

The *Africanness* of African Pentecostal Christianity in Nigerian Context

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Abstract

The ministry of the Church is classified into three categories: The ministry to God, Church and the world. The center of the church ministry to the world is to evangelise the world. This is the heartbeat of Christ's recommended mission for the church to the world. The necessity and the urgency of this great mission make the Church to be conscious of evangelizing the world intelligibly and yet remain faithful to the Scripture. However, due to the fact that Africa is made up of diverse cultures, many Pentecostals are finding it difficult to bring the word of God to the Africans without compromising the authentic teaching of the word of God. The study observed that in the quest of bringing the Word of God to the several cultures in Africa in African ways, by using African languages, images, and ideas, many of the Pentecostals are compromising the authentic teaching of Christ as they are using these African elements inappropriately. In addition, the *Africanness* of some of these Pentecostals does not portray the uniqueness of Christianity as many Africans could not differentiate between Christianity and their former religions. This is making it difficult for some of Africans to understand and accept the gospel of Christ. The effects of the colonization of the Africans by the West is not helping matter either as many Africans are interpreting the westernization of Christianity as continuation of African colonization and a means of making the Africans lose their cherished identity. The attempt to recover African religious heritage by relating Christianity to the Africans in their religious context without compromising the authentic gospel of Christ with reference to the *Africanness* of the Pentecostals, informed this study. It is therefore appropriate for the Pentecostals in Africa to insist on authentic teaching of the word of God, organizing educative seminars for the church leaders, and timely correction of the erring members. Doing this will go a long way in helping the Pentecostals to proclaim the gospel of Christ to the Africans in African ways without compromising the gospel of Christ in Africa.

Keywords: Africanness, Pentecostals, Contextualisation, Westernization, Christianity.

Introduction

Most of the Africans who were converted to Christianity were wrongly made to feel that they needed to become more like Westerners in order to be good Christians by Western missionaries who brought Christianity to the continent. Consequently, the Western missionaries succeeded in westernising the Africans instead of Christianising them. This eroded some African ways of life and replaced with the Western worldview. This westernization of the Africans has continued to make some Africans to reject the gospel for they see it as a weapon being used by the Westerners to destroy the valuable African

culture, hence the misinterpretation and rejection of the gospel Christ. It is therefore a concern of modern Christians in Africa to make the gospel of Christ relevant to the Africans without distorting its truth.

The Nigerian Christians are not left out in this struggle. The Nigeria Christian Association, the apex of all Nigerian followers of Christ, is made up of five blocs. They are: Christian Council of Nigeria, (CCN), Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), Christian Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (CPFN) or Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC), TEKAN and ECWA Fellowship. All these five blocs have great concern for the evangelization of the Nigerians. However, out of these five blocs, the Pentecostals are often considered a renewal movement in the Christian Church that is always of great concern of making the gospel of Christ relevant to the Africans through effective contextualization of the message of Christ (Ozodo, 2017).

The Pentecostals are also known as the charismatic movement because they argue that the remarkable spiritual talents that are mentioned in Acts chapter 2 and I Corinthians 12–14 should be recovered and put into practice (Greek: *charismata*). From a small number of people, the Pentecostals have grown into billions in the world today.

The movement is seen as a "third power" in Christendom, standing alongside Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, and ECWA Fellowship. Practically, it seems that in all churches, Pentecostalism is present. Many churches were built on Pentecostal principles and were established to carry out Pentecostal practices. These churches tend to be large and expanding. Other churches, however, support Pentecostalism and welcome it into their community. It is challenging to identify a church denomination that has resisted the Pentecostal movement due to its immense popularity and influence.

The Origin and Spread of Pentecostalism

The term Pentecostal is derived from the Greek word *pentekosté*, which literally means 'fifty'. It is the Greek name for the Jewish festival known as the 'Feast of Weeks' in the Old Testament, which celebrates the fiftieth day after Passover observances. The New Testament

used the term to refer to the established Jewish feast. However, since the gift of the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), Christians re-interpreted

the meaning of it in terms of this event (Rylaarsdam, 1982). Pentecostalism is therefore a form of Christianity that emphasises the work of the Holy Spirit and the direct experience of the presence of God by the believer. The Pentecostal movement's history is fascinating, instructive, and crucial in deciding whether the movement is inspired by God. Many academics believe that the incident in Acts 2—when the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles—is what gave rise to the Pentecostals. According to many who hold this opinion, the foundation of Pentecostalism lies in a crucial moment in the history of the early Christians: the Holy Spirit's baptizing of the twelve disciples on the day of Pentecost. Most

Pentecostals believe that their movement is bringing Christianity back to a straightforward form that shares many similarities with the very beginning of the Christian church.

However, some people think that the Azusa incident may have given rise to the Pentecostal movement as we know it today. According to these academics, the Pentecostal movement was conceived on January 1st, 1900, at Bethel Bible College in Topeka, Kansas, and was birthed on Azusa Street in Los Angeles, California, in 1906. This is referred to as the "second Pentecost" in Pentecostal settings (Hyatt, 2006).

The movement's roots can also be traced back to the Wesleyan Holiness tradition of the 18th century, the Holiness movement of the 19th century, and the late Victorian Keswick Higher Life movement, even though its foundation is typically credited to the American Azusa Street revival in the first decade of the 20th century. The Wesleyan Holiness movement, in their eyes, was a response to the formality and ritualism of the time's established Christian churches (Fahy, 1998).

In a nutshell, one could argue that the modern Pentecostal movement had its beginnings in the late 19th century, a time of growing apathy toward established religion, even if Pentecostals trace their lineage to the Apostles. Religions with a reputation for fervor became more restrained. Passionate congregational singing, spontaneous testimonies, unified prayer, and extemporaneous sermons on straightforward biblical themes delivered by lay preachers were emotional forms of religious expression that gave way to formal, ordered worship services led by "reverends," or ministers with training in homiletics (preaching skills), who were influenced by higher biblical criticism. Camp meetings and simple wooden-frame tabernacles were replaced by lecture halls and opulent churches.

Many Pentecostals consider their revival to be a sign of the End Times and, thus, a summons to save the world before Christ's Second Coming (Kunyahop, 2012). This belief is inspired by Acts of the Apostles 2:1-13, which speaks of God pouring forth his Spirit in the final days. Pentecostals hold that speaking in tongues aids in the conversion of the world's population, much as the Apostles did when they spoke to people from all nations on the first Pentecost. As a result, Pentecostalism quickly evolved into a global missionary movement. Minority populations in North America saw the movement's initial expansion before it swiftly migrated to Europe. A significant Spanish-speaking church movement emerged in Mexico and the southwest of the United States thanks to Latino participants in the Azusa Street revival. Later, Pentecostalism extends to the rest of Latin America, where it rose to prominence in the second half of the 20th century and into the beginning of the 21st (Stanley and Gary, 1988).

When Pentecostal missionaries arrived in South Africa in 1907, they settled in the mission started by members of the Christian Catholic church, an American denomination that placed a strong emphasis on healing. Missionaries from the Assemblies of God joined them in 1914. Following World War II, the African Independent church movement emerged, and Pentecostalism spread throughout sub-Saharan Africa on a large scale. Despite the difficulty in obtaining statistics on Pentecostalism, it has been noted that the movement has spread worldwide.

One could conclude from the beginning and growth of Pentecostalism that it is a movement made up of many separate churches rather than a single church, and that the Pentecost event is primarily responsible for its foundation. Additionally, it is a revival or renewal movement within other denominations. Due to the fact that many Pentecostal denominations do not use the word "Pentecostal" in their names, it is not always simple to determine whether a church is Pentecostal.

The Beliefs and Features of the Pentecostals

Bible as the Authoritative Word of God

Pentecostals base their theology on the text of the Bible, which they believe to be the word of God and completely infallible, despite the fact that it is frequently said that the movement is more grounded on experience than theology.

Sanctification

A person is sanctified when they dedicate their lives to God and cut themselves off from their previous sinful lives. When a person is sanctified, they are born again into a relationship with Christ via the power of the Holy Spirit and turn away from the negative traits and ideas of their former life. Some faiths refer to this idea as holiness as well. Whatever it is called, it is crucial to leading a Christian life.

Water Baptism

Pentecostal churches practice immersion baptism in accordance with the Bible. Pentecostals view water baptism as an external sign of an already-completed conversion. The water baptism is just one component; conversion is what's most important. Pentecostal congregations do not practice infant baptism.

Baptism in the Holy Spirit

Most frequently, the gift of tongues is thought to accompany the baptism with the Holy Spirit. This "speaking in tongues" manifests as xenoglossy or glossolalia (talking in an unfamiliar language) (speech in a language known to others but not the speaker). Speaking in tongues is regarded as one of the spiritual gifts of the Spirit as described by St. Paul the Apostle (1 Corinthians 12), and Pentecostals believe that those baptized by the Holy Spirit may receive additional supernatural gifts that are said to have existed in the early church, such as the capacity to prophesy, heal, interpret speaking in tongues, receive dreams, visions, and words of wisdom, work miracles, and even raise the dead.

Pentecostalism revolves around the Holy Spirit Baptism. A person must already be converted in order to receive baptism in the Spirit; it is not a conversion event. Pentecostals consider the Spirit's baptism to be a crucial component of salvation. This is often the second baptism that comes after the first water baptism, though certain biblical verses reverse this order.

Speaking in Tongues

Speaking "as the Spirit gives speech" or "in tongues" refers to speaking miraculously in a language that the speaker is not familiar with. On the day of Pentecost, the disciples experienced it for the first time. Speaking in tongues might be a sign of the Holy Spirit's baptism or a manifestation of the tongues gift.

Miracles

Pentecostals believe that God can and does work miracles today.

Sacraments

Anything that could be interpreted as sacramentalism is typically avoided in Pentecostal churches. They do, of course, practice rituals and procedures that other faiths regard as sacraments, such as communion and water baptism, but Pentecostals refer to these as ceremonies or ordinances. Ordinances and sacraments are outward symbols of inward truths.

Prayer Cloths

Prayer cloths are tiny cloths, similar to handkerchiefs, used for healing and Acts 19:11–12 serves as the foundation for the custom. The sick person may bring the cloth close to the injured area of their body after the healer has prayed over it. The idea is that the sick person receives the prayers and heavenly healing power through the cloth.

Tithing

Many Pentecostals tithe 10% of their income directly to their church.

Pentecostalism in Nigeria

The 1970s saw the emergence of Nigerian Pentecostalism as charismatic, college-educated young started building their own houses of worship. Its origins can be found in the 1960s American and British Evangelical and Pentecostal churches, as well as in African Initiated Churches (such the Aladura), which Nigerians were exposed to through international education, Pentecostal outreach, American televangelism, and other Christian media. Thus, Nigerian Pentecostalism blends aspects of African worship while highlighting its position among international Pentecostal networks that have evolved as a result of both active immigration and conversion. Nigerian churches were largely "charismatized" as a result of the popularity of the Pentecostal movement there, which by the late 1970s had gained a significant following among Christians in the upper middle class.

Pentecostals start participating in the Christian Association of Nigeria in the 1980s. The Association was established in 1976 and at first only included Catholics and mainline Protestants; but, by 1988, it had also included churches affiliated with the Organization of African Instituted Churches and the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria.

The Africanness of the Pentecostals in Nigeria

Some of the African elements incorporated into the Pentecostals in Nigeria include the following:

Music, Drum and Dance

In Africa, singing is commonplace. They use songs for worship, naming rituals, weddings, funerals, wrestling, work, thanking the rulers, rocking infants to sleep, and a variety of other activities. Their songs are deeply rooted in their religious beliefs. However, gospel music, which was primarily translations of Western Christian hymns, began with the spread of Christianity into Yoruba country. The primary flaw in early Christian hymns is that they were not written to take into account the tonal characteristics of the Yoruba language (Dada, 2010).

Since the Pentecostals arrived in Nigeria, congregants are now permitted to sing traditional music, play drums, and dance during services. People are racing to attend Pentecostal churches' services as a result, giving them a chance to convert more people than mission churches (Odejebi, 2014). African music, drumming, and dance are increasingly frequently included in worship services at mission churches throughout Africa. The result of this innovation is that the worship in these churches is more vibrant and helps people enter supra-rational realms.

Use of Indigenous Language in Worship

How to share the gospel with Africans in their own language was one of the biggest challenges facing the Western missionaries.

As correctly noted by Hashimi (2009), the missionary approach to education was largely based on the English model. Many Africans at the time did not have access to formal education, which made the situation worse. This complicated communication and delayed the speedy evangelism of Africa that the missionaries had envisioned. Indigenous languages are frequently employed as a means of communication for Pentecostals in Nigeria. This has greatly aided in spreading to the worshipers the profound message of Christ. The growth of African literature and the Bible's translation into the native tongues allowed the converts to read the Bible well. and to also produce their own hymns and sermons.

Use of African Religious Healing Methods

Africans' conversion to Christianity was slowed down by the western missionaries' failure to present Christ as the Healer of Body and Soul. The focus on Christ as the atoning sacrifice for sins overshadowed His ability to deliver people from the oppression, disease, and affliction that are a fact of life in Africa. This imbalanced presentation of the gospel may have been impacted by the accessibility of hospitals, prosperous economies, high levels of education, and technological advances in western countries. African elements like palm leaves, water, herbs, oil, and many other items are believed to be used for healing by those

who practice religion. Africans were forced to rely on medicine men and herbalists for their medical care due to a lack of hospitals and money for hospital costs.

There is a great deal of faith in the healing powers of items like herbs, water, oil, and palm leaves, among others. To the surprise of Africans, the majority of Pentecostals in Nigeria also employ handkerchiefs, water, and olive oil among other things for healing (Atansuyi, 2015). This has enabled Africans accept the gospel of Christ and experience the healing power of Christ visibly at the same time.

The Role of Women in Worship

"*Olodumare*" established the necessity of men and women cooperating for overall success in life. This may have served as the model for the status and roles of women in Yoruba religion (Olademo, 2014). According to Akintan (2008), traditional African women are educated, vibrant, vocal, determined, bold, and endowed with the responsibility of bringing about change. They play crucial roles in the social, economic, and health growth of their communities. African religion gives some leadership responsibilities in worship to women in acknowledgement of the value of women in society. The role of a professional priestess is one of these roles.

Typically, they go by the names *Olorisha* or *Yeyerisha*. She is capable of taking on significant male roles. She also translates the gods' messages for the worshipers (Quarcoopome, 1987). The Pentecostals in Africa, especially in Nigeria, have been successful in bringing many African women into the Church thanks to their attitude of recognizing women in places of worship. There are numerous women who started churches today. The Pentecostal churches, according to the talented women, are one setting where they can make good use of their spiritual gifts (Atansuyi, 2015).

The Implications of the Africanness of the Pentecostals in Nigeria

Given that there are over 600 million Christians in the globe; one would anticipate that their combined influence would be significant in a variety of fields. The Pentecostals in Nigeria's Africanness have had a significant impact on both Christianity and Nigerians in general. The following are some areas where Pentecostals have significantly influenced Christianity in Nigeria:

Baptism of the Holy Spirit

Through the focus on the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the gospel has switched from the Christian's indescribable experience of God and power for ministry, especially in the evangelism of Nigerians, to their indescribable experience of God and power for ministry.

Worship

The Pentecostals' emphasis on praise and worship is one of their greatest contributions to Africa. The Pentecostals' Africanness has fundamentally remade and altered the church's public worship, making it always livelier (Calvin, 2005). The core of the service is no longer

the unadulterated preaching of the right theology of Scripture and the correct delivery of the sacraments. The key things are instead the congregation's jubilant worship and the use of diverse gifts while under the influence of a roving Spirit. This makes church services more engaging and less dull, which is especially pleasing to the majority of Nigerian youngsters.

Unity

Africanness of the Pentecostalism has promoted unity among the believers in Nigeria. That the Pentecostals are parts of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) is living evidence. It is truly a trans-denominational, trans-confessional movement. Members of virtually all churches,

Adaptation to Various Cultures and Traditions

The Africanness of the Pentecostals in Africa Christianity has demonstrated a unique ability to adapt itself to diverse cultural and religious traditions. Instead of rejecting a culture's traditional belief in the existence or power of spirits, Pentecostals in Africa particularly in Nigeria demonize those spirits as entirely evil. The Pentecostal worldview divides the world into good and evil, those who follow God and those who follow the devil. By presenting the Holy Spirit as a good and more powerful spirit, Nigerian Pentecostals allows its adherents to maintain their indigenous spiritual cosmology and even ritual engagement with traditional spirits through Christian spiritual warfare and exorcism. Africans' belief in the invisible spirit world has been fundamental to the phenomenal growth of Pentecostalism in Nigeria and Africa in general. Perceiving the world as a constant struggle between physical and spiritual forces, Nigerian and African Pentecostals have succeeded in emphasizing the critical role of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the Africans.

Promotion of Modernity

In Nigeria, the Pentecostals support contemporary ideals including individuality, capitalism, and gender equality. They learn that they should treat their spouses more lovingly and abstain from infidelity. They also learn that each person—not a family or tribe—is accountable for his or her salvation. They pray to God that He may help them find employment in a new capitalist labor market. Pentecostals in Nigeria have taken the initiative to modernize the movement by absorbing ideas from the contemporary, worldwide spiritual community.

Appeal to Lay People and Women

The egalitarian character of Nigerian Pentecostalism is very appealing to many African ordinary Christians, especially women and the illiterate, who were historically underrepresented in church leadership. A person with spiritual talents, not a religious hierarchy, is where religious authority should rest, according to Pentecostal theology, which places little weight on formal ordination or theological training. This fundamental

idea creates a wealth of chances for laypeople and women to work in the church as preachers, evangelists, and healers.

Innovation

Nigerian Pentecostals are well known for their extensive use of mass media, open-air crusades featuring popular evangelists, electronic musical instruments for worship. Many Pentecostal churches in Nigeria have their own Television and YouTube channel as well as broadcasting studio to stream live music in public places. The spontaneous, experiential, and exuberant elements of Pentecostal worship offer liturgical alternatives compatible with African religiosity.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The impact of the Pentecostals in Nigeria through its Africanness and contextualization of the gospel is an affirmation that the Pentecostal Churches have pointed the way to adaptation of Christian worship to suit the African world view. Africanness of the Church has helped the Africans to discover her seemingly lost identity and to also serve as the bridge between the traditional religion, culture and the Christian faith. The rates at which people are trooping into the church could be attributed to the liturgy of the Church which adopts some African elements. However, incorporating African elements to Christianity with the aim of evangelizing the Africans without caution can cause serious damage to the great commission and promote religious syncretism, immorality and heresies among the Christians in Africa. To avoid this, the following are hereby recommended:

- African characteristics must be prayerfully and consciously incorporated into the Pentecostals' activities and beliefs in order to Africanize Christianity effectively. If this is not done, the ancient religious traditions would continue to be upheld rather than the word of God.
- Upholding the standard of the scripture among the Pentecostals is essential in fulfilling the great commission and leading Africans to Christ through the gospel. Where the word of God and culture come into conflict, the word of God must prevail
- Pentecostal churches in Africa should frown at religious syncretism as the body of Christ continues in her pursuit to bring the gospel of Christ to all Africans. Africanizing Christianity should not allow for any form of religious syncretism. It is not surprising that many traditional worshippers accepted Jesus Christ into their lives during the early years of Pentecostalism in Nigeria and Africa in general because of the encounter they had with Jesus Christ that the Pentecostals proclaimed to them without compromising the standard of the Bible. This is where the observation of Bidoli (2017) is relevant that Christians need to evaluate any culture based on the biblical teaching, any culture that her view is against the word of God, then such culture should not be accepted nor the truth of the gospel compromised for the sake of that culture. Therefore, modern Pentecostals should avoid unintentionally contextualizing the gospel in order to foster religious syncretism.

- With the gospel being contextualized to meet the needs of Africans, it is advised that Pentecostal ministers receive sound theological training. It is also advised that ministers who are commercializing the gospel by using the spiritual gifts to turn their churches into dens of robbers, exploit, and cheat their members be rebuked.
- Finally, preachers, missionaries, and teachers of the gospel need to make sure that the gospel is effectively preached throughout Nigeria and Africa at large while maintaining the integrity of the message. Only by doing this will the body of Christ be able to fulfill the great commission while also making Christianity appealing to Africans.

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