection of worldly pleasures. Success in one’s work is seen as indicative of God’s favor. This helped the growth of capitalism in 18th and 19th century Europe. Broom and Selznick (1977:397) posit that

The capitalist spirit did not flow directly from the religious revolution of Luther and Calvin. But the revolution did go beyond religion to influence more general cultural attitudes towards work, poverty, individual obligation and the worth of trade and industry.

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For Pentecostalism in Africa to dwell on the actions of the holy spirit in order to receive health wealth will mean a return to practices that predate the age of enlightenment and industrial revolution in European history. The pre – enlightenment and industrial revolution era was characterized by overwhelming influence of the Church. That is why the renowned scientist, Galileo Galili (1564- 1642) was persecuted by the Catholic church and expelled from the Catholic university of Padua while his contemporary Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) was expelled from the protestant university of Tubingen for expressing scientific ideas about the positioning of the earth contrary to what the churches taught at the time. (Spybee 1992:68) These actions of the church reflect the extent of restrictiveness of the church on knowledge and secular action. The power of the church and the overwhelming influence of religious institutions pervaded European society throughout the 16th century. However in mid 17th century, perhaps as a result of the reformation in the church and secular advances in society, King Charles 11, epitomizing the state at the time, gave institutional focus for scientific advancement by chartering the Royal Society of London in 1662. In 1666 the academy of Sciences in Paris was instituted. These bold actions paved the way for what is today known as the age of enlightenment in European history. As Spybee (1992:69) put it,

It was against this changing background that Isaac Newton (1642-1772) provided an integrated framework for science that took Europe by storm...it is perhaps also significant that the German, Gottfried von Leibniz discovered calculus at approximately the same time. Newton's 'Principia Mathematica' of 1687 was central to the development of the physical sciences, as Charles Darwin's 'The origin of species' of 1859 was to the natural sciences..., in the field of social and political ideas, Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-78) reflected during this period on the origins of society and its governments, particularly in terms of the relationships between the individual and the collective.

The above illustrates the distinction between the enabling and constraining characteristics of secular and religious institutions. The scientific discoveries catalogued above cannot be divorced from the socio economic and political conditions which gave rise to the Industrial revolution and American Declaration of Independence in 1776 and the French Revolution beginning in 1789. In Nigeria, Capitalism has failed to advance beyond the mercantile (buying and selling)stage. Production which characterized the industrial stage of capitalism has been neglected as a result of the entrenchment of a culture of consumerism in Nigeria. It is this culture of consumerism that is orchestrated by Pentecostalism in the form of miraculous delivery of health and wealth. It is against this backdrop that this paper opines that apart from eroding African values and belief systems, Pentecostal millenarianism has had the tripartite effect of restricting the export and reducing the value of

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African goods and services, imposing Western values, goods and services on Africa and perpetuating the super ordinate / sub ordinate relationship between the West and Africa. It should be stressed here that although Engels, expressing a Marxian viewpoint sees millenarianism as an awakening of 'proletarian self consciousness', an attempt by oppressed groups to change the world and remove their oppression here and now rather than in the after life and Worsley opines that millenarian movements represent a fore runner of political awareness and organization (Haralambos 1983) The activities of the present day Pentecostal movements in Africa seem to depict Marx's assertion that

Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the hearth
of the heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless
situation. It is the opium of the people. (Broom and Selznick 1977:398).

In order to check these negative influences of Pentecostal millenarianism, this paper suggests that African governments undertake overhaul of their educational system to reflect the realities of the continents relationships with other parts of the World. This paper specifically suggests a pedagogy of the oppressed. This is supposed to engender true political consciousness among Africans but especially the productive population. This will make them more discerning in their choice of a life style, belief systems and encourage prudent use of their time and other economic resources. It will also teach them that man must produce in order to provide himself, the basic necessities of health and wealth. This knowledge and practical reorientation is most needed in this era of globalization when ideas, belief systems, lifestyles are imposed on people through improved communication network.

CONCLUSION

An attempt has been made here to assess the impact of Pentecostal millenarianism on Africa. From Africa's disadvantaged socio-economic and political position it is argued that Pentecostal millenarianism is a form or source of underdevelopment in Africa since it opens Africa up to foreign ideas, goods and services that tend to institutionalize Africa's dependence on the West. Worse still, it discourages hard work, personal and group initiatives in production by giving the erroneous impression that the Holy spirit delivers health and wealth to people.

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