

PENTECOSTALIZATION: A THREAT TO CHRISTIANIZATION

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INTRODUCTION

Africa as a continent, in recent times, has seen an unprecedented manifestation of the Pentecostal spirit, which tends to posit some level of upheaval in the way of evangelization. No time in history has it been more difficult for orthodox preachers and missionaries to communicate effectively the good news of Jesus Christ than it is in our time. Fidelity to the Gospel message and attention to the apostolic tradition have become obviously impossible in many quarters because of the unguarded influence of Pentecostalism. Yes, Pentecostalism has become a threat to the mandate which Christ gave to his apostles to proclaim the good news to all creatures (Matthew 28:19) and to remain steadfast in the work which he handed over to them. A careful reflection on what is happening today shows that the structures of what it really means to witness authentically to Christ have been disturbed, and preachers today, more than ever, are badly influenced to adjust to the new trend. There is a shift in emphasis from what the author of the gospel message said to what the recipients of the gospel message want and feel. The focus is no longer on what Jesus said but on what modern man desires. It is a pity, but it is true that the divine injunction to Christianize the world is today suffocated by the new tendency to pentecostalize the world.

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There is today an exceptionally fast rise in the number of Pentecostal churches and communities in such a manner that brings about a gradual but steady transformation and transmutation of orthodox Christianity into a charismatically oriented group. It has increasingly become difficult in our time to distinguish orthodox Christianity from Pentecostal communities. In the same manner, it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish a Catholic from a Pentecostal. In some extreme cases, some members of the orthodox Churches, especially the Catholic Church, prefer to be called Pentecostals or Charismatics, or at the least, to have "Pentecostal" attached to their names. Many are nominally Catholic, but in practice, they are Pentecostals. The situation is so bad that even though, from a nominal calculation, the number of Catholics may not be declining, essentially there is a decline in the number of faithful Catholics. There is an aggressive infiltration of pagan and non-Catholic spirituality into the Church. Many attend Masses on Sunday morning but attend Pentecostal fellowships in the afternoon. Many use the Catholic Church as their official denomination and one or two Pentecostal churches as their unofficial denomination and they are often swayed to pay more allegiance to those unofficial groups. Emmanuel Dim harped on this when he said that "the word 'Pentecostalism' could be said to be a popular one these days. It is found on the lips of many people, especially in discussions about the Christian religion."²

The face of Christianity in our contemporary time has been wounded by the new Pentecostal threat, and it is pitifully regrettable to note that this threat is not only an external challenge but a dangerous threat even within the Church. It is a dangerous threat in the sense that the face of Catholicism is being negatively changed from within. Yes, Christianity is today challenged by Pentecostal threats not so much from the external but from the internal. In his book, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, Anderson says that the

²E. Dim, *Pentecostalism and its Challenges: The Pertinent Question* (Sovereign Prints, Lagos, 2012), p. 1.

situation in Africa is so adverse to the extent that older churches are rethinking their entire strategy and are being changed by the "pentecostalization" process taking place.³ There is an aggressive and unprecedented charismatization of Christianity in Africa to such a degree that it is disturbing to the normal religious consciousness of a true Christian. The Pentecostal influence on Christianity and human society is an issue that has gained great theological momentum in our time. The thrusts of this work, therefore, are to dig deep into the concept of Pentecostalism, to find out the different forms in which pentecostalization takes place, to find out the extent to which pentecostalization takes place in our time and to highlight what the Church can do to arrest this new threat.

WHAT IS PENTECOSTALISM?

Pentecostalism means different things to different persons. It does not enjoy a universally accepted definition because its manifestation is not uniform. Hence, we have as many definitions of Pentecostalism as there are scholars. Emmanuel Dim expresses this difficulty in the conceptualization of Pentecostalism when he says that:

Some have described it, very broadly, as a movement concerned primarily with the experience of the working of the Holy Spirit and the practice of spiritual gifts. It means, then, that Pentecostalism has its emphasis on experience and spirituality rather than on formal theology and doctrine. From that consideration, some others often describe or define it more from the practical side.⁴

Pentecostalism, according to W. Kay, is "a type of Christianity that does not rely on liturgies, prayer books, creeds, or a highly educated

³Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 121–22.

⁴E. Dim, *Pentecostalism and its Challenges: The Pertinent Question*, p 2.

clergy, but rather on the testimony of lay people communicating their intense relationship with a personal God."⁵ Hillary C. Achunike corroborates this position when he succinctly opines that:

“The term Pentecostalism refers to certain elements of Christian life often associated with the experience of the power of the Holy Spirit, which is manifested strongly at the feast of Pentecost in the Bible and the consequent gift of the Holy Spirit by Christ. It also refers to the emphasis on the third person of the Trinity and his manifestation in the individual and corporate lives of Christians.”⁶

One could attribute the conceptual difficulty in Pentecostalism to its overemphasis on the role of the spirit. Because the spirit is immaterial and as such, cannot be localized in terms of space and time, Pentecostalism, which centres on the role of the spirit, becomes difficult to conceptualize. Ogbu Kalu, however, locates this difficulty in socio-economic factors rather than spiritual when he says: "This difficulty is compounded by Pentecostalism's tendency to splinter, a fragility that is usually dubbed as 'setting up new alters' arising from intramural conflicts over doctrines, theological rifts, moral lapses, personality clashes, competing ambitions or financial crisis."⁷

Pentecostalism is much more difficult to define because it cannot be identified with any defined theology with a creed, as is the case with the Catholic Church, nor is it a corporate and integral denomination. In its nature, it appears to be fluid and floats on the personal spiritual experience of its adherents. It leverages on the role of the Spirit as

⁵W. Kay, *Pentecostalism* (SCM Press, London 2009), p.7.

⁶H. Achunike, *Catholic Charismatic Movement in Igboland, 1970 – 1995* (Fourth Dimension Publishers, Enugu 2009), p.35.

⁷O. Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (University Press, Oxford 2008), p. 5.

experienced by the spiritually energized person who makes himself available to be used by the Spirit. The person does not need to identify with any group as such. What matters is spiritual and meta-spatio-temporal affiliation with the Spirit. It is somewhat of a dissoluble movement that permeates mainline traditions and orientations. Allen Anderson offers a summary of Pentecostal belief when he says: "The term 'Pentecostal' is appropriate for describing globally all churches and movements that emphasize the working of the gifts of the Spirit, both on phenomenological and on theological grounds—although not without qualification."⁸

It is worthy of note that the general thread that connects all ideas about Pentecostalism is the indispensable role that the spirit plays in the lives of believers. A brief reflection on the different themes that Pentecostals propound and project would help to shed more light on the concept of Pentecostalism.

COMMON THEMES OF PENTECOSTALISM

While Pentecostalism defies easy understanding and objective conceptualization and while the Pentecostal movement does not have a unified theological perspective and orientation, there are shades of common themes across the modern Pentecostal spectrum. Even though the emphases vary from one preacher to another, the commonalities generally fall under the category of "gifts of the Holy Spirit." Even when the reflections on such themes are nothing but subjective opinions of the preachers, they will always find a way of giving them a pneumatological underpinning. The emphasis of modern Pentecostalism is an exaggerated emphasis on the person and work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit empowers individuals to live and do certain things.

⁸Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, pp. 13-14.

Prosperity

One of the themes which Pentecostal preachers cherish and use to their advantage is the theme of prosperity. This pattern of preaching has truly eaten deep into the spiritual fabrics of modern Christians because of the way in which Pentecostal preachers have thwarted its original course. In its very nature, the theme of prosperity is not truly alien to the spirit of biblical theology. Yes, God created the world in an intelligent manner and entrusted it to man to care for it and to dominate and conquer it (Gen 1:28, 2:15). This "creation mandate" first places man as a partner with God in creation. It also suggests the idea of prosperity because God would not have entrusted this task to man if he wished him failure. In other words, if God did not desire that man should be prosperous in this task of conquering and dominating the world, he would not have entrusted it to him. But as we know, the world is not a perfect place and neither is man a perfect being. There are chances that man may slide from the ladder of success in his attempt to conquer and dominate the world. So, even though God wills that man should be successful and prosperous, man's imperfect nature and our imperfect world often make the contrary possible.

What prosperity preachers do is to cash in on the above gap and brainwash their gullible and vulnerable loyalists to believe that their lack of success in their endeavours is as a result of their sins against God. The logic is simple! Since success is from God and he desires that we be successful, if anyone encounters failure, the implication is that he/she sinned against the author of success. And one sins against the author of success by not tithing regularly and also when one fails to apply divine laws that could allow one to claim one's wealth in God's name.

Often, prosperity preachers place a central focus on the work of evil spirits and their exaggerated roles in the world. For the Pentecostals, prosperity is seen as something that can be achieved not through dominating and conquering the world but by claiming that which God foundationally willed.

Some preachers do everything possible to convince or confuse their loyalists to believe that they can achieve anything when they align themselves with God's principles, claim God's blessings, and give generously to the church. Others preach that spiritual growth determines material wealth and that people achieve material wealth through victory in spiritual battles of prayer and driving out of demons and Satan. For them, prosperity is realized when the devil is vanquished.⁹ But one very deceptive thing about prosperity preaching is that when the loyalists do not enjoy the wealth they were hoping for, the preachers explain this in terms of unrepentant sins, lack of belief in God's word, ancestral curses, witchcraft and poor donations to the Church. Misfortune is understood as the work of the devil, witchcraft, and the ancestors. The Leader of Nigerian Winner's Chapel, Oyedepo, was quoted to have said that poverty is an individual's own fault; poverty is a proof of unrighteousness! Poverty is a curse and it is self-made.¹⁰

To have a successful life, one has to continuously wage war against demons and Satan. Wealth in Pentecostal churches is achieved not through hard work and the grace of God but by living out a lively faith that is shown through donations to the Church. Wealth is won in a spiritual battle and in order to win this battle, "strong prayers" are needed.¹¹ This theology emphasizes that wealth is within the grasp of every person. All that the members have to do is to believe and make significant personal sacrifices, usually in the form of contributions of money, so that the pastors can pray "strong prayers" over them to drive out the evil spirits and ancestors who are preventing them from realizing the wealth that God has promised

⁹Gifford, Paul, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalizing African Economy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), p. 4.

¹⁰Gifford, Paul, *The Prosperity Theology of David Oyedepo, Founder of Winners' Chapel*. In *Pastures of Plenty: Tracing Religio-Scapes of Prosperity Gospel in Africa and Beyond*. Edited by Andreas Heuser. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, p. 83–100.

¹¹Van Wyk, Ilana, *The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God in South Africa: A Church of Strangers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p 18.

them. This theology is focused on breaking the bonds of the devil and ancestors.¹²

Continuing Revelation

One other theme that is viable in Pentecostal churches is their idea of continuing revelation. Using Joel 2:28 as the biblical foundation of their belief, they hold that the revelation of God's will is something very continuous and it is made manifest in dreams and visions. "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy; your old men will dream dreams; your young men will see visions" (Joel 2:28). Pentecostal preachers allow belief in dreams and visions to influence and guide their systems of operation. They frequently interpret visions and dreams from a literalist's perspective, believing that they contain divine instructions for the daily lives of all believers. But we know that visions and dreams fall within the province of private revelation, which does not provide a norm of action for all believers. Private revelation (visions and dreams) is binding on the person who received it.

It is true that in the scriptures, God, in so many instances, communicated and revealed divine will to his people through dreams and visions, as we see in the cases of Abraham, David, Daniel, etc., but we also know that dreams could occur as a result of psychological manifestations of repressed fantasies, fears, hopes, and memories. We also know that all public revelation ended after the death of the last Apostle, John, and is closed until the Second Coming of Christ. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: "The Christian economy, therefore, since it is the new and definitive Covenant, will never pass away; and no new public revelation is to be expected before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 66). What we call "private revelation" truly continues till this day, but it is only binding to the person who experienced it and it must be consistent with what

¹²Van de Kamp, Linda, *Violent Conversion: Brazilian Pentecostalism and Urban Women in Mozambique* (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2016), p 14.

is already publicly revealed in the scripture, tradition and teaching authority of the Church. However, as experience has shown in numerous cases, many dreams and visions given by Pentecostal preachers are seen or given incorrectly. In our world today, there are many cases of visionary failure. Families have been torn apart and relationships destroyed without any hope of repair because of purported visionary experiences and dreams. Some Pentecostal preachers project their visions and dreams and insist on them as if they are meant to improve or complete God's definitive revelation in Christ. Dreams and visions must be properly discerned.

Faith Healing

Faith healing is another important theme among Pentecostals. They believe that Jesus died on the Cross not only so that man could have abundant prosperity and wealth, but also so that he could be completely healed of all infirmities. Their choice quotation on this is Isaiah 53:5: "By his stripes we have been healed." The implication of this is that Christ's salvific death on the cross is identifiable with economic prosperity and physical prosperity in terms of healing and good health. To be more direct, healing and economic prosperity are the reasons for the salvific death of Christ. What one is expected to do is to have enough faith to bait God into healing action. Often, when healing fails to happen, it is the believer's lack of faith that is said to be the cause of the failure. This is an erroneous position because the death of Jesus on the Cross is not just about physical or economic salvation but, more importantly, about salvation from slavery to sin. It is our sin that made the Lord Jesus suffer the torment of the Cross. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches: The Scriptures had foretold this divine plan of salvation through the putting to death of "the righteous one, my Servant" as a mystery of universal redemption, that is, as the ransom that would free men from the slavery of sin (CCC 601).

In a unique way, Madueke highlights other Pentecostal themes when he says:

"All Christians should seek a religious experience similar to the first Pentecost, popularly referred to as the 'Baptism of the Holy Spirit'. Included in this religious experience are elements such as praying in tongues (*glossolalia*), healing, whether as exorcism or deliverance, vision and prophecy. Other elements associated with Pentecostalism are vibrant preaching, enthusiastic congregational singing, spontaneous testimonies, prayer in unison, extemporaneous sermons on simple biblical themes by lay preachers and most recently, healing of the family root, 'sowing and harvesting of seeds.'"¹³

WHY THE SEEMING GROWTH OF PENTECOSTALISM?

It is no news that Pentecostalism is spreading like wildfire across the entire continents of the world. Anderson is of the opinion that there are over five hundred million adherents of Pentecostalism found in every country in the world.¹⁴ It is also worthy of note that other mainline churches are rapidly losing their members. This remarkable growth in Pentecostalism and the corresponding decline in membership among many older churches spur us to pause and consider the reasons. Cardinal Walter Kasper argues that the challenge represented by Pentecostalism should move the Catholic Church toward a self-critical approach, asking why so many leave it and what they find in Pentecostal congregations.¹⁵ This self-critical

¹³J. Madueke, *Catholic Church in Nigeria and the crisis of identity since the advent of Pentecostalism*, in A. Obiwulu (ed.), *Traditional Religion, Pentecostalism and Catholicism: Influences, Problems and Prospects* (Afro-orbis: Nsukka, 2007), p. 33.

¹⁴Cf. A. Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, p. 1.

¹⁵Walter Kasper, *The Current Ecumenical Transition* (Origins 36, 2006), p. 407–414.

question will certainly engineer a certain level of reform and adjustment in an attempt to curb the problem.

While the reasons for the decline in membership in the mainline churches and the attendant growth of Pentecostalism vary, some scholars are of the opinion that older churches have become so powerless to confront the problems of modern men as Pentecostal churches do today. Speaking of the older churches, Anderson says: If people perceive their teachings and practices as powerless to meet their everyday felt needs, then these churches cannot continue with "business as usual" in the face of obvious shortcomings...their decline will probably continue and may be terminal.¹⁶ This position of Anderson cannot be true. The mainline churches have not suffered any form of spiritual haemorrhage. This is because the church is not just a human social institution. The Catholic Church, for instance, is instituted by Jesus Christ, who is the Head of the Church. He is inseparably united with the Church, which is his body. Therefore, all actions of the Church flow from Christ and are directed towards Christ. The Church enjoys unquantifiable divine power and strength. The mission of the Church is the mission of Christ. The power of the Church is the power of Christ. The Church's mission flows from the divine Persons of Christ and the Holy Spirit in a similar way as the "Holy and sanctifying Spirit" flows to us, "the members of his Body," through "the Church's sacraments" (CCC 739).

Other scholars believe that the mainline churches are losing members at an alarming rate because they have ignored the existence of the Holy Spirit. They strongly opine that the Pneumatological tracts in theology are neglected or obviously underdeveloped. And this affects, to a great extent, their worship and faith. In a critique of mainstream Christianity, the World Council of Churches in August 1971 pointed out that:

¹⁶Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, pp. 121–22.

The emergence and growth of Independent Churches in Africa, of Pentecostal Churches and of Pentecostalism within the established churches could point to some deficiency in traditional Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. These churches' theology and practice have largely ignored the Holy Spirit's affirmation of his continuing presence. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit and even more sensitivity to his active presence in the church and the world were and still are underdeveloped in the Western tradition of Christianity.¹⁷

The Church is not indifferent to the person and roles of the Holy Spirit. The Church is Trinitarian and her actions are inspired and directed by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has always guided the church in all her activities, as evidenced in the inauguration of the Church at Pentecost. In fact, the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of the Christian faith and of Christian life. The Church is a living institution, guided by the Holy Spirit and she confesses this in her creed. All the sacraments of the Church have a pneumatological character and significance. No one can say, "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit.

There are varieties of opinions which resonate around the ineffectiveness of mainline churches in guiding and sustaining their members. Renate Poblete, a Chilean Jesuit, attributes the effectiveness of the Pentecostals to their emphasis on a subjective experience of God, something he says that Western theology has long lost sight of.¹⁸ Miller and Yamamori point to Pentecostalism's worship as the engine driving the movement.¹⁹ Walter Hollenweger

¹⁷C. G. Williams, *Tongues of the Spirit* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1981), p. 95.

¹⁸Poblete, *The Catholic Church and Latin America's Pentecostals*, pp. 719–20.

¹⁹Miller and Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism*, p.23–24.

ascribes its success in developing countries to its oral character, with its narrative theology and witness, ability to bring dreams and visions into worship and maximum participation in public prayer and decision making.²⁰ Gifford says that "countless thousands are leaving mainline Christianity to join the Pentecostal churches because mainline Christians do not take seriously divine and demonic interventions and do not seriously expect to replicate New Testament miracles today."²¹

Whatever the reasons for the above situation might be, the truth staring all of us in the face today is that mainline churches are geometrically losing their members while Pentecostal churches are radically and geometrically increasing their membership. The greatest danger, for me, lies not in the number of mainline Christians but in the fact that many of those who publicly profess to be mainline Christians are privately Pentecostals. Many Catholics, for instance, are more Pentecostal in faith and action than professed Pentecostals. So many mainline church ministers are more Pentecostal than Pentecostal pastors. The situation has created a spiritual mesh and confusion too difficult to resolve. Today, more than ever, it is becoming increasingly difficult to know those values that are characteristically Catholic. Today, more than ever, many Catholic ministers are no better than Pentecostal pastors in both words and actions. It is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish a Catholic Mass from a Pentecostal service. This has created a situation best called the Pentecostalization of mainline churches.

PENTECOSTALIZATION

In his paper, "The Growth of Global Pentecostalism," delivered at the Wheaton Conference on April 3rd, 2014, Allan H. Anderson used four different categories to show the similar, though often overlapping, strands of global Pentecostalism. The first group he

²⁰Walter J. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostal Elites and the Pentecostal Poor: A Missed Dialogue*, in *Charismatic Christianity as a Global Culture*, ed. Karla Poewe (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1994), pp. 200–204.

²¹Gifford P., *African Christianity: It's Public Role* (Malaysia Press, 1998), p. 329.

identifies is the **classical** Pentecostals, who, according to him, emerged in the early 20th century in the context of the Azuza Street revival in Los Angeles. An example of this group is the Assemblies of God. The second category he identifies is those who maintain an independent existence. They are not affiliated with any group. He calls them **independents**. This second category originated in Africa within the 20th century after the end of the colonial era. The third group, according to him, is non-Pentecostal groups who belong to mainline Churches but have in their practice and operation adopted the Pentecostal mode of worship and life. He calls them **charismatics**. The fourth category, which Anderson identifies, is the **independent megachurches**, many of which fall into the prosperity gospel model. The fourth group, according to him, has a great impact on the changing shape of global Christianity.²²

From Anderson's categorization above, we discover that the third group, whom he calls non-Pentecostal groups, belong to mainline churches but have adopted Pentecostal worship and life. Examples of this third group are Catholics, Methodists, Episcopalians, Anglicans, etc. They are said to have been pentecostalized or charismatalized. While they are different from Pentecostals in name, they are seemingly the same in operation. They are transformed from within and their unique identities are metamorphosized.

The term "pentecostalization" was used by Johnson Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu and refers to "a process of renewal or revival" of the mainline churches in order to "accommodate Pentecostal practices" as a result of the impact of Pentecostalism on them.²³ Pentecostalization remains an aggressive tendency of mainline churches to become Pentecostal in approach. It is about the silent distortion of true Christian values to accommodate Pentecostal tune. It is about the deconstruction of authentic and orthodox Christian

²²Allan H. Anderson used these categories in a paper, "The Growth of Global Pentecostalism," delivered at the Wheaton Theology Conference, April 3, 2014.

²³Asamoah-Gyadu, J K, *Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Leiden Boston: Netherlands, 2005), p. 30.

spiritual structures in order to give vent to the Pentecostal spirit. It is about adjustment and adaptation to the Pentecostal mode of operation.

It is worth noting that new forms of Pentecostal religiosity have infiltrated the Catholic Church in Africa, particularly Nigeria. Pentecostal religiosity is speedily permeating the Catholic Church. An increasing number of Catholics in Nigeria are carrying out actions that are characteristically Pentecostal. For instance, drinking exorcised water, using exorcised salt, using different forms of oil as anointing oil, using stickers and statues of men of God, etc. are Pentecostal actions which have been taken up by many Catholics.

It is a pity, but it is also true that many Catholic priests are becoming very Pentecostal in the discharge of their ministry. Some are no longer comfortable with the orthodox and traditional ways of celebrating the sacraments. They have given in to spontaneous liturgy and personality cults, which are characteristics of Pentecostal pastors. Theatrical and prosperity preaching, often targeted at massaging the spiritual ego and consciousness of the people, which are often devoid of any transformative effect, have almost become the norm of operation for many. Blamires calls this "showbiz" when he says: "Pentecostalism makes for great melodrama and showbiz. Like showbiz, it is, of course, highly vulnerable to manipulation and is riddled with personality cults."²⁴

The above situation has birthed a certain level of crisis of faith and identity in some priests. Those unique characteristics and distinctive features for which authentic priests are known are lacking in some and the resultant effects are often adverse. Agu, speaking on this issue, notes: "Certainly, one who has a false conception of oneself cannot relate properly to oneself and one's environment. Likewise,

²⁴C. Blamires, *Pentecostalism-From a Catholic Perspective* (CST Explanations; London: Catholic Truth Society, 2010), p. 51.

if the priest has a wrong image of himself as a priest or is ignorant of his identity, he will invariably not be true to his calling."²⁵

The implication of the above is that the Catholic Church in Nigeria is dangerously undergoing a transformation which has changed not only the faith of her members but also their style of worship. Our worship has become generally transformed and the new can hardly be matched with the old. The outcome is total confusion, not only in the minds of the people but also in their relationship with God. There is an obvious crisis of faith that has generated the formation of new faith communities and sects. In fact, the essence of the global process of pentecostalization is creating new Pentecostal communities and transforming other Churches and religious associations into one syncretic form of Charismatic Christianity around the world.²⁶

Today, more than ever, there is an undue emphasis on tithe and tithing as a result of Pentecostalism. Tithe payment is becoming a common experience in the Catholic Church. Some young priests, in imitation of the Pentecostal pastors, urge people to pay their tithe to the parish priest. Tithe payment is very common in parts of Lagos as a result of Pentecostal influences.²⁷ Even fundraising in the Church has taken on a Pentecostal shape. There is an unguarded emphasis on divine reward on the principle of the more you donate, the more you are blessed. God's blessings are today thought of as being an exclusive reserve for those who donate more to the Church. "Fundraising activities in the Church are gradually witnessing Pentecostal-like anchors on prosperity, like the promise of automatic reward for every donation."²⁸

²⁵Ambrose Agu, *Critical Issues on Faith and Practice, A Theological Elucidation*, (Diocesan Printing Press: Holy Ghost Cathedral, Enugu, 2021), p. 154.

²⁶A. Kobyliński, "The Global Pentecostalization of Christianity and its Ethical Consequences," *Chicago Studies*", 2016, vol. 55/2, pp. 98-118.

²⁷H. C Achunike, *the Challenges of Pentecostalism to the Mainline Churches in Nigeria*, p. 93.

²⁸C. O. Ebebe, *the Impact of Pentecostalism on the Catholic Church*, pp. 36-37.

WHAT CAN THE CHURCH DO?

Looking at the above influences of Pentecostalism on mainline churches, it is obvious that Pentecostalism, which exerts great pressure on the affairs of Christians, is a force to reckon with in contemporary Christianity. It has created a permanent impact on the churches and the Christian faith and practice can no longer be the same. In fact, there is every indication that Pentecostalism and Pentecostal experience and spirituality have come to stay in Nigeria. Every available statistic supports this claim. The question that begs for an answer is: what can the Church do to remain relevant to modern man in the face of aggressive Pentecostalism? A diligent response to this question will be the focus of this part of our discussion.

Fidelity to the Gospel Message

The easiest way to solve a problem is to locate its foundational cause. The greatest danger of Pentecostalism, as earlier highlighted, is not its effects from without but from within. A kingdom that is divided against itself cannot stand. No true king would send out his warriors from his kingdom in the face of a threat. If the Catholic Church, for instance, gets it right from within, then the challenge posed by Pentecostalism would be squarely curbed. And to get it right from within, I propose an unflinching fidelity to the gospel message. There is no other Gospel but Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The gospel message should be proclaimed without any form of sugar-coating or adulteration. The explosion of Pentecostalism in the mainline churches is an invitation to churches to reconsider their Christian testimony and proclamation of Jesus Christ as the Saviour and Redeemer of all people. The face of Jesus should be proclaimed as it is seen in the scriptures and in the apostolic faith. Any tendency to reshape or recast the face of Jesus gives a great boost to the spread of Pentecostalism. Paul's message to Timothy on the issue of fidelity to the gospel is very instructive here: Keep what you heard from me as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in

Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you— guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us (2 Timothy 1:13–14). Here, Paul is telling Timothy to keep the pattern of sound teaching that he had heard from him (Paul). Timothy's task was not to reproduce new content but to preserve and proclaim the content with which he had been entrusted. In the same manner, ministers of the word and sacraments should make an effort to see that they do not produce new content for the gospel message. Priests must remain focused on Christ, from whom their authority comes and not allow themselves to be influenced by Pentecostal preachers. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that "bishops, with priests as co-workers, have as their first task 'to preach the gospel of God to all men,' in keeping with the Lord's command. They are 'heralds of faith,' who draw new disciples to Christ; they are authentic teachers of the apostolic faith 'endowed with the authority of Christ'" (CCC 888). Christ is the model, and every preaching should be Christocentric in nature.

Fidelity to the Gospel message is also expected of the lay faithful. They have it as their obligation to listen to their ministers and to allow their lives to be influenced and transformed by their teachings. They are to allow the word of God to serve as a lamp for their feet and a light on their path (Psalm 119:105). Can. 212 §1 teaches that the Christian faithful, conscious of their own responsibility, are bound to follow with Christian obedience those things that the sacred pastors, inasmuch as they represent Christ, declare as teachers of the faith or establish as rulers of the Church.

Openness on the Part of our Christians

A problem shared, they say, is a problem half solved. The Nigerian political landscape has actually made the cost of living too high for the average Nigerian. So many of our Christians are passing through untold hardships and many are dying unnoticed. In an attempt to surmount so many difficulties, many of them patronize some Pentecostal preachers who promise them light in darkness, heaven on earth, hope in hopelessness and massive wealth in wretchedness.

They present to them a Christ that never went to Calvary; they preach to them a Christianity without the Cross. The result is that such Christians are left more confused and frustrated than they were. The Christian faithful, as a matter of fact, should be open to their ministers. Priests are ordained to serve and they exist for others. Canon 212 §2 teaches that the Christian faithful are free to make known to the pastors of the Church their needs, especially spiritual ones and their desires. Catholics who learn to express their concerns to their priests will be properly guided along the path of faith, peace, and salvation.

Youth Participation

The youthful age is a period of searching. It is a period of searching for meaning in life. It is also a period of adventure and exploration of new things and realities. The youth have great energy and vigour and many of them are uncommonly gifted and talented. We have incredible youth capital in the Church. They should be properly guided and directed and given a sense of purpose. They should be duly given a sense of belonging and even given leadership roles in the Church. Those who have had the courage to do this have reaped a harvest of zeal, dedication and innovation. Pentecostal preachers understand this and they uniquely make their ministry, worship and sermons a youth-friendly experience. Many of them provide mentoring for the young people and support them even in their trials. There is a general disposition and orientation among the Pentecostals to recognize and foster charisms among the youth and to give them a proper space and platform for growth and service in the Church. The church is a community composed of members from diverse backgrounds who are enjoined to share the work of God. The youth must therefore be involved actively in drawing the congregation, both old and young, to participate responsibly in the work, life and mission of the church and the community. When the

youth are drawn to the community, it becomes easier for them to comprehend what it is to live in the Christian community.²⁹

Ongoing Catechesis

Education happens from birth to death. We stop growing when we stop learning. Education in the faith should also be a lifelong process. We stop to grow in the faith when we stop to be educated in the faith. Catechesis is the process of transmitting the faith. Its Greek origin means, "to sound forth." Catechesis is distinct from the first evangelization which is popularly called Kerygma. The purpose of catechesis is to bring that initial faith to maturity and to teach the Christian to live as a true disciple of Christ. In the *Introduction* of the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II on *Catechesis in our Time (Catechesi Tradendae)*, he says that the Church has always considered catechesis one of her primary tasks, for, before Christ ascended to His Father after His resurrection, He gave the apostles a final command-to make disciples of all nations and to teach them to observe all that He had commanded. He asserts that the parish should take care of the catechesis of all ages with the help of other priests, religious and catechists (No 32–34). Everybody needs to be catechized. And this, as a matter of fact, should be an ongoing process. The establishment of schools of evangelization in many dioceses in Nigeria is a timely response in the right direction to overcome the challenge of Pentecostalism that flows from the danger of shallow faith.

Inculturation of Faith

Gaudium et Spes no. 53 defines culture as all those things which go to the refining and development of man's diverse mental and physical endowments. The implication of this is that the term *culture* embraces all of man's life: his values and relationships; language and customs; as well as the institutions and support structures he has created. In his Letter to the Vatican Secretary of State, dated May 20, 1982, Pope John Paul II says that "Faith that has not become a

²⁹Nielson, J., *Faith that Lasts: Raising Kids that don't Leave the Church* (Fort Washington, PA: CLC Publications, 2016), p. 8.

culture is faith that has not been fully accepted, completely thought through and faithfully lived". The General Directory for Catechesis teaches that the "Inculturation of the faith is not simply an external adaptation designed to make the Christian message more attractive or superficially decorative. On the contrary, it means the penetration of the deepest strata of persons and peoples by the Gospel, which touches them deeply, going to 'the very Centre and root of their cultures" (cf. GDC, 109). When we allow the gospel values to penetrate the inner recesses of our lives, we cannot but be satisfied with the Catholic values and experiences.

Social Media

According to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online*, Social Media is defined as forms of electronic communication (as Web sites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages and other content (as videos).³⁰ Social media has become the modern Areopagus, where people gather to share ideas and information. Many young people may not be found in the pews of the Church, but they are readily found on the internet. The Church and her spiritual worship may be boring to young people, but the visual and audio content online are the most interesting and entertaining to them. How do we then bridge the gap? What we have to do is to carry the gospel message to meet them where they are in the form of modern grass-roots evangelization. Pentecostal preachers do this in an amazing manner. Many of them have different social media handles through which they communicate their message. Church ministers should make their homilies and reflections available for mass usage and delight. As Pope Francis said in his message for the 48th World Communications Day, "The revolution taking place in communications media and in information technologies represents a great and thrilling challenge: may we

³⁰Merriam-Webster. 2019 December 31. Retrieved on 16th October, 2022 from <https://www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary/social%20media>

respond to that challenge with fresh energy and imagination as we seek to share with others the beauty of God."

If parishes, zones, stations, etc. communicate through digital media, it will not only boost the communication aspects of the church, but it will also help the community to grow stronger and faster.

CONCLUSION

The threat of Pentecostalism is real. Whoever neglects it does that at their own peril. The influence is viral and dangerous. True Catholicism can only shine out if Catholics bravely embrace the orthodox way of Christian life and worship. Jesus is the gospel. He is the visible face of the invisible Father. What we know about God is what we know about Jesus. In other words, Jesus is the message of the Father. The preacher is not the message. He is only an instrument through which the message is communicated. Pentecostalism is a real threat in Nigeria. But it is not overtly insoluble. We can avoid the pentecostalization of Christianity by remaining faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ.