

Towards an Assessment of Pentecostalisation in French-speaking African Nations with Special Reference to the Democratic Republic of Congo

Jesse Kipimo

Abstract

The nature of the Pentecostal spirituality stands as a key contributing factor to the pentecostalisation process taking place in the church of Africa, especially in French-speaking African nations like the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Dimensions of this spirituality accommodate the culture, the identity and the nature of African people. Consequently, most Africans find themselves at home within Pentecostal communities unlike in any other mainline churches. This article is based on an empirical research (DTh, Unisa) conducted in recent years around one of the largest Pentecostal denominations in Sub-Saharan Africa - the Congo Evangelistic Mission. I believe that findings from a church that has been around for more than 100 years deserve our attention, as they can enhance the current debate on pentecostalisation in many ways. First, the paper attempts to understand pentecostalisation in an African context and includes some possible classifications—Evangelistic pentecostalisation, Experiential pentecostalisation, social/humanitarian pentecostalisation and preventive denominational pentecostalisation. Second, it explores current Pentecostal scholarship to overcome the bias that has dominated Pentecostal literature in the past. Third, the article describes the various dimensions of the Pentecostal spirituality that shape the

About the Author¹

DTh, UNISA.

Dr Kipimo is the author of several Christian books in the area of practical theology. He has served as a lecturer at Pan Africa Theological college (Zimbabwe) and Trans Africa Theological College (Zambia). He also served as academic dean and senior lecturer at The Assemblies of God Bible college (Lubumbashi-DRC). He is the founder of Central African school of Missiology (DRC). He is currently serving as a lecturer, and the coordinator of the Bachelor of Theology Honours program at the South African Theological Seminary (SATS). Jesse is the senior pastor of Liberating Truth Mission church international (Lubumbashi- DRC), and an external postgraduate examiner at the UNISA.

¹ The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

whole pentecostalisation phenomenon. And lastly seven challenges facing the future of pentecostalisation in Africa are described, to draw the attention of Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal scholars to consider doing in-depth investigations on these new issues.

Introduction

The global Christian movement is going through a major Spiritual shift known as pentecostalisation, and the church in Africa has not been spared by this wave. The phenomenon is so strong that on one hand Pentecostal/ charismatic churches are experiencing a phenomenal numerical growth and on the other hand almost every mainline church in Africa is becoming Pentecostal in one way or another. In the context of the Democratic Republic of Congo, there is a great increase of Pentecostal and charismatic groups. The research conducted reveals that the Congo Evangelistic Mission (30ème CPECO) has spearheaded the pentecostalisation process in the country since half of these new churches are its offshoots. This church denomination started as early as 1915 in the Congo, and it has a vast Pentecostal experience which researchers can tap into and advance their debate on the pentecostalisation of the church in the global south.

Instead of basing theological reflection on the global north, data that is unrelated to the context, I argue that it is high time that pride of place be given to pentecostalism-focused fieldwork. I contend that the best way for the church in Africa to participate in global theological debates is by bringing to the global Christian world what is happening within African Pentecostal/ charismatic groups, and how they are experiencing God the Holy Spirit in their life, worship and witness.

1. Pentecostal Scholarship Overview

There is much more Pentecostal literature today than ever before. However, the predominant literature on pentecostalism written by European, American Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal scholars, shares one thing in common. They describe pentecostalism as a historical movement which grew out of Los Angeles and spread throughout the world as a result of western missionaries. Anderson (2004:15) says that 'although much has been written on the strength of Pentecostals/charismatics in America, relatively little has been written on their significance in Africa and Asia'. I share the position that we need to make the non-western nature of pentecostalism more visible and accessible.

I consider this view of pentecostalism to be biased; as attested to by the number of scholars who now suggest that the movement did not only start from Los Angeles. It has roots in other parts of the world, including Asia, the United Kingdom, Latin America, and Africa. Kalu (2008: viii) argues that 'African Pentecostalism did not originate from Azusa street and is not an extension of the American Electronic church'. Other places experienced pentecostalism in the 19th and 20th centuries, often predating the Azusa Street revival of April 1906. In this vein I contend that studies on pentecostalism should also focus on the other roots of the movement in order to bridge the scholarship gap.

Secondly, pentecostalism is not just a historical event with Azusa Street as its starting point. It is a dynamic contemporary movement with great impact in different parts of the 'third world.' I advocate a shift in our approach to pentecostalism, moving from a historical approach to a more contemporary emphasis. To explore the contemporary nature of the movement, detailed empirical studies on the growth and expansion of pentecostalism in different specific contexts of the world become necessary.

Another observation arising from my interaction with literature on pentecostalism is that, with very few exceptions (cf. Allan Anderson (2007), (1990), (1991) and Allan H Anderson (1992), pentecostalism in Africa is always associated with the African-initiated churches. While I do not deny the Pentecostal nature and lifestyle of these churches or downplay their importance in Pentecostal studies, I argue, however, that in Africa there are also Pentecostal congregations of western origin, which one could perhaps call Pentecostal mission churches that have made (and continue to make) a significant impact. These churches were once influenced—and even controlled—by white missionaries in the years prior to the independence of many African countries. But with the coming of African emancipation in the early 1960s, most of these Pentecostal churches are now led by African clergy. This has made them become more African in theology and spirituality. Such churches should be the focus of regional missiological studies, as is the case with the present research paper.

In other words, I assert that pentecostalism is not just a historical event, but also a contemporary phenomenon. It is not just a movement with roots in Los Angeles but a phenomenon with shoots in Lubumbashi, Lusaka, Luanda, Pretoria and many other mega-cities in southern Africa. Anderson and Hollenweger (1999:25) report that 'since the 1990s the greatest quantitative growth of Pentecostalism has been in Sub-Saharan Africa, including the Democratic Republic of Congo'. The approach in

previous studies on pentecostalism has been descriptive and narrative, creating the impression of a passive missiological enterprise, due to too much emphasis on the history of the movement. My position is that we need a shift from a narrative-descriptive to a more analytical-reflective approach that would engage Pentecostal scholarship in serious critical thinking on what is happening within the movement today. This will make Pentecostal studies more attractive and contemporary. In the past, Pentecostal scholarship aimed at giving the history of how the movement started in the United States of America and in Europe. It also focused on describing what went on within pentecostalism in different parts of the world, from a historical perspective. I do appreciate this former approach to Pentecostal research. However, we need to render Pentecostal scholarship more contemporary by studying the pentecostalisation process taking place currently within the movement.

My main argument is that people have for some time now heard the 19th and 20th centuries history of pentecostalism. Anderson H (2013) and Anderson (2004) describe pentecostalism as a global historical movement with western origin. Something new needs to be told because the wave of pentecostalisation is still spreading in developing nations. I believe that this shift calls for consolidated academic efforts in the area of empirical research in different parts of the world - like the Democratic Republic of the Congo and elsewhere, where the movement is still making noticeable strides, despite claims by scholars of the 'crossroad' experience characterised by stagnation and lack of growth (both qualitative and quantitative) within pentecostalism in other parts of the world. This position is shared by Cox (1995), Faupel (1996), Hollenweger and Anderson (1999), Anderson (2004, 2007). In these publications the scholars argue that there is no remarkable growth in the movement especially in the west and that pentecostalism is going through a crossroad experience. I agree with Kalu (2008) that empirical studies from Africa present a completely different story with several Pentecostal denominations experiencing phenomenal growth.

When such a paradigm shift occurs, it will bring about innovations in different aspects of Pentecostal studies, such as pneumatology (the doctrinal study of the Holy Spirit), Pentecostal history, Pentecostal theology and many others. Pneumatology will experience transformation because of new input from field data on current manifestations of the charismata and their use in addressing community issues such as gender and sex, suffering, uncured diseases, poverty, and spiritual enslavement. Rather than using Pauline and Lukan writings as proof texts for the baptism of

2 The \$1-20 experiment conducted by Festinger and Carlsmith, 'Cognitive Consequences of Forced Compliance' (pp. 203-208), as well as the 'Counter Attitudinal Advocacy' experiments that were conducted by Leippe and Eisenstadt in 1994, as cited in E Aronson, *The Social Animal*, 9th ed. (New York: Worth Publishers, 2004), 166, provide some of the evidential support for this claim.

the Holy Spirit and charismatic manifestations, contemporary use of these spiritual graces will inform pneumatology through critical research. In other words, the Holy Spirit has not stopped working with Paul and Luke or any other Apostle, but he is behind the pentecostalisation phenomenon that is affecting the social and public life of a lot of nations in our time. And if this is the case, scholars should also use contemporary manifestations of the Holy Spirit in their various contexts to sustain Pentecostal claims and arguments. This would help in addressing misunderstandings among scholars. Some argue that the charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit ceased at the time of Apostles and as a result the growth of pentecostalism has become debatable.

Pentecostal history—or the history of the Pentecostal movement—will not only be a study of what happened with William Joseph Seymour, but will also focus on what is happening in Pentecostal churches on the many streets of cities and villages in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Scholars and students will be given a contemporary history of pentecostalism that affects both head and heart, as they reflect on the working of the indwelling Spirit in our modern world.

Pentecostal theology and the distinctive claims of the early Pentecostal revival will then also be evaluated on the basis of up to date findings. Space will thus be created for new trends in Pentecostal theological thought to blossom, especially now that the movement has become globalized—including the classical, charismatics and neo-Pentecostals. This section calls for a scholarship shift. Pentecostalism should be considered as a contemporary phenomenon with new challenges that deserve urgent attention from Pentecostal scholars. The next section will focus on understanding pentecostalisation from an African perspective.

2. Understanding Pentecostalisation

2.1. Defining pentecostalisation from an African perspective

The word pentecostalisation seems to have been at the centre of a lot of theological debates in recent years. Parsitau (2006:83) describes pentecostalisation as the integration and appropriation of the Pentecostal ethos, spirituality and features by mainline churches. In other words, they attempt to become like Pentecostals both in their theology and praxis. Furthermore, Parsitau (2006:85) considers pentecostalisation as a theological transformation that informs worship as well as the social, public and ecclesial shape and role of Christianity in Africa. It is indeed a quest for a relevant

religion. First, pentecostalisation as a theological transformation does not only affect the physical manifestations of worship service in a church but also how people think and practise their theology. Non-Pentecostals are being forced to reformulate their theologies in order to improve their praxis in the areas of worship, prayers, preaching and witness. They slowly move from a pneumatological belief to a pneumatological encounter. This agrees with what Klempa (1972: 120-121) summarised in a report prepared for the World Alliance of Reformed Churches: 'For those who wrote the New Testament, the Spirit was not primarily a doctrine but an experience. They did not speak of believing in the Holy Spirit but of receiving and experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit when they believed.'

This theological shift from belief to experience, from head to heart has become a central motif in the wave of pentecostalisation taking place in the church of the global south. Asamoah- Gyadu (2005a: 18) thinks that 'through Pentecostalisation the church in Africa has emerged as a new Centre for theological creativity. It has become like a workshop where Christian answers to African questions are being hammered.' Second, when theology is transformed it is natural that practice follows suit. Therefore, pentecostalisation affects the worship style of many non-pentecostal denominations. Pentecostal music has been described as fervent, emotional, spiritual, dynamic, exuberant and quite entertaining (Parsitau 2006). This implies that pentecostalisation shapes the spirituality of African Christianity today.

After this brief description of how pentecostalisation is understood in Africa in general and the French-speaking African nations in particular, the next section will focus on the typology of pentecostalisation from a Congolese context.

2.2. Towards a 'possible typology' of Pentecostalisation

Kipimo's (2014) research among 100 branches of the Congo Evangelistic Mission (CEM) in Congo suggests three ways through which the members of these congregations become pentecostalised: the evangelistic activities, Spirit-baptism and exorcism meetings. The same study reveals that there are also mainline churches that appropriate the Pentecostal spirituality to avoid losing membership to Pentecostal groups. A critical reflection on these findings led to a possible typology of the pentecostalisation process in the DRC. The aim of such a possible classification is to enhance research on this new Pentecostal phenomenon.

2.2.1. The 'evangelistic' pentecostalisation

This is a process of being pentecostalised through various evangelistic activities carried out by Pentecostal and charismatic church members. African pentecostalism has exhibited a higher degree of creativity and a more vigorous passion for evangelism than the mission-aged churches (Gifford 1998). This category represents close to 30% of Pentecostals in the DRC.

2.2.2. The 'experiential' pentecostalisation

It takes place through a pneumatological encounter. Not all members attending Pentecostal/charismatic churches have had a personal encounter with the Holy Spirit. Through intensive prayer and fasting programmes, overnight prayer meetings, special gatherings at church marked by the preaching of guest iconic leaders, special seminars with emphasis on the baptism of the Holy Spirit, several Christians experienced a personal encounter with God the Holy Spirit. This category covers about 25% of Pentecostals.

2.2.3. The 'social/ humanitarian' pentecostalisation

Christians from mainline churches in search of healing, marriage, employment, deliverance or any other remedy for social or human needs tend to appropriate for themselves the Pentecostal ethos and spirituality. On this, Balcomb (2008:34), a Pentecostal researcher says, 'People did not need another church, but they needed healing, comfort, reassurance, to repent of their sin and they could not find these things in the mainline churches. There was a great hunger which we could meet. They came to us as though they were coming to the hospital, a therapy, counselling and healing'. In the DRC this group counts for about 30% of Pentecostals.

2.2.4. The preventive/ denominational pentecostalisation

This is pentecostalisation taking place within the mainline churches such as the Roman Catholic Church, the United Methodist, the Anglican, the Baptist and many other mission churches. These churches appropriate the Pentecostal spirituality to prevent their churches from losing members to Pentecostal and charismatic groups. Kalu (2003a) argues that the established churches usually react in three stages towards pentecostalisation: hostility, apologetics and adaptations. Institutionalisation breeds late adoption of innovation. This kind of pentecostalisation represents 15% of Pentecostal Christians in the DRC. In the next section I explore Pentecostal spirituality.

3. The Congolese Pentecostal Spirituality

In the following paragraphs dimensions of Pentecostal spirituality will be explored in relation to the Congolese Pentecostal context.

3.1. Describing pentecostal spirituality

Pentecostalism is a movement known for its spirituality (Brandt 1986:19), so one cannot talk of pentecostalism without referring again and again to the question of the Spiritual experience, with features such as prayers, Spirit baptism, the exercise of spiritual charismata, corporate praise and worship services and many more. Brandt (1986:20) observes that this emphasis on spirituality explains why Pentecostals are often referred to as the people of spiritual experience. The spiritual experience of Pentecostals is also alluded to by Anderson (2001:302) when he says ‘our Pentecostal and charismatic spirituality has to be totally dependent on the Spirit of God. The Spirit is the one who makes us, equips us and who actively participates in our spiritual development.’

3.2. Spirituality as regeneration

Congolese Pentecostals understand their spirituality as starting with regeneration. They consider regeneration as the first experience anyone needs to go through in their life before becoming a Christian. My analysis of this manifestation of the CEM spirituality suggests that regeneration is the starting point for the CEM members’ spiritual experience. It constitutes an ‘entry point’ to other spiritual blessings—Spirit-baptism, the exercise of spiritual gifts, ministry, healing, deliverance, and so on—which come later on in the spiritual life.

3.3. Spirituality as sanctification

Kipimo (2014) describes sanctification as another manifestation of CEM spirituality. Members of the CEM assert that through the regeneration experience they get converted or receive God’s nature in life, then physical healing and spiritual healing. But through the sanctification experience they develop maturity in their Christian life or character.

The study also reveals that the life of holiness and obedience to God’s commandments occupies a central place in the teachings of the CEM. Believers are to separate themselves from worldly conduct, a lifestyle that is contrary to biblical Christian living. And they are to consecrate themselves to God and to his service. The believer’s holiness is integral to his/her obedience to God’s word. A life of holiness is also a way Christians prepare themselves to meet

with the Lord at his second coming. In other words, holiness fosters communion between God and believers, but also among believers. Sanctification is not limited to the church environment; the family and friends would like to see God through the life Christians lead where they live.

3.4. Spirituality as encounterology with the Holy Spirit

CEM spirituality derives from the encounter that members have with the Holy Spirit, which I refer to in this section as the Great Encounter.

When looking at mission in the New Testament, there is a key missional dimension I call the encounter with the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4): ‘All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability’ and John 20:21-22: ‘Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’ When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’...

The Great Encounter with the Holy Spirit not only empowers the church in *doing* mission; it is also the key in their *being* church, in their liturgical spirituality, their Pentecostal way of worship and fellowship. Therefore, to understand pentecostalisation in the Congolese context, there is the need to explore the types of Pentecostal spirituality in the CEM and reflect on how the latter affect their worship, their songs, their preaching, their festivals. Commenting on the importance of spirituality in mission praxis, Kritzinger (2007:9) says: ‘Unless we are vitally connected to Christ as the vine, and unless his Spirit controls and guides our operations, we do not have spiritual integrity.’ The encounter with the Holy Spirit empowers CEM members to heal the sick, witness to the community, engage in intensive prayers, and celebrate God in vibrant worship and praise.

3.4.1. Spirituality as healing the sick

Kipimo (2014) confirms that CEM spirituality puts emphasis on divine healing, which is viewed as part of the salvation experience. Pentecostals understand salvation to be an integral concept. It contains in itself the idea of deliverance from sins and its consequences, freedom from the powers of darkness and also healing of all kinds of sicknesses, including physical illnesses. CEM has daily healing and exorcism sessions in all its branches. My research shows that Pentecostal churches in the DRC start with the exercise of the charismata. Membership recruitment is done via spiritual gifts; as people follow the manifestations of the

Holy Spirit through a charismatic leader the church is established. But theologically speaking Christ promised to build his church on the word, the rock, according to Matthew 16:16–18.

3.4.2. Prayer as spirituality

The CEM's spirituality also encompasses intensive prayer times. These include daily morning devotions, fasting and prayers (these take between 3 to 40 days) depending on the lead of the Holy Spirit and all-night prayer meetings. Through these prayers CEM members experience the supernatural power of God, which often responds to both the spiritual and physical needs of the members. They practise Unisom prayers, CEM members contend that 'If prayer is talking to God, there is no way to let just one person pray for the majority regularly.' However, every Christian is encouraged to speak to God on their own because God is their Father on an individual basis. From my investigation I realised that in Francophone Africa ministry starts with prayer not with theological education. People only get trained afterwards. This is a bit different from Anglophone countries like Zambia where I served for many years. In that country ministry starts with theological education and prayer comes later. Congolese Pentecostals argue that even Jesus Christ himself started ministry with 40 days of prayer and fasting (Matthew 4). Therefore, the spirituality of prayer must be taken seriously because Africans believe in the existence of spirits that need to be conquered through prayers.

3.4.3. Spirituality as praise and worship

The CEM spirituality of power is also evident in times of worship and praise. They do have worship services that are characterised by a very real sense and awareness of the presence of God. 'As we praise God in an atmosphere of freedom, dancing and shouting we feel more and more close to God. And a lot of things happen in the members' lives during the time of worship and praise', reported one of my respondents during research.

3.4.4. Spirituality through preaching

The preaching time is one of the most important aspects of the CEM's spirituality of power. From the many research visits I had in different CEM congregations, I observed the following: preaching in the CEM is not just reserved for the pastor of the church, but lay leaders—church elders, deacons, evangelists and other church leaders—also preach in the church. The Pentecostal pulpit is open to all. And there are times when invited guest speakers are given time to preach. In most cases sermons are

testimony-based. In other words, as the preacher delivers his sermon, he brings in short testimonies about what God has done in his ministry, through his mission trips, in the lives of the members he prayed for during the week or even things the Lord revealed to him as he was sleeping. This responds to the African way of learning through stories or testimonies.

After this analysis of spirituality, I will now highlight seven challenges facing the future of pentecostalisation in African French-speaking nations.

4. Pentecostalisation and its Future in Africa: A Look at New Challenges

In the following paragraphs, I will highlight seven new challenges that appeared from my doctoral research among Congolese Pentecostals (Kipimo 2014). I argue that these challenges require our attentions as scholars because they have an impact on the pentecostalisation process to an extent.

4.1. The challenge of schism

Schisms in pentecostalism, and in the CEM particularly, are a major concern for the future of movement in Africa. Results from my investigation show that the Congo Evangelistic Mission in Katanga experienced repeated occurrences of schisms (Kipimo 2014). Schism from a scholarly point of view could be classified in different categories depending on the root causes. Schism maybe passive or active, external or internal, doctrinal or structural (Marthaler 2003). This study reveals that schisms in Africa are often related to pentecostalisation and charismatisation rather than any other form of Christianity. Hence, the need for more research on this challenge.

4.2. Evangelising people of other faiths

Africa is becoming more and more a pluralistic faith society. Reality shows that there is a revitalised and flourishing increase in the number of non-Christian religions in the Congo and Africa as whole. Adherents of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and other world religions have become members of our communities. And research in Pentecostal outreach programmes shows that if other non-Christians can be easily won to Christ by Pentecostal evangelists, members of other religions show resistance. In some cases, Pentecostals are being converted to these non-Christians in search of employment and marriages. I argue that such a trend should be the focus of missiological reflections in Africa.

4.3. The scope of healing among Pentecostals

Healing occupies an important place in the ministry of Pentecostals. However, in CEM healing is only understood and practised from a spiritual perspective. Sicknesses and illnesses are viewed as being caused by sins and evil forces, and as such they must be dealt with through prayer and exorcism. As a Pentecostal scholar, I think this scope of healing is narrow and should be broadened through critical research.

4.4. The impact of eschatology in a context of social brokenness

The specific eschatological emphasis of premillennial rapture theology that is dominant in Pentecostal mission has both a negative and positive impact on socialisation. What is important in this doctrine is that the imminent return of Christ has been both a motivating factor for mission—in its evangelistic dimension—and a discouraging factor for social involvement in the community. Research should be carried out on this Pentecostal doctrine to enhance the Pentecostal role in both the social and public life of the Congo as a nation.

4.5. Women's ordination as a Pentecostal challenge

Women make up most of the members attending church services in Pentecostal and charismatic churches in Africa. But surprisingly enough, Congolese Pentecostals don't ordain women in ministry. Instead, they are given other responsibilities outside the key leadership roles in the church. This practice contradicts both Pentecostal theology and the priesthood of all believers, both of which are championed by Pentecostal denominations in other parts of the world.

4.6. The extent of contextualisation among Pentecostals

Pentecostals are known for their ability to use local people's culture to communicate the Christian message. However, this contextualisation process has been hampered in many ways. Pentecostalism in Southern Congo started in 1915 as a rural movement and became urbanised in the late 1950s. In its move from rural to urban public, it kept the same worship style, same medium of communication (mother-tongue), same style of worship services (from 8h00 to 16h00) especially on Sundays. The urban residents and intellectuals find this Pentecostal rural culture difficult to assimilate.

4.7. The challenge of Simony among Congolese Pentecostals

Spiritual gifts are being used for personal enjoyment or money-making – rather than for the edification of the church among

Congolese Pentecostals. This is a serious challenge to pentecostalism, as some non-Pentecostals start to develop a negative attitude towards the use of charismata, thus hindering the pentecostalisation process to some extent.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to call for a paradigm shift in Pentecostal scholarship. Pentecostalisation is real in the church of Africa as shown by the case of the CEM in Congo. But this should be accompanied by up to date publications that take the African Pentecostal voices and experiences seriously. Now is the time to write the new Pentecostal history based on what is happening in our various local contexts, and this could shape both our Pentecostal theology and mission praxis.

The Pentecostal spirituality remains as the driving force behind pentecostalisation on the continent. And because of its diverse manifestations, more attention should be given to this aspect of pentecostalism.

The future of pentecostalisation in the global south depends on how scholars respond to the new challenges which are rising wherever the wind of Pentecost blows. I believe that good theory will lead to good practice, and good practice also becomes the starting point for a good theory. Therefore, as scholars we have the obligation to develop good Pentecostal theologies that should enhance the pentecostalisation process in Africa and the world at large.

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