

PENTECOSTALISM: AN INSTRUMENT OF RESILIENCE IN A CHANGING WORLD

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Abstract

The most significant religious movement in the 21st century has been Pentecostalism. This vision emanated from the impersonal nature of the urban society that was fast emerging in the late 18th century. The relationship in the society was changing and it was difficult to reaccept the original sense of communalism. In this context, a vision where God was the centre of living and the great provider for all, leading all to experience the universal harmony in creation, restoring to the disinherited their rights, liberating them from the tentacles of the faceless oppressive society was a welcomed good news which provided an environment for the explosion of the Pentecostal movement. In the light of this, this article discusses Pentecost, Pentecostalism and the Holy Spirit conceptually and explains some of the strength and impacts of Pentecostalism in Nigeria contemporary society. The work also reviews some literature based on the explosion of Pentecostalism in Nigeria. This study therefore, is an attempt to bring to the fore, Pentecostalism as an instrument of resilience in the changing world in the aspect of evangelism, poverty alleviation, and empowerment programmes organized for their members. The article also brings to limelight, some of the teachings, preaching and doctrines that serve as resilience to their members in the changing world, i.e. the holy bible, spirituality and prayer, liturgy worship, ecclesial consciousness, and believe in the Holy Spirit. Using participant observation, this work concludes that Pentecostalism, through their teaching, preaching and doctrine have been able to serve as instrument of resilience to the Christians in the face of challenges like, insecurity, oppression, assault, health challenges, poverty and suffering, etc. This paper therefore, recommends that Pentecostal churches should do more to help their members in this turbulent and trying times. Moreso, the work also recommends that there should be an organizational model and a culture of authority among the Pentecostal Churches.

Keyword: *Pentecostalism, instrument, resilience, changing, world*

Introduction

In an era defined by rapid globalization, social fragmentation, economic meltdown, recession, insecurity, oppression and existential uncertainty, the explosive growth of Pentecostalism is one of the most significant religious movement standing tall as an instrument of resilience at this time. Far from being a retreat from modernity, Pentecostalism can be understood as a powerful and highly adaptive instrument of resilience, providing individuals and communities with the spiritual, social and psychological tools not to only endure change but to navigate and thrive within it, through their teachings, belief and doctrines. Since the 1970s there have been new developments in African Christianity – Ogbukalu (2000).

Charismatic revivals from within mainline churches soon fed into Pentecostal forms as young Christians emerged from the mainline, churches and formed current day Pentecostal ministries and churches. These churches all over Africa have their roots in the mainline churches. Asamoah-Gyandu (2000). These churches gained prominence in the 1990s. their emergence and proliferation is attributed to a reaction to the bureaucratization of the mainline churches and their subsequent lethargy. They are also linked to the legitimacy, economic and social-political crisis in Africa since the 1980s Gyandu (2000). Pentecostal churches identify with the central act of conversion in which individual consecrates his or her life to Christ, atones for past sins and becomes “born again” or “saved” Ruth Marshall (1995).

According to Gyandu (1998), since the 1990, the Pentecostal churches have become the fastest growing churches in Africa. He explained that the Pentecostal churches have challenged the historic churches and old African Independent Churches to reinvent themselves to become more relevant and in tune with the spiritual needs of their flocks Gyandu (1998).

These churches often function as surrogate kinship networks. Members call each other “brother” and “sister”, and the church provides material support such as food, jobs, childcare, emotional comfort and a strong sense of belonging. Similarly, belief in miracles, divine healing and prophecy make the supernatural immanent and practical. For instance, a person struggling with illness, unemployment, or family strife, the belief that God can and will intervene directly transforms situation of despair into one of hope and potential victory.

In the same vein, these churches have given rooms and opportunity to exhibit their potential, women to operate as leaders in their own capacity. This is due to the Pentecostal theology that provides avenues for charismatic gifting regardless of gender. To some extent their attitudes towards women's leadership has been positive. Gyandu (1998) It is also noteworthy that the explosion of Pentecostalism introduced into Nigeria's spirituality has awakened across board a tremendous desire for a kind of "primal spirituality" in the country.

Meanwhile, this has helped the disinherited people and the oppressed of the land and the strangers in the common household of God have sought a means of getting themselves free from the shackles and shame of being prisoner in one's house and slave in the father's house Isichel (1989). It is in the light of this that this work is carried out to explore Pentecostalism; as an instrument of resilience in a changing and perverse world.

Conceptual Clarifications

There are some terms that need clarification in this article. This aspect of the work will be dedicated to that. These are Pentecost, Pentecostalism and the Holy Spirit.

Pentecost

Pentecost, meaning 50 (fifty), is the Greek name for the Old Testament feast of weeks, since this festival occurred on the 50th day (seven weeks) after Passover. Along with the three annual pilgrimage feast for the Jews. A harvest festival, it marked the beginning of the time when the people brought their offerings of first fruits. This can also be referred to as the feast of ingathering and Day of First fruits Donatus (2008). Considering the above perspective, one could consider Pentecost as a commemoration of a religious consciousness of a people, a celebration of the saving presence of God as a giver of the fruits of the land and to whom belong the primal fruits. From the Old Testament tradition, Pentecost is peculiarly a feast of the "in-gathering", that is the gathering together of human beings, who recognize Yahweh as the Giver of the fruits of the earth – John (2008).

John (2008) maintains that in Judaism, the feast received a historic motif, it became the anniversary of the giving of the law of Moses. This Motif does not certainly appear until after the beginning of the Christian era. According to him, the feast therefore points to two religious experiences in the Jewish religion, namely: the covenant, and the giving of law of Moses. God gave the people of

Israel the rules of living, offering them a unique identity among the people of the earth. In the Old Testament therefore, Pentecost pointed to the recognition of God by the people, which manifested in their communal act of worship.

In the New Testament, the event of Pentecost assumed a new dimension. “The feast of Pentecost commemorated in the church as the day on which the Holy Spirit descended (Acts 2) is fulfilment of the promise of Jesus, this is traditionally recognized as the birth of the church as an institution. John (2008). The feast of Pentecost became a providential moment for the in-gathering of the people of God. The experience of the early Christians on the day Pentecost constitutes a foundational and perennial principle of the Christian faith.

The crux of this encounter according to the Acts of the Apostles is the descent of the Holy Spirit on the disciples, the discourse of Peter and the formation of the first Christian community. Therefore, these could be considered as a tripod of the church: the Holy Spirit, the proclamation and the community. The feast of Pentecost is to be seen in this context and as such it provides an indelible identity of the church. It is the power and enthusiasm that were manifested by the early Christians during and after the feast of Pentecost that have been awakened in the phenomenon of Pentecostalism in the contemporary era. J.D.G. Dunn (2008).

Pentecostalism

Pentecostalism is the most significant religious movement in the twentieth century John (1995). Pentecostal churches are growing three times faster than Protestantism as a whole, particularly in Africa, and also in Latin America where it is the largest protestant denomination. The principal Pentecostal distinctive is speaking in “tongues” – a language other than one known to the speaker, called glossolalia – which Pentecostals believe is an outward evidence of an inward experience of being “baptized in the spirit”. Pentecostals are called Pentecostals because the first visible sign of the spirit-speaking in tongue came on Pentecost in AD 30 John (1993). In Pentecostalism, religious “experience” is more important than theology. Schewarz (1995). The biblical background of the contemporary phenomenon of Pentecostalism is commonly situated in the religious feast of the Jewish people marking or celebrating 50 days after the Passover. This Old Testament “agricultural” celebration marks the beginning and offer a foundational set up and terminology for the overwhelming religious conviction in the hearts of the earliest followers of Jesus of Nazareth.

This unique experience exercises a permanent influence on the nascent Christian church, her spirituality and ministry Donatus (2008).

The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the third person in God head – thus a “person” and the third person in trinity. God the father, son and the Holy Spirit Wilbur (1992). When we write about the Holy Spirit, we refer to Pentecostalism, hence, these are churches who believe in the gifts of the spirit but are not insistent on speaking in tongue as the only evidence of the spirit.

It is clear that it is primarily the Holy Spirit who is at work in the church and in individual Christian today. Jesus said when he (the Holy Spirit) comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment (John 16:8). From this verse, it is clear that it is the Holy Spirit who persuades people about their sin. The Holy Spirit is present all over the world, at all times and no one can hide from him. Wilbur (1992) depicts that, if it were not for the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in the world today, life in this world would be unbearable. The Holy Spirit restrains much of the evil that people would like to do. It is clear that the Holy Spirit does not restrain all evil from taking place. The world still has much crime and violence. However, if the Holy Spirit were to suddenly stop his restraining work, the world would become almost unbearable.

According to Wilbur (1992), the Holy Spirit uses different ways to restrain evil in the world. Sometimes he uses the government, the laws and police. He also uses the holy angels of God in response to the prayers of Christians. Probably the most general way in which the Holy Spirit restrains evil in the world is by speaking to people’s hearts about right and wrong, and convicting them to guilt for doing wrong.

In all, it can be deduced that, since these churches believe in Holy Spirit and as well teach and instill in their members the place of the Holy Spirit in their lives, these have helped the Christians in so many ways by serving as instrument of resilience to overcome in the changing world.

Literature Review

Historical Background of Pentecostalism in Nigeria

Pentecostalism developed from the religious and political scenario of the country between 1950 and 1970. The historical context of these decades is very vital for and indepth understanding of what can be termed as “the Nigerian Spirit and hazard”.

The goal of self-affirmation and actualization was glaringly evident in the projects of the nationalists, seeking liberation from the churches of the European imperialism. This spirit of nationhood and self-affirmation swept over everything that was western in origin and configuration but only exteriorly without touching the reality of the things in themselves. Mbeto (2008), in spite of the optimism generated by this spirit, there was an undeniable attraction for the western system and, perhaps a kind of childish longing for the “white man’s apple”. This longing and attraction has remained a constant hazard in African culture generally. Mbeto (2008), from the spirit of this epoch, any situation that was wholeheartedly in conformity with the pre-colonial status quo, that fostered self-consciousness and identification was accepted. To this end anything that offered more practical solutions or gave impetus for the realization and actualization of the desire for liberation was a welcome phenomenon in Nigeria.

Pentecostalism surface within this context and it was intertwined with this spirit religiously. Mbeto (2008) observes that there was dissatisfaction among members of the missionary churches in the country.

According to Mbeto (2008), “this general dissatisfaction opened door for new religious forms among members of the mainline churches in particular and the general populace at large. The desire for a religious experience will become a constant hazard in the country, compelling people to constantly change their ecclesial affiliation based on their current and prevailing religious feelings.

When the influenza epidemic broke out the same year, the group saved many affected with prayers. This consolidated the formation of the prayer group, which was named precious stone and later the “Diamond Society” Ogunmola (2012).

By 1920, the Diamond Society had grown tremendously with branches around the Western Region of Nigeria. It emphasized divine healing, holiness and complete dependence on God, Ogunmola (2012). The Oke Ooye, Ilesha revival sparked off Pentecostalism in Nigeria. The late Apostle Ayo Babalola performed several miracles that culminated in the formation of the Christ Apostolic Church. Meanwhile, many mainline churches such as Anglican Communion, Methodist Church, Baptist Convention and others were witnessing similar internal dissensions. Many Africans were denied Holy and disallowed from church workforce on allegations of being polygamous pushed to the wall, many of the pulled out and formed the own churches.

It all started in 1918 in Ijebu-Ode when the first Aladura movement was founded Sunday Ogunmola (2012) According to Sunday Ogunmola (2012) a School Teacher, Sophia Odunlami, and a gold-smith, Joseph Sadare, were behind it. The duo, members of St. Saviour's Anglican Church, rejected infant baptism and all forms of western and traditional medicine.

They initiated the "prayer group and band" popularly called Egbe Aladura Sadare was compelled to give up his post in the Synod and others were forced to resign their jobs and withdrawn their children from the Anglican School. The Aladura began as a renewal movement in search of true spirituality.

Other indigenous churches sprang up such as the Celestial Church of Christ (CCC) founded by the late Prophet Samuel Oshoffa and the Cherubim and Seraphime Movement led by the late Prophet Moses Orimolade. Both spiritual churches, however, witnessed different Schism that led to different factions based on personal and doctrinal crises.

Ogunmola (2012) explains that, in 1930, a certain Joseph Akindayomi joined the Cherubim and Seraphim Church. By 1947, he started to become concerned that the church was departing from the true word of God in some of its practices. By 1952, he felt totally persuaded to leave the church. He started a house fellowship at Willoughby street, Ebute Metta, christened the Glory of God Fellowship. Initially, there were nine members, but before long the fellowship rapidly grew as the news of the miracles that occurred in their midst spread. In a vision, late Akindayomi saw The Redeemed Christian Church of God written on a blackboard. Thus began the RCCG, the world's largest growing Pentecostal church in 1952.

Ogunmola (2012), added that, somewhere in Benin City a sickly child was born and christened Benson Idahosa. He was converted to Christianity and began conducting outreaches from village to village. Renowned for his vibrant faith and power ministration, Idahosa rose to become the first Pentecostal Archbishop in Africa.

He broke new grounds, aggressively converting many from animism. The founder of the Church of God Mission International is acknowledged as the father of Pentecostalism in Africa, raising such prominent preachers like Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor, Bishop David Oyedepo, Pastor Chris Oyakhilome and Bishop Fred Addo, among several others. Through him, charismatic Pentecostalism became a force to reckon with in Nigeria. Today, there are thousands of independent charismatic churches across the length and breadth of the nation.

Pentecostalism as an Instrument of resilience in a changing world

Pentecostalism is seen as an instrument of resilience in a changing world based on the following:

1. **Evangelism:** According to the president of International Church Growth Ministries, Dr. Francis Akin-John, Pentecostal churches have aggressive evangelical zeal going for them. “They are fearless and fiercely committed to taking the gospel to hitherto unreached parts of the world. That is why the Nigerian churches are spearheading missionary efforts everywhere in the world” Ogunmola (2012). Fracins is of the notion that this evangelical zeal is why it is so easy for Pentecostal churches to start branches everywhere in the world, regardless of the most stringent conditions. Through rigorous evangelism these churches to also helped break the stronghold of traditional religion across the nation. Several former traditionalist accepted Christ and burnt their charms, a development that repelled spiritual darkness. The fire brand Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries (MFM) is reputed for deliverance and breakthrough sessions. This has delivered millions from spiritual strongholds and generational curses, thereby servings as an instrument of resilience to the people in the face of life challenges.
2. **Poverty Alleviation:** Much as people have issues with crass materialism in the independent churches, the fact is the church owes it current buoyant financial status to them. Gone are the days church rats were sarcastically said to be poor. These days, rats are competing to gain access to Pentecostal churches to enable them taste of the many crumbs in churches. Many of these churches have also contributed to poverty alleviation in no

small way by supporting indigent students and widows in so many ways. These churches see this as responsibility and stewardship what God called them to do, and they are relentlessly passionate about it.

3. **Empowerment Programme:** Beyond poverty alleviation, many of them have also started business ventures that are empowering members financially. They run churches, printing presses, banks, creches and several business outfits that are providing employment and sources of livelihood for members. These ventures also provide alternative incomes for members and the churches. Consequently, until the rise to prominence of these churches, Christianity remained largely a despised, conservative religion, attracting only the dregs and outcast of the society. Through the influence of Pentecostal church founded in Nigeria, Christianity now has a new face, attracting upwardly mobile executives and business owners like never before. According to Bishop Wale Oke “The people never wanted to have anything to do with the Lord. They felt they had wealth and comfort and wondered what else can Christ offer them. But Pentecostals have proven that they need much more than that. These churches have taught their adherents how they can bring the faith to bear in business decisions and policies. Market place evangelism and Christianity have become the fad”.
4. **The Holy Bible:** Pentecostalism through teachings has reawakened a general desire and love for the Bible as the written word of God and a perennial document of authentic Christian life. Many Christians nowadays take the Bible seriously as a weapon to fight against life’s challenges and it is no longer considered a book meant for the clergy alone.
5. **Spirituality and Prayer:** Pentecostalism has teaches its adherents an eagerness for spiritual life in the secular world, and a desire for an experiential communion with God in prayers. People now give serious attention to their prayer lives. Pentecostalism is noted for encouraging spirituality that abhors confinement and standardization, while provoking an intimate experience of the holy spirit in a person’s life Achunike (2003).
6. **Ecclesial Consciousness:** Pentecostalism has really influenced the ecclesial consciousness of many Christians and their identification with the church is becoming very strong. The spirit is not just gathering people into a faceless mass, but into an organized body of Christ. There is personal identification with the church. “My church” slogan is becoming popular among Nigerians. Expressions such as these are commonly used by Nigerians nowadays.

“There is a function in my church”, “come and worship with me in my fasting in my church today”, etc. these indicate that people now considered ecclesial identification seriously. The Pentecostal teaching of born-again has had much influence and impact on the Christians, since every authentic Christians, since every authentic Christian is expected to live a new life in Christ and to be guided by the spirit. There is no evidence that there is a church that is contrary to holiness and righteousness of her members, and many are compelled by their ecclesial identification to demonstrate acceptable Christian moral standards in public, at least so that they do not tarnish the image of their church. It is obvious that this will eventually have impact on the general society at large.

Conclusion and Recommendations

An attempt has been made to explore Pentecostalism as an instrument of resilience in a changing world. In the process, we have identified the fact that until the emergence of Pentecostalism, Christianity remained largely a despised, conservative religion, attracting largely only the dregs and outcasts of the society. The work also spelt out analyzed some areas of resilience which Pentecostals are known for and have been so committed to making sure that their adherents enjoy.

In view of Pentecostalism as an instrument of resilience in a changing world, the following recommendations are proffered: it is observed that, there are some of these churches that have been founded by some so called pastors that were not called by God in the world today, and so take advantage of those churches to perpetrate evils. This work recommends that there should be an organizational model and a culture of authority among the Pentecostal churches.

Similarly, it is being observed also Pentecostalism scope has witnessed pluralism and diversity characterized by pockets of fundamentalists. Therefore, this work also recommends that Pentecostalism raise the standard for probity and accountability.

Lastly, in alignment with the instrument of resilience the Pentecostal churches are known for this work recommends that some of these churches owned one institution of learning or the other should have a human face to the extent that both pastors and members laboring in such ministries should enjoy some benefits and scholarship for their children.

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